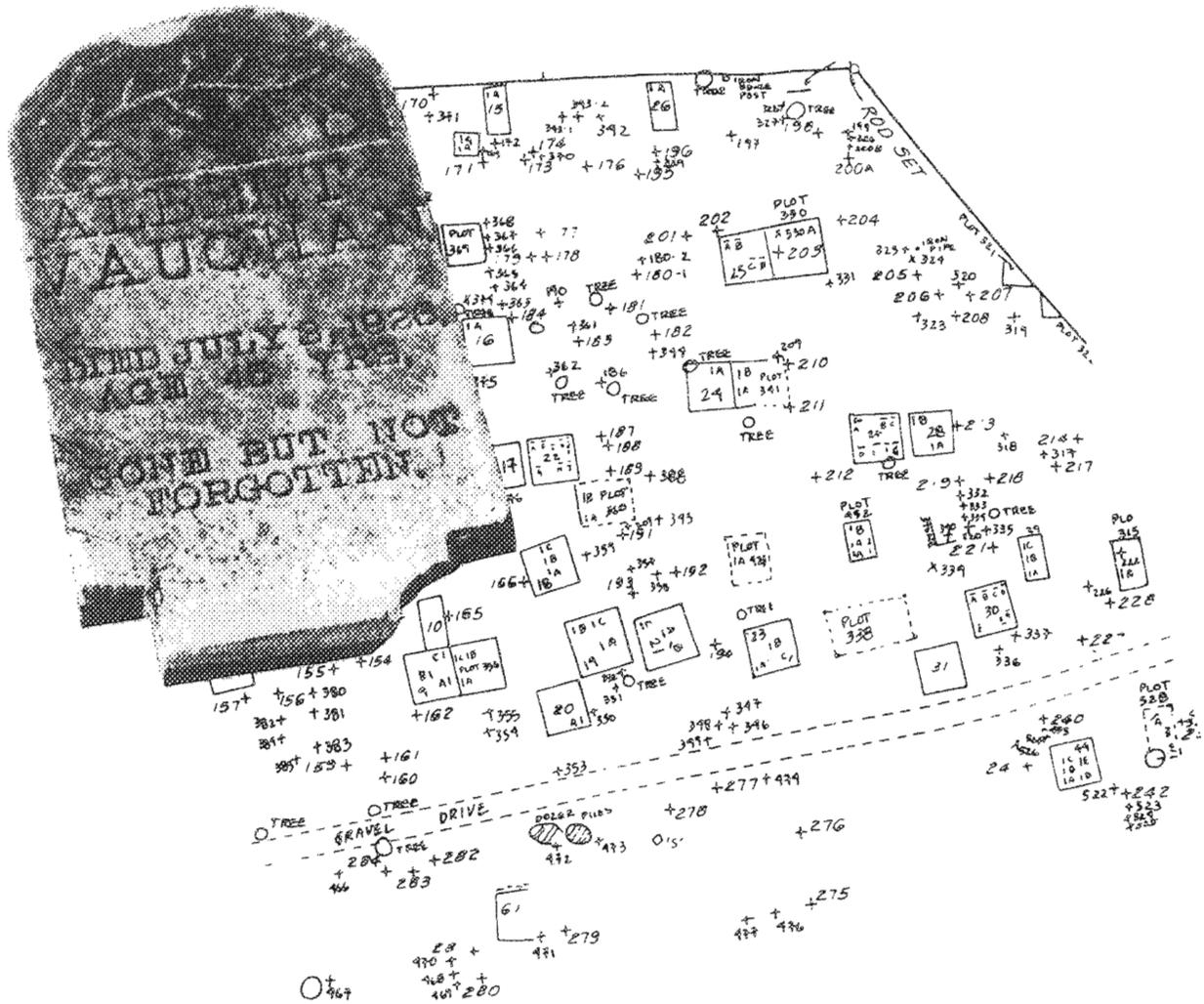


# THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Vol. 1: Text



CHICORA FOUNDATION RESEARCH SERIES 55

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN  
CEMETERIES  
OF PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA:  
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Vol. 1 Text

Research Series 55

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Ole white preachers used to talk wid dey tongues widdout sayin  
nothin' but Jesus told us slaves to talk wid our hearts.

-- Nancy Williams of Petersburg in  
*The Negro in Virginia*

## ABSTRACT

Petersburg has long been recognized as having a special place in African American history. The First (African) Baptist Church, on Harrison Street, and Gillfield Baptist Church, on Perry and Gill streets, were organized during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. By the end of the century the area's free black population represented an anomaly in Southern society, and Petersburg, for reasons still being explored, appears to have been one of the most attractive locations for their settlement.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, on average, a third of the total African American population of Petersburg consisted of free blacks. They, along with the city's white population, enjoyed a relatively prosperous period. On the eve of the Civil War, Petersburg had the largest number of "free persons of color" of any Southern city

Even after the Civil War the black population continued to climb, as the white population declined. Moreover, black businesses, as well as cultural and social organizations, thrived. Black home-ownership increased by 300% during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, while white home-ownership was stagnant.

During the twentieth century black society in Petersburg was largely dominated by the churches. Gillfield's membership included many of the city's most successful, and prosperous, African Americans. Significant among the city's black population were also the undertakers, one of the more prestigious callings.

It is against this backdrop that this study begins to explore Petersburg's African American graveyards and cemeteries, focusing on four still extant today: People's, Blandford, Little Church, and East View (which includes Wilkerson Memorial). Excluded from consideration are the several graveyards which have been lost to development activities.

This study has been undertaken as a result of

funding provided by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the City of Petersburg. The research goals included the collection of historical information concerning the extant cemeteries, with particular attention on People's Cemetery, now owned by the City. In addition, People's was completely mapped and surveyed, with all extant markers and plots being incorporated onto a map of the cemetery. As a result of this work we identified 114 family plots containing at least 290 graves, as well as an additional 440 graves without any form of plot designation. Using an earlier, incomplete survey of the cemetery, as well as maps prepared during several episodes of road widening, we were able to add over a hundred additional family names to the inventory.

The historic research not only focused on issues of ownership and the evolution of the property, but also on the role that African American lodges, societies, and organizations (both secret and fraternal) played in ensuring the proper burial of Petersburg's African American community. Thus, in turn, led to our exploration of lodge stones as a particular type of funeral marker not previously surveyed in the literature.

Associated with these investigations at People's, this study also explored several of the seemingly vacant areas (one of which was being considered for cemetery access parking by the City), using a penetrometer to determine if graves were present. We found that a number of graves were present, even in areas with no outward appearance of burials (i.e., lacking markers or even sunken depressions).

Incorporated into the research at People's was the preparation of a preliminary preservation plan for the cemetery. This information focuses on issues of access, routine maintenance, and historic "restoration" efforts appropriate for the property.

Although less detailed, research at Blandford's

black section, Little Church Cemetery, and East View Cemetery provided not only historic overviews and sketch maps, but also allowed a much broader range of grave markers and burial practices used by the African American community to be examined. As a result, the study provides new information on the range and styles used by African Americans in the Petersburg area and compares them to other areas of the South.

This research ultimately revealed that these cemeteries, taken together, are clearly eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places as a multiple property nomination. Part of this project, therefore, involved the development of a draft multiple property nomination.

Finally, the Petersburg research clearly reveals the significance of this topic and highlights issues appropriate for wider investigation or more detailed research. These are provided as recommendations to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources for additional research and preservation activities.

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The City of Petersburg has been no less enthusiastic about this project and has offered us exceptional assistance. Ms. Suzanne Savery, Museums Manager for the City of Petersburg, Department of Tourism, coordinated the efforts and, whenever we were "stumped" was available to provide a local contact, suggest a different approach, or provide assistance. We are very appreciative of her time and energies. Ms. Roswitha M. Rash, Curator of Collections, provided a wealth of information from her files concerning People's Cemetery. Without her assistance and knowledge of the resources our job would have been far more difficult.

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has expressed considerable interest in ensuring the appropriate preservation of the cemetery. Likewise, Dr. Larry C. Toombs, Superintendent of Buildings, Grounds, Parks, and Cemeteries, has been very open and interested in obtaining advice on how to best manage People's Cemetery.

Mr. Benjamin O. Scott, Petersburg's Clerk of Court, was of exceptional assistance in pointing us to the appropriate records and ensuring that we had access to everything that we needed in his jurisdiction during our research. Moreover, his staff cheerfully taught us the ins and outs of the Records Office, providing constant attention and assistance. Ms. Christine Joyce, Site Manager of the Blandford Museum was also very generous of her time and knowledge, providing us with information concerning that cemetery and its historical relations with the African-American community. Ms. Roberta Denton, Blandford Cemetery's Secretary, was very helpful in securing us maps of the cemetery. Mr. Howard Turner, also with Blandford, kindly pointed out the different sections and helped us orient ourselves. City Manager David Canada has also been very supportive of this project, expressing considerable interest in helping to ensure that the People's cemetery is restored and preserved.

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A number of individuals in Petersburg offered us exceptional assistance and support. Mr. Mike Farrell, reporter with the Petersburg *Progress-Index*, not only helped promote this project, but was also concerned enough to always ensure that his facts were correct and his stories balanced. Mr. Ronald Hess, owner of Hess Trgard, provided us with insight on Petersburg's stone cutters and the business. Mr. Willie Graham went out of his way to provide copies of hard to find sources.

But our greatest appreciation must go to Petersburg's African American community, who have kept People's alive, generation after generation. They maintained the property when no one would, and just as importantly, served as a reservoir of information. Those who came to the public meeting about People's proved their interest. In particular, we want to acknowledge the assistance of Mrs. Katie R. Walker, Miss Thomasine Burke, Mrs. Mary Lee Berry, and Ms. Ethel Norris, who shared their memories and collections, and inspired us with their enthusiasm for the project and hopes for future work.

Finally, we want to thank the staff that helped make sure this project was completed so successfully. Ms. Debi Hacker was responsible for overseeing the transcription of the People's Cemetery stones in the field — in spite of the cold and seemingly constant rain. In addition, Ms. Hacker took the variety of rough notes and transformed the maps into the forms used in this report. Assisting in the field was Ms. Kerri Barile, who was also responsible for collecting much of the field information concerning the other cemeteries. Ms. Suzanne Coyle was responsible for taking the field notes from Peoples and producing legible cemetery records. She also tracked down many of the DOT sources used in this study. Ms. Rachel Campo was also responsible for much of the work on the People's map.

## INTRODUCTION

### Project Background and Goals

In February 1998 the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) solicited proposals from local governments for a broad range of historic survey and planning activities. The resulting projects would be developed as cost-shares between the DHR and local government. Through competitive evaluation, a proposal from the City of Petersburg to survey and evaluate African American cemeteries was among those selected.

One of the identified cemeteries, People's Memorial, had been long recognized as one of the largest African American cemeteries in Virginia. Now owned by the City of Petersburg, efforts were being made to ensure not only its preservation, but in some manner, its restoration. This interest grew gradually, being spearheaded by not only the local community, but also the City's Mayor, Roslyn Dance (Figure 1). Consequently, the City was particularly interested in obtaining outside preservation assistance. Moreover, DHR recognized that combined with Petersburg's other black cemeteries, this project had the potential for creating a significant Multiple Property Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. This would help recognize, and commemorate, the importance place of these cemeteries in black life.

As a result, DHR distributed a request for proposals at the end of July 1998. At that time the project envisioned the identification and documentation of the several African American cemeteries known to exist in Petersburg and, assuming that the criteria for nomination were met, the preparation of a draft Multiple Property nomination.

In discussions with both the City of Petersburg (where the project was being handled by Ms. Suzanne Savery, Museum Manager for the City) and DHR (where the project's technical contracting officer was Ms. Margaret Peters), we found that there were actually multiple goals. The City recognized the need to better manage People's Cemetery. This meant that they needed to have a more complete history of the cemetery;

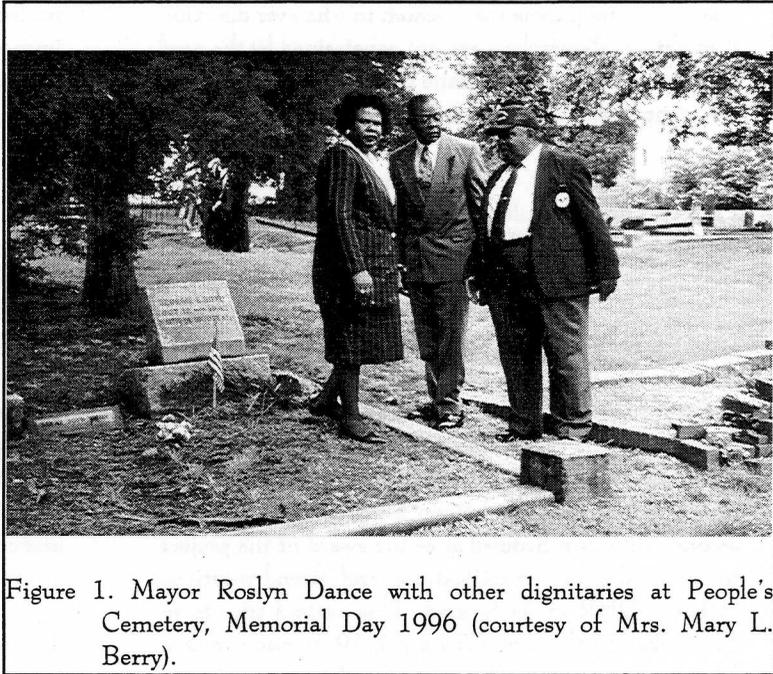


Figure 1. Mayor Roslyn Dance with other dignitaries at People's Cemetery, Memorial Day 1996 (courtesy of Mrs. Mary L. Berry).

that they needed assistance determining how to best preserve, operate, and manage the cemetery; that they needed information on where they might construct a parking lot for those using the cemetery; and finally, that they needed a better handle on who was buried at Peoples and, if possible, where all of the documented burials were located. The Department of Historic Resources viewed the project from a broader perspective. They were interested in better understanding the significance and needs of African American cemeteries across Virginia and saw this project as an opportunity to

## INTRODUCTION

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develop and test techniques and research strategies toward the goal of a wider, more inclusive project. A draft Multiple Property Nomination would help establish a context for African American cemeteries at least in the Southside region<sup>1</sup> and might point out issues applicable across the state.

We immediately recognized that this project was being thought about as providing many things to many different groups. In preservation, as in any discipline, this format has the potential to cause many problems as individual constituencies feel unsatisfied or left out. On the other hand, such projects also provide exceptional opportunities. Being loosely structured, they offer the maximum potential to develop research questions, and pursue the research in whatever direction it might go. Researchers are not constrained by the need to produce largely bureaucratic paperwork. Such projects are, simply put, very exciting.

As a result, Chicora Foundation and Historic Preservation Consultants combined experiences and expertise, successfully proposing on the project in September 1998.

By the end of September we had been notified that DHR intended to award the Petersburg project to our team and, by mid-October, an agreement for the work had been processed and signed. Having already made one visit to Petersburg, both to view the cemeteries and also to attend a pre-bid conference, a second visit was scheduled after the award of the project to review contract specifications and attend meetings with the DHR in Richmond. This second trip, from September 30 through October 4, 1998, also included a brief layover in Petersburg, during which we began the on-going process of research.

Although the exact nature of the project would continue to evolve over the next several months there were two major goals consistently advanced throughout

our research.

The first, and certainly primary goal, was to collect the information necessary to develop a **draft multiple property documentation form for African American cemeteries in Petersburg**.<sup>2</sup> This form organizes the themes, trends, and patterns of history that are shared by the resources into one or more *historic contexts*.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the form also outlines the *property types* that represent those historic contexts.

The multiple property documentation form is not intended to be a nomination in its own right, but rather to provide a basis for the evaluation of National Register eligibility for similar types of sites. As such, the multiple property documentation form may be used immediately, to nominate and register thematically-related historic properties that are submitted at the same time, or it may be used to establish the registration requirements for future nominations.

For the Petersburg sites, we envisioned (along with the DHR) that the draft multiple property documentation form would help do both. It would provide an immediate boost to the nomination of several of Petersburg's African American cemeteries, but it would also serve as a foundation for nominations of additional African American properties throughout Virginia. It would help in the evaluation of individual properties by comparing them with resources with similar physical attributes and historic contexts or associations.

The project would produce only a draft of this document since it was recognized that there may be other historic contexts — other themes, trends, and patterns obvious elsewhere in the state — that were not

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<sup>2</sup> Additional information concerning Multiple Property Documentation Forms is available in National Register Bulletin 16B, *How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form*.

<sup>3</sup> Historic contexts are the patterns or trends in history by which properties or sites are understood and their meaning is made clear. It is a written narrative that describes the unifying thematic framework. The context also helps to support the relevance or importance of the properties.

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<sup>1</sup> The Southside is typically considered the region between the James River and the North Carolina line and between the Blue Ridge foothills and the Nansemond River and Dismal Swamp. It takes in at least 18 counties, including the vicinity of Petersburg and Dinwiddie County.

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present in Petersburg.

Those familiar with the National Register of Historic Places will no doubt wonder about this approach since the conventional wisdom is that cemeteries — such as those in Petersburg — are often not considered eligible properties. In fact, National Register Bulletin 16A, *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, notes that ordinarily cemeteries (as well as properties achieving significance within the last 50 years) are not eligible for inclusion on the National Register. For a cemetery to be eligible it must fall within one or more exceptions, known as Criteria Considerations.

We felt, very early on, that the Petersburg cemeteries would easily meet several of these exceptions or Criteria Considerations. Most clearly, we felt that the cemeteries would fall under Criterion Consideration D: a cemetery is eligible if it derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events.<sup>4</sup> In particular, we believed, after only a little research, that Petersburg's African American cemeteries contained distinctive design features and also were associated with significant historical events.

We also felt that a case could be made that the cemeteries were also significant under Criterion D, typically used for the nomination of archaeological properties that contain significant research potential. The application of this criterion does not require, or imply, that the site is subject to excavation or removal. It simply means that if such activities ever occur (as they have twice in the past at People's), this aspect of the site's significance should be considered.

The information thought to be necessary to accomplish this first goal was known at a general level to include primary and secondary historical research associated with the cemeteries in Petersburg. This included title searches, review of published material, and

the collection of oral history, all critical for the development of a historic context. But, we also recognized that additional contexts might include issues such as the importance of fraternal and benevolent lodges and associates, the origin and development of burial insurance, African American burial and funerary customs, the place of the African American church in the social fabric of urban life, the role of free persons of color in Petersburg, the development of what might be described as folk art markers, and the adoption of broad cemetery trends and traditions by African Americans.

A second goal was more closely related to the immediate and specific needs of the City of Petersburg and involved providing assistance in the **management, preservation, and operation of People's Cemetery**. This took the form of several tasks, including the production of a map showing all of the known graves in People's Cemetery, the preparation of a complete inventory of stones and markers in People's Cemetery, a penetrometer survey of several locations to help the City better understand the density of remains in the cemetery, and some preliminary recommendations regarding essential preservation efforts at the cemetery.

Although this goal seems far less "theoretical" than discussions of historic context, significance, and criteria considerations, the issues involved in developing cemetery preservation plans are no less complex or time consuming. Moreover, because they involve issues associated with the day-to-day operation and maintenance of cemeteries, they can generate considerable interest and even disagreement. As a result, we recognized that just as we were charged with developing a draft multiple property documentation form, so too would the preservation plan be only a draft — an initial effort at developing a cohesive preservation philosophy for a site which had received only minimal maintenance and care for the last 50 or more years.

Our third visit to Petersburg was made from December 12 through 18, 1998, during which time the field investigations of the various cemeteries were conducted and a great deal of the oral histories and on-site historic research was collected. At the conclusion of this visit, on December 18, an on-site meeting was held with representatives of the City of Petersburg, including

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<sup>4</sup> For additional information, see National Register Bulletin 41, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places*.

## INTRODUCTION

the City Manager, David Canada, and others.<sup>5</sup> During this meeting we quickly presented an overview of our findings thus far, including information on the historic background on the cemeteries, their current conditions, and recommendations we intended to offer regarding preservation efforts at People's Cemetery (Figure 2).

A fourth visit to Petersburg was scheduled from January 25 through January 29, 1999. The focus of this work was to complete the necessary on-site

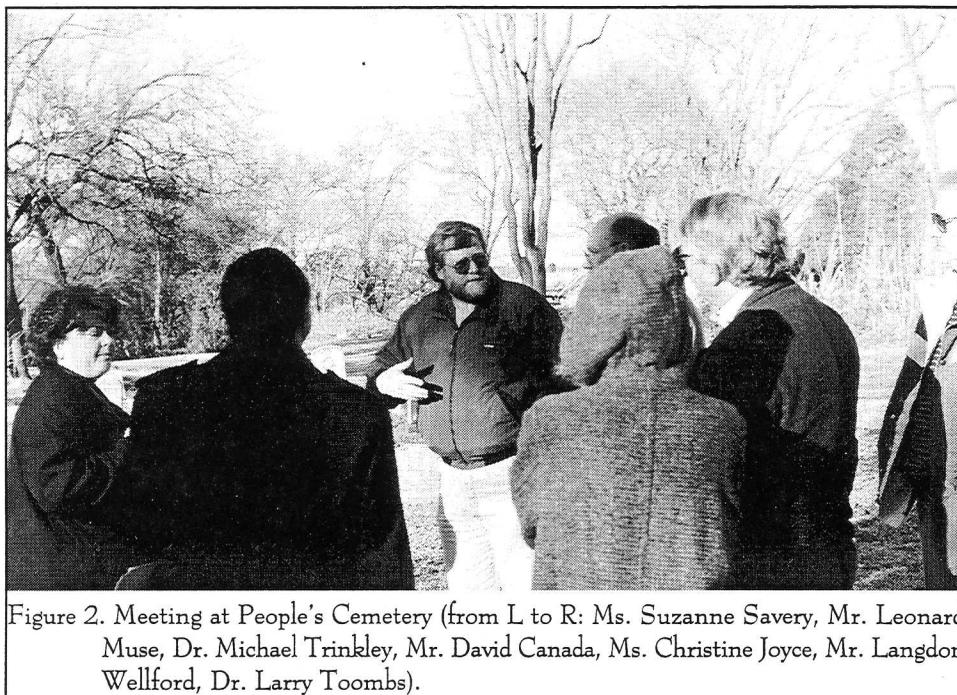
progress up to that point and also to solicit any additional information that individuals might have concerning the cemeteries in Petersburg.

About 25 individuals attended this meeting. Although some additional information came to light, including the existence of a hand written history of People's Cemetery by Captain Thomas Brown (in the possession of his grand-daughter, Thomasine Burke), more of those attending were interested in finding out

if there had been any success in locating a map of the cemetery. There was considerable interest on the part of the community in trying to determine where family members were buried. Of course there was little that we could do to respond to these concerns, since it was clear to us that it was unlikely a map or complete record book ever existed for People's Cemetery, which has been used for over 150 years. We explained that while we were compiling all of the extant information concerning the location of various family plots, there was

no way to ascertain who was buried in the vast majority of unmarked plots.

In addition, a number of families wanted to know what the city's policy would be on additional burials at People's Cemetery. Specific questions included not only where individuals were buried, or where family plots were located, but also how they were to go about making arrangements to use plots they owned, or how they were to obtain replacement deeds for plots. Although we were in a position to make recommendations regarding a number of preservation issues, we pointed out that these were administrative concerns beyond both the scope of our project and also



historic research and interviews. In addition, a public meeting was held in the evening of Tuesday, January 26 at one of the oldest African American churches, Gillfield Baptist Church. This meeting was designed to provide the local community with an overview of the

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<sup>5</sup> Besides Mr. Canada, the meeting included Ms. Suzanne T. Savery, Museums Manager; Mr. Leonard A. Muse, Director of Planning and Community Development; Mr. Landon C. Wellford, Preservation Planner; Dr. Larry C. Toombs, Superintendent, Buildings, Grounds, Park, and Cemeteries; and Ms. Christine Joyce, Curator, Blandford Cemetery Museum.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG

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our authority.

There was also considerable concern expressed over what was perceived as a lack of interest in People's Cemetery on the part of the City, which they saw as translating into a lack of care and appropriate maintenance. Here we indicated that we were able to make preservation and maintenance recommendations to the City, although clearly we did not have the authority to demand that they be implemented.

In other words, the public hearing made it clear that the black community in Petersburg, while possessing relatively little information concerning specifics of burial locations, is tremendously concerned that People's Cemetery be cared for and that some provisions be made to ensure that families have appropriate burial spots. These concerns are incorporated into our recommendations.

The remainder of our time involved in this project focused on collecting, weeding, and synthesizing the vast literature involved with African American burial practices, fraternal and benevolent organizations, and cemetery practices. This work involved a broad range of searches, taking us to a number of different libraries, often seeking rather obscure publications.

This report summarizes the different facets of this research, providing detailed documentation of the various cemeteries, an outline of the historic context, information on the mapping and inventory of People's Cemetery, recommendations for the preservation of People's Cemetery, and a draft Multiple Property Documentation Form. This publication should provide an excellent initial overview for others undertaking research on African American burial practices in Virginia's Southside area.

### Research Strategy and Questions

The previous discussion provides some general indication of the research questions we sought to address during this work and outlines two major goals of the project: the development of a draft Multiple Property Documentation Form and the development of information on the current condition of People's Cemetery (including a map and inventory).

Although there has been considerable research in African American burial practices, there has been relatively little examination of black urban Virginia cemeteries. Most of the focus has been on rural cemeteries, often associated with coastal South Carolina, Georgia, or Florida.

Moreover, we found that much of the literature on African American burial practices might be characterized as fixated on proving African connections. Historians such as Vlach (1978) have sought to find these connections throughout the African American cemetery. For example Vlach sees hand made concrete markers as a "neat intersection between commercial headstones and scattered clusters of burial offerings" associated with both African and nineteenth century American traditions (Vlach 1978:145).

There seems to be no end of African traditions. Nigh, for example, suggests that hand made markers are examples of "recoded traditions;" that multiple grave markers ("redundant identification") are forms of respect for the "new ancestor;" that mementos at graves are examples of the Kongo tomb decorations; that furry rugs provide examples of direct Yoruba traditions; and that shells and shiny objects may all be traced back to the Yoruba traditions associated with water (Nigh 1997).

Archaeologists have likewise sought to find evidence of African religious practices in nineteenth and even twentieth century cemeteries. Connor, for example, argues that African slaves brought a world view and burial practices quite distinct from Euro-Americans and these beliefs are still visible in black graveyards through the use of specific plants, the use of plates (which she relates to a Nigerian tradition), and the scattering of grave goods. She even argues that the modern use of styrofoam decorations follows well defined African traditions (Connor 1989).

Overlooked by these efforts are similar (or in some cases, identical) practices in white cemeteries, leaving unaddressed the issue of origin. Did African traditions affect white burial practices, did white practices affect African-American, or might both have been independently developed from different traditions?

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Not all historians or archaeologists, of course, have sought to find little pieces of Africa in graveyards. Examining the Charleston, South Carolina, King Cemetery, Jones and his colleagues tend to describe it as a distinctive "Sea Coast African American type," without extending the parallels too far (Jones et al. 1996:70). Cemetery historian Barbara Rotundo is even more critical, noting that most items found in African American cemeteries are well within the Anglo-American tradition and none have what might be described as a particularly strong "African stamp." She suggests that, "as a reaction to the long-time white denial of any black culture, scholars today are often too apt to make sweeping statements" concerning African connections (Rotundo 1997:103).

While African connections may be present, we feel that a middle ground is more suitable and, like Rotundo, believe that moderation is appropriate. Moreover, to focus on posited African connections, to the exclusion of other research issues and topics, might suggest that were it not for those perceived connections, black cemeteries would be unworthy of study. We do not believe this to be the case. In fact, as our Petersburg study demonstrates, there is far more occurring in most African American cemeteries than many researchers have previously recognized.

We believe that a more fundamentally useful theoretical perspective is provided by cultural geographers who have viewed cemeteries as deliberately shaped and highly organized cultural landscapes (Francaviglia 1971). To this can be added an anthropological perspective, which allows a more holistic perspective. When studied individually, such as the case when any one of Petersburg's African American cemeteries is examined in isolation, the cemetery may offer clues about the belief systems of the living. The strength of these clues, of course, depends on the clarity of the cemetery, depth of the research, and the understanding of associated historical events.

When several cemeteries are studied collectively, as in Petersburg, they are more likely to provide clues regarding social conditions and perhaps even idealizations of larger patterns. How far these observations can be taken of course depends on the sample size. At present, our examination includes only

Petersburg, supplemented by personal observations and professional experiences, other site-specific work in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, and also the benefit of some other good studies.

By way of comparison, our investigation of African American cemeteries is far less extensive than Gregory Jeane's sample used to create his model of Upland South Cemeteries (Jeane 1969). By 1987 his study included two Virginia counties — Isle of Wight to the southeast of Petersburg and Hanover to the north (Jeane 1987). Nevertheless, we believe that the Petersburg research provides an important new focus in the examination and recordation of African American cemeteries, at least in the Southside area.

Our survey of the various cemeteries sought to document not only features that seemed unique to the African American community, but also to examine how blacks adopted, and adapted, traditional (i.e., white) cemetery movements or expressions. This involved the examination of how cemeteries such as People's incorporated the rural cemetery movement, how there was a gradual transition to concepts associated with the lawn-park cemetery, although there seems never to have been anything approaching complete acceptance, and how finally the memorial park movement has blended with more traditional customs.

In Petersburg, at least, we also recognize that even this process of adoption and adaptation is likely far more complex than it might at first seem. As is well understood, the dominant elite in Petersburg's historic African American community were mulattoes. It seems likely that these individuals were not only aware of prevailing white customs and attitudes through their education but also through their close connections with the white community. It may be not so much that beliefs and attitudes were copied as it was that the elite of the African American community were actively participating in similar cultural activities and events. Of course, this leaves unaddressed the role of blacks in lower socio-economic brackets. Were they copying and adopting white behavior or perhaps the patterns of the black brothers?

As this research progressed we found that one significant issue was the development of folk

## AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG

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monuments — or concrete markers. We were particularly interested in how they were used, where they came from, and what they represented. We were fortunate that several researchers, notably Little (1998) and Rotundo (1997), had previously explored many of the issues which we recognized as potentially significant in Petersburg. As a result, we have been able to compare and contrast, rather than simply describing.

Having dispensed with the notion that African-American cemeteries would somehow provide evidence of African roots and, instead, focusing our research on the cemeteries as cultural landscapes, we then moved on to a range of historical issues which quickly became critical in our study. Perhaps the most interesting and complex, was the role of fraternal, secret, and benevolent societies in the black community, as well as the development of funerary customs in Petersburg.

Although we found an exceptional range of research in this general area, we discovered that much of it, too, was flawed. Having been largely conducted prior to the Second World War, it was dominated by two opposing philosophical positions and preconceived attitudes. Scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois spent much effort to demonstrate that beneficial societies grew directly out of African Obeah worship (DuBois 1907), in order to emphasize the importance of economic cooperation among the “Negro Americans.”

In contrast, others (typically white) sought to demonstrate either that blacks spent an inordinate amount of both time and money on funeral issues (“The accusation that Negroes spend more on their loved ones’ burial than they spend on them while alive is hardly an exaggeration”) or that the various societies and organizations were little more than shallow imitations of white organizations (“most negro lodges are scrawny and pathetic, the height of their pretensions matched only by the depth of their impecuniosity”) (Perdue 1994:332; Ferguson 1937:196). One scholar went as far as to describe the African American willingness to join voluntary associations, such as burial organizations, as “pathological” or “a sign of social pathology” (Myrdal et al. 1944:953). These authors overlook the identical tendencies among the urban white laboring class during the same period.

Of course, all were written in an era of not only implicit, but explicit, racism. Today’s historians, when the topic is occasionally reviewed, are far more even-handed. Perhaps the best simple analysis is offered by Joel Walker, who observes, “Blacks’ use of the clubs and lodges served a very complex and externally not well understood system of human needs” (Walker 1985:8). Regardless, our point is that although there is a wealth of literature published on burial associations, fraternal organizations, and secret societies in the African-American community, in its failure to contrast accurately with white groups, relatively little of it offers any real substance or foundation for modern analysis. What is used must be accepted with caution, recognizing the source, including both the intention and ability of the author.

Nevertheless, much of our historical research focused on the issue of fraternal and benevolent lodges and associations, the place of the African-American church in death and burial practices, and the rise of the black undertaker or funeral director. We attempted to develop as much information as possible on the organizations specific to Petersburg, but all of our sources are in agreement on one essential issue — the number of such organizations was overwhelming, most survived for relatively short periods, and few left any meaningful historic documents.

A final issue which we dealt with was the development of preservation recommendations for People’s Cemetery. The typical strategy in developing such a plan is to have considerable input from both the local community and the governing body. In this case, neither group was prepared to provide clear “wish-lists.” The local community, while very interested in the cemetery, seems interested in an abstract fashion, having relatively few clear concerns regarding issues of landscaping, access, or maintenance. Similarly, although the City is concerned with issues such as parking and security, it has not fully explored the ramifications of ownership.

As a result, we chose to offer our recommendations in a more general format, avoiding the formality of a “preservation plan.” This should allow additional dialog (even helping to guide that dialog), while still providing guidance on actions which

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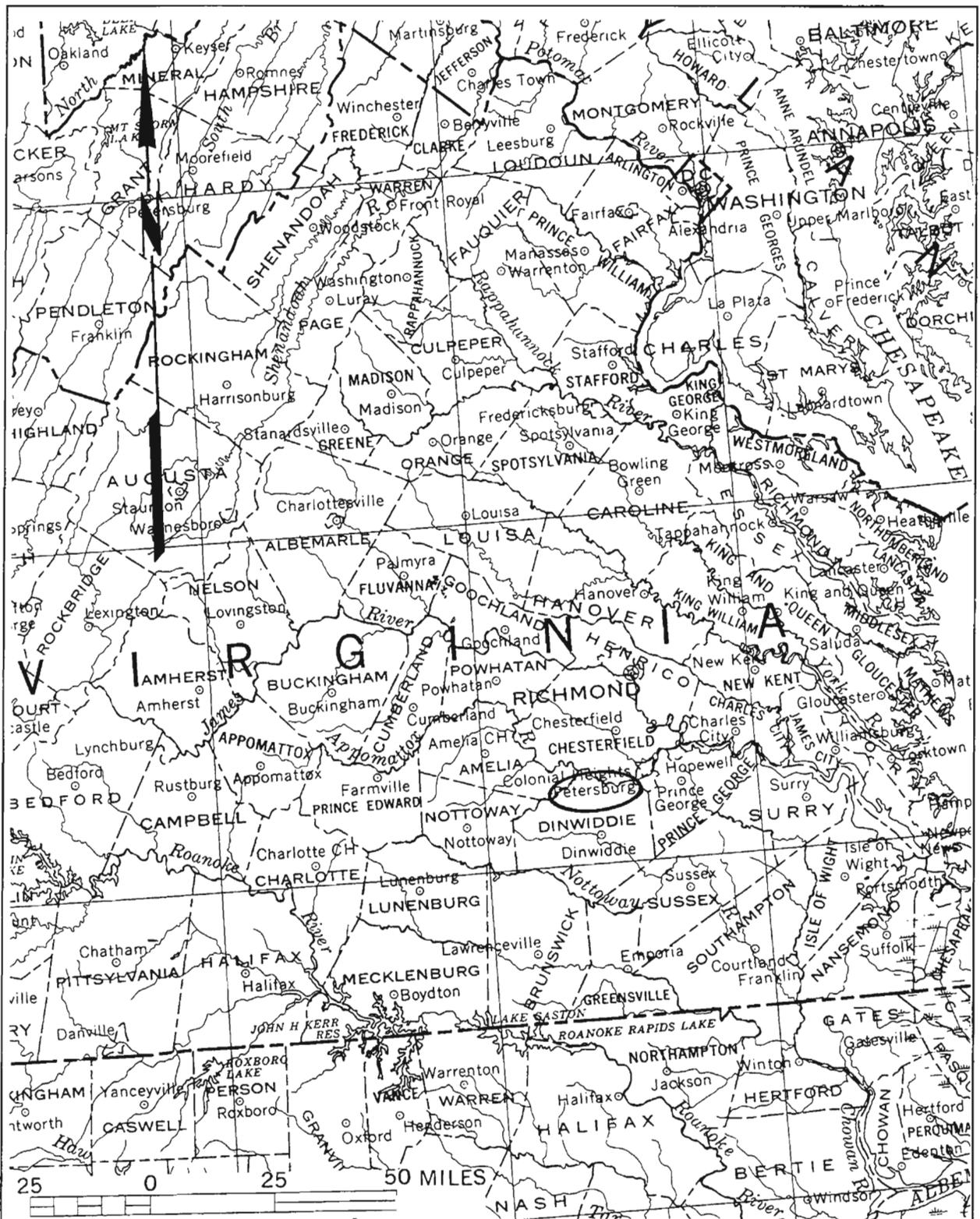


Figure 3. Location of Petersburg in southeastern Virginia (basemap is USGS United States 1972, 1:2,500,000).

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are critical and which should be implemented immediately.

### The Natural Setting of Petersburg

By 1850 Virginia officially recognized, for statistical purposes, four "grand divisions" the tidewater, piedmont, valley, and trans-Allegheny. As might be expected, geographical, geological, and physical differences in these divisions have had profound effects on Virginia's history. As mentioned earlier, the project area also falls into the region known as the "Southside," one of nine generalized areas of Virginia. Situated between the James River to the north and the North Carolina line to the south, the western limits are the Blue Ridge foothills, while the eastern limit are the Nansemond River and the Dismal Swamp.<sup>6</sup> Depending on how the lines are drawn, the Southside includes at least 18 counties, including Dinwiddie, Prince George, and the City of Petersburg (Elliott 1983).

Petersburg is situated in (but administratively independent of) Dinwiddie County, in southeastern Virginia.<sup>7</sup> It, along with cities such as Alexandria, Fredericksburg, and Richmond, is situated on the Fall Line, a narrow zone of rapids that are found at the point where the rivers pass from the resistant granites of the Piedmont to the more easily eroded sands and clays of the Coastal Plain. It was along the Fall Line that not only were inland water vessels stopped by the falls, but that these falls furnished power for mills, promoting industrial development. As a consequence Petersburg's history is intimately tied first to tobacco and later to milling and shipping.

Petersburg is situated on the south bank of the

Appomattox River, just downriver from the rapids that mark the division between coastal plain and piedmont (Figure 3). The city originated on a relatively flat terrace bordered by Brickhouse Run to the west and another small drainage, Lieutenant Run, to the east. Elevations dropped as you left the higher, inland part of the city and moved north toward the riverfront. Nearby Pocahontas was situated on the floodplain of the Appomattox, while Blandford, like Petersburg, was built a little further inland, on a terrace. As a result, Petersburg incorporates considerable topographic relief and elevations range from less than 50 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) to over 150 feet AMSL. Only 2 miles to the west elevations range up to 200 feet AMSL.

To the east is the Tidewater region — a level plain of alluvial soil. Elevations range from about sea level, along the Atlantic coast, to upwards of 300 feet, at the Fall Line. Although characterized in simple terms, closer inspection reveals the Tidewater to be far more complex and diversified. For example, on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay the topography is very flat, while the western shore is far more varied and rolling. In fact, David Hackett Fischer observes that when cleared and cultivated this western shore "took on a quiet, pastoral beauty that reminded homesick colonists of southern and western England" (Fischer 1989:248).

To the west of the Tidewater region is the Piedmont, the largest physiographic province in Virginia. It is a relatively low, rolling plateau with elevations ranging up to about 2,000 feet at the foothills of the Blue Ridge, previously known as the trans-Allegheny.

Early on differences were observed in Virginia's vegetation, based largely on drainage. Pines seemed to quickly give way to oaks and hickories as one moved inland, toward the fall line, where deciduous hardwood forests dominated the setting (Morgan 1998:31).

Just as Petersburg takes on characteristics of both the adjacent Tidewater and Piedmont regions, it is also situated between two different climates. The climate of the southeastern Coastal Plain is moderated by the Atlantic Ocean, having fewer hot and cold days, less

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<sup>6</sup> The Southside has its origin in Prince George County, which was formed in 1703 from the portion of Charles City County (one of the eight original shires or counties created in 1634) situated on the south side of the James River. One of its characteristics was a slower settlement and development than the area to the north of the Appomattox River.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia is composed of 130 political subdivisions, including 96 counties and 34 independent cities.

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snowfall, and a longer growing season than is typical for the rest of the state. In general, however, the region's climate may be described as having hot summers and mild winters, characteristic of a continental climate. The growing season varies from about 200 to 210 days in the Tidewater to about 180 days in the lower reaches of the Piedmont. Rainfall over much of the region is around 50 inches, easily supporting a range of both subsistence and cash crops.

In terms of its natural setting, however, the one thing that stands out in the descriptions of many eighteenth and nineteenth century visitors is the "grubbiness" of Petersburg. For example, Suzanne Lebsock notes the 1786 complaints of Josiah Flagg ("This is the most dirty place I ever saw"), and also observes that the town's growth was largely unplanned, resulting in meandering, narrow streets and large number of wooden houses (Lebsock 1984:1-3). It was only with the nineteenth century that things began to change. Streets began to be paved about 1813, the 1815 fire promoted "urban renewal," gas lights were introduced in 1851, and by 1857 there were new waterworks. All of these urban improvements ameliorated the unhealthiness of the area. Nevertheless, the city was considered fairly lackluster even in the 1820s, when Samuel Mordecai commented on the town's condition:

the roads in ruts — the fields  
uncultivated — the houses tumbling  
down, groups of free negroes,  
mulattoes and whites lounging  
around a grog shop — the town half  
depopulated (quoted in Lebsock  
1984:9).

### Curation

The map of People's Cemetery resulting from this work has been prepared on mylar and has been curated at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, with copies provided to the City of Petersburg. The inventory of People's Cemetery is incorporated into this study, which is printed on permanent paper. Likewise, the sketch maps of the other cemeteries in Petersburg are incorporated into this study, although copies are also curated with the

DHR.

Photographic materials for this work were produced with color print film. Although inherently unstable, color prints often provide the most useful renditions of cemetery markers under less than ideal conditions. Copies of critical photographs have been incorporated into this study as black and white prints, ensuring their long-term usefulness. The remainder are incorporated in files retained by Chicora Foundation.

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### Historical Overview of Petersburg's African American Community

This is not intended to be a comprehensive account of African-American history in Petersburg. Other writers, Luther Porter Jackson, Lucious Edwards, Jr., and William D Henderson, have documented the subject well up until about 1900. A thorough exploration of Petersburg's twentieth century African-American history has yet to be made.<sup>1</sup> Our purpose in this summary is to note the aspects of local history that relate to cemeteries.

From its earliest colonial settlement, the Petersburg area was home to free whites, enslaved blacks, and a separate class, "free persons of color," whose liberties were subject to white control. Because such control could not be escaped, even in the North, urban areas with relatively open wage labor and entrepreneurial opportunities drew many free blacks. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the number of free persons of color in Petersburg increased dramatically with both immigrants and new manumissions and self-purchase. The census of 1810 found 310 free persons of color. By 1830, there were 2,032 free blacks alongside 3,440 whites and 2,850 slaves (Bushey et al. 1994: 22-24).

They found employment alongside slaves in Petersburg's rapidly-growing tobacco factories, the women typically stemming<sup>2</sup> and the men twisting.<sup>3</sup> For

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<sup>1</sup> A similar situation is found in Norfolk, where Bogger's (1997) research stops at 1860.

<sup>2</sup> Stemming is the process of stripping the entire midrib or stem from the leaf.

<sup>3</sup> Following stemming the delicate strip tobacco was fashioned into a twist. These twists then went into a press where they were "prized," or compacted in order to evenly

example, in 1831 the Leslie and Brydon factory labor force included 21 free "boys," 52 slaves, and 23 free women, all of whom were stemmers. A sort of truce developed among the white and black working classes and their employers. Cotton mills, driven by water and steam power, were staffed by white labor, while blacks held most jobs in tobacco factories, which were unmechanized. By 1860, about one-quarter of tobacco factory workers were free blacks (Jackson 1942: 74, 92-94).

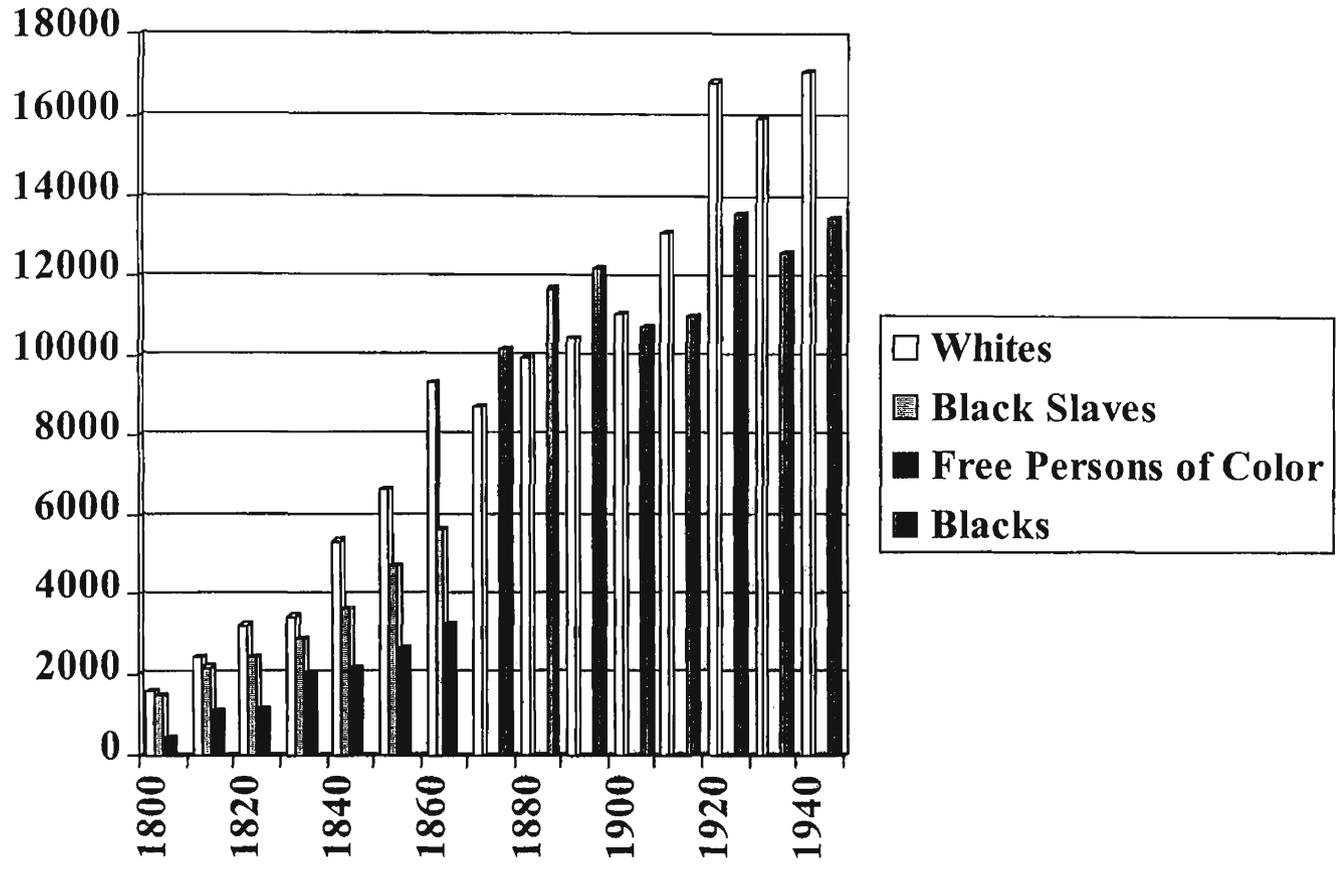
Other free people established themselves as craftsmen, tradespeople, entrepreneurs, and property owners. Many among the African-Americans who accumulated real estate were blacksmiths, barbers, carpenters; mechanics, preachers, shoemakers, boatmen and restaurateurs. Fewer were twisters and stemmers. By 1860 about one-third of Petersburg's 811 free Negro families (composed of 3,225 individuals) owned property. More free Negroes were women than men, and about half the heads of families were women. By 1860, 70 such women were stemmers, 65 were laborers, and only 39 were washerwomen, the cliché image of free black women workers. Like men, the more ambitious free women of color found ways to acquire real estate (Jackson 1942). Unlike men, however, they were not among the individuals or mutual benefit group trustees who acquired land for cemeteries in the nineteenth century.

Petersburg was a majority-black city in 1870, with 10,206 blacks and 9,342 whites, and an important city to Virginia's black life. During the 1870s, African-American religious and fraternal organizations routinely held their annual meetings at Petersburg. With white conservatives holding power in both local and state government, African-Americans were forming a separate society. By the early 1870s, the powerful African-American churches, Gillfield Baptist, First

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distribute the moisture.

Table 1  
 Petersburg's African American Population



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(Harrison Street) Baptist, Third Baptist, St. Stephens PE, and Oak Street AMEZ, had become independent of white conferences and played a significant role in community life.

The Petersburg community was often prosperous by comparison with African-Americans elsewhere. Although tobacco plants were closed for several months of each year, they did offer wage-labor opportunities. In 1870 there were approximately 20 tobacco factories in Petersburg. After the economic crash of the early 1870s, they were among the local industries that recovered, even booming in the 1880s (Henderson 1977 95, 115, 147).

Petersburg's tobacco industry peaked in the early 1880s, then began to decline as American tastes shifted away from dark tobacco to bright-leaf and cigarettes. Nonetheless, Watson and McGill, a maker of plug and twist tobacco for export, continued to expand into the 1890s, and the Cameron and Brothers' Tobacco Company employed 800 in 1893. In the mid-1890s Dunlop Tobacco Company was employing nearly 700 black men and women. In 1908 five large tobacco factories employed 5,000 people making plug tobacco for export, included Watson & McGill, John H. Maclin & Son, and Dunlop. There were also four cigar factories with 2,000 hands (Anonymous n.d.).

After the departure of the textile industry and decline of flour milling, industries such as tobacco, peanut factories, foundries and machine shops, trunk-and-bag manufacturing, Dupont's Hopewell plant, railroads, and even Fort Lee, supported the general economy until after World War I. Most occupations were racially segregated, and there was still a color line within the tobacco industry. Cigarette makers were becoming mechanized, but stemming and twisting were more efficiently done by hand (Perdue 1994: 339). White labor was chosen for machine-driven work, and African-Americans for manual tasks. In 1917 Petersburg's cigarette factories employed 700 white women and girls, 500 white men and boys; cigar makers employed 300 white women and girls. In the plants devoted to dark tobacco in smoking, plug, twist and leaf form were 1,000 Negro men and boys and 500 women and girls. In addition, a large number of black men were employed as laborers in

warehouses and freight yards (Hodges 1917).

American tastes abandoned Petersburg's dark tobacco for lighter tobacco and cigarettes, but dark tobacco in plugs, whose production was dominated by African-American labor, was still valuable on the export market. Fire-cured dark tobacco took another blow after World War I, as Europeans switched to flue-cured bright leaf tobacco, but plug makers developed new export markets in Asia, saving the stemmenes and their job opportunities for another generation of African-Americans in Petersburg.

Dunlap Plug and Twist Tobacco Company, after being taken over by Maclin-Zimmer-McGill, prospered through the Depression with exports of plug and twist tobacco. Seidenburg & Company, which opened a stemmery on Harrison Street by about 1910, also survived the crash. According to city directories, this plant, which became a branch of the American Cigar Company about 1920, and then the Petersburg Division of American Suppliers, remained an employer until 1949. The export market had been killed by World War II, but in 1942 the US government bought the plant's entire production as a trade item for workers in the South Seas. Only in the 1950s did a cash economy replace this Pacific market, and demand declined for the first time. In 1950 American Suppliers was converted to the American Tobacco Company's bright-leaf department. Employment at the old Dunlop-McGill plant dwindled down from 200 in 1950 until the operations were finally phased out in the late 1960s (Henderson 1980).

### Funeral and Burial Customs

American slavery separated Africans from their traditional societies, but it did not erase all their spiritual values. The plantation situation put great numbers of black slaves together, in limited contact with whites. A distinct African-American culture was forged as slaves drew upon their diverse backgrounds, retaining elements of African tradition as they established communal and family life in the new setting (Faust 1991. 4-5). For a group granted little dignity by the surrounding society, the funeral developed into a prominent religious ritual and social event, providing a rare opportunity to acknowledge a member of the

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African-American community. The central position of the funeral in an individual's life has been seen as an African tradition that persisted after conversions to Christianity, and to some modern observers it even appears that the funeral was "the climax of life" (Roediger 1981). Although this is an overstatement, it was unquestionably important that when life was finished, the body not be disposed of like a dead animal, but the "book should be closed with dignity" (Wade 1964: 170-171).

A similar view is provided by Angelika Krüger-Kahloula (1989:38) who notes that a study of African groups on the Ivory Coast found that "to be forgotten is far worse than death." Consequently, it may be that much of the funeral, the grave marker, and even the grave decorations are intended to ensure that a relative or friend is not forgotten.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, black people in some cities had access to livery hearses and carnages. In 1852, a Sunday afternoon funeral in Richmond involved a "decent hearse of the usual style, drawn by two horses" and more closed coaches leading the procession of walkers. At the cemetery, a reporter observed fifty mourners and a single white man, who remained separate from them in the capacity of observer (Olmsted 1996 [1861]: 35-36).

Slave and free-black funerals, like all gatherings of blacks, were closely observed by whites fearing that such gatherings could become occasions for subversive plotting. As long as it was kept within bounds, many white Southerners condoned the slave funeral, because for whites, too, a proper funeral was an important community ritual. The whites extended their community feeling to a few favorite slaves, whom they occasionally honored with funerals and gravestones equivalent to those placed on white graves (Roediger 1981, cf. Krüger-Kahloula 1989 for a different perspective on whites commemorating blacks).

A rare funeral notice for a slave was published in Petersburg in 1857 "The Funeral of Sarah Smith (colored) will take place this morning at the residence of her owner, T P Watson, Blandford. The friends of her late mother and those of her father are invited to

attend."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, as with notices for white funerals, the interment location was not stated.

Regardless of the extent of Africanisms retained in slave and free black funeral rites during the antebellum period, disposition of the body was supervised by whites. Plantation burials were typically in a graveyard set aside for slaves (whether the master or the community chose its location probably varied). Many free blacks and urban slaves, even churchgoers, were laid in a potter's field, disposed of at the least cost to the public. Therefore, acquisition of a suitable burial ground was a priority of mutual assistance organizations from their beginnings in the late eighteenth century

Petersburg obituaries for the nineteenth century supply no information about burial places, and little about funerals. One, however, did attract significant coverage: that of Richard Slaughter, who died at the age of about 75, a "well-known colored citizen and musician—a champion fifer for 60 years—a life-long Petersburg resident and formerly the slave of E. G. Hinton." The remains were "escorted [from the church] to the cemetery by a large concourse of colored people on foot and in vehicles—the band named after him preceded the procession, discoursing solemn music and with instruments draped [making] a striking and impressive effect."<sup>5</sup> The attendance and coverage reveal Slaughter's status, especially considering the fact that the occasion took place in mid-winter.

Slaughter's Brass Band was a commercial venture. Benevolent societies also organized bands to provide music for their members' funeral processions. In the early 1870s, Baker's Band played for Odd Fellows functions, and probably funerals as well, and the Cable Band (part of BIBC), Ideal Band (NIBS) and Young Men's Band (YMIBA) were well-respected well

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<sup>4</sup> Petersburg *Daily Express*, September 12, 1857.

<sup>5</sup>Petersburg *Index and Appeal*, January 22, 1875 and January 23, 1875.

into the twentieth century<sup>6</sup>

By the 1880s, fraternal orders, notably Masons and Odd Fellows, had begun inserting funeral notices when members died, summoning other members to the funeral. Benefit club members also provided a respectable turnout for their members' funerals. Two hundred members of YMIBA escorted the body of Thomas Hardy from First Baptist Church to East View Cemetery in April 1925. A photo of the floral tributes on the grave of James Major Colson (d. 1909), member of the Beneficial Society and a founder of the YMCA in Petersburg, shows wreaths bound with sashes printed "YMCA."<sup>7</sup>

After funeral ceremonies are complete, the grave can provide little indication about how large the procession was, how fervent the eulogies, or even the status of the deceased. Nevertheless, sometimes community standing is proven by an impressive marker such as that of the Reverend Henry Williams in Little Church Cemetery, or by smaller stones bearing society names or emblems of lodge membership. Found on many of Petersburg's African-American graves, these markers testify to the importance that fraternal and benevolent societies placed on mutual reliance, community, and remembrance.

### The Role of Benevolent Societies

Private fraternal organizations have a long tradition in America. With memberships traditionally based on ethnic and cultural affinity, their purposes have ranged from socializing to religious outreach to educational philanthropies and charitable support. Secret ritual societies have played an important part in the spectrum of fraternal organizations, and the blend

of mysticism with mutual assistance proved especially attractive during the nineteenth century. Working classes, white and black, were particularly interested in providing themselves a respectable funeral or gravemarker. This became a primary role of benevolent organizations. As early as 1783, free blacks in New Orleans organized the Perseverance Benevolence and Mutual Aid Association, and the Brown Fellowship Society of Charleston was established in 1790 (Wikramanayake 1973: 81-86). Also in 1790, the Free African Society, forerunner of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, applied for a grant of land in Philadelphia's potter's field to be set aside as a burial ground for Negroes (Browning 1937).

The plantation experience was the crucible for African-American culture, but cities made possible the benevolent societies and strong churches that helped create an African-American community (Goldfield 1991: 146-147). By the early 1850s the large free black community in Washington, DC, was sustaining churches, schools, and mutual assistance organizations (sick relief and burial societies), some groups including both free and slaves among their members (Olmsted 1996: 29-30). Before the Civil War many such groups were found in the north and in areas with large free black populations; nearly all the large towns in antebellum Virginia had benevolent financial societies, many of them the owners of cemeteries (Browning 1937). No other region of the county had such a concentration of lodges and other mutual aid organizations as the Middle Atlantic South, notably the cities of southeastern Virginia (Walker 1985: 103).

The first decades of the nineteenth century, not coincidentally a period of religious awakening, was a time of organized benevolence. Influenced by the same philosophies that affected whites, the free black community viewed mutual cooperation as the tool for improving social problems, and self-help as the vehicle for individual advancement. Civic-minded blacks, however, could not enter white circles of influence, and were further tied to their own community by the unwillingness of white-managed associations to serve colored people. Regardless of wealth or education, for blacks to participate in civic and community improvement there was no choice but to organize independently of whites. Therefore, the free black

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<sup>6</sup> Petersburg *Daily Courier*, March 21, 1871. Interviews, Mr. Pernell Simms, December 16, 1998 and Mrs. Mary Lee Berry, January 28, 1999. See below for beneficial group acronyms.

<sup>7</sup> Ca. 1880s newspaper clippings in an undated scrapbook, Major William Henry Johnson Papers, Special Collections, Johnston Memorial Library, Virginia State University (VSU). Petersburg *Progress-Index*, April 8, 1925. Colson family papers, Special Collections, VSU.

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community created its own societies to care for the sick or impoverished and manage burials (Bellows 1993: 68-69).

Whites did not object to charitable efforts that they did not consider threats to the established order. On the other hand, after state laws in 1831 forbade the education of blacks, whether free or slaves, schools were driven underground. Private benevolent societies were crucial to their continuation.<sup>8</sup>

The first documented African-American mutual assistance group in Petersburg was the Benevolent Society of Free Men of Color. In 1818 the group's five trustees were schoolmaster John T Raymond; Unah Tyner, blacksmith; Major Elebeck, a mechanic [skilled builder]; James Colson, a barber; and John Stewart. The organization was set up so that "as often as any one or more of the said Trustees shall die or cease to be a member, then the remaining trustees shall nominate one or more persons to fill such place (provided the person shall have been at least one year a member and be 21) in order to keep up the number of five trustees forever."<sup>9</sup> Despite the process, the group eventually became defunct.

Another group, the Beneficial Society of Free Men of Color, may have grown out of the Benevolent Society, or as a separate endeavor. Its records have been lost, but a broadside copy survives of a revised constitution adopted in 1852, which sets an initiation fee of \$10 and monthly dues of 25¢. Every member was entitled to "a square in the place of interment" (probably the first tract of People's Cemetery) wherein to bury himself, his wife, and siblings or children who were under the age of 21. Other benefits were to be drawn from the Treasurer's Account: lump sums of \$5 to \$15 to survivors; weekly payments of \$1.50 to sick members or \$1 monthly to members' widows. Every member was expected to attend every member's

funeral.<sup>10</sup>

The cash structure of such an organization could only be supported by a steady membership of healthy, employed individuals. Most lodges paid burial funds raised by assessments on members at the time of a death or illness. Therefore, when too few members were well-employed to support the funds, benefits were reduced, taking membership incentives on a downward spiral. The practice of assessing small dues to fund large promises may have caused the collapse of an earlier Beneficial Society (the 1852 group set out a revised constitution, not a wholly new charter) and the Benevolent Society. Companions to women's beneficial groups would be valuable, especially because of the large proportion of working women among the heads of free black families (Jackson 1942); but no records of women's associations have been found. In any case, mutual-benefit groups could not survive substantial unemployment among their members.

Benevolent and fraternal orders were also a significant part of white community life in antebellum Petersburg. The Benevolent Mechanics' Association was organized in 1825 to serve the interests of working men and their families (Lebsock 1984:214). Blandford Lodge #3, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, first met in 1755; Petersburg Lodge #15 was formed in 1786; and in 1809 the Petersburg Union Royal Arch Chapter #7, affiliated with the Masons, was chartered. At least by 1816 the Blandford Lodge Committee on Charity was assisting to support children of deceased members. Lodges also funded funerals for impoverished members. Interestingly, after paying for a member's funeral in 1825, Blandford Lodge was reimbursed by the city's Overseers of the Poor, an option unavailable to black organizations. Sometime before 1827 the Petersburg lodges bought a plot (known as the Masonic Plot) in Blandford Cemetery. After a decline in the 1830s and 40s, reflecting a national anti-Masonic sentiment, the white Petersburg lodges regained their popularity (Brown 1957 119, 149-150, 211-212,

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<sup>8</sup> For example, as early as 1820 John T Raymond was operating a school in Petersburg, mention of which later disappears (Jackson 1942:20).

<sup>9</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 5, pg. 306 (recited in Jackson 1942:162).

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<sup>10</sup> *Constitution, Rules and Regulations of the Beneficial Society of Free Men of Color, of the City of Petersburg and State of Virginia, as revised on the 2nd day of August A.D. 1852* (Special Collections, VSU).

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The purpose of African-American benevolent organizations was mutual assistance, but like similar white groups — temperance societies, labor unions, even fraternal life insurance firms — some incorporated secret or mystical rites into their programs, and their members were aware of, if not familiar with, Masonic rites. North American Masonic lodges generally excluded blacks, but in 1775 Prince Hall and 15 other colored men were initiated in Boston. In 1784 Hall founded African Lodge No. 459, the first of the black lodges. For a number of years these were recognized by the Grand Lodge of England, but the connection was eventually lost (Fox 1997 377-379). African Lodge attempted to associate with white American Masons, but in 1827 the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts refused to recognize them. Black Masons created an independent Grand Lodge, continued to establish new lodges, and in the 1840s began to adopt the name Prince Hall Masonry. The Order of the Eastern Star among the Colored People (OES), an affiliated women's group (with men in the highest ranks), was organized somewhat later (Schmidt 1980: 99).

African Americans also became Odd Fellows. The first American Negro Lodge was recognized by the Grand Lodge of England in 1842, whereupon the white American lodges withdrew to form the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The black branch retained the name of its English parent, the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (GUUOF). The women's branch of the order was organized as the Sojourna Household of Ruth (Ferguson 1937:191).

White Petersburg in 1857 boasted two Masonic lodges, with a total of 160 members; two Odd Fellows lodges, with 240 members; a 200-member chapter of the Sons of Temperance; the International Order of Red Men, with 200 members; about 100 members each in the St. Andrews and St. Patricks societies; and a society of the city's Germans being organized.<sup>11</sup> Even allowing for overlapping memberships, the numbers are impressive.

<sup>11</sup> Petersburg *The Daily Express*, September 18, 1957

It cannot be guessed how many African Americans were involved in their separate array of friendly societies and fraternal orders, ignored by white publications of the day. Given the levels of church membership and education among Petersburg's free people of color, it would seem likely for them to have supported a Masonic or Odd Fellows Lodge. However, it was white Masons who laid the cornerstone for the new Gillfield Baptist Church in 1859 (this may have been because Gillfield, like all black churches, was under white supervision at the time, and not because there were no black Masons). The ceremony of prayers, music from Slaughter's Brass Band, and speeches was attended by a large crowd, church members and others, "including a large number of ladies and gentlemen"<sup>12</sup> — that is, white people.

Because Petersburg's white newspapers and gazetteers paid scant attention to black social and community activities until the 1870s, we have not learned when the city's branches of national orders were organized. By 1870 there were three African-American Odd Fellows lodges - Noah Lodge #1367, St. Joseph Lodge #1382, and United Sons of the Morning Lodge #1384 — which shared a hall on Lombard Street. Sheba Lodge #17, Ancient York/Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, was well-established by 1871. In 1873 the Door of Virtue Tabernacle #80 of the General Grand Accepted Order of Brothers and Sisters and Charity was organized.<sup>13</sup> The 1880-81 city directory lists three fraternal hall buildings: Masonic (Oak Street), Odd Fellows (Lombard Street) and Temperance (Oak Street).

Some orders stressed pomp and regalia more than others. An article about a procession held by the Host of Israel described a procession of uniformed members, carrying a replica of the Ark of the Covenant and preceded by Slaughter's Brass Band. A participant declared "that thing excels the Odd Fellows, Masons

<sup>12</sup> Petersburg *Daily Express*, August 11, 1859

<sup>13</sup>Petersburg *Daily Courier*, October 31, 1870, January 23, 1871, March 21, 1871, Petersburg *Index and Appeal*, August 19, 1873, October 24, 1873.

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and all of them."<sup>14</sup>

The mid-1870s was a high point of fraternalism for whites as well as African Americans, memberships swelling as working classes joined the elites. Petersburg's National Register Courthouse District includes several white fraternal buildings: Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and Mechanic's Hall.<sup>15</sup> The Great Council of Improved Order of Red Men expected its largest council ever in 1875 when it met in Virginia for the first time.<sup>16</sup> In an era without government benefits or even health insurance, lodges offered financial aid to ill members and death benefits to their survivors, small sums that prevented starvation or homelessness. Between 1880 and 1900 hundreds of secret beneficial societies offering fellowship, cheap insurance and initiatory ritual were established. For many of these, the secret rituals were the glue that kept their mostly-male members together (Carnes 1989: 9-11). For others, membership was an important aspect of social networking. Officers were generally selected from the leaders of church and community, and ambitious people found lodge membership an aid to advancement in business and public life (Taylor 1926: 65).

Several temperance organizations formed during the 1840s incorporated mystical rites into their meetings. Among them were the Sons of Temperance, which had active chapters, both black and white, in 1870s Petersburg. Another was the quasi-integrated (top ranks were all white) Independent Order of Good Samaritans and the Daughters of Samaria. In 1870 the order had 12,000 members in Virginia — six lodges in Petersburg alone (Ferguson 1937 185-186; Carnes 1989: 6-7). The Good Samaritans flourished, representing some one hundred lodges statewide when

the annual meeting was held in Petersburg in 1876.<sup>17</sup>

Other independent branches of all-white lodges were formed after the Civil War. In 1869, the Knights of Pythias soundly rejected the charter application of a Negro Knights lodge in Richmond. A separate organization, the Colored Knights of Pythias, was organized as a fraternal benefit society (Ferguson 1931: 191). Likewise, white Elks would not admit African-Americans, so the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World (IBPOEW) was organized in 1898. The IBPOEW remained a substantial order well after the general decline in fraternalism had begun (Ferguson 1931: 190-192). Petersburg's first Elks lodge was said to have been established by the turn of the century; Royal Lodges #72 and #77, and Majestic Temple #109, were active at least into the 1960s. The Royal Social Clubs, #43 Girls and #44 Boys, active in twentieth-century Petersburg are also thought to have been affiliated with the Elks.<sup>18</sup>

Mutual aid societies, fraternal lodges, church groups and burial associations helped to create the first major black financial institutions. Especially after the collapse of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company in 1874, blacks mistrusted established banks. Mutual aid organizations began to create alternatives, the most rapidly successful being those that combined mystic fraternalism with finance (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 244-245).

The Grand Fountain of the True Reformers, a joint-stock mutual insurance association composed of male and female members, was organized in Richmond in 1881, and incorporated in 1883.<sup>19</sup> Principal officers

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<sup>17</sup> Petersburg *Daily Courier*, August 9, 1870, October 12, 1870; Petersburg *Index and Appeal*, December 29, 1874, December 13, 1876.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, Mrs. Mary Lee Berry, January 28, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> By 1900 the joining fee for those 14-45 was \$4.50 with monthly dues of 35 to 50¢ and an 80¢ annual tax. Death benefits ranged from \$75 to \$125. There were also "Rosebud Fountains" for children under 14, with a death

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<sup>14</sup> Petersburg *Index and Appeal*, March 27, 1877.

<sup>15</sup> "Petersburg Courthouse Historic District," VDHR File No. 123-103, National Register nomination, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Petersburg *Index and Appeal*, April 6, 1875.

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were Grand Worthy Master Rev. William W. Browne of Richmond and Grand Worthy Mistress Eliza Allen of Petersburg (DuBois 1907: 101). Among the earliest lodges (Fountains) was Petersburg's Fidelity Fountain #40.<sup>20</sup> By the turn of the century, the savings bank of the Grand Fountain had more than 10,000 depositors and over 100 employees in its main office (Rabinowitz 1996: 211). From four Fountains in 1881, the True Reformers grew to 2,678 lodges with over 50,000 members in 1907 (DuBois 1907: 101). In 1900 the Silver Key and Cir. #26 were active in Petersburg, with the Chief being James Allen, living on Oak Street.<sup>21</sup> The True Reformers organization collapsed shortly after the failure of its bank in 1910 (Meier 1964: 137).

Probably the best-known of the new benevolent societies was the International Order of St. Luke. This organization began in Baltimore and achieved only moderate success before 1899 when executive secretary Maggie Walker of Richmond took over the affairs. St. Luke's membership increased exponentially, and Walker soon organized the St. Luke's Penny Savings Bank. As late as 1935, the Order still had 53,000 members (Perdue 1994: 323).

The National Ideal Beneficial Society (NIBS), formally organized in Richmond in 1912 (Perdue 1994: 326), was active as early as 1910, when NIBS was cited on stones in Petersburg cemeteries. Petersburg supported at least three NIBS lodges: Magnolia #116, Blooming Zion #275, and Charity #502. At least one of these lodges was associated with Wilkerson Funeral Home, where the first meetings were held.<sup>22</sup> After the death of Maggie Walker, NIBS assumed the obligations of the Supreme Council of St. Luke, and in 1937 had 500 lodges with 40,000

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benefit of \$25.40 or \$37.00 (Richmond *The Reformer* January 27, 1900).

<sup>20</sup>Petersburg *Index and Appeal*, August 19, 1873.

<sup>21</sup>Richmond *The Reformer*, January 27, 1900.

<sup>22</sup>Interview, Mrs. Marv Lee Berry, January 28, 1999. As early as 1900, Wilkerson was advertising a hall to rent for such societies (see Figure 15).

members (Perdue 1994: 326).

The crest of mystic fraternalism's popularity lasted until about the turn of the century (Carnes 1989: 2-3). In 1904 there were at least 64 Prince Hall Masonic lodges in Virginia, with 2,111 members, and 235 Odd Fellows lodges, with about 9,000 members (DuBois 1907: 109, 121). During the 1920s institutional fraternalism began to lose strength (although beneficial societies remained powerful in Petersburg; according to the city directory in 1920 there were ten beneficial insurance companies, seven of them for whites), then during the Great Depression many national orders shrank or went bankrupt. In 1937 the total membership in the 60+ national Negro societies was estimated at 2.5 million, but by 1940 the heyday of ritual fraternalism had clearly ended (Carnes 1989: 152; Ferguson 1937: 184, 197); yet NIBS continued placing markers well after 1950. The current Bell Atlantic Yellow Pages list only Elks Majestic Temple #109 with a permanent address.

Alongside national fraternal orders, Petersburg's black community supported a number of local beneficial associations. Providence Beneficial, among the groups that have been connected to People's Cemetery, was organized sometime after the Civil War.<sup>23</sup> Minerva Spratley's obituary in 1879 commented that she was a member of "a number of the colored benevolent societies of the city, and her funeral will doubtless be largely attended."<sup>24</sup>

A special edition of the *Index-Appeal* provides a snapshot of fraternal organizations at the end of 1887. Among established African-American societies were Masons: Pocahontas Lodge #7 and Friendly Lodge #21, which shared Masonic Hall on Lombard Street; Virginia Lodge #9, Abraham/Abram Lodge #10, Jerusalem Lodge #16, and Sheba Lodge #17, all using Masonic Hall on Oak Street, which was also

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<sup>23</sup>Thomas H. Brown, letter 1931 (copy in "History of People's Cemetery"). DuBois (1907-94) did not record the existence of Providence as of 1898.

<sup>24</sup>February 21, 1879 clipping in *Obituaries Scrapbook* (Petersburg Public Library).

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home to Keystone Royal Arch Chapter and St. Mark's Commandery Knights Templar; and Eureka Lodge #15. Odd Fellows Hall on Lombard Street was headquarters to several lodges: Noah #1367, St. Joseph's #1382, Abraham #1533, as well as the affiliated Household of Ruth (women) and United Sons of the Morning. Two chapters of the Knights of Pythias were active, Auxiliary Lodge (which met at the white-owned Ramsdell Hall and may have been a branch of the white Pythian Knights) and Excelsior Lodge #43, which used Coleman's Hall on Sycamore Street. Coleman's Hall was the meeting place of quite a few groups: women's organizations including Sisters of David, Sisters of Esther, Sisters of Samuel, and Sisters of Job; two chapters of the Order of St. Luke (Petersburg Council #55 and Mt. Lebanon #10); and Crystal Fountain #43 of the Order of True Reformers.<sup>25</sup> There was also a Good Samaritan Hall on South Jefferson Street, which had moved to Gill Street, next to Brown's Funeral Home, by 1935.<sup>26</sup> The Masonic-affiliated Mosaic Templars Hall at 211 Halifax Street is said to have been built in the late nineteenth century (Bushey et al. 1994: 46).

The 1880s, a decade of expanding industrial employment and wages, are considered to have been the high point in black cultural life in Petersburg, but the interest in benevolent and fraternal organizations lasted several more decades. In 1898 there were at least twenty-two mutual benefit societies, alongside numerous secret and fraternal lodges (Weare 1973: 11). The Young Men's Industrial Beneficial Association (YMIBA), organized in 1894, had its own building by 1911 (shared with the Young Women's Industrial Beneficial Club (YWIBA or WIBC) at 434 Federal Street; and in 1925 was described by the *Progress-Index* as "one of our most formidable, influential and useful local organizations."<sup>27</sup> Another local society, the Blandford Industrial Benefit Club (BIBC), had a

building (now gone) at the corner of Bank Street and Crater Road. It is not known when the Young Men's Silver Leaf Industrial Club (YMSLIC) developed; the women's Silver Leaf Club (SLIC) was active by the 1920s.<sup>28</sup>

Most if not all of these organizations are inactive today, their buildings demolished or converted to other uses. The most tangible reminders of the clubs are the individual memorials they placed on the graves of their members. An important reason for supporting large funerals was to ensure that friends would not be forgotten (reiterating the idea that "to be forgotten is worse than death"), but the individual lodge stones have become significant memorials to the clubs themselves.

### Petersburg Cemeteries

Burial of the dead in the ground is an ancient custom in both Africa and Europe, and came to the New World with the earliest settlers. Whether in town or on the plantation, most corpses were interred, and the locations of an untold number of burial sites have been forgotten. The earliest extant cemetery in Petersburg is Blandford Churchyard, known to have been in use by 1702. Well-situated on the outskirts of the growing town, Blandford Cemetery became the principal place of interment for white residents of Petersburg.

Perhaps even older, and used by many of the town's white citizens, was one situated "around High and Market streets"<sup>29</sup> (Figure 4). This cemetery was apparently moved in the early nineteenth century to make way for the city's expansion. Another early graveyard, shown on an 1809 map of Petersburg,<sup>30</sup> was situated on the north side of Marshall between Walnut and Adams — essentially in the backyard of what is today the Petersburg library. Nothing is left to mark the

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<sup>25</sup> Petersburg *Index and Appeal's Annual and Resume of Events*, January 1888.

<sup>26</sup>Petersburg City Directory 1935.

<sup>27</sup>Petersburg *Progress-Index*, April 1, 1911, April 15, 1925, April 17, 1925.

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<sup>28</sup> Petersburg *Progress-Index*, March 1, 1925. Interview, Mrs. Marv Lee Berry, January 28, 1999

<sup>29</sup> Petersburg *Daily Index*, February 6, 1866.

<sup>30</sup> Lots South of Washington Street Surveyed for Robert Bolling by James Hargrave.

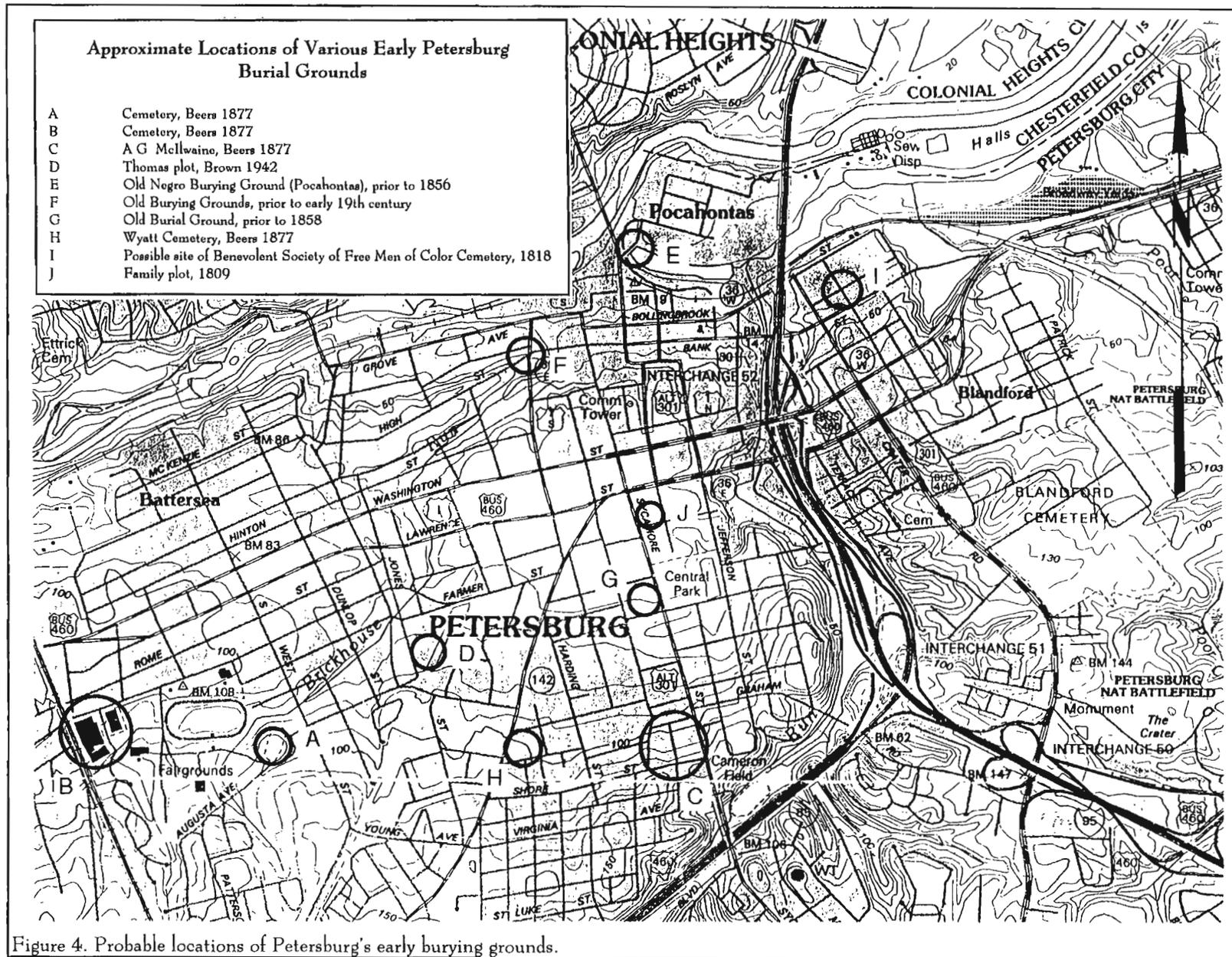


Figure 4. Probable locations of Petersburg's early burying grounds.

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spot. Another white cemetery, at times called Bethel, was situated southwest of the fairgrounds and saw the burial of 500-600 Confederate soldiers.<sup>31</sup> This cemetery was apparently built over during the early 1970s (see discussion below). The "Old Burying Ground" on Sycamore Street, opposite Poplar Lawn, by 1858 was abandoned and the City Council decided to convert it to an oat field, later selling lots for development.<sup>32</sup>

Although the cause is far from clear, it is curious that Petersburg seems to be one of the few cities without urban or in-town churchyard cemeteries. Instead, there appear to have been public and private cemeteries both in the city and on the outskirts. Following a trend spreading throughout Europe and North America, the town of Petersburg purchased the Blandford tract for use as a public burying ground in 1819

Adjacent to Blandford Cemetery, St. Joseph's and B'rith Achim, for the use of Catholics and Jews respectively, were both established in the nineteenth century. These cemeteries are often considered part of Blandford, but they are separate tracts not included in the National Register listing for Blandford, and were not researched for this project.

Plots in Blandford were available for white citizens, but paupers and indigent strangers who died in Petersburg would be taken to a "potters field," where they were interred with little ceremony, at the lowest cost to the public treasury. Several such burial grounds were probably used in Petersburg. They may have been segregated by race, and it is likely that a large proportion of urban slaves were buried in a potters field.

In addition to public graveyards (Blandford and potters fields), in various areas of the city were private burial grounds which are generally undocumented. Two are shown on the 1877 Beers Map, one for the Wyatt family (on Portersville Street) and one owned by A.G. McIlwaine (west of Sycamore). Beers does not show a cemetery on the Mingea lot (about the site of today's

Blandford Manor on South Crater Road) where a single head and footstone, without legible inscription, was photographed for a ca. 1958 news article about the "old rectory on Blandford Hill."<sup>33</sup>

African American cemeteries were treated no better — and likely far worse — than white graveyards. One of the earliest is undoubtedly the "colored burying ground" on Walnut Street, given to Petersburg in 1794 by the father of Robert B. Bolling. By 1856 the City found it "unnecessary" and the land was converted to "purposes better suited to that improving and populous portion of the city"<sup>34</sup> In other words, it was developed.

Many of Petersburg's free blacks settled in the Pocahontas area, found employment in trade, service, and laboring occupations, and began to acquire property. Sandy Beach Church was established before 1800, and at an early date a burial ground was in use on Pocahontas. It is not certain whether it was begun through the church or other organization. Independently held by black people, and not by the city, the cemetery was acknowledged but not protected.

As early as 1856 this property, owned by G.W. West, had been abandoned and sold at auction to Pannill and Collier, only to be quickly purchased by the city.<sup>35</sup> It seems that almost immediately the city began excavating the property and using it as fill dirt in various street repair projects. It wasn't until 1869 that this was noticed by anyone who either found it offensive or who was in a position to be vocal. The horror of the site was reported<sup>36</sup> and a year later, after apparently no action had been taken, a councilman, Mr. Doggett, warned that, "when we cease to respect the dead, we cease to

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<sup>33</sup> "Old Rectory Interesting Place," in Petersburg *Progress-Index* (n.d., ca. February 1958, copy in D.L. Lauter files, Prince George County).

<sup>34</sup> Petersburg *The Southside Daily Democrat*, November 12, 1856.

<sup>35</sup> Petersburg *The Southside Daily Democrat*, December 19, 1856.

<sup>36</sup> Petersburg *The Daily Express*, February 15, 1869.

<sup>31</sup> Petersburg *The Daily Index*, May 22, 1869.

<sup>32</sup> Petersburg *Daily Index*, February 16, 1866.

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respect ourselves”<sup>37</sup> A year later the newspaper reported that sand was still being hauled from the abandoned graveyard during the construction of the new iron bridge and no action had been taken to either stop the desecration or rebury the exposed bones.<sup>38</sup> Years later, Thomas Brown declared that Pocahontas Cemetery had been dug up as a health nuisance and the remains used to fill Low Street or Tinpot Alley, just west of Petersburg's Old Town Section.<sup>39</sup> Regardless of the precise intents or activities, there is no visible trace of the cemetery today.

To provide an alternative to potters field or private backyard burial, in 1818 trustees of the Benevolent Society of Free Men of Color paid \$100 for a small parcel in the section of Petersburg known as Blandford to become a burial ground. Their half-acre plot, a portion of the estate of Nicholas Voss, has not been located with certainty. The deed describes it as surrounded by Voss's land on three sides, with a 30' street to the north.<sup>40</sup> Because bones were unearthed during the construction (ca. 1920) of Blandford Elementary School on East Bank Street, this has been said to be the Benevolent Society lot (Bushey et al. 1994: 42). However, according to Mary Berry, several older residents believe that these bones represented another small graveyard whose name has been lost, and not a heavily used plot such as the Benevolent Society's would have been.<sup>41</sup>

The Benevolent Society's 1818 purchase was made while the City of Petersburg was purchasing four acres at old Blandford Churchyard as a public burying ground for whites (arrangements began 1817, sale complete 1819). The free men of color did for their

own community what the government did for its citizens, both purchases influenced by the combination of a rising economy with awakening public/religious zeal that rebuilt Petersburg after the great fire of 1815, and saw the expanding congregations of Gillfield Baptist, First Baptist, and Union Methodist (Oak Street AMEZ) churches.

During the 1830s, when restrictions on free blacks were being enacted in several states (Virginia was especially vigorous, reacting to Nat Turner's rebellion; see, for example, Guild 1996), cities began to formally segregate their public burying grounds (Goldfield 1991: 150-151). Petersburg was no exception: in 1837 a City Ordinance forbade the burial of blacks in Blandford Cemetery. New restrictions at Blandford, the limited land area at Pocahontas, and the absence of churchyard cemeteries all contributed to the need for a larger cemetery for the free black community. In 1840, a group of 28 men paid \$200 for a one-acre tract, the first deeded parcel of today's Peoples Memorial Cemetery. In 1865 the cemetery was enlarged, again by the purchase of land by a group of African American men. Because records have been lost, and later writers relied on oral tradition, the story of the organizational management of People's Cemetery has been lost. The 1840 tract was probably the "place of interment" mentioned in the Beneficial Society's 1852 constitution. This group and its successors were the "Old Beneficial" and "Beneficial Board" cited in twentieth century records.

Although \$200/acre in the first quarter of the nineteenth century was closer to market price than a gift, 125 years later Thomas Brown stated that "some of the noble white men under Col. McRae (Captain Richard McRae of the Petersburg Volunteers in the War of 1812) had given to the slaves and free Negroes the two strips of land, namely the Old Beneficial and the Beneficial Board " that form the northern portion of People's Cemetery (Brown 1942). Soon after, he wrote of "the existence [of] the old Beneficial Board that was next to a piece of ground that was set aside by a Mr. Bolling. This land was called a free

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<sup>37</sup> Petersburg *The Daily Courier*, February 2, 1870.

<sup>38</sup> Petersburg *The Daily Courier*, March 14, 1871.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Brown, unpublished letter to the editor of the Petersburg *Progress-Index*, March 17, 1941.

<sup>40</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 5, pg. 306 (recited in Jackson 1942:162).

<sup>41</sup> Interview, Mrs. Mary L. Berry, January 28, 1999.

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Negro's burying ground."<sup>42</sup> Brown added to the confusion of records about Petersburg's cemeteries, but there may be some truth to the notion that there had been a free cemetery at the north side of People's. Abutting the earliest part of People's, Little Church Cemetery was already a burial ground when the Mingeas heirs sold the plot to undertaker James Wilkerson in 1882. The Mingeas, a prominent white family, had owned the land for decades, but nothing is known of the burial plot: who was buried there, or when. Slaves of the Mingeas or free blacks may have been buried there; the Mingeas may even have had a cooperative arrangement with other whites (McRae or Bolling) to allow use of the cemetery.

Petersburg's other extant historic cemetery, East View/Wilkerson Memorial, was in use by 1866. Little is known of the early history of this burial ground, which was acquired by the Wilkerson interests in 1911 but not annexed from Prince George County into Petersburg until the 1940s. Adjacent to the in-town cemeteries, East View was no less convenient for city dwellers by being outside the city line.

The City of Petersburg enlarged Blandford Cemetery in the early 1840s, and in 1850, noting the "propriety of providing a burying ground for persons of color by the city," authorized a section to be separated by a fence from the white section<sup>43</sup> and used for African American burials. This provided one more option for Petersburg's black families when they selected a grave site.

Petersburg's separate cemeteries — the People's complex, Little Church, East View, and the Blandford complex — are connected geographically, with several boundaries being blurred over time. They are also knitted together by family relationships within the black community, as many of the city's long-established families have members buried in two or more cemeteries. Geographic and family ties, even

similar grave markers, create a unity among the properties that should not be overlooked when studying them separately.

Several other cemeteries have disappeared from Petersburg's landscape. According to the Beers Map of 1877, two graveyards were in the West End, near the city poorhouse and charity hospital. The City Home remained occupied into the 1930s, when one of the residents, a retired minister, was supervising burials there (Perdue 1976: 211). The cemeteries later fell into disuse and were obliterated with the construction of nearby Pecan Acres in the early 1970s. Some of the Confederate soldiers were moved to Blandford; the unmarked burials of indigents and the unknown, whether black or white, were probably covered over.<sup>44</sup> On Jones Street, a plot called the "Matthew Thomas Cemetery" had vanished by the time Thomas Brown wrote his *History of the People's Memorial Cemetery* (Brown 1942). There may have been a burial ground on St. Andrews Street, the road that runs up to the west side of People's, which was separate from the People's complex but also under Thomas Brown's management during the early twentieth century.<sup>45</sup>

There are few contemporary descriptions of antebellum African American cemeteries, and those that can be found are often tainted by racism. A white reporter observed a funeral in Richmond in 1852: Beyond the white cemetery, a "neat, rural place, well-filled with monuments and evergreens," was a "desolate" place — the black hillside cemetery. The grave was already dug, next to that of an apparently unrelated child who was interred the same day. Once the pine coffin had been lowered and earth piled up into a raised mound over it, one of the men broke two small branches from a nearby beech tree and placed them upright at the head and foot (Olmsted 1996 [1861]: 35-36).

William Cullen Bryant was more sensitive, noting that it did not matter so much that the

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas H. Brown, letter to Petersburg City Council, April 1943.

<sup>43</sup> "Blandford Cemetery" National Register nomination, VDNR, 1991

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<sup>44</sup> Interview, Mr. Leonard A. Muse, December 18, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Interview, Mrs. Marv L. Berry, January 28, 1999.

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cemeteries were "poorly kept", with few markers and "those mostly humble" (quoted in Wade 1964: 170-171). Regardless of the perspective of white onlookers, slaves and free persons of color conducted their funerals and maintained their graveyards in accordance with their own spiritual beliefs, and with as much care as circumstances permitted, often making them not only orderly but artistic (Quigley 1996: 88).

Landscaping, fencing, and markers bearing the name of the deceased are conventional grave care customs that vary according to time, place, economics, and spiritual values. One of the notable, if not unique, ways in which Petersburg's black community traditionally demonstrated remembrance was by placing small "lodge stones" to commemorate membership in a fraternal or mutual-assistance organization.

As early as 1873 and as late as 1948, grave markers in Petersburg's African American cemeteries bear Masonic emblems. Although fraternal and beneficial organizations were as active in the 1870s and 1880s as in the 1920s and 1930s, the greatest number of lodge stones bear twentieth century dates. While many stones from the earlier period may have been lost over time, it seems that the custom of providing small membership markers was more popular in the latter era.

The International Order of St. Luke's objective to "administer to the sick, help the distressed, extend charity to all, and bury the dead" is demonstrated by 1920s gravemarkers placed by Deborah Chapter #1285. Besides Masons, other groups prolific in placing markers were YMIBA, NIBS, BIBS, and the various Elks lodges and temples. Some graves have more than one commemorative stone or carving: IBPOEW Royal Lodge #77/YMIBA, IBPOEW Majestic Temple #109/NIBS Blooming Zion #275; IBPOEW Majestic Temple #109/YWIBA, IBPOEW Royal Lodge #77/IFL Inc./MIBA.

The habit continued well into the twentieth century. ES & LC, responsible for a good many markers between 1920 and 1949, was probably related to the Order of Eastern Star. Rosetta Tent #433 is a later group; its first stones date to 1950. Other organizations await research, such as Star Chamber #5352.

Despite the presence of mutual-aid organizations, other charitable acts may have been more personal. In 1932 undertaker Thomas Brown buried Nannie McNeil and her baby at People's Cemetery, charging his \$15.90 fee to "Friends at factory" (People's Cemetery Records Reel One). Mid-1920s gravemarkers in People's Cemetery were placed by co-workers in Seidenburg Stemmery Room No. 1 and No. 2; a stone from 1941 is inscribed American Suppliers Stemmery No. 1 (the successor to Seidenburg). Seidenburg/American Suppliers was a major employer of African Americans, apparently in large enough numbers to support some sort of in-house mutual-benefit group. The workplaces of other employment-related memorial stones have not been identified: at Little Church is a 1933 marker "from the Employees of C. S. H." and at East View is a marker from "Employees 1898-1945, C. S. H.", and one for Holly Hunter (1949) "from her co-workers."

### Undertaking

During the nineteenth century, the occupation of undertaker became professionalized, with traditional "layers out of the dead" (often women) being displaced as other tradespeople expanded into the business of managing funerals. Carpenters and cabinetmakers who made coffins and livery-stable keepers who supplied horses and coaches grew more involved with the funeral business, joined by barber-surgeons and chemists trained in embalming. This chore was better performed in a specialized setting, so embalmers preferred to remove the body from home for the work. Evolving into funeral directors, they provided viewing rooms and on-site chapels instead of returning the body home for the watch and funeral (Habenstein and Lamers 1955; Mitford 1998: 147-149; Quigley 1996: 52-53). Other funeral parlors and mortuaries grew out of burial associations through which poor people bought burial plans, paying an undertaker a few cents weekly, to assure themselves of decent burial (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 246).

Petersburg's early undertakers arrived in their profession through the normal routes. The city directory of 1859 includes four undertakers (all white), with advertisements for two: James T Morris (furniture dealer; "coffins of every description always on hand.

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And particular attention paid to the duties of an Undertaker") and John Morrison ("Cabinet Maker, Upholsterer & General Furnishing. Undertaker, Agent for Fisk's Metallic Caskets.")

In the black community too, some professions were associated with funerals and burial. At least by 1858 Richard Kennard, a free man of color, was operating a hack (horse and carriage for hire) business in Petersburg (Jackson 1942: 20). Involvement in funerals was probably one reason he joined nine other men in the purchase of cemetery land in 1865. Another of the purchasers, Thomas Scott, established a funeral home business (he is listed in the 1870 Census as a 49-year-old undertaker). Although antebellum gazetteers seem to include only white citizens, the city directory for 1873 lists two black undertakers, Philip Robinson, and Hill, Parker & Wilkinson [probably Wilkerson].

A successful African-American undertaker or funeral director could earn a comfortable living in a trade mostly free from white interference. Not surprisingly, the trade was intensively competitive in Petersburg. While the white businesses were fairly stable with two funeral directors for decades, the black field was volatile. By 1877 John M. Hill & Co. had joined the ranks of the city's undertakers. After a decade of turnover and changes, in 1888 there were four undertakers headquartered on Harrison, Oak and Halifax streets: Green & Crowden, Philip Robinson, Thomas Scott, and J. M. Wilkerson, now a sole proprietor.<sup>46</sup>

Several other funeral directors operated more or less successfully during the next decades, most of them along Halifax, Oak and South streets. Among them were Armistead Green (1841-1893), grocer and undertaker, perhaps associated with Green and Crowden; Christopher B. Stevens, builder and coffinmaker; R. A. Jones (1893 City Directory); J. A. C. Stevens (1899 Directory). About 1910 William Frederick Jackson came into the business as a funeral

director-embalmer who was probably associated with the "William Jackson Beneficial Club" (cited in Brown 1942) and Jackson Cemetery (the south part of the People's complex, and the only burial place not being managed by Wilkerson in 1910). Jackson's business disappears from the listings by 1914, but may have been connected with Jackson Memorial Funeral Home, established in the 1930s. Between about 1914 and 1925 J. M. Epps/Epps & Epps operated a funeral home; David T. Paige was in business briefly around 1920. City directories reveal no information about Albert Avant, the proprietor of another early funeral home (Bushey et al. 1994: 45), or Wilcox Jones, of Community Funeral Directors (perhaps an out-of-town firm) who directed at least one funeral in 1925.<sup>47</sup> The concerns presently in business are Wilkerson, William N. Bland & Sons (established 1952), and Tucker's Funeral Home. The oldest of them, Wilkerson, has endured with several generations of family management, and the company still retains ownership of Little Church and East View cemeteries.

Besides Wilkerson, the longest-lasting of the early undertaking businesses was that established by Thomas Scott, a member of an antebellum free family that produced a number of carpenters and builders. In 1893 the elderly Scott took an assistant, Thomas H. Brown. Very shortly Brown took over the business, and was listed as an undertaker in the 1897 City Directory. By 1899 he was running an advertisement in the city business directory, an approach taken by neither of his direct competitors. Soon undertaker James M. Wilkerson too had advertisements in the local black press, stressing "fine caskets; embalming neatly done."<sup>48</sup> A 1900 advertisement (Figure 5) also reminded the public that he had a "Hall to rent for Societies, Suppers and Concerts."<sup>49</sup> Groups such as NIBS found a home in Wilkerson's hall.

Captain Thomas H. Brown (1864-1952) is

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<sup>47</sup> Petersburg *Progress-Index*, April 8, 1925.

<sup>48</sup> 1903 newspaper clippings in W.H. Johnson Scrapbook, Special Collections, VSU.

<sup>49</sup> Petersburg *National Pilot*, February 1, 1900.

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<sup>46</sup> This situation seems to have been similar in Richmond where, in 1900, at least five undertaking firms were advertising (Richmond *The Reformer*, January 27, 1900).

the most vivid character in the history of the city's undertaking establishments. A Petersburg native, he went to work as a boy in the tobacco industry and at the age of 18 joined the Knights of King Solomon; found employment in a drug store/pharmacy, then, probably having learned something of chemical embalming, was hired by Thomas Scott; and eventually took over not only Scott's business but also People's Cemetery. In 1899 he was instrumental in organizing an Elks lodge; in 1900 he was commissioned a deputy of the RWG Council of Virginia, International Order of St. Luke (Brown 1945).

Brown's granddaughter's memories, and his own autobiographical sketch, are unclear about some of his professional activities. He may have practiced as an undertaker in Alexandria for a while; he may have operated a drug store in North Carolina. For several years after 1909, he does not appear in Petersburg City Directories, so the only competition to James Wilkerson was offered by William Frederick Jackson. In 1914, the year Brown returned to Petersburg, Jackson's business disappears from the listings.

At some point, Brown moved his funeral home from Thomas Scott's old location on Halifax Street to a new building next to Gillfield Baptist Church. He later established a branch of the business in Hopewell, and in 1916 organized the Hopewell Benevolent Beneficial Society, a funeral-insurance association. Despite his lack of formal schooling, Thomas H. Brown was a prodigious writer, publishing newspapers targeted toward the black community (Brown 1942), and writing epistles to editors, politicians and club members nearly until his

J. M. WILKERSON,



FUNERAL DIRECTOR

—AND—

EMBALMER,

*Cor. South Avenue and  
Harrison Street,*

Hacks furnished for Marriages, Funerals, Entertainments, etc.

Hall to rent for Societies, ~~Supper~~  
and Concerts.

Dec-16-12

Figure 5. Advertisement for J.M. Wilkerson from 1900.

death.<sup>50</sup>

The important asset that the two most successful funeral home businesses, Wilkerson and Brown, had in common was ownership or management of a cemetery. James M. Wilkerson purchased Little Church in 1883; from about 1899, he was the

<sup>50</sup> Thomas H. Brown, "An Open Letter to the Public," undated newspaper clipping ca. 1942.

superintendent of Providence (part of People's); by 1905 he was also managing East View Cemetery, which he acquired in 1911. Wilkerson's non-ownership superintending jobs ended about the time Brown returned to Petersburg in 1914. Within a few years, Brown was generally recognized as the manager of People's Memorial Cemetery, a consolidation of Beneficial, Providence, Scott, and Jackson cemeteries.

### A Brief Overview of Cemetery Development

In 1978 Gregory Jeane commented that, "so little has been done toward classifying the American cemetery landscape that the process seems a labyrinth" (Jeane 1978:895). He went on to footnote the efforts of Larry Price over a decade earlier (Price 1966) who used size and period of most active use, but explained that American graveyards were so ethnically diverse that an extraordinary range of burial practices and values can be found. Consequently, although the landscape of cemeteries<sup>51</sup> often remained unchanged for long periods of time, the diversity worked to complicate any organizational scheme.

Jeane goes on to define the Upland South Cemetery type (see also Jeane 1969, 1987) based on five characteristics: site (hilltop), size (small, less than 2 acres), vegetation (distinctive species such as cedar, with all other plants manually removed), decoration (a broad spectrum of individualism), and a cult of piety (seen primarily in the care and upkeep).<sup>52</sup> He notes that although most frequently associated with white cemeteries, often with a Scotch-Irish core, there was considerable cross-over with African American cemeteries. He even comments that it is possible "some of the burial traits may have been introduced into the south via the slave trade" (Jeane 1978:902).

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<sup>51</sup> Authors such as Lynette Strangstad (1988:6) prefer to distinguish between cemeteries and graveyards, with the former being nineteenth century and later, while the latter term is used for earlier burying grounds. Using these definitions, the extant Petersburg burying grounds are all most typically "cemeteries."

<sup>52</sup> Although he focused on rural cemeteries, some of his discussions and observations are equally appropriate for urban examples.

Regardless, the Upland South Cemetery, although found in the project area, is clearly not an urban cemetery. Nor is it particularly useful for characterizing African American burial practices. In spite of this, as is discussed below, at least one of the Petersburg cemeteries incorporates elements of the Upland South Cemetery type.

Perhaps more useful for our purposes are the efforts of authors such as David Charles Sloane (1991) to establish a more uniformly defined typology of cemetery types based on the evolution of largely (although not exclusively) commercial cemeteries. Sloane, like Jeane before him, recognizes the confusion (he calls it a mosaic), but offers hope for a synthesis:

There is a vast diversity of American burial customs and burial places. As many as one hundred thousand European-style burial places have been identified nationally. The result of the tragedies and hopes of three centuries of settlement, these burial places reflect many aspects of American technology, business practices, demographics, cultural norms, social relationships, and maternal culture. *Yet the American mosaic has a discernible pattern* (Sloane 1991.1, emphasis added).

Sloane, like Jeane, recognizes that the cemetery provides an exceptional landscape open to study, allowing us to view the "hopes, fears, and designs" of succeeding generations. Moreover, however much cemeteries change, they also stay the same. Rarely are the grounds *dramatically* redesigned. Instead, you see several successive designs presented and interpreted within the same cemetery. Consequently, it is possible to observe how changes in styles, beliefs, and customs are interpreted by differing generations. At the same time it is also possible to examine the changing business practices of the cemeteries — and how those practices affected the embellishment and maintenance of different lots. In fact, a central theme in Sloane's analysis (focusing as it does on the urban and suburban landscape, rather than the rural landscape) is that the formation of the landscape "by lot holders, cemetery

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designers, and cemetery managers and owners was intricately related to the marketing and management of the institution" (Sloane 1991.7).

Sloane uses several hundred pages to develop his evolutionary scheme of cemetery development and we will dramatically synthesize those discussions for this overview (see, for example, Table 2). He observes that the earliest burial customs were unorganized, often in isolated places. Through time the family burial plot is used by additional families, probably through intermarriage. It evolves from a few graves to perhaps several dozen (see also Jeane 1969:40).

Church graveyards followed European practices, providing a place for the burial of city-dwellers. As authors such as Ariès (1974) emphasize, parishioners hoped for a safe, and comfortable, closeness to heaven and eternal salvation by being buried close to the saints on sacred ground. Social stratification quickly developed, with the wealthiest being buried within the church, while those of modest means made do with outside plots.

Care, as well as planning, was minimal, so that not only were the grounds often "torn up," but graves weaved across the landscape (see, for example, Trinkley and Hacker 1998). Few pathways existed, the ground being far too valuable for burials to be wasted. Ornamentation and vegetation were scarce, for the same reason. The church graveyard presented a bleak reminder of the cold, harsh grip of the grave. It wasn't until the mid to late nineteenth century that well-intentioned caretakers began to gather up markers, resetting them in neat straight lines, establishing paths over burials, and in general "beautifying" these graveyards.

Sloane observes that the close proximity of these church graveyards to town residences and commerce helped maintain contact between the living and the dead. But it also made it far easier for the living to justify displacing the dead and obliterating the graveyard as the need for city expansion became critical. This might be subsumed under the warning that "familiarity breeds contempt." As has been previously discussed this is exactly the situation at several of Petersburg's cemeteries.

Potter's fields, the term applied to any burial place for the indigent<sup>53</sup>, were rarely found prior to nineteenth century. Prior to that time plots were typically set aside for "strangers," who typically would not have the means to pay for their grave (Sloane 1991.24-25).

African Americans were particularly susceptible to losing their burial places, especially since these burying grounds were often little more than potter's fields. One of the greatest problems in tracing the history of these graveyards is that none existed for very long. They were typically used and then discarded, being built over. In a society that was dominated by racism and concern with maintaining the white power structure, African Americans, who had a hard enough time owning land in the first place, were usually denied the right to bury in family plots. Sloane observes that this effort to strip familial and community relationships actually encouraged blacks "to develop and protect the areas in which they could express their sense of family and community" (Sloane 1991.15).

Through time the urban graveyard began to engender considerable concern. One account proclaimed that, "the living here breathe on all sides an atmosphere impregnated with the odor of the dead. Typhus fever in its aggravated form has attacked them with the most destructive ravages." At another location the situation was no better, the soil being "saturated with human putrescence." Elsewhere the accounts of bodies being dug up and carted away for their bones, or simply being strewn around the graveyard, were common (Collison 1841.143).

As overcrowding of typical church cemeteries became more clearly recognized and as concerns over the "reservoir" of disease that church cemeteries presented to the urban population mounted, there was a clamor to close city graveyards and move burying grounds outside the city limits. In New Haven, Connecticut this led to the creation of a private association of lot holders "joining together to save the

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<sup>53</sup> The term comes from Matthew xxvii,7 and describes a burial place, "the potter's field," purchased with the 30 pieces of silver thrown down by Judas.

Table 2  
 Characteristics of American Cemeteries (adapted from Sloane 1991:Table 1 1)

Name	Period	Design	Location	Monumental Style	Monument Material	Type of Management	Paradigm
Churchyard	17th - 20th c	Geometric or formal garden	Adjacent to church	Artistic iconography	Wood, marble, slate	Part-time sexton	Religious ownership, functional design
Potter s field	17th - 20th c	Geometric	City border	Plain markers, if any at all	Wood, stone	Sexton	Judas (St Matthew), provision for strangers, indigents
Town/city cemetery	17th - 20th c	Formal garden	City border	3-dimensional markers, monuments, sculpture	Stone	Sexton	Family or government owned
Rural cemetery	1831 - 1870s	Picturesque, natural garden	Suburb	3-dimensional markers, monuments, sculpture	Stone	Trustees, later superintendent	Private ownership; garden aesthetic
Lawn park cemetery	1855 - 1920s	Pastoral, park-like	Suburb	3 dimensional monuments, sculpture, close to the ground markers	Granite, stone, bronze	Trustee, entrepreneur, superintendent	Entrepreneurial, park aesthetic
Memorial park	1917 - present	Pastoral	Suburb	2 or 3-dimensional, flush-to-the-ground markers, central section sculptures	Bronze, granite	Entrepreneur, sales manager, superintendent	Entrepreneurial, suburban aesthetic, mausoleums

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living and preserve the dead" (Sloane 1991:29).

As part of general civic-improvement movement these private or city sponsored cemeteries were laid out in rather traditional fashions, although the single greatest change was the orientation toward family lots coupled with some effort at landscaping. This, in fact, may be viewed as the beginning of the transformation from graveyards to cemeteries. There was an increasing emphasis on celebrating kinship with large, three-dimensional monuments focusing on the family name, rather than individual achievements inscribed on headstones. Nevertheless, there was still an overall geometric or formal organization to these new places of burial, harking back to the churchyard burying grounds.

The private town and city cemeteries, although offering a marked improvement over the "old style," were still tied closely to the urban environment — probably too closely, in fact, for them to allow any radical change. They still seemed dominated by the city's economy and commercial life and weren't able to offer the cemetery visitor any respite from city life. Nevertheless, they did serve as a point of departure, opening the way for the next phase of cemetery evolution — a movement that began to focus on rural values.

Most authors, including Sloane, see the origin of the rural cemetery movement beginning with Mount Auburn's formation in 1831. Organized as a voluntary association of families and individuals, it was laid out on what can only be described as "strikingly beautiful" land outside Boston — providing an essential ingredient in what would become recognized as the "picturesque." Americans began to move away from planned order and rigid formality, turning instead to things that seemed more naturalistic.

At Mount Auburn the individual lot holders were expected to develop the landscape. As a family-centered cemetery, families were expected to decorate the graves tastefully with the finest available memorials and plants. At 300 square feet, the family lots (usually about 16 to 18 feet square) were large enough to permit considerable variety, as well as burials over several generations. The cemetery was made accessible through

its serpentine roads and wide pathways — laid out to maximize the number of desirable lots. As Sloane comments, Mount Auburn sought to offer families "a stable and secure place of memories" (Sloane 1991:53).

The cemetery founders also sought to celebrate the democratic, egalitarian nature and heritage of America, making burial space affordable and pleasant. This effort, however, was threatened rather quickly by large, ostentatious monuments and plots tended by professional gardeners. In addition, those unable to afford family plots, who purchased individual grave sites instead, were not voting members of the corporation and had no say in how the cemetery was tended. As Sloane observes, "they were outside the decision making about the dead, just as they were often outsiders among the living" (Sloane 1991:54). In spite of this, the cemetery became a focal point in Boston and its word quickly spread (see, for example, Anonymous 1839).

Within two decades, rural cemeteries patterned on Mount Auburn had spread across regional boundaries. Hollywood Cemetery was sited just west of Richmond, commanding a view of the city from a bluff overlooking the falls of the James River. Designed by Philadelphia architect John Notman, it was organized by 1848 (DuPriest 1989). Similar cemeteries were organized in other Southern cities, such as Atlanta, Georgia (Oakland, 1850), Charleston, South Carolina (Magnolia, 1850), and Wilmington, North Carolina (Oakdale, 1852).

Sloane explains that the impact of Mount Auburn was extraordinary. Not only were cities' burial crises resolved with the creation of new, rural cemeteries, but more importantly the nation was provided "with the model for a new sacred space for the dead and a tranquil spot, even a pleasure ground, for the living" (Sloane 1991:63). Eventually the rural cemetery movement spilled over into smaller towns. Even where there was no "burial crisis," local communities wanted the new style cemetery and it was elevated to a "cultural necessity."

There were gradual modifications, both to the laws and also to the practice. In the 1840s, for example, a wave of states passed laws allowing cemeteries to incorporate, placing them on firmer legal and financial

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footing. In addition, the cemetery managers began to recognize that not all families would maintain appropriate decorum in the decoration of their lots, nor would maintenance be equal.

There was no clear answer for the issue of taste, especially since virtually all of the rural cemetery organizations had made some provision assuring lot-holders of their free rein.<sup>54</sup> The issue of maintenance was somewhat easier to address. Although no board desired to be responsible for the care and maintenance of monuments (there were simply too many different styles and materials), there were trusts established to help care for lots' appearances. The movement, however, was slow, and most cemeteries did not establish funds until the 1870s or 1880s.

Blanche Linden-Ward (1990) suggests that fences are one of the hallmarks of the rural cemetery movement. Owning the plot and assured of its preservation (a situation which was never present in the church cemetery), fencing suddenly became an option. She also sees it as part of a far-reaching trend in privatization and emphasizes that it was a matter of taste, not necessity (i.e., there were, by this time, no cattle or pigs freely ranging in rural cemeteries).<sup>55</sup>

The building of fences at Mount Auburn increased annually from 1840, reaching a peak in 1853, then dropping off markedly from 1858 through the 1860s. During the prime, dealers sought to create a market by advertising a wide range of funerary furniture, including tree guards, trellises, planter urns, settees, statues, and hitching posts. All of this, of course, encouraged family plots to become increasingly cluttered and overwhelmed, fitting in nicely with the Victorian middle class's effort to achieve identity and

individual sensibility (Grier 1988).

Through time, as the rural cemeteries became more cluttered, less rural, and more ostentatious, a back-lash developed. One critic was the horticulturalist Andrew J. Downing, often described as America's "arbiter of taste" from the 1840s until his death in 1856. While an ardent supporter of the rural and picturesque movement, he was a vicious critic of the pomposity found in many rural cemeteries. Moreover, he found them far too gayly decorated, not in keeping with the need for contemplation central to the idea of a Romantic cemetery as part of the larger Romantic-Picturesque landscape movement. He argued that the clutter also detracted from the rural setting and made the cemeteries feel far too urban.

It was about this time that a gradual shift away from fencing and toward curbing begins. It first appeared at Mount Auburn in 1858, but increased dramatically in the 1860s and 1870s.

The curbs served many of the same goals as fences, clearly marking ownership. But, instead of an iron fence, owners used granite curbs raised 12 to 16 inches above the surrounding ground. The interior of the lot was then "filled up inside with good earth like a flower pot and grassed over" (Linden-Ward 1990:51). The cost of curbing was far greater (\$600 to \$700 for a simple design) than a fence, but the curbing required less maintenance and, in the long-run, was considered an excellent investment.

As a result of criticisms the cemetery began to be re-fashioned yet again, pushed toward a more formal, less picturesque design similar to that being found in urban parks and middle-class suburbs. A leading proponent of this new movement, called the Lawn-Park Cemetery, was Adolph Strauch, best known for his work at Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati in 1855.

Strauch sought to replace the picturesque with the pastoral, feeling that one of the greatest faults of the rural cemetery movement was the effort to include too much in the landscape, resulting in a clutter of opposing and conflicting devices. He also was strongly opposed to the "individualism" found in rural cemeteries like Spring Grove, commenting that "Gaudiness is often

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<sup>54</sup> Actually there were some restrictions. For example, at Mount Auburn owners had "the right to erect on their lots fences, monuments and stones of appropriate character. Wooded fences and gravestones of slate [were] not allowed" (see Linden-Ward 1990:36).

<sup>55</sup> Historian Stanley French (1975) suggests that funerary enclosures were "symbolic of the national trait of possessive individualism"

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mistaken for splendor and capricious strangeness for improvement" (Sloane 1991.104).

He aggressively controlled the introduction (or what he felt was the intrusion) of markers into the landscape. He sought to provide incentives for lot owners to memorialize using plantings and to minimize stone monuments, gradually acquiring the power to prevent what he saw as excesses. He also gradually restricted private gardeners from working family plots, hiring instead a crew of professional gardeners to assure a unity of appearance.

His modifications were costly and, in order to pay for these changes, Spring Grove began to offer those purchasing lots two options: pay a higher price and receive perpetual care or pay a lower price supplemented with annual-care payments. Those already owning lots were given the opportunity to join the annual care payment program. By the end of the 1870s almost all cemeteries used annual-care fees and perpetual-care payments as a means of increasing their maintenance funds (Sloane 1991.109).

Strauch's approach not only changed the landscape of the cemetery, and marked the rise of the superintendent — a professional responsible for the maintenance of the cemetery — but it also marked a radical change in the relationship between lot-holder and the cemetery. The lot-holder's "freedom" was dramatically limited. Monuments had to meet guidelines set by the superintendent; plantings were determined by the superintendent and put in by his crew, not the lot-holder; and the superintendent became the official arbiter of good taste in his cemetery.

For a variety of reasons, many focused on America's retreat from sentimentality after the Civil War, as well as a growing interest in parks, lawn-park cemeteries became increasingly popular. Sloane observes that they combined "the beauty of the lawn with the artistry of the monument" (Sloane 1991.121). There were fewer clusters of bushes or trees to clutter the lawn and individual markers were not allowed to overwhelm the setting. Flower beds, often limited to the entrance and road intersections, provided restrained splashes of color. Classical art was featured. Through time, of course, even the lawn-park cemeteries developed excesses

and occasionally artificiality threatened, or even overwhelmed, the naturalism that was at the core of the movement.

An excellent understanding of the lawn-park cemetery can be obtained from scanning the literature of the period. For example, Howard Evarts Weed (1912), in *Modern Park Cemeteries*, lays out a plan for the development of an appropriate cemetery of the period. For example, while he recounts that originally Christian burials were oriented east-west "in order than the spirit might face the rising sun on resurrection morn," (cf. Ezekial xxxvii, 12-14) he emphasizes that this was no longer common, "in all modern cemeteries no attention is paid to orientation, the graves being placed on the lot so as to make the best use of the space" (Weed 1912:15).<sup>56</sup>

Further emphasizing the efficiency of the modern lawn-park cemetery, Weed explains that while walkways were previously common, "in all recent plans, each lot faces only one walk. This has proved of great economy as it allows more burial space in a given area and there is thus less waste" (Weed 1912:33). He goes on to explain the dimensions of family plots:

Allowing three by six for grave space, two feet for markers, and a six-inch margin at the border of a lot, a six grave lot would be nine by seventeen, such small lots, of course, not allowing for monuments. In fact, no monuments should be allowed on lots less than 14 by 20, containing 280 square feet, a space for eight full-sized graves and a monument. The family which cannot afford the purchase of a lot of this size certainly cannot afford a monument (Weed 1912:43).

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<sup>56</sup> This comment serves to emphasize the increasing commercialization of cemeteries and effort to ensure "entrepreneurial efficiency." The new cemeteries were not run by churches, towns, or even owner-boards, but by private businessmen seeking to profit from death.

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The corners of these lots should be marked, minimally, by flat concrete monuments — the cost of which “should not exceed fifty cents each” (Weed 1912:53).

Weed also makes it very clear that it is the landscape with which the superintendents were concerned:

The best landscape effects cannot be obtained when flowers are planted on the graves. The individual grave is but a small detail of the whole grounds, and the general appearance of the cemetery should not be marred by planting thereon (Weed 1912:73).

He argues that mausoleums are not only “unsanitary,” but often distract from the landscape. As a result, they should be severely limited. Likewise, monuments on family lots should be limited to one centrally placed stone.

The members of the Association of American Cemetery Superintendents were even more critical of markers, with one noting that:

A headstone or marker exists merely to preserve the location of the grave. It does this perfectly when its top is even with the surface of the ground. It is not a work of art or thing of beauty. Why should it be allowed to mar a beautiful lawn? (Simonds 1898: 100).

Weed notes this allows “a lawn mower to pass over them,” which translates into “economy in care” (Weed 1912:94). For all their concern with taste, there seems to be little understanding of the beauty, quality, or artistry of gravestone markers. The desire to create a uniform — and pre-approved — landscape was far more important than any art form. Death was being rapidly transformed into commercial expediency.

The Superintendents were even more outraged at the fences, curbs, and other privatization devices they saw in cemeteries. Matthew P. Brazill, for example,

complained that many people sought:

to be as exclusive and private in their lots as in their dwellings. But when we come to see the confusion and unsightly appearance caused by stone, iron fences, and copings, it becomes our duty to appeal to the good senses and taste of the lot owners to avoid them altogether

Lot Enclosures are unsightly in appearance and contrary to good taste, besides requiring a good deal of labor and expense to keep them in repair and they destroy the general good appearance of the cemetery (Brazill 1898:129-130).

He suggests that at “all the most important and best managed cemeteries, the work of getting rid of stone and iron fences has been going on for some time,” although at Mount Auburn the first voluntary removal of curbing didn’t take place until 1885 and there doesn’t seem to have been any widespread effort until the 1920s (Lunden-Ward 1990:54-55). It seems likely that the cemetery superintendents waged war on curbing for years before actually making much headway.

Sloane believes that the memorial park, the last (historical) phase in the evolution of the American cemetery was the result of the public’s desire to further isolate death. Arising as it did in the aftermath of World War I there may be some truth to this. But perhaps even more telling is the increased commercialism of this final phase.

In 1917 Hubert Eaton converted a failed California cemetery into Forest Lawn — the epitome of the memorial park which served as the model for new cemeteries across the country. Drawing upon the experiences of both cemetery operators, and real estate developers, Eaton recreated the cemetery. He removed the last vestiges of death from the landscape, succeeding in forcing all monuments to be at ground level. He created a cemetery without “gloom.” He also created a multiservice business, streamlining the process of burial by offering all the services of the funeral director, cemetery, and monument dealer. Death was given the

convenience of "one-stop shopping."

Sloane observes certain characteristics in the development of memorial parks that are especially worthy of consideration. For example, almost all took large tracts of pasture-like land and developed them section by section, using pre-need sales to offset development costs. Since the landscape was typically flat suburban farmland, there was no effort to create anything even vaguely picturesque. Instead, there was a central drive off which short, circular drives extended, creating sections and subsections. Each section had a different theme, based on three-dimensional sculpture and associated plantings<sup>57</sup> Purchasers were offered a choice of themes, just as they were offered a choice of neighborhoods in which to live (Sloane 1991:162).

Typical of the time, these cemeteries became increasingly exclusive, with racial-exclusion clauses in their deeds mirroring a growing real estate trend. Sloane emphasizes that this exclusion had not always been standard. Although many cemeteries segregated races, very few rural or lawn park cemeteries had exclusionary clauses in their deeds (Sloane 1991:188). By 1917, however, it was commonly held in the courts that blacks could be excluded from purchasing a plot by the cemetery company. This racial segregation was not challenged until well after WW II. A more common response was for African Americans to create their own memorial parks, such as Detroit Memorial Park Cemetery, organized in 1925 by a group of black businessmen, including African American funeral directors and also ministers (Wright 1993).

The creators of the memorial parks sought to create a cemetery the public would be comfortable returning to over and over, but they dramatically misread the American public. There was no twentieth century interest in having a close relationship with the cemetery such as was seen in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>57</sup> Although monuments and carved sculpture are again seen in a positive light, their place, style, and design are very strictly limited by the memorial park owner and designer. There is no individual freedom of expression, so the recognition of the sculpture's beauty and worth is contrived and commercialized.

Americans no longer wanted to go to a cemetery for contemplation or relaxation. Instead, they sought out the memorial parks because they offered a total-service package that helped reduce the exposure to the reality of death and distanced the grave from the mourner.<sup>58</sup> Another attraction of the memorial parks, especially in today's mobile society, may be the assurance that the grave site will be protected "in perpetuity," unlike so many other graveyards.

### Markers

There have been a few efforts to trace the development and evolution of different markers. Larry W Price (1966) examined 214 cemeteries in southwestern Illinois, identifying four basic styles of markers: a crudely carved sandstone "keyhole" style (1831-1841)<sup>59</sup>, a plain marble style (1840-1900), a granite or marble obelisk (1870-1930), and a low, wider granite style (1920-1960). He also observes that more recently a "brass or bronze plate" put in at ground level had become more popular (Price 1966:205).

Coleen L. Nutty (1984) conducted a study of gravestone art from a number of Midwestern stones dating from 1850 through 1900 and, in the process, proposed definitions for a number of different stone types she encountered, going far beyond the simple styles discussed by Price. For example, upright marble tablets are divided into square top, square top with ornamentation, multiple square top, rounded top, ornamented rounded top, multiple rounded top, segmented top, ornamented segmented top, indented circle, and so on, all of which are considered variations of the "standing tablet." Obelisks are divided into at least four styles and are called "columns," while the term "block gravestone" is applied to a range of different

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<sup>58</sup> Of course, this is not the case with all families. The presence of trinkets and other memorabilia at the grave site, even outside of African American culture, seems to suggest that some families strive to un-isolate death by maintaining contact with the deceased.

<sup>59</sup> Although the symbolism of this form is not understood, Ruth Little reports that it is found in African American cemeteries in North Carolina during the twentieth century (Little 1989:Figure 11).

## HISTORIC OVERVIEW

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rectangular devices (Nutty 1984:55-57). She found that her standing tablets dated primarily from the 1850s through the 1870s, while the column style was popular during the 1880s and 1890s. The block style, which appears to include the more massive granite styles, became popular after 1890 (Nutty 1984:96-98).

Regardless of the scheme, or the author, these efforts at devising evolutionary scenarios must be evaluated in the context of the local conditions and circumstances. So little is known about the development and marketing of stone styles, or the practices of consumer choice, that it would be difficult to offer meaningful observations without research far beyond the scope of this project.

For example, as tempting as it might be to make a case that Petersburg's African Americans had more limited consumer choices than whites in the same area, this cannot be proffered without undertaking exhaustive studies of gravestone styles in both white *and* black cemeteries. Moreover, it would be necessary to control for other variables, most especially cultural practices, to ensure that only issues of price and availability were being considered.

More important to our current needs, is a clear typology of marker styles, allowing us to discuss the monuments found in the various cemeteries without long digressions on the styles themselves or on added decorative elements. As a result, we have taken ideas, definitions, and generalized styles from a broad range of researchers, modified them to suit our needs, and offer them here as a glossary of *major* styles in the African American cemeteries of Petersburg (Figure 6). The reader, however, should be aware that these are essentially architectural descriptions, because a range of artistic or verbal imagery may exist on each type.

**Base, Die and Cap Monument** — usually constructed of granite or marble, these are very heavy monuments consisting of at least three (and often more) pieces: one or more bases (often stepped) on which may be carved a family name, a central massive die which usually contains the epitaph, and a cap. These monuments typically predate 1930.

**Bedstead Monument** — headstone, footstone, and

side rails designed and laid to imitate the form of a bed. Initially in marble, although imitated in concrete. Sometimes called a “*cradle grave*.”

**Burial Vault Slab** — top of the concrete burial vault left at grade, forming an imitation **ledger**. Usually plaques with information concerning both the deceased and the name of the funeral home are attached. There may also be other decorative elements. Often these are painted.

**Box Tomb** — a masonry box measuring about 3 by 6-feet on top of which is laid a horizontal **ledger stone**. Strictly speaking these were not “tombs” since the burial was below grade and the monument was afterwards built over the grave.

**Die in Socket** — a type of upright **headstone** terminating in a tab which was set into a socket or support buried under the ground. Typically the die in socket stone is indistinguishable from a **tabletstone** unless fully exposed. The die in socket stones were popular during the last quarter of the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth centuries. Both marble and concrete styles are recognized.

**Die on Base** — Two piece monuments consisting of an upright or vertical die set on a broad, flat base. Prior to about 1930 the die was attached with the use of brass or iron dowels set with melted sulfur, lead, or cement. After this period it was usually attached with a setting compound.

**Footstone** — usually smaller than a **headstone**, set vertically at the foot of the grave. Inscriptions, when present, are typically limited to initials and perhaps a death date.

**Government Stone** — there are three broad types of government-provided headstones and markers. The first, often called the “*Civil War*” type, was approved in 1873 and consists of a **tabletstone** measuring 4-inches thick and 10-inches in width. The top is slightly curved and there is a sunken shield in which the inscription appears in bas relief. Despite the name this style has been used for the eligible deceased of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican War, Indian Campaigns, and Spanish American War. In 1903 the width of the stone

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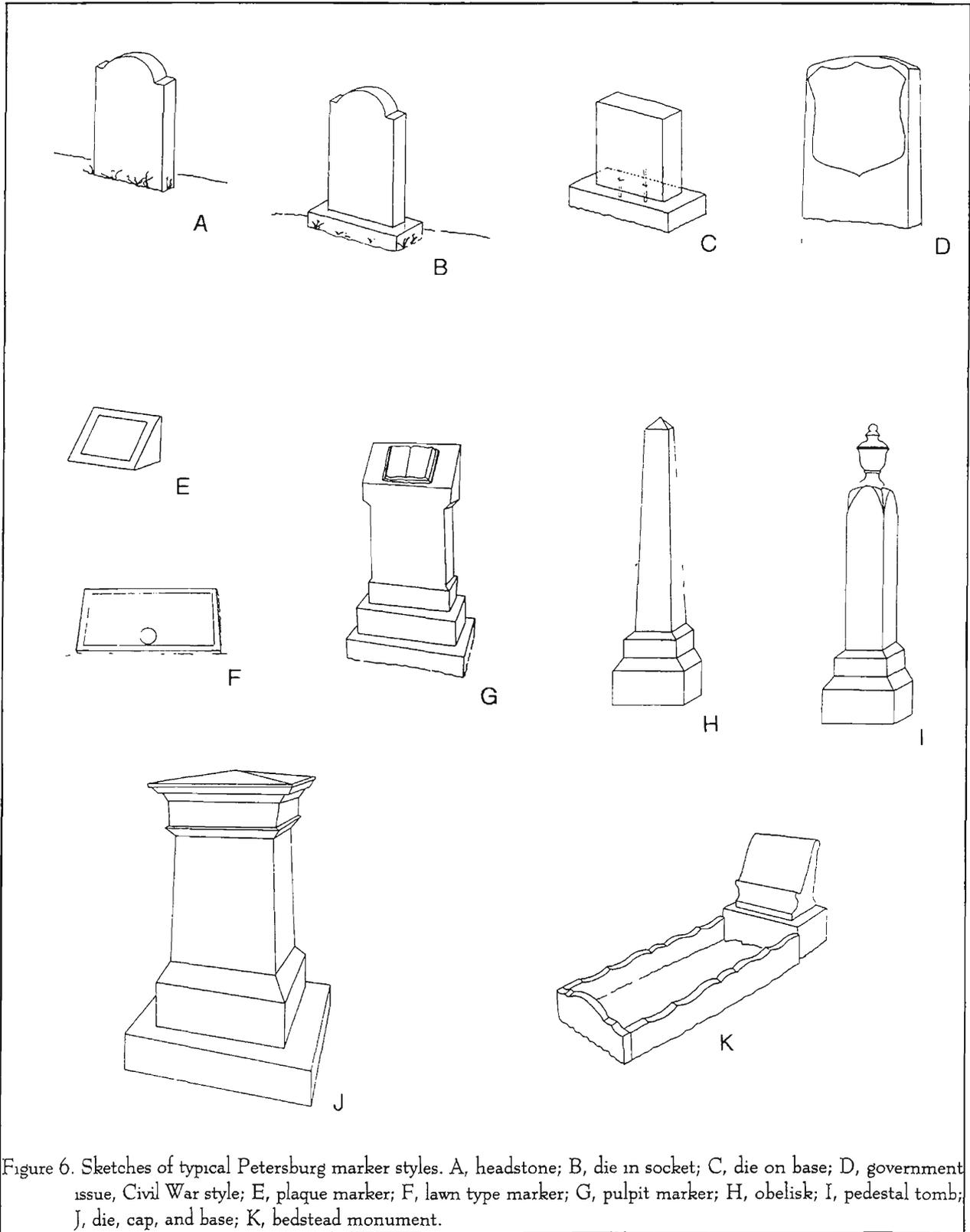


Figure 6. Sketches of typical Petersburg marker styles. A, headstone; B, die in socket; C, die on base; D, government issue, Civil War style; E, plaque marker; F, lawn type marker; G, pulpit marker; H, obelisk; I, pedestal tomb; J, die, cap, and base; K, bedstead monument.

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was changed to 12-inches. A subcategory of this "Civil War" government stone was approved for Confederate dead in 1906. The top is pointed and the shield is omitted. In 1930 the Confederate Cross of Honor was added. The second type of stone, often called the "General" type, was used after World War I. This stone is 13-inches in width and the inscription appears on the front face without a shield. The third type of government stone is the "flat marker," approved in marble in 1936 and granite in 1939, and bronze in 1940. These measure 24-inches by 12-inches. This style of stone is also known as the **lawn type**.

**Headstone** — one of the most common grave markers, usually set vertically in the ground at the head of the grave and containing an inscription. Usually of stone, although wood (known as headboards), concrete, and metal markers are also known. The term covers both **tabletstones** and also **dies in sockets**. Of particular interest in Petersburg are the large number of "lodge stones." These are small headstones, often about the size of footstones, or between 6 and 10 inches in width and perhaps about 2 feet in height. They are typically marble and contain very basic information — usually the name of the lodge (sometimes with its symbol), the name of the deceased, and the death date. Often the birth date is omitted (Figure 7).

**Lawn-Type** — these are usually granite or bronze plates with their tops set flush with ground level. Originally designed for use in lawn-park cemeteries where there was an objection to other monuments breaking-up the landscape and causing problems in maintenance activities, such as mowing. These were introduced about 1910. They are similar to **Raised-Top Inscription Markers**.

**Ledger** — thin horizontal stone slab laid covering the grave. These usually measure about 3-feet by 6-feet and may be elaborately carved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Occasionally they are set on a low masonry base. As the base is increased to about 3-feet in height the marker is referred to as a box tomb. When the ledger is supported by four to six supports or pillars it is called a table stone or table tomb. While usually marble, they may also be of concrete.

**Obelisk** — this neoclassical monument consists of a

column or shaft set on a base, which is often multi-tiered. They terminate in a pyramidal point. These may be marble or occasionally granite and are related to **Pedestal-Tombs**. They were most common from about 1880 to 1910.

**Pedestal Tomb** — this neoclassical monument consists of a base, usually high and often multi-tiered, which terminates with an urn or other decorative element, often a cross-vaulted "roof." These are typically marble and are simply called **Obelisks**. They usually predate 1920.

**Plaque Marker** — these are simple rectangular to square tablets at a 45-degree angle, sometimes resting on a stand design or base. Often the inscription will be set within a recessed frame. These monuments are found in marble and granite, although they most commonly occur in concrete which has been whitewashed.

**Pulpit Marker** — these stones may be marble or granite and have a height typically under 30-inches. The inscription is on the slanting top of the marker. Occasionally there may be an open book on the top of the "pulpit," containing a Biblical verse.

**Raised-Top Inscription Markers** — these are rectangular slabs, usually of granite, although marble is also used. The inscription is on the flat top. They differ from **Lawn-Type** markers in that they are raised about 6-inches above the ground surface. Although "flat type" **Government Stones** are designed to be used as **Lawn-Type** monuments, they are sometimes set as **Raised-Top Inscription markers**.

**Table Stone** — this type of marker consists of a **ledger stone** supported by four to six pillars or columns, usually about 2 to 3-feet off the ground. At the base, on the ground, is a second stone with shallow tabs for the columns. These are also known as table tombs.

**Tabletstone** — upright (vertical) single piece of stone usually not more than 3-inches thick. Often the depth of the buried portion is equal to or greater than the portion exposed. This is also popularly known as a **headstone**. Marble tends to be the most common material, although both slate and concrete are also used.

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Figure 7. Examples of lodge stone types from African American cemeteries in Petersburg, Virginia. A, Royal Lodge No. 77 I.B.P.O.E.W. (People's); B, Y.W.S.L.I.C. (People's); C, Royal Social Club Girls No. 43 and Boys No. 44 (People's); D, E.S. & L.C. (People's); E, Majestic Temple No. 109 I.B.P.O.E. of W (People's); F, Y.M.I.B.A. (Little Church); G, Blooming Zion Lodge No. 275 N.I.B.S. (People's); H, Pocahontas Lodge No. [ ] A.F. & A.M. (Little Church); I, Rosetta Tent No. 433 (Little Church).

The Use of Concrete Monuments

Of special interest to our study are the concrete stones identified in the African American cemeteries in Petersburg. They are found primarily as simple tablets or occasionally as tablets with overhangs or "peaked roofs." Many are also cast as what we have identified as plaque markers, and most were initially whitewashed.<sup>60</sup>

The shapes are all fairly common, being found at a wide range of cemeteries throughout the region (Figure 8). For example, tabletstones with a pointed top are found not only in Petersburg's African American cemeteries, but also in North Carolina (Little 1998:Figure 6.25) and in Dorchester County, South Carolina. They are easily created using simple wood forms, perhaps occasionally using leather belting or other flexible material to create the rounded or segmented top.

Less easily crafted, however, are several concrete markers found in East View. Described as "barbed spears," or perhaps "roofed obelisks," they range from about 2 to 4 feet in height and are about 4-inches on a side. Not only is the style unusual (we have not been able to identify it from other African American cemeteries in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, or Georgia), but it represents considerably more effort on the part of the artisan. Whereas other markers are easily created with simple forms, these would require considerably more effort and more complex casting techniques. This is particularly true of the marker at East View that has a cast Negroid head. This three-dimensional work, cast as one piece on the shaft, would have required a carefully executed negative mold that the concrete could have been poured into —

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<sup>60</sup> Whether this was intended to make them look like marble, or has some long-lost tie to the importance of white in African religions, is unknown. In fact, the whitewashing may simply have been a sign of respect, of keeping the stone clean and neat. Regardless, the practice appears widespread. Little's (1998) photographs of African American markers in North Carolina, for example, show many with evidence of remnant whitewashing. The same has been seen at an African American cemetery in downtown Columbia, South Carolina.

far different than casting tabletstones. An interesting parallel is illustrated by Lydia Parrish (1992:Figure 17) from the Georgia coast. There may also be some similarity in style to the bronze bust or head recovered from Ife in 1938 (Parrish 1992:Figure 18).

Although we have no information concerning the maker of these unusual concrete forms, we do have clues concerning at least two makers of the more conventional markers. One informant recounted that V.H. Poppa, a mid-twentieth century Petersburg stone cutter, produced concrete markers for those clients whom he couldn't "sell up" to marble or granite. He maintained a variety of forms and special lettering for the purpose — suggesting that while a "sideline" it was requested often enough to make it worth his while collecting the necessary items for a professional job. Another informant told us that one of the Wilkerson employees also crafted concrete markers as a side-line.

Both Rotundo (1997) and Little (1989, 1998) have discussed the practice of using concrete markers among African Americans, making observations that are worthy of brief discussion. Rotundo cautions against assuming any ethnic folkways, claiming that they were produced out of poverty. She quotes John Milbauer, who claims:

with increasing affluence blacks are choosing commercial tombstones over those made by themselves. The transition from folk to mass culture manifests itself in the Afro-American cemetery, where one can observe a commercial tombstone juxtaposed to a homemade marker on the same grave (Milbauer 1991, quoted in Rotundo 1997:105).

This may, in fact, be true. But we wonder if the process is that simple. Clearly concrete markers are sometimes chosen because of cost — this is demonstrated by Poppa's decision to offer concrete in order to attract more clients. But are commercial stone markers chosen only because a family has more money? Might it also have something to do with their status (apart from financial standing) in the community or perhaps even cultural values? To equate this choice with only money

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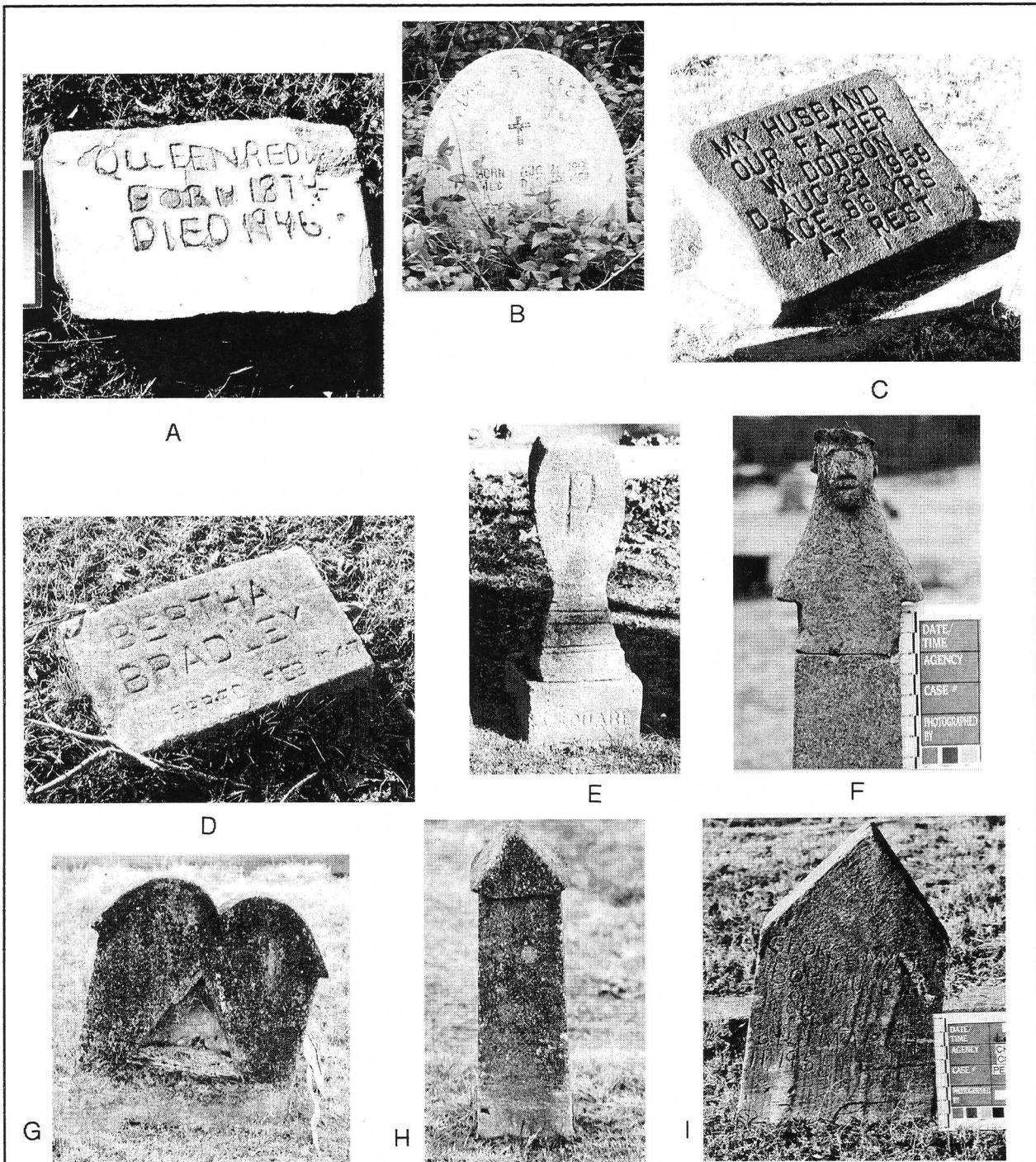


Figure 8. Examples of concrete markers in Petersburg's African American cemeteries. A, hand-written lawn-type (Wilkerson's); B, painted headstone (Little Church); C, plaque marker (East View); D, lawn-type, perhaps made by Charles F. Sparks; E, A Square marker from People's Cemetery; F, African-American head on barbed spear marker (East View); G, unusual double arch marker with triangular molded area (East View); H, low barbed spear (East View); I, slender, picket-shaped headstone (Little Church).

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may miss other, potentially significant, variables.

Little, for example, observes that while both whites and blacks use concrete markers in their respective cemeteries (perhaps because of poverty), there are differences:

white gravemarkers adhere more tightly to popular aesthetic norms than the African American ones.

Black gravemarkers exhibit the animated style and uninhibited handling of materials that characterize much of the African American material culture, including quilts and paintings. Blacks were generally not drawn into the social posturing of white society in the erection of a fashionable monument, and black artisans remain freer of the preconceptions of a fitting and proper grave monument that guide white artisans (Little 1998:268).

Although we are not sure that we would agree with Little's comments concerning "social posturing," since this likely depends on issues of status, location, and time period, we do believe that her observations concerning a different style are appropriate — and perhaps nowhere better illustrated than with the presence of the "barbed spear" monuments. It seems likely that this is a topic which has received far too little examination and may be suffering from its focus. It may be, for example, that the "popular aesthetic norms" of which Little speaks are actually only the norms of white society. It may be that upon more careful scrutiny we would find that African American society has its own "popular aesthetic norms," historically quite independent of white society.

### Fences and Curbing

The African American cemeteries in Petersburg contain a number of fenced plots, indicative of the efforts that the families took to permanently mark, and memorialize, their cemetery plots. Fences ranged from simple and inexpensive to individually crafted art forms. The earliest fences were simple wire

work, several examples of which are still present in People's Cemetery.

This tendency, of course, was not unique to blacks. As previously discussed, at the height of the Rural Cemetery movement came an increasing focus on privacy, exclusivity, and conspicuous consumption.<sup>61</sup> At a philosophical level this was intolerable to those who viewed the movement as one fostering pious contemplation and who viewed the rural cemetery as a "place of moral purity, in contrast to the impure commercial world of the cities" (Sloane 1991:86). A.J. Downing was forceful in his disdain for what rural cemeteries were becoming with the introduction of curbing, gates, and large monuments. He argued that the rural cemetery was intended to "educate" the public through lessons of "natural beauty" and that by "enclosing" lots (with curbs, but especially with fences), lot-holders violated the balance between nature and art (Sloane 1991:88). He argued that:

The exhibitions of ironmongery, in the shape of vulgar iron railings, posts and chains, balustrades, etc., all belonging properly to the front-door steps and areas of Broadway and Chestnut-street [in Philadelphia], and for the most part barbarous and cockneyish in their forms, are totally out of keeping with the aspect of nature, the repose, and the seclusion of a rural cemetery (Downing 1846:229-230).

This sentiment against fencing continued, unabated, among the "professionals" throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the turn of the century H.E. Weed commented that, "there is a great need for the spreading of the gospel of simplicity

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<sup>61</sup> Of course some fencing was used, as discussed in the section on People's Cemetery, to protect the stones and graves from cattle. Nevertheless, many of the iron fences found in our cemeteries post-date the time when wandering livestock would have been a serious concern. Their use, therefore, must express something concerning the "popular aesthetic."

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among the lot owners, and all cemetery officials should consider it their duty to aid in this education" (Weed 1912:123). But more than "aid," Weed argued that superintendents should actively remove eyesores and problems, such as fences, copings, grave mounds, and even foot stones (Weed 1912:120-122). This, coupled with America's eventual war drives for metal, decimated many cemeteries (Sloane 1991:91).

Linden-Ward (1990:54), however, suggests that it was not so much the Superintendents who managed to have fences curtailed as it was the American public's change in taste. In the 1880s they began to be considered "old fashioned," although they continued to be used for perhaps another 30 or 40 years in many areas — such as Petersburg and most of the South.

One of the most prolific companies is **Stewart Iron Works**, which gradually grew out of Stewart & Martin Iron Fence Works in Covington, Kentucky, first established in 1862 by R.C. Stewart and T.A. Martin. By 1869 the partners had gone separate ways, with Stewart operating a successful business in Covington. By 1887 two of Stewart's sons established a foundry in Wichita, Kansas, although their father and another brother, Frank L. Stewart, remained in Covington, operating the Stewart works, which seems to have been formally established in 1886. After an 1889 fire, the brothers returned to Covington, consolidating the family business. Frank L. Stewart was, at that time, the general foreman of the operations. By 1914 the company surrendered its Ohio charter and again consolidated their operations in Kentucky (Lietzenmayer 1998). The company is still in existence and continues to manufacture many of its historic fences using the original patterns. Although producing jail ironwork, bridges, and even trucks, cemetery fences were a specialty (see Figure 9).

This company has fences in many cemeteries throughout the area east of the Mississippi, including at least two in Little Church. Stewart was one of the largest companies, selling fences directly to both individuals and retailers (such as hardware or dry goods stores), and also selling their products to "middle men" (such as fence companies) who would install fences using their own identification plates (or none at all). This is also seen at Little Church, where a Stewart

design is installed with another company's shield.

We have also identified at least one fence of the **Cincinnati Iron Gate Company** in Little Church. This firm was first listed in Cincinnati city directories in 1905 and continued in business until 1968. During at least part of their history the general manager was Frank L. Stewart, who served as the general foreman at the Stewart Iron Works for many years (and who died in 1917). The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County has three catalogs from this company, with one approximately dated to about 1925. Their fences varied in price from about \$1.10 to \$2.30 per linear foot, with so-called walk gates (3 feet 2 inches in width) ranging from \$9.50 to \$22.00. Arched gateways and gates ranged from about \$182 to \$234 (Cincinnati Iron Fence Co., Price List No. 75, The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County).

Found in Peoples Cemetery were two fences marked with a winged globe shield. On this shield is "THE/VALLEY FORGE/PATENT FENCES/KNOXVILLE/TENN." We have found only two references to **The Valley Forge**. One is from Kephart's (1901) *Manufacturers of Knoxville, Tennessee*, a promotional booklet that lists H.O. Nelson as proprietor and observes that it was first started in 1873. At the turn of the century 10 men were employed at the shop and the company indicated that its sole product, wrought steel fences, were used in "yards, cemeteries, public parks, etc." The 1902 City Directory includes an ad for the firm, on the same page as a machine shop and the W.L. Bean Monument Company.

**C. Hanika & Sons** of Celina, Ohio have fences in both Little Church and Peoples. Their shield is a rather plain circle in which is cast, "C. HANIKA/ &/SONS/CELINA, OHIO." To date we have been unable to obtain any additional information concerning this company. There is no listing for them in Archives Library of the Ohio Historical Society, nor have any Celina City Directories been identified. An inquiry to the Mercer County Historical Society in Celina has gone unanswered. Curiously, several of the fences have an identical shield except the city is listed as Muncie,

Indiana. Further research may identify the firm.

In addition to these traditional fences, several of Petersburg's African American cemeteries also revealed examples of very low borders, consisting of plastic or wire fences used in lawn edging or borders of bricks. These typically surround a single grave (Figure 10). Little contrasts these grave enclosures at black cemeteries with the white practice of enclosing an entire plot (Little 1989:127). In fact, the difference is so great that we suspect that the low enclosures are not, strictly speaking, fencing, but perhaps are more appropriately considered grave decorations. Their function seems not so much exclusionary as commemorative. They help define the grave and ensure its place is remembered.

Curbing followed a history similar to that of iron work. Introduced in the 1860s, it became very popular in the 1870s, only to begin its decline at cemeteries such as Mount Auburn in the 1880s (Linden-Ward 1990:52-54). Curbing, however, seems to have disappeared from cemeteries far more slowly than fences, perhaps because it was more stable and also because it has less salvage value. Regardless, most cemeteries didn't see any massive curbing removal until the 1920s. At Petersburg, in contrast, it appears that

curbing was still very popular in the 1920s, perhaps well into the 1940s, when it was being re-established for plots removed by highway widening. It was apparently even reinstalled with some of the 1968 re-interments.

The curbing observed in Petersburg falls into two broad categories. It may be well executed granite, often rounded with corner posts, or granite with rusticated sides (Figure 11). In either case the family name was often cut in an entryway on one side of the plot. This curbing was typically installed in sections ranging from 4 to 8 feet in length, with the individual sections attached to one another using iron dogs. The other category of curbing is made from concrete, apparently cast on-site. Again, the family name is often



Figure 9. Example of Stewart Iron Works advertisement for cemetery fencing.

at some "entry point," where the name is impressed into the wet concrete using some sort of letters. A variation of the concrete curbing has small marble flakes impressed into the outer surface.

Neither type of curbing bears any manufacturer's name, although it was almost certainly produced locally. In fact, in speaking with Ronald Hess, owner of Hess Tringard, we discovered that the stonemason Poppa had made the concrete curbing with limestone flakes. Poppa apparently tried to sell individuals (white or black) marble or granite stones and coping first. If they didn't order these, he had a fall-back line — making concrete monuments and curbing. Both were apparently made with, and without, the marble flakes. These were sweepings from his floor that were dusted in the mold prior to the concrete being added. This apparently provided a "touch of class" to the otherwise utilitarian concrete. Although he produced both, we don't know if the marble chips made the stone or curbing more expensive.

Petersburg's Stone Cutters

The only Petersburg stone cutter whose history has been extensively explored is Charles Miller Walsh, who was active from 1865 through 1901 (Briggs 1990). A Confederate veteran, he apparently apprenticed in Petersburg, perhaps under Charles Ritch (who left no known signed stones), prior to the Civil War. Afterwards he opened his own shop, eventually calling it the Cockade Marble Works. What are probably a small minority of his stones are signed C.M.W., C.M. Walsh, or C.M. Walsh, Petersburg, Va.<sup>62</sup> Briggs mentions that several of his



Figure 10. Example of decorative fencing placed around a grave in People's Cemetery.

children were involved in the firm before Walsh's death, as well as the fact that the firm continued for at least a few years afterward. She does not, however, indicate the ultimate disposition of the business (Briggs 1990:164).

<sup>62</sup> Although Briggs comments that the use of Petersburg in his signature is found only on stones outside the city, we identified it on several stones in East View and

People's cemeteries.

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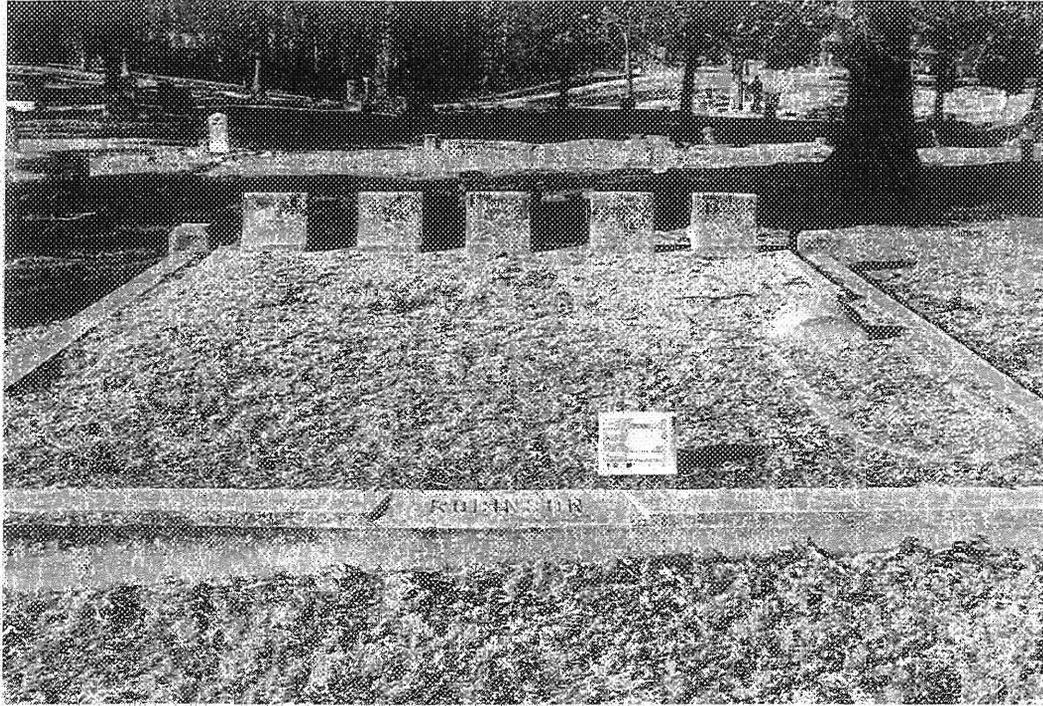


Figure 11. Example of curbing found in People's Cemetery.

While it offers an excellent beginning, Briggs fails to include any of the Walsh stones from Petersburg's African American cemeteries in her inventory (Briggs 1990:Appendix 2 and 3). Given the proximity of the various cemeteries, we question why only Blandford was included in her study. It is clear from our work that Walsh, Confederate veteran or not, was willing to serve the African American community. Further research may compare the styles of stones found in the white and black cemeteries, but our general observations suggest that there are little or no differences.

There are several additional stone carvers represented in People's, Little Church, and East View, as well as the "Negro Section" of Blandford. Table 3 lists these individuals, but unfortunately there are no published histories for any. The limited oral histories sought during this stage of investigation suggests that a detailed historical survey should be conducted. As an example, we were told by one informant that during the late 1940s through the early 1960s there were three firms lined up on S. Crater: Poppa, Arlie Andrews, and Crowder. There was, however, no real competition.

Prices were readily communicated from one firm to another. In addition, Pembroke Granite Works is reported to have been an umbrella company for all three stone cutters. Today the only remaining companies are Pembroke (under new ownership) and Hess-Trigard (the successor to V.H. Poppa).

Only four stone carvers are reported from Blandford, not because the others sold exclusively to the African American community, but rather because our Blandford data is based on the National Register nomination, which focused only on the period up to 1900. The bulk of the carvers not identified as being in Blandford all date from the turn of the century. The one clear difference between Blandford and the African American cemeteries is the greater use of extralocal stone carvers in Blandford, compared to the African American cemeteries, where only Little Church revealed a single non-Petersburg carver (Oakwood, identified from Richmond).

Based on this initial overview we have not been able to detect any carvers that were either more or less

AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG

Table 3.  
Stone Cutters Identified in Petersburg's African American Cemeteries  
(Blandford included for comparison)

Stone Cutter	People's	Little Church	East View	Wilkerson	Blandford "Negro Section"	Blandford NR document
C.M. Walsh	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Burns & Campbell	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Crowder Memorials		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pembroke Granite Works	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Milton Rivers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Arlie G. Andrews		✓		✓	✓	✓
Hess-Trgard		✓		✓	✓	
Metalstone Corp.				✓	✓	
Ramkev & Murray				✓		✓
Shaw & Facu					✓	
V.H. Poppa					✓	
Oakwood (Richmond)		✓				

prevalent, with the exception of Milton Rivers, who was an African American. Although we have not conducted an exhaustive examination of Blandford, it may be that he found his clientele exclusively in the black community.

## HISTORIC OVERVIEW

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## PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

### Current Condition

What is today known as People's Memorial Cemetery is situated on the west side of S. Crater Street across from Blandford Cemetery (Figures 12 and 13). It is bordered to the north by two residential lots and the modern, but indistinct, boundary of Little Church Cemetery. To the south is a commercial lot (fronting on S. Crater) and Windy Ridge Apartments. The southwestern boundary consists of residential lots, although the bulk are not currently developed. St. Andrews Street stops at the cemetery's western boundary, while Talliaferro Street turns to the north and continues to Mingea Street. Along Talliaferro is a narrow triangle of property which, according to the deeds, is not actually part of People's Cemetery. Nevertheless, as these discussions reveal, it appears to contain burials and should be considered part of the cemetery for management purposes.

The cemetery is bisected east-west by a gravel road running off S. Crater and, at the far end of the cemetery, tying into the intersection of St. Andrews and Talliaferro streets. This does not appear to be an original road for the cemetery and, we believe, was created within the past 70 years to provide access to the different

plots.<sup>1</sup> What were more likely early entrances, forming a horseshoe drive are marked today only by remnant curb cuts (although at least portions of both can still be traced among the graves).

The western-most extension of People's, as will be discussed below, is actually a recent addition, purchased by the City in 1943 for the relocation of

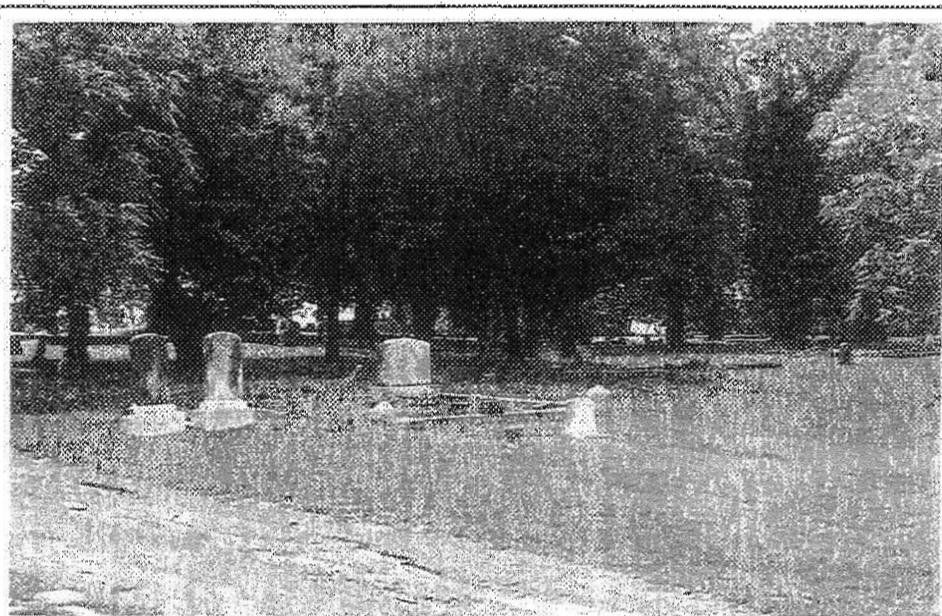


Figure 12. View of People's Cemetery. The gravel extension of St. Andrews Street is shown in the foreground.

burials fronting S. Crater, where road construction was planned. This addition incorporates a parallelogram containing about an acre. Excluding this addition, People's Cemetery has a roughly trapezoid form and

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As a result, it is likely that this "modern" road has been laid through graves and family plots.

PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

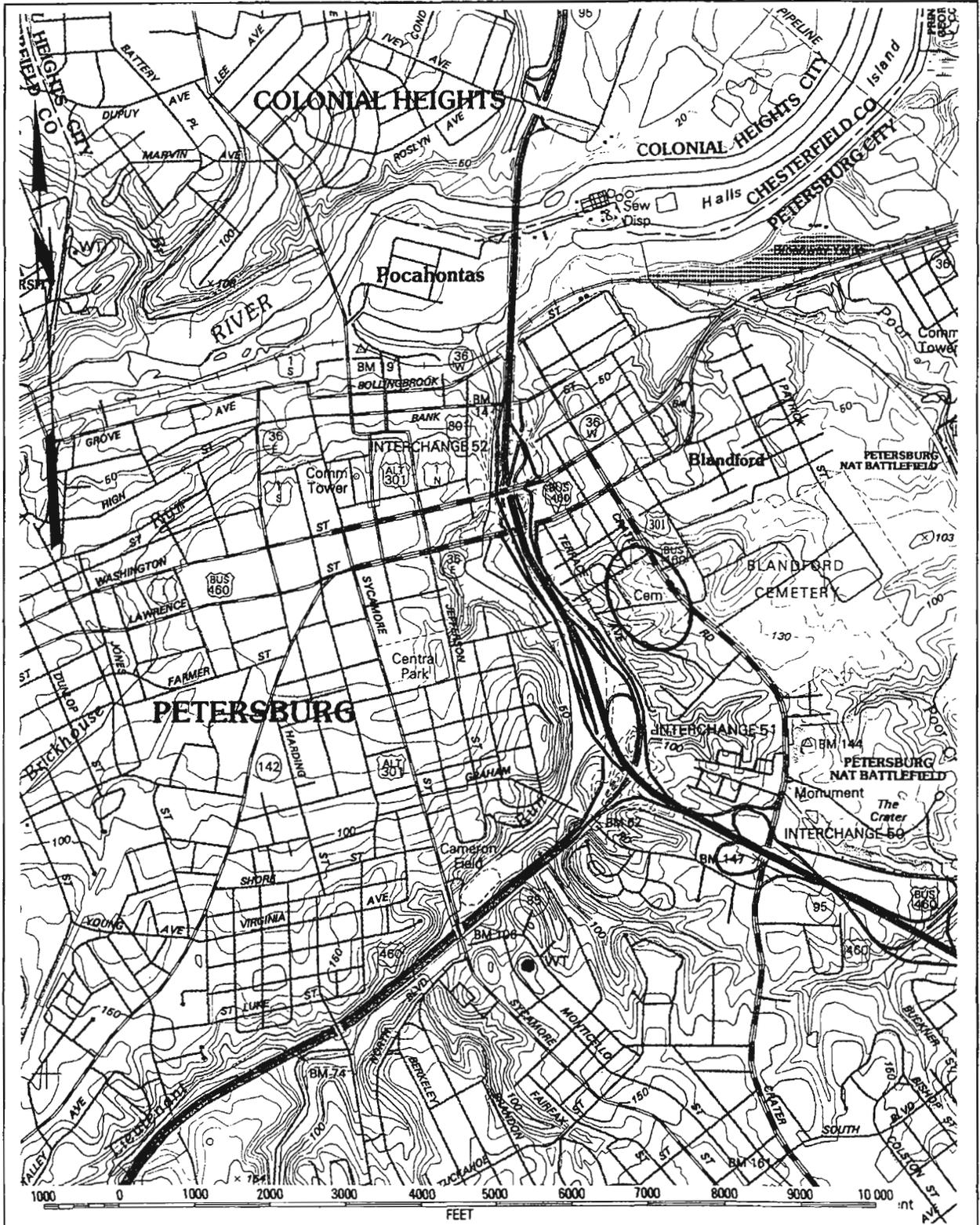


Figure 13. Petersburg (1994) 7.5' USGS map showing the location of People's Cemetery.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG

incorporates about 7.2 acres.<sup>2</sup>

The cemetery's graves and family plots (again, except for the new addition) have a distinct and fairly consistent orientation of about  $176^{\circ}30'$  (or only  $3^{\circ}30'$  off magnetic east-west)(Figure 14). The 1943 addition breaks with historic pattern, assuming an orientation of about  $146^{\circ}$  — apparently adopted for convenience's sake since it allows more full plots to be laid into the available space (as mentioned by Weed 1912:15).

People's Cemetery occupies the southern edge of a ridge top (which extends northward into Little Church Cemetery), with a maximum elevation of about

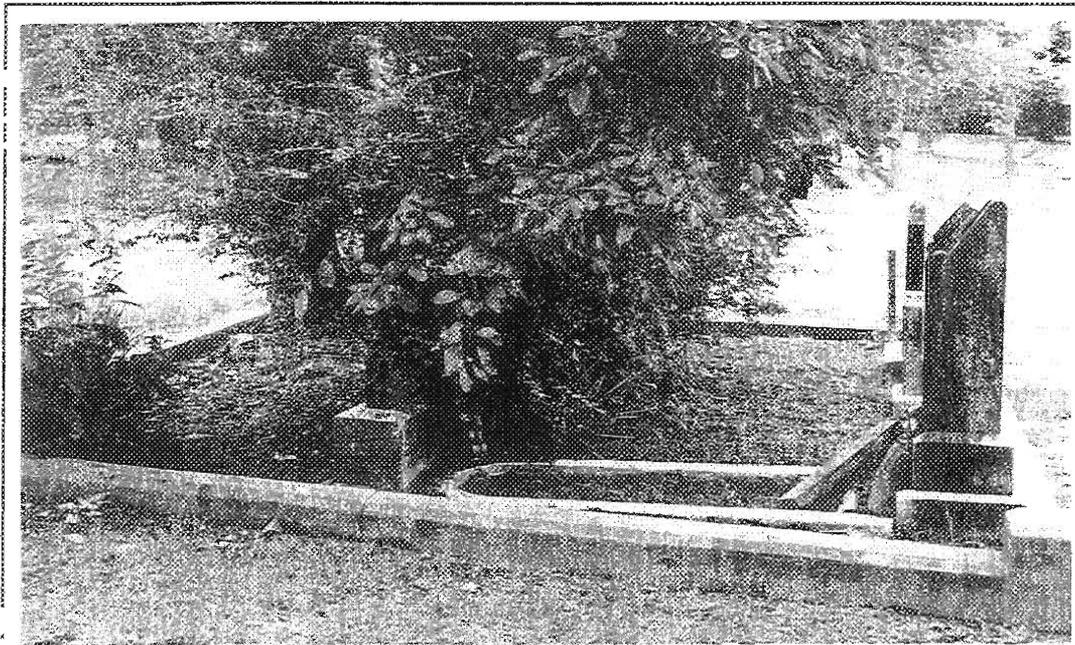


Figure 14. Example of a family plot with plantings, markers, and use of both lot and grave curbing.

130 feet above mean sea level (AMSL). The topography slopes to the south, and there is a remnant drainage running northeast-southwest through the eastern third of the property. This is shown as a "ditch" on the 1996 survey, but the USGS topographic map suggests it is more likely an intermittent drainage that emptied into

<sup>2</sup> The portion of People's Cemetery now owned by the City of Petersburg measures 8.173 acres according to its 1996 survey by Harve L. Parzs, Inc.

Lieutenant Run prior to the construction of I-85 and 95. On the opposite side of the drainage the cemetery's topography slopes steeply to the southeast.

At the western edge of the cemetery, toward Talliaferro Street, the topography becomes level, before once again dropping steeply down a short bank to the road. The cemetery's property, according to the plat, ends at the crest of this lowest slope, while the city owns the strip sloping down to the road. This strip widens to the north, toward Little Church Cemetery, becoming more steeply sloped and containing less level land.

The northern third of the parcel, adjacent to Little Church Cemetery, is far less sloping and presents a very gradual slope from S. Crater Road to Talliaferro Street. The ridge top extends northward, into Little Church, so that what might be considered the prime lots occur along S. Crater Road and along the

eastern third of the property. Along Crater Road, however, there is a slight bank, suggesting that as the highway has been widened into People's Cemetery the bulk of the work has involved fill sections.

The cemetery includes both open grassed areas as well as sections dominated by large (primarily oak) trees which have reduced or completely shaded out the grass. Although recent efforts to clear the undergrowth have largely been successful, there remain a number of weedy areas and, especially around the oaks, large

## PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

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clumps of poison ivy. The trees themselves are not well tended and have suffered from years of neglect. A number of trees, for example, evidence damage from past wind and ice storms. Grass mowing is sporadic and is supplemented with the use of nylon-string weed trimmers among the graves. There is evidence of considerable damage to the stones from these practices. Leaf raking is likewise sporadic and there are, at times, dense accumulations of leaves both on the grass and also on the stones.

Although there were no open graves, occasional erosional areas, as well as small excavations to reveal buried inscriptions on stones, gave us some idea of the soils in People's Cemetery. In the more upland areas there appears to be a fairly well developed A horizon of dark brown loamy sand overlying a firm red clay. This is typical of the Cecil-Applying area of what has been called the red-clay hill region stretching from Alabama through the Carolinas and into Virginia (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1939:1059).

There is a report that heavy equipment was used to clear the underbrush when the cemetery was first taken over by the City of Petersburg. The only clearly visible evidence of this are two spoil piles on the south side of the gravel access road about mid-way in the cemetery. Two displaced stones were found in or on the edge of these piles, suggesting that the piles are result of aggressive clearing operations.

There are no pathways in the cemetery and a landscaping plan, probably dating about 1926, which would have provided walkways within the family plot layout, was not fully implemented and its vestiges have been lost (largely through the breakdown of the formal cemetery arrangement and use of available space). The single road is in poor condition.<sup>3</sup> Ruts and erosional areas appear to be occasionally filled in by a light grading, but there is no evidence of any planned

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<sup>3</sup> As previously mentioned there are curb cuts for the original access road. These curb cuts, however, provide inappropriate access to the cemetery. During our study we observed one vehicle take one of these entrances, drive among the markers on the grass, wind its way to the gravel road, then speed off.

maintenance. Moreover, as previously mentioned, this is a relatively new road which may have been placed over a number of graves. During our investigations we found that this road was commonly used as a cut-through between Crater Road and the neighborhoods to the west, off St. Andrews Street. On only a few occasions was the road used by individuals having business in the cemetery.

While there are no formal pathways, the cemetery sees a great deal of pedestrian traffic, largely cutting through from the vicinity of Talliaferro and St. Andrews streets in the west to Windy Ridge Apartments along the southern side. This traffic is unimpeded since the cemetery is completely open and unsecured. In several areas close to the apartments there are worn pathways marking heavy use areas. In one area a basketball hoop has been set up in the cemetery and local youth from the apartments play basketball among the graves. This pedestrian traffic is also the source of a great deal of trash found in the cemetery. Lacking trash cans, these debris are scattered throughout and the City has no organized effort to pick up trash or maintain the cemetery.

There is no parking area for visitors or for use during funerals or other ceremonies. It appears that the lower (western) section bordering Talliaferro Street has been used, based on the compaction results of the penetrometer study (discussed below). Nevertheless, this area is very limited and during our investigations we observed that most visitors simply pull off the central gravel road, parking on unmarked graves.

Stones and other monuments in the cemetery show considerable variation in condition (Figure 15). A large number exhibit some form of mower or weed whip damage. Many are simply toppled or badly leaning — the result of graves sinking. There are also a number which have been broken. Vandalism seems to be only a minor problem and appears (at present) to be focused in the new section at the far rear (western) corner of the cemetery. Graves in this area are in very close proximity

## AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG

to a number of houses.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to emphasize that all these problems most certainly existed before the City took ownership of the cemetery. In fact, most are the result of years of neglect and inadequate maintenance. However, by virtue of ownership the City now has the responsibility to make substantive improvements in the care and maintenance of the cemetery (as outlined below).

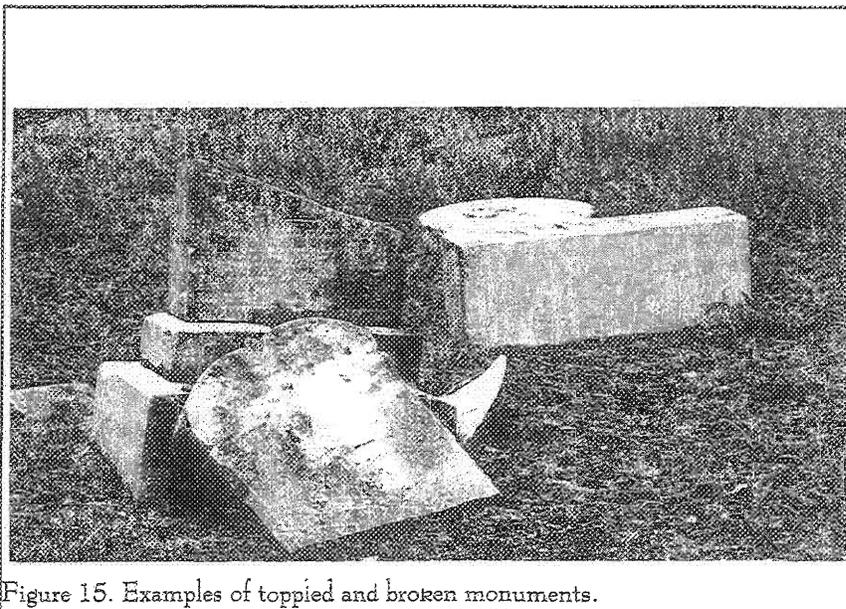


Figure 15. Examples of toppled and broken monuments.

### Historical Synopsis

Deed records in the City of Petersburg Hustings Court chronicle three stages in the historical development of People's Memorial Cemetery. The written record begins in 1840. In that year William H. and Edith Williams, who were white, sold to twenty-eight men a parcel at the west side of Blandford Road (today's South Crater Road) for use "as a burying ground."<sup>5</sup> It is possible that the land was already being used as a cemetery; however neither this deed nor the deed filed when Williams purchased the land in 1837 (part of a 16-acre conveyance from Samuel and Mary Robbins) makes any mention of burial.

The 1840 purchasers, who paid \$200 for their acre of land, were all residents of Petersburg, and all believed to have been free men of color:

Bailey Matthews	Gaston Burnett
Arthur Parham	Thomas Joiner

<sup>4</sup> In one area a portion of the City's property (a 20 foot open area) is being occupied by an adjacent property owner. This proximity, we believe, results in much mischief and is an excellent example of why appropriate fencing and maintenance are critical.

<sup>5</sup> Hustings Court, City of Petersburg, Deed Book 11, p. 321.

Thomas Walden	Harrison Bailey
James Ford	John K. Shore
Robert Chieves	John McRae
James Fells	John Myrick
William Underdue	Latinus Stewart
Thomas Pritchett	Henry H. Elebeck
Robert Stewart	Paul Jones
John Cary	Frank Stewart
John Bays	Edward Stokes
William Adkins	Cato Guthrage
Henry Claiborne	James Easter
William King	Harrwell Parham <sup>6</sup>

Among them were members of the Elebeck and Stewart families, who had been active with the earlier Benevolent Society of Free Men of Color, which had purchased a half-acre site (location not certain, but see Figure 4) for a cemetery in 1818. The 1840 deed does not specify that the cemetery was being acquired for a benevolent burial association, but clearly this was

<sup>6</sup> Several of the purchasers are found in the first volume (1794-1818) of Petersburg's Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes: Thomas Joiner (#322), "Billy" King (#747), John "Stuart" (#504), Unah Tyner (#676), Harrison Bailey (#864). Others have been identified by Luther Porter Jackson and Lucious Edwards Jr.

PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

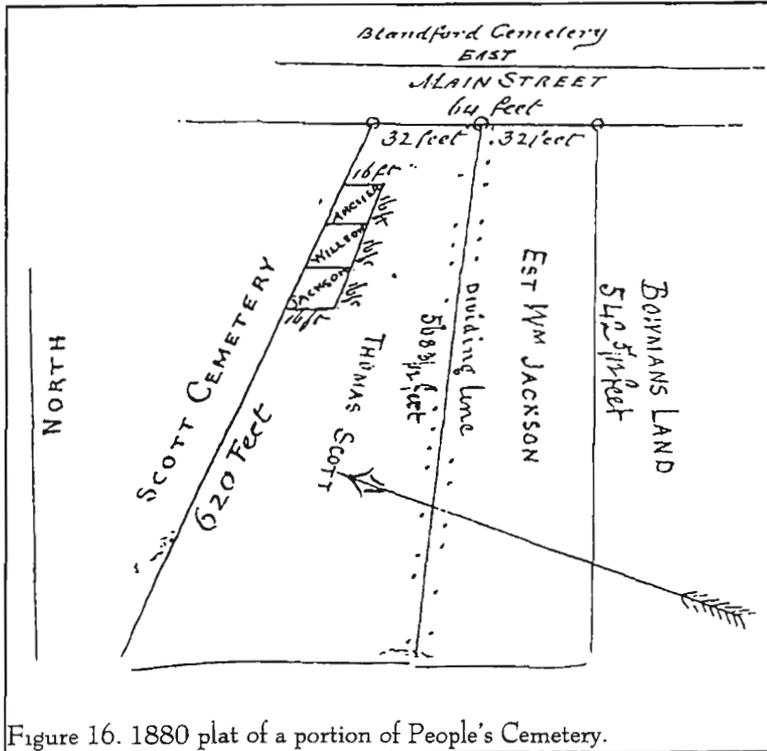


Figure 16. 1880 plat of a portion of People's Cemetery.

As with the earlier group, the deed does not specify the arrangement these men had made for the purchase and use of the land, but they too were almost certainly co-operating on behalf of a mutual-assistance or burial society. Although none of their family names were the same as those of the earlier group, several of them are known to have had family or business connections with them and with each other (see Jackson 1942 and Edwards 1977). By 1880 this property was referred to as Scott Cemetery, for undertaker Thomas Scott.

The largest portion of the cemetery was the last to be acquired from Williams' estate. The 5 1/8 acre tract south of the 1865 lot was purchased privately in 1868 by Peter Archer, a barber; Armistead Wilson, a blacksmith; and William Jackson.<sup>9</sup> Archer established a residence on his share, north of which the families laid out three 16' X 16' grave plots, marked

the case. Whether the Benevolent Society had already been supplanted by the Beneficial Society of Free Men of Color is not certain. Later references to this plot as "Beneficial" and not "Benevolent" indicate that its purchasers had acted for the antebellum Beneficial Society.<sup>7</sup>

Archer, Wilson, and Jackson on an 1880 plat (Figure 16). Peter Archer and his widow Sarah Ann (d. 1882), Armistead Wilson (d. 1880), and other members of their families and the Jacksons probably rest in this section of today's Peoples Cemetery.<sup>10</sup>

In March 1865 Williams sold another tract, two acres south of the first, to a group of ten men, again identifiable as prominent in the antebellum free black community:

- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| John Hill                | Joseph Bentley           |
| Harrison Artis           | Thomas Scott             |
| John Brewer              | Robert Buck              |
| Jesse O'Bird             | Richard Kennard          |
| Benjamin Robert Hargrave | Henry Mason <sup>8</sup> |

The Beers Map shows a dwelling house marked "Archer Est." at about this location in 1877 (Figure 17), the year his heirs sold their third of the land. The purchaser was J. C. Drake, whose wife Eloise was an heir to William Jackson's estate (she may have been his daughter). Two years later, the rest of the tract was divided: the northernmost section, with the grave plots, was conveyed to undertaker Thomas Scott, while the Jackson heirs retained the balance.<sup>11</sup> Thus the 5 1/8 acre

<sup>9</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 31, p. 837.

<sup>10</sup> Clippings in Obituaries Scrapbook (np, nd, Petersburg Public Library).

<sup>11</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 38, p. 348; Book 40, p. 554; Book 41, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the 1882 deed to Little Church Cemetery refers to "the Beneficial Cemetery lot to its south" (Hustings Court, Deed Book 43, p. 99).

<sup>8</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 28, p. 347.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG

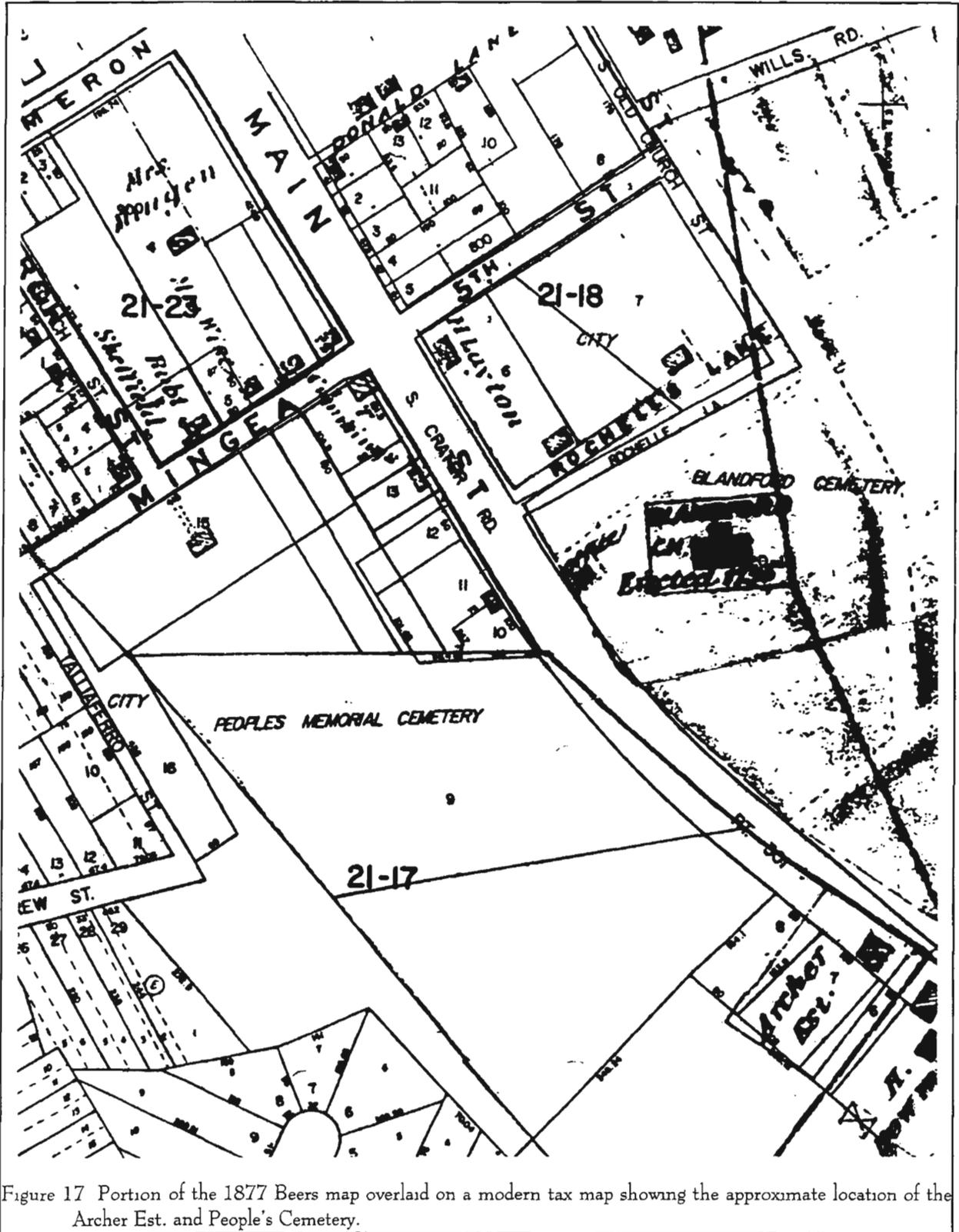


Figure 17 Portion of the 1877 Beers map overlaid on a modern tax map showing the approximate location of the Archer Est. and People's Cemetery.

## PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

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parcel had come to be held by the Jackson-Drake family and Thomas Scott.

Within the early deeds can be seen the beginnings of several aspects of the history of the cemetery known today as People's Memorial. First, most of the land was owned by groups of individuals, not by chartered organizations. Unlike the continuity at city-owned Blandford Cemetery, when trusteeship of an association changed, or it became inactive, there was not an assignment of responsibility for the burial grounds.

There was periodic physical neglect, and from an early date record keeping was erratic at best. Not all graves were marked, and families died out, moved away, or simply forgot where relatives were buried. Grave sites were sold by organizations whose maps or layouts disappeared when the groups became defunct. Deeds that were issued or re-issued from the 1920s through the 1940s often refer to a location in a named section, but may also indicate "number to be given after map is completed" or "when new plat is made."<sup>12</sup> The goal of mapping the cemetery accurately has never been achieved. Even had it been attempted as early as 1880, it would probably have been impossible; too many burials would have been forgotten, and too many deeds misplaced.

Alongside the evidence of occasional severe neglect, People's Memorial Cemetery retains positive physical reminders of its association with benevolent societies. Mutual aid societies and secret fraternal orders both offered burial assistance to their members. In fact, provision of a decent funeral and burial site was a primary purpose of some groups. A lodge or associational funeral was a great celebration of unity, reinforced in Petersburg by the habit, adopted not only by mystic fraternal orders but also the more prosaic mutual-assistance clubs, of placing separate markers inscribed with club name or lodge symbol at members' graves.

Another aspect of cemetery ownership relates to the undertaking business in nineteenth and

early-twentieth century Petersburg. Besides serving as officers of benevolent organizations, several men involved with the land were funeral directors. Access to burial plots was among the services provided by Thomas Scott, Thomas Brown, James M. Wilkerson, and William F Jackson, all African-American undertakers during different periods of the city's history.

For years, the various sections of today's People's Cemetery were referred to by separate names that remained in local memory even when records were poorly kept. From north to south, these were Old Beneficial (the original acre), Beneficial Board (2 acres acquired in 1865, known as Scott Cemetery in 1880), Providence First Section (north section of Archer-Wilson-Jackson tract, purchased by Thomas Scott in 1879), Providence Second Section and Jackson Cemetery/Jackson Memorial Cemetery Section (the balance of the Archer-Wilson-Jackson-Drake tract). In about 1926, when trustees of the cemetery laid out a master plan for improvements, the sections were labeled according to common usage.<sup>13</sup>

North of the Peoples complex, Little Church Cemetery was privately owned by the Wilkerson family. In 1931, by a deed from J. M. Wilkerson to the People's Memorial Committee, Little Church was merged into Peoples. The agreement was intended to eliminate property taxes on Little Church, and combine use and maintenance of the two plots.<sup>14</sup> However, the deed was not filed in Hustings Court. In 1986 when the City of Petersburg accepted ownership of People's Cemetery, the boundary was drawn to include part but not all of Little Church. Title to its north half remains in J. M. Wilkerson Funeral Establishment.

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<sup>13</sup> "Plat of Outlay 'The People's Memorial Cemetery, Petersburg VA,'" nd, ca. 1926 (copy in Siege Museum files). W.E.B. DuBois (DuBois 1907:94) noted the presence of a 163-member "Beneficial Association" in Petersburg, a group organized in 1893. This was at least the third group by that name, and is probably the Beneficial Board cited in People's records. DuBois did not record the existence of Providence Association, though he recognized that as the name of the cemetery.

<sup>14</sup> People's Memorial Association Minutes, February 10, 1931 (Siege Museum files).

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<sup>12</sup> Peoples Cemetery Records: Reel Two.

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## AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG

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The white population of Petersburg historically considered the several adjoining cemeteries as one property. An 1870 news article complains about the condition of the:

colored people's burying ground near the Brick Church. The whole place is open and exposed to the ravages of cattle; graves are trampled on; the tombstones are knocked down, and no one seems to take any care of the place whatever. Now, we do not know whose business it is exactly to see to it, but it is surely somebody's, and whoever that somebody is, we suggest that he or they take some steps to have a new fence put around the yard.<sup>15</sup>

The mingling of names and blurring of property lines continued into the twentieth century. In 1907, W. E. B. DuBois (DuBois 1907: 132) recorded two Negro cemeteries in Petersburg: East View, and "Providence," a name that to him covered the entire Peoples/Little Church complex. Maps prepared by the City Engineer's office (1892 and 1930) show "Colored Cemetery" or "Peoples Memorial Cemetery (Colored)" extending south from Mungea Street, and the Sanborn Map Company also treated the entire area as one burial ground (Figure 18).

There were periodic attempts to reconstitute or replace the organizations that had initially had charge of the cemetery tracts. In 1894, Thomas H. Brown, C. B. Stevens, John Berry and John G. Smith organized themselves in an agreement to oversee the work at Peoples Cemetery, then in very bad condition. The People's Memorial Association worked to put the "grounds in a pretty condition. . . , but interest died and it soon went back to a wilderness."<sup>16</sup>

According to city directories, from 1899 until

at least 1911, James M. Wilkerson was superintendent of Providence, Old Beneficial and Little Church cemeteries. During this time, interest may have died in the group headed by Brown, but there was certainly activity on behalf of the cemetery. On Labor Day 1906 a new iron fence with a central arched gate was dedicated, secured and set up by the Women Union Cemetery Club, led by Nellie Coleman, Cindarella Bvrd, and Malinda Johnson. The printed announcement states that, with the help of churches, Sunday Schools, Lodges and Societies, the club had contributed much of the \$350 needed to pay for the fence and erection, but \$100 was still needed to dedicate it free of debt (Figure 19). The gate must eventually have been paid for, and is remembered as reading "Providence Cemetery"<sup>17</sup>

Thomas H. Brown (1862-1952) is the individual most closely associated with People's Cemetery during the first half of the twentieth century. It is impossible to speculate from this distance on the degree of rivalry between him and others for management of the property. His explanation of how he came to manage People's Cemetery was as follows:

The Old Beneficial Board bought the first land (1840) for the cemetery; the second and third acquisitions (1865 and 1879) were made on behalf of the Providence Mutual Society and the Jackson Club. Tax rolls recorded the land as owned by Thomas Scott, president of the Old Beneficial Board, William Berry, and others; but in an unrecorded deed, the trustees of Beneficial and Jackson had transferred their interest to the Providence Mutual Society. Thomas Brown was the last surviving trustee of Providence. Further, in an 1894 Hustings Court case apparently brought on by the Brown-led cleanup

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<sup>15</sup> Petersburg *Daily Courier*, May 12, 1870.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas H. Brown, open letter, February 1931 (Siege Museum files).

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<sup>17</sup> Newspaper article announcing dedication in undated scrapbook, Major William Henry Johnson Papers, VSU Library Special Collections. Interview, Mrs. Mary Lee Berry, January 28, 1999.

PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

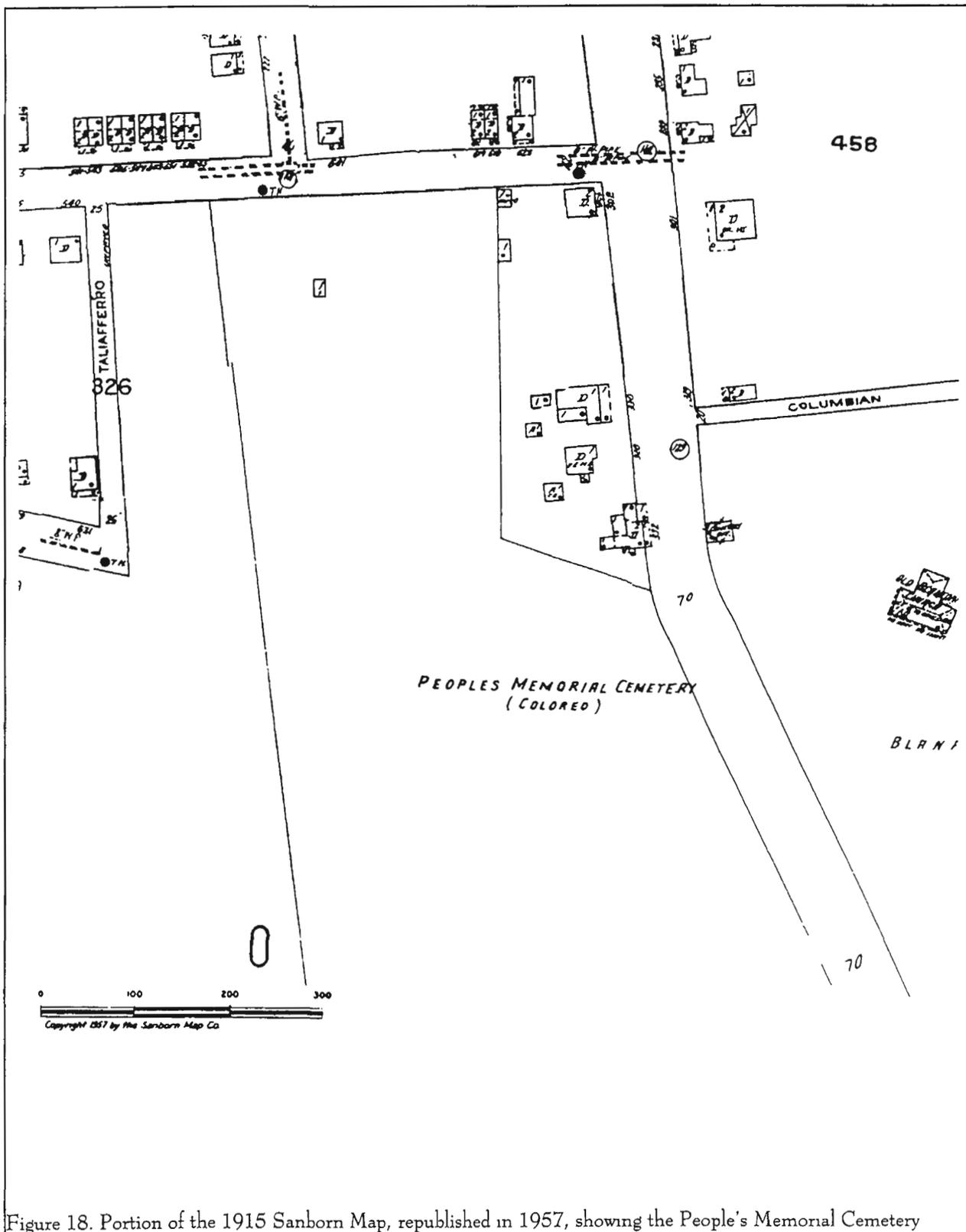


Figure 18. Portion of the 1915 Sanborn Map, republished in 1957, showing the People's Memorial Cemetery

# DEDICATION

CEMETERY FENCE. SEPTEMBER 3, 1906.

THE WOMEN UNION CEMETERY CLUB,  
 Having secured and set up the iron fence at Blandford Cemetery of  
 the city of Petersburg, Va., do hereby set aside and designate  
**Labor Day, Sept. 3, 1906,**

As the day for publicly dedicating this fence by the citizens of Petersburg.  
 The cost of this fence, and the whole of the expenses connect-  
 ed therewith, will be at least three hundred and fifty, or three  
 hundred and sixty dollars.

The club has in its treasury one hundred and forty odd dollars, and  
 Churches, Sunday Schools, Lodges and Societies have handed in one  
 hundred dollars more to Rev G. B. Howard to date.

To dedicate this fence free of all debt the Club must have ONE HUNDRED and FIV  
 or TEN DOLLARS more by or on the day of dedication:

Hence, the appeal is hereby made to all Churches, Sunday schools and Lodges and So-  
 cieties, that have not responded. Please do help. This appeal is to individuals also.  
 The names and amount of contributions of all Churches, Schools, Societies, and persons  
 amounting to one dollar, will be published in the city papers.

*All churches, pastors, Sunday schools, choirs, lodges  
 and societies are invited to take part in this dedication,  
 as well as the general public*

## Order of Services.

1. Please form on South Ave. Oak St. and Sycamore St. at 2 p. m. and proceed to  
 the cemetery.
2. All are asked to take along flowers, and place them on graves of friends and loved  
 ones as soon as you reach the grounds.
3. At 2 p. m. all will assemble at the platform at the Central Arch gate when the  
 exercises will take place as follows:  
 First, Call to order, singing, Scripture reading, prayer, singing.  
 Second, The object of the day stated, and the list of Churches, Sunday Schools, Lodges  
 and Societies called, and the response from each. Then collection from general public  
 for the fence and cemetery.  
 Third, Music and addresses by pastors and officers of ten minutes each. (Hours  
 present will be asked to sing selections.)  
 Fourth, Announcement of cost of work, the collections, and the formal turning over  
 of the fence by the Club to the public. Benediction.

## OFFICERS

ELMIRA L. COLEMAN, PRESIDENT  
 GINDARELLA BYRD, VICE-PRESIDENT  
 MARY E. JOHNSON, SECRETARY  
 ANNIE B. JOHNSON, ASST. SECRETARY  
 MARY H. WATKINS, CHAPLAIN  
 BOARD OF MANAGERS

Figure 19 Broadside for the People's fence dedication.

## PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

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of the grounds, the legal owners and heirs to the land (Thomas Scott, C. B. Stevens, J. K. Berry and Isham Carry) lost their rights by not being elected Trustees of the newly-formed People's Memorial Association, which was given title. Thus, as Chairman of the Trustees, Brown had come to manage all the components of the People's Memorial Cemetery, holding the property on behalf of the Trustee Board and the individual lot owners (Brown 1942).

Particularly because of the absence of organizational charters and deeds, the reform-minded city government of the 1920s must have been relieved to have a single organization and a single individual to accept accountability for the grounds. They had not bargained for Brown's tirelessness in demanding public assistance for People's Cemetery, or his simple longevity. It was only with difficulty that for decades Thomas Brown's strongly-voiced demands on behalf of People's Memorial Cemetery could be denied.

Captain Thomas H. Brown was an undertaker who began his career as an employee of Thomas Scott and eventually took over the business. Although he was successful in Petersburg, and active in the People's Memorial Association, he was absent from the city for several years during the early twentieth century; his granddaughter recalls that he operated in Alexandria for a time.<sup>18</sup> The 1914 city directory shows that he had returned to Petersburg. A few years later he was again in charge of People's Cemetery.

One of Brown's initiatives was to eliminate the property tax on the burial grounds. In 1920 the city government began to combat the economic depression that accompanied the closure of Fort Lee. Along with reorganizing departments, the city also began to issue improvement bonds and attempt seriously to bring in new industry. Funds were allocated for improving,

maintaining, and enlarging Blandford Cemetery.<sup>19</sup> Reacting to these public expenditures, Brown returned to the old issue of tax-exempt status for People's Cemetery. In 1921 the property tax was finally eliminated, with the land being recognized as a place set aside by a charitable group for the purpose of burying the dead.<sup>20</sup>

In about 1922, the People's Association was reorganized as the Colored Cemetery Association, Brown retaining his post as Keeper of the People's Memorial Cemetery. The city government drew up rules to govern the cemetery (Figure 20), providing for the Association to elect the Keeper and spelling out his duties and powers. During this period, the Colored Chamber of Commerce and most of the African American churches in Petersburg were involved in the effort to bring the cemetery into line with city health and safety regulations, and also in the attempts to improve the grounds. Their fund-raising was targeted toward the community; it is difficult to tell how much they were simultaneously lobbying for public funds.<sup>21</sup> Regardless, public funding was not forthcoming and the burden remained on the cemetery's own constituency.

Despite the inability or unwillingness of lot owners to fund even the annual care fee (\$3/square) permitted under city regulations,<sup>22</sup> in 1926 the Cemetery Memorial Association and Colored Chamber of Commerce sponsored an ambitious new plan to make

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<sup>19</sup> Report of the City of Petersburg, Virginia, for the Period September 15 1920 to June 30, 1923, Being a Complete Report of the City Government under the Council-Manager Plan (Petersburg: City Council, 1923).

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Judge Mullen, August 1921 (copy in "History of the People's Memorial Cemetery"). Thomas H. Brown, open letter, February 1931 (Siege Museum files).

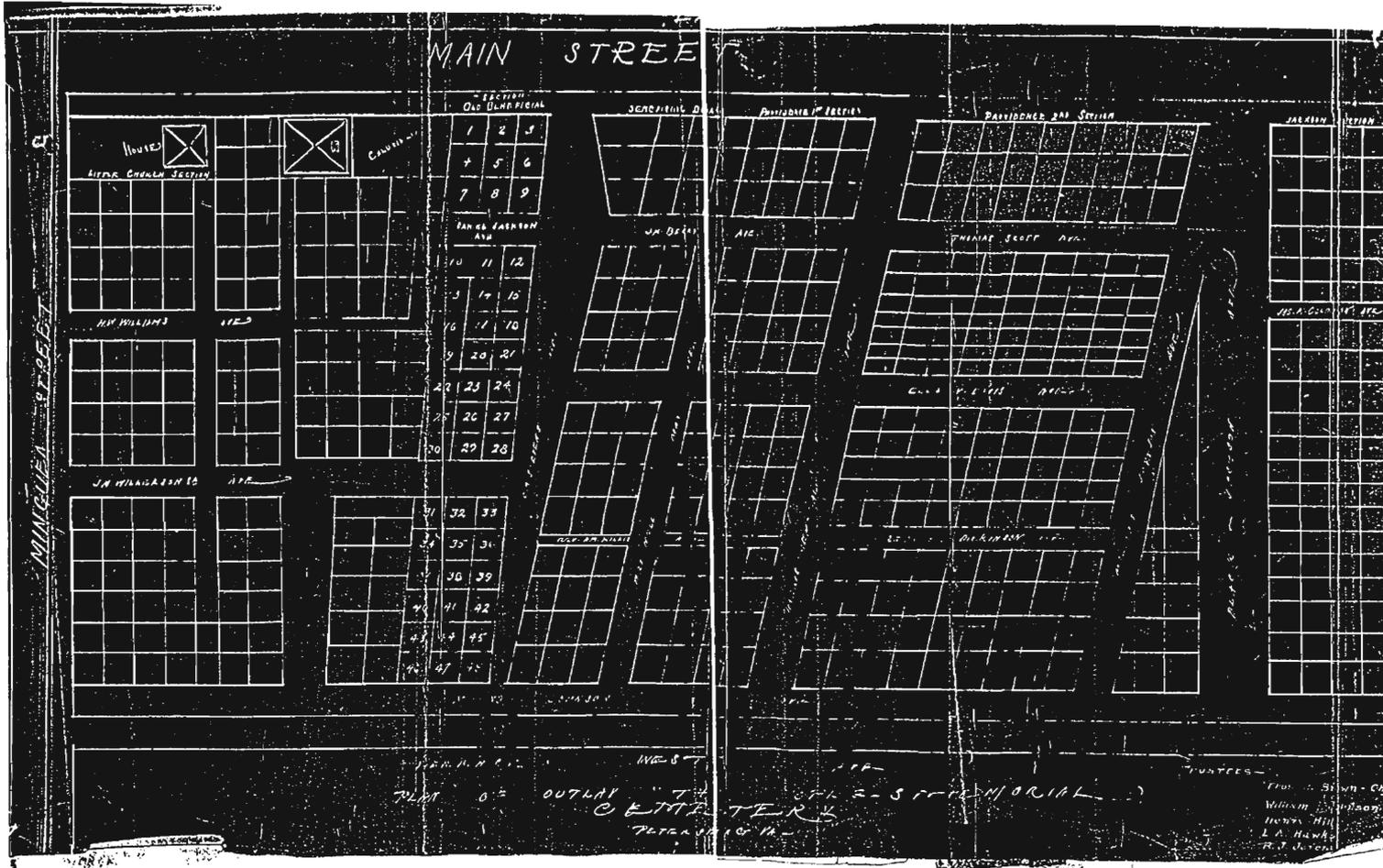
<sup>21</sup> Rules Governing People's Memorial Cemetery, Petersburg City Code Sections 525-539, adopted 1925. Meeting Notice, 1925 (William H. Johnson Papers, VSU Archives).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas H. Brown, letter to members of People's Memorial Cemetery Committee, February 10, 1931 (Siege Museum files).

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<sup>18</sup> Interview, Ms. Thomasine Burke, January 28, 1999.





PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

Figure 21. "Plan of the Outlay of the People's Memorial Cemetery" by Thomas H. Brown, ca. 1926.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES OF PETERSBURG

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the cemetery "one of the beauty spots of the city." During the \$3,000 improvement program, new plots would be made, new deeds issued, the existing fence repaired and a new fence extended around the entire property (including Little Church), the grounds cleared of overgrowth, landscaping and new avenues laid out. The avenues would be named Harris (Dr. H. L. Harris, "G. S. Masons of Virginia"), Thomas Scott ("Vet. F. D."), Stevens-Berry ("first trustees"), Jackson-Black (Major Jackson and Rev. L. A. Black), H. Williams (Rev. Henry Williams), J. M. Wilkerson ("V. F. D. Founder of Little Church"), and the walkways Rev. Daniel Jackson, Nellie Coleman, Malinda K. Johnson, Rev. H. Dickerson, Rev. A. M. Morris, and Junious Chavers. Unfortunately, despite the enthusiasm of Brown and his colleagues, fundraising fell short. Cleanup days were fairly well attended and many new deeds were issued,<sup>23</sup> but thorough mapping was not achieved, no new fencing was installed, and little progress was made laying and grading drives or walks - a project that would surely have been destructive to unmarked graves. This plan appears to be retained by an undated drawing, labeled "Plan of Outlay of The People's Memorial Cemetery, Petersburg, VA" (Figure 21).<sup>24</sup>

In his efforts to raise funds to "transpose the sites from eyesores into ones presentable and neat in appearance," Brown continued to go from City Council to the white community back home to the black community. Council steadfastly resisted his appeals, but small amounts, such as \$100 given by the Relief Association in early 1931, were gratefully noticed. Yet even with a donation of \$50 from the Richmond Grand Lodge of Colored Masons, the group had less than \$500 in the spring of 1934. Once again, a fundraising

drive was promised.<sup>25</sup> Throughout these appeals there appears to have been no clear accounting of how the funds required by city ordinance were collected or spent. Short of the \$1 per burial due to the city, the records are silent regarding the remaining \$2 to \$4 per interment.

After the failure of the landscaping master plan, ambitions for People's Memorial Cemetery were much quieter. Families continued to bury there, and maintain their own plots in a more or less passive fashion. Memorial Day observances at the cemetery included choirs, dignitaries and recitations,<sup>26</sup> but the era of optimism had generally passed. Thomas Brown's was a voice in the wilderness. In a 1941 letter to the editor, he called attention to the cemetery's location on the main road to the "New National Park" (Petersburg National Battlefield). Its condition, particularly by contrast to Blandford Cemetery across the road, would be seen as a disgrace by visitors. The only solution was funding assistance by the public, without regard to color. Two years later he wrote "While your tax takes care of the Blandford Cemetery, who and by what means is there for taking care of ours?... [we] have to ask God to get into the hearts of our City Council to take care of us."<sup>27</sup>

Some of Thomas Brown's loudest outcries responded to very unwelcome public expenditures targeted toward People's Cemetery. The city had decided to improve South Crater Road/Highway 301 at the curve between Blandford and People's. To do so, it was necessary to encroach onto the southeast section (Providence-Jackson) of People's Cemetery. The strip of land to be condemned in 1943, about 0.1 acre, was

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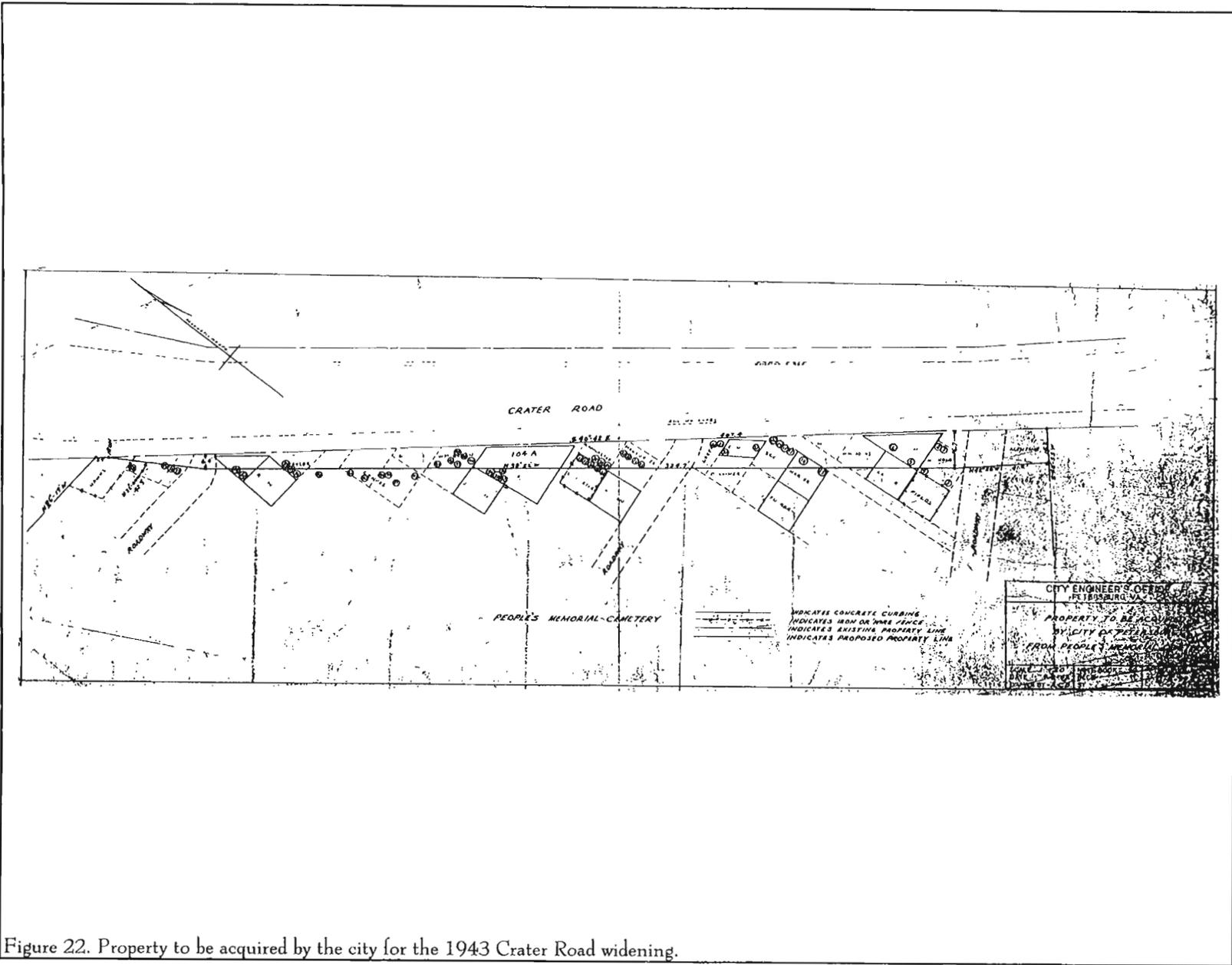
<sup>23</sup> Petersburg *Progress-Index*, March 15, 1926 and April 5, 1926. Thomas H. Brown, letter March 17, 1941 (Siege Museum files).

<sup>24</sup> Efforts to scale this drawing to fit either the current tax map or the plan of People's Cemetery have been unsuccessful. This is simply a sketch, intended to provide a general view or impression of the layout — not a scaled drawing.

<sup>25</sup> People's Memorial Association Minutes, February 10, 1931 (Siege Museum files). Newspaper articles ca. 1933-34 in undated scrapbook, Major William Henry Johnson Papers, VSU library Special Collections.

<sup>26</sup> Petersburg *Progress-Index*, June 1, 1941.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas H. Brown, "An Open Letter to the Public" undated newspaper clipping ca. 1942 (Siege Museum files).



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Figure 22. Property to be acquired by the city for the 1943 Crater Road widening.





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a thin triangle 15 feet wide at its base (Figure 22).<sup>28</sup> Over the spirited objections of Brown and others, the city moved ahead with plans to remove the bodies from the roadway, and ultimately contracted Brown's assistance in identifying bodies and the ownership and location of graves, and also with relocating graves in the new section.<sup>29</sup>

The "new section" was one acre at the west side of the cemetery which the city had acquired (after a separate court case with the owner of an adjacent residence) for the reburials (Figures 23 and 24). This was significantly larger than the area to be disturbed, where Brown estimated there were 108 bodies. The extra space allowed the city to carry out the move on the basis of lots or squares: if any portion of a lot was within the condemned strip, a new square of equivalent size would be assigned to that owner in the new lot, and any bodies in the old lot would be moved to the new lot. Although records are unclear as to who would actually provide labor and equipment for the move, the city's own crews or a separately-retained funeral home, tombstones, monuments, fences and markers would be reset in the new square, and plots would be curbed in the new lot to correspond to curbing in the old. The city also planned to place curbing around each section that would be used for interment. Finally, "the fence along Crater Road will be moved and reset along the new

boundary of the cemetery"<sup>30</sup>

There is no purpose in trying to guess the level of thoroughness or sensitivity with which the move was accomplished. Much more important would be to determine the fate of the 1906 iron fence. No photograph or drawing of the fence has been located, and the only certain memory of it concerns the arched "Providence" gate. Because fence repair was an uncompleted work item in 1926-34, its condition was surely very poor by 1943. The probable conclusion is that the fence was not in fact reset. Removing it would have further damaged its already-fragile sections, so that reinstallation would require extensive repair. Regardless of cost overruns, wartime material shortages would have argued against replacing broken elements. A patriotic appeal would likely have resulted in the People's constituency themselves donating the fencing to the war effort. Because there is no mention of the fence after 1943, this may well have been the outcome.

Not all the disinterred bodies were moved to the new section of People's. Some families chose to have their kin relocated to plots they purchased in East View Cemetery, in a new section of Wilkerson Memorial Cemetery opened in 1942.<sup>31</sup> Unused space in the reinterment section of Peoples was sold as new lots after the project was complete.

Crater Road/Highway 301 was widened again in 1968 to a full four-lane road with median. This state highway project required a right-of-way of nearly 0.5 acre through the southeastern edge of People's Memorial Cemetery (as well as additional acreage at Little Church). The department's engineers mapped the area in question, locating curbing, vaults and headstones, and acknowledging the presence of unmarked, unknown graves. Sixty squares in Wilkerson Memorial Cemetery were purchased from Wilkerson Memorial Funeral Association. The funeral directors

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<sup>28</sup> This plan (see also Figure 23) reveals that, in 1942, there were three entrances to the cemetery. The northern two forming a horseshoe-shaped drive and the third running westwardly into the southern quarter of the tract. In addition, the layout of plots reveals that while a few were placed with walkways (on the southern edge of the plan), most lacked this design feature.

<sup>29</sup> City of Petersburg, letter to Thomas H. Brown (May 3, 1943, Siege Museum files). This letter provides some evidence of the poor relations between the city and its black citizens. Although Brown would be paid \$400 for his services, including assistance "in the identification of bodies and ownership and location of graves," the city manager opened the letter, "Dear Brown," dropping the titles "Mr." or "Captain."

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<sup>30</sup> City of Petersburg, "Petition in the Hustings Court of the City of Petersburg," (unexecuted copy, 1943, Siege Museum files).

<sup>31</sup> Interview, Pernell Simms, December 16, 1998.

## PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

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contracted to move the bodies (Newcomb Funeral Home of Chase City for the disinterments, Wilkerson for the reinterments) were to relocate all head and foot stones, monuments, and vaults. As with the earlier move, any square that had to be removed in part would be completely removed, and an equivalent new square assigned.<sup>32</sup> However, this relocation of whole plots was not carried through. At the edge of South Crater Road today are several partial plots, still with monuments.

Figure 25 provides a graphic picture of the gradual "erosion" of People's Cemetery along Crater Road. It also reveals what appear to be incomplete removals from the two different episodes. Finally, Figure 26 is Brown's map of People's. Like the earlier plan of proposed improvements, this is at best a sketch, showing general, almost idealized, relationships. The map was prepared after the first road relocation, in 1943, perhaps accounting for the large areas where no graves are shown. In addition, the drawing shows both "Xs," likely indicative of graves in a plot indicated by depressions, grave mounds, or other features, and numbers, which at one time were probably keyed to some sort of index that Brown maintained.

By 1968, Thomas H. Brown was dead. His grandson Henry Burke was among nine men named trustees of People's Memorial Cemetery in 1957,<sup>33</sup> but Brown's activist spirit had passed with him - perhaps because the new trustees were not funeral directors. The cemetery had again become very overgrown, and plots away from the outside edges were inaccessible. Because of the conditions, by the 1960s, even families who knew there was space in their plots were burying at

East View or Blandford instead.<sup>34</sup> Yet despite the deplorable conditions, markers today prove that funeral directors, mourners, and their deceased relatives managed to make it into People's Cemetery during those years.

A new push came in the 1980s, when Assistant City Manager Beverly Brewer proved responsive to requests for assistance in improving conditions at People's. In 1986, "so that this City can properly and perpetually maintain the cemetery," the City accepted title to the land from the two surviving trustees, Moses White and Corliss A. Batts.<sup>35</sup>

### The Penetrometer Survey

A penetrometer is a device for measuring the compaction of soil. Soil compaction is well understood in construction, where its primary objective is to achieve a soil density that will carry specified loads without undue settlement, and in agronomy, where it is recognized as an unfavorable by-product of tillage. Compaction is less well understood in archaeology, although some work has been conducted in exploring the effects of compaction on archaeological materials (see, for example, Ebeid 1992).

In the most general sense, the compaction of soil requires movement and rearrangement of individual soil particles. This fits them together and fills the voids which may be present, especially in fill materials. For the necessary movement to occur, friction must be reduced, typically by ensuring that the soil has the proper amount of moisture. If too much is present, some will be expelled and in the extreme the soils become soupy or like quicksand and compaction is not possible. If too little is present, there will not be adequate lubrication of the soil particles and, again, compaction is impossible. For each soil type and condition there is an optimum moisture level to allow compaction.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview, John Donley, Virginia DOT Right-of-Way Division, December 30, 1998. Correspondence between C. W. Mangum, District Property Manager, and Henry C. F. Burke, Corliss A. Batts, Moses White, et. al., Trustees for the People's Memorial Cemetery, October 1967 - July 1968.

<sup>33</sup> Hustings Court of the City of Petersburg, "Order Appointing Trustees," October 4, 1957 (Reel 2, People's Cemetery Records).

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<sup>34</sup> Interview, Mrs. Mary Lee Berry, January 28, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Quitclaim Deed, February 21, 1986 (Siege Museum files).

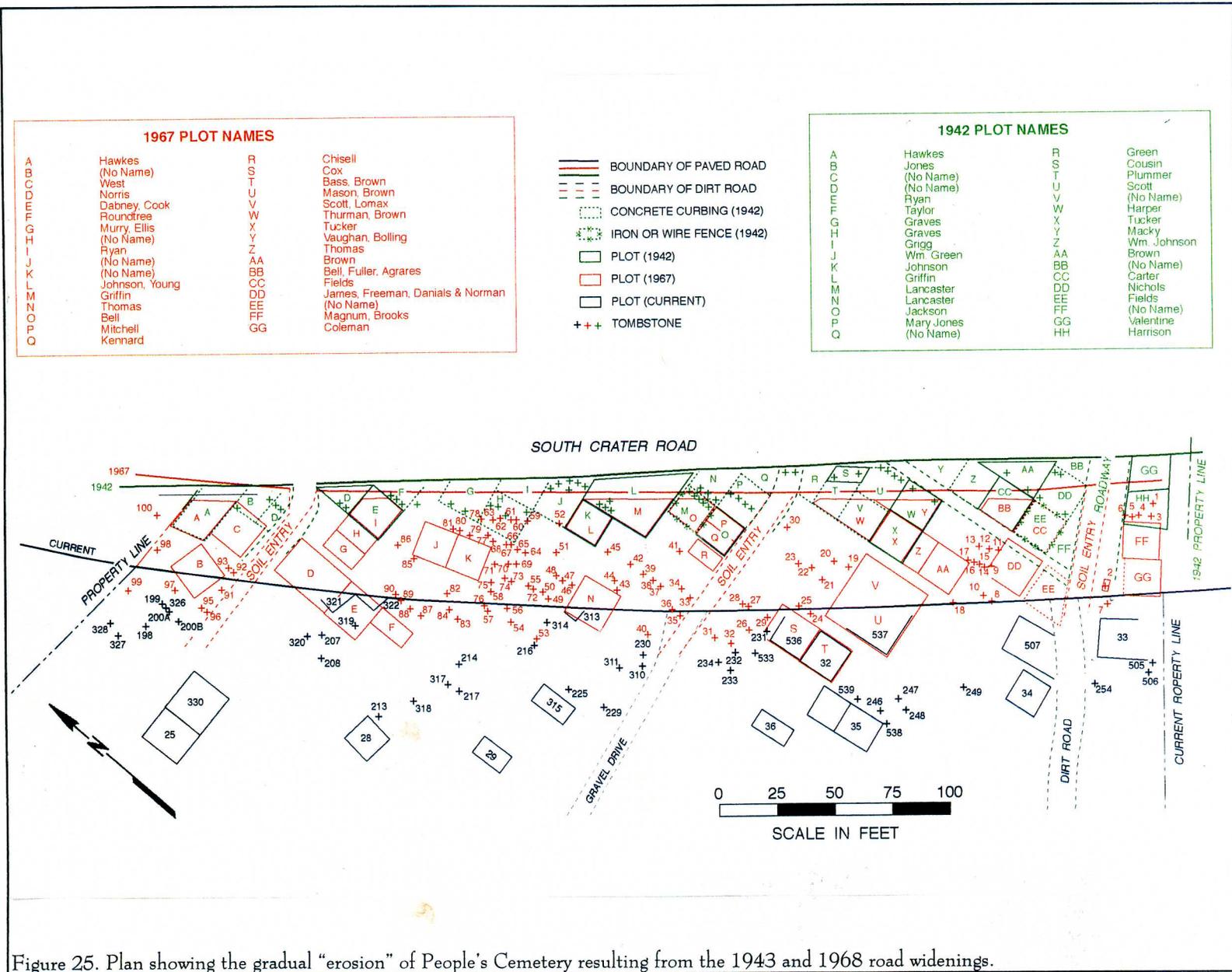


Figure 25. Plan showing the gradual "erosion" of People's Cemetery resulting from the 1943 and 1968 road widenings.

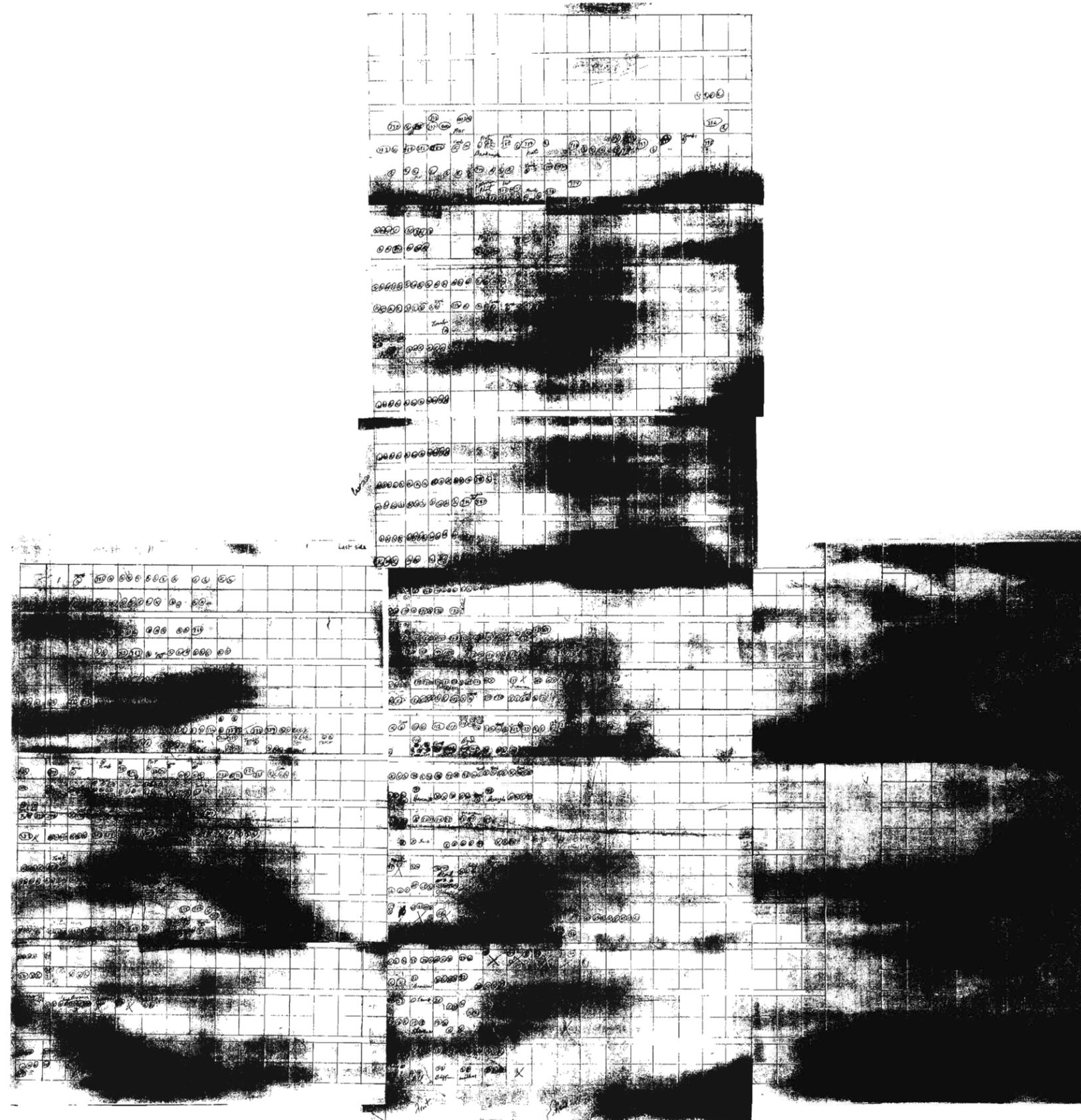


Figure 26: Thomas H. Brown's sketch map of People's Cemetery.

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When natural soil strata are disturbed — whether by large scale construction or by the excavation of a small hole in the ground — the resulting spoil contains a large volume of voids and the compaction of the soil is very low. When this spoil is used as fill, either in the original hole or at another location, it likewise has a large volume of voids and a very low compaction.

In construction, such fill is artificially compacted, settling under a load as air and water are expelled. For example, compaction by heavy rubber-tired vehicles will produce a change in density or compaction as deep as 4 feet. In agriculture, tillage is normally confined to dry weather or the end of the growing season — when the lubricating effects of water are minimized.

In the case of a pit, or a burial, the excavated fill is typically thrown back in the hole not as thin layers that are then compacted before the next layer is added, but in one, relatively quick, episode. This prevents the fill from being compacted, or at least as compacted as the surrounding soil.

Penetrometers come in a variety of styles, but all measure compaction as a numerical reading, typically as pounds per square inch (psi). The dickey-John penetrometer consists of a stainless steel rod about 3-feet in length, connected to a T-handle. As the rod is inserted in the soil, the compaction needle rotates within an oil filled (for damping) stainless steel housing, indicating the compaction levels. The rod is also engraved at 3-inch levels, allowing more precise collection of compaction measurements through various soil horizons. Two tips (½-inch and ¾-inch) are provided for different soil types.

Of course a penetrometer is simply a measuring device. It cannot distinguish soil compacted by natural events from soil artificially compacted. Nor can it distinguish an artificially excavated pit from a tree throw which has been filled in. Nor can it, per se, distinguish between a hole dug as a trash pit and a hole dug as a burial pit. What it does is convert each of these events to PSI readings. It is then up to the operator to determine through various techniques the cause of the increased or lowered soil compaction.

Curiously, penetrometers are rarely used by archaeologists in routine studies, although they are used by forensic anthropologists (such as Drs. Dennis Dirkmaat and Steve Nawrocki) and by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (Special Agent Michael Hochrein) in searches for clandestine graves. While a penetrometer may be only marginally better than a probe in the hands of an exceedingly skilled individual with years of experience, such ideal circumstances are rare. In addition, a penetrometer provides quantitative readings which are replicable and which allow much more accurate documentation of cemeteries.

Like probing, the penetrometer is used at set intervals along grid lines established perpendicular to the suspected grave orientations. The readings are recorded and used to develop a map of probable grave locations. In addition, it is important to “calibrate” the penetrometer to the specific site where it is being used. Since readings are affected by soil moisture and even to some degree by soil texture, it is important to compare readings taken during a single investigation and ensure that soils are generally similar in composition.

It is also important to compare suspect readings to those from known areas. For example, when searching for graves in a cemetery where both marked and unmarked graves are present it is usually appropriate to begin by examining known graves to identify the range of compaction present. From work at several graveyards, including the Kings Cemetery (Charleston County, South Carolina) where 28 additional graves were identified, Maple Grove Cemetery (Haywood County, North Carolina) where 319 unmarked graves were identified, the Walker Family Cemetery (Greenville County, South Carolina) where 78 unmarked graves were identified, and Colonial Park Cemetery (Chatham County, Georgia) where 8,678 probable graves were identified, we have found that the compaction of graves is typically under 150 psi, usually in the range of 50 to 100 psi, while non-grave areas exhibit compaction that is almost always over 150 psi, typically 160 to 180 psi (Trinkley and Hacker 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999).

After the examination of over 20 cemeteries using a penetrometer, we are relatively confident that the same ranges will be found throughout the Carolinas,

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Georgia, and Virginia. It is likely that these ranges are far more dependent on general soil characteristics (such as texture and moisture) than on cultural aspects of the burial process.

The process works best when there are clear and distinct non-grave areas, i.e., when the graves are not overlapping. In such cases taking penetrometer readings at 2-foot intervals perpendicular to the supposed orientation (assuming east-west orientations, the survey lines would be established north-south) will typically allow the quick identification of something approaching the mid-point of the grave. Working along the survey line forward and backward (i.e., north and south) will allow the north and south edges of the grave to be identified. From there the grave is tested perpendicular to the survey line, along the grave's center-line, in order to identify the head and foot.

Typically the head and foot are both marked using surveyor's pen flags. We have also found that it is helpful to run a ribbon of flagging from the head flag to the foot flag, since the heads and feet in tightly packed cemeteries begin to blur together.

### Findings at People's Cemetery

The investigations at People's Cemetery were intended to explore two general areas. One was the area at the west end of the cemetery, adjacent to Talliaferro Street, where the City hoped to construct a parking lot for use by cemetery visitors. The other area was on the broad slope in the southeast corner of the cemetery, where relatively few monuments are found. There the question was whether this portion of the cemetery might be vacant, perhaps allowing additional plots to be used.

Initially we "calibrated" the penetrometer by examining what were thought to be marked graves. We found that the soil compaction varied from about 50 psi to about 125 psi — suggesting a relatively standard compaction range for human burials based on our previous experience. We were likewise able to consistently identify the sides of the grave, although we found considerable variation in some areas, suggesting that some portions of the cemetery had been extensively used (and that there may be far more individuals buried in the cemetery, perhaps very close to being on top of

one another, than previously anticipated).

Moving from the central portion of the cemetery to the southwest, on the slope, we found that graves were likely located in this area, although their placement seemed less regular, or at least less tightly placed, than in the central portion. This finding is difficult to interpret, largely since the sample size is so small. What it may suggest, however, is that this section of the cemetery, while used, has been less intensively used than that closer to Crater Road.

Turning to the area along Talliaferro Street we did encounter a line of graves at the western edge of the proposed parking area. The central portion of this parking area, however, evidenced artificial compaction — typically in the range of 250+ psi. This may be the result of the area being frequently used for parking in the past. There is also a large quantity of gravel spread around in this area, as though it may have been used by the City as a stockpile for gravel used in road work. Regardless, the compaction is so great that we cannot determine the extent of graves in this area. Since there are at least some to the west, we suspect that graves extend to the road — that would be the safest assumption unless the City wishes to conduct archaeological testing in this area to determine with a greater degree of certainty.

### Stones and Other Features

Standing on the ground today, it is difficult to envision People's original design or layout. Historic documents suggest that it was developed to provide family plots to members of mutual benefit societies. Based on remnant portions, these were probably around the standard of 17 to 18 feet square, providing about 300 square feet. There is no evidence of the kind of larger lots that were considered "prime" real estate at cemeteries such as Mount Auburn (Boston, MA) or Spring Grove (Cincinnati, OH). There is also much remaining evidence that many lots, especially along Crater Road and continuing north and west toward Little Church, had either fences or curbs to mark them. It seems more likely that individual burials were placed at the far southwestern edge of the cemetery.

In these respects People's Cemetery appears to

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follow the general scheme of the rural cemetery movement, which would have been in vogue during most of its early history. What is perhaps more curious is that the cemetery contains relatively few indications that other cemetery movements ever took hold. There are, of course, occasional lawn-type markers, but they are scattered throughout and appear to be more influenced by consumer choice than by any change in the orientation of cemetery design. Unlike at least one other African American cemetery in Petersburg (East View), there is no evidence of any appreciable evolutionary development. People's Cemetery, perhaps because of its frequent periods of inactive oversight, changed little from its initial plan.

What has evolved, however, is our understanding of the cemetery. In 1987, a year after the City acquired ownership, a police intern began transcribing stones and making notes on conditions which needed repair. The ultimate goal of this was to develop a computer listing of the burials, but today we have been able to identify only bits and pieces of the original research. From what has been reconstructed 122 stones were identified and recorded from two of the four sections of the cemetery<sup>36</sup>

The next recordation effort came in 1997 when the City contracted with Harvey L. Parks, Inc. to prepare a plan of the cemetery property, including the location of plots and stones, as well as any names. The resulting survey revealed 309 plots and grave locations, most with at least a family name.

Our research, which included a rather detailed exploration of the grounds (generally open and easily accessible) as well as the recovery of several stones from spoil piles, revealed a total of 114 surviving family plots with 258 monuments or markers revealing the burial of 290 individuals.<sup>37</sup> In addition, our work revealed an

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<sup>36</sup> Although we assume that the four sections included two on either side of the gravel road, this is no longer clear from the surviving notes.

<sup>37</sup> The number of burials is greater than the number of markers or monuments since several revealed that more than one person was buried in the plot.

additional 434 individual markers or monuments (i.e., not clearly associated with family plots evidenced by coping or fences) marking the burial of 440 individuals.

Of the 122 stones documented by the intern's 1987 list, 22 are no longer present in People's Cemetery. This is disturbing since it projects nearly a 20% loss over a 12 year period. While some may have been moved by families, rather than simply being stolen or destroyed, the City has no record to indicate where these 22 markers went.

We have also identified 26 family plots from the 1942 highway removal, as well as 38 plots and 48 individual graves from the 1967 removal. In neither case, however, were the records adequate to do more than provide last names (and often did not indicate the exact number of bodies actually removed).

As a consequence, we have developed an index incorporating the 864 individuals or family names known to be associated with People's Cemetery. We have also developed a detailed inventory of the 692 stones present at People's Cemetery (included in this report as Appendix 2).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In 1921 Thomas Brown estimated that there were about 140 gravestones in Peoples (inclusive of what was being called Old Beneficial, Beneficial Board, Providence 1st and 2nd, and Jackson). The earliest he cited was Moses Jones, with a date of 1862. He included a list of about 30 of the more prominent names, including Major W F Jackson and Thomas Scott (Letter to Judge Mullen, August 1921, copy in "History of the People's Memorial Cemetery"). This count did not include unmarked graves, which must surely have been numerous.

A letter of 1931 claimed 642 deaths in Petersburg's African-American community during the years 1928-30; an average of 214 annually, not all of whom were buried at People's (Thomas H. Brown, letter to members of People's Memorial Cemetery Committee, 2/10/31, Siege Museum files; Thomas H. Brown, People's Cemetery Record and Ledger 1931-35, People's Cemetery Records, Reel One). Brown's ledger for the early 1930s includes fewer than 200 burials per year. Again, not all the burials were at People's: in 1931, for example, 20% of Brown's 158 funerals were elsewhere. There is no indication of how many burials other directors may have made at People's during the same period.

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The form used for the inventory is a standard format that solicits information concerning the name on the marker, the complete inscription (ensuring adherence to original spelling, punctuation, and spacing), the inscription technique (carved, painted, or other), the grave marker material (marble, granite, etc.), gravestone measurements, design features, condition, information on the stonecutter, and information on coping and fencing (Figure 27). The only data category which was not routinely used was the one for measurements. As the work progressed we found that there was inadequate time to collect all of the data so this category was eliminated. Otherwise, the form allowed for consistent collection of a broad range of information essential to our goal to provide not only a listing of individuals in People's, but also recommendations concerning repair and maintenance. Just as importantly, this information allows the City of Petersburg to evaluate the on-going condition of stones and will help prioritize immediate needs.

Family plots were assigned only one number, with the individual graves within the plot assigned letters. Thus, within Plot 3, there might be stones 3A, 3B, and 3C. A sketch of the family plot was made on the reverse of the form, showing the location of the various stones, as well as other details, such as the shape, often the approximate size, and information on plantings.

In those cases where there were multiple stones for one individual, they were designed by a dash and

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In 1943 Brown stated that from 1892 to 1925, 4,992 interments were made at Peoples, and 3,890 from 1925 to October 1943, for a total of 8,882 for the 52 years. The figures were used to make the point that, at \$1 per burial, People's Cemetery had contributed nearly \$9,000 to the city coffers, and received nothing in return.

An average of 171 burials annually seems reasonable for a population that averaged 12,280 from 1890 to 1940. This yields a death rate of 13.9 per 1,000 — almost exactly that reported by Gee and Carson (1929:89) for surrounding areas between 1923 and 1927 — 13.4 per 1,000.

sequential numbers. So you might have grave 100-1 and 100-2. In cases where there were multiple stones for the same individual within a family plot, the designation would combine both approaches, with the result of grave 100A-1 and 100A-2.

Although this sounds complex, it is actually very simple and allows a great deal of information to be collected in a relatively short period of time. It also ensures a high degree of standardization.<sup>39</sup>

After the completion of the monument survey, all markers were field checked against the 1997 Harvey L. Parks map, and those not shown on the map were added. Where corrections were needed, either of plot size or shape or location of monuments, these were also made at the same time. Figure 28 shows the resulting map of People's Cemetery.

Because of the size and intensity of recordation efforts, People's Cemetery exhibits a great deal of variety in the types of stones present.

It is perhaps interesting to comment that a casual observer probably would not, or even could not, discern that this is an African American cemetery. There are no obvious grave goods, there are no immediately obvious Africanisms, there is no effort to make the cemetery stand out as culturally or ethnically different or distinct. In fact, a casual observer would likely mistake People's for a small white cemetery. This is because the casual observer sees only the "forest" — the vague outline of markers and their arrangements, and the orientation of fences and curbing. This casual observer does not see the "trees" — the individual markers, their form, their composition, the great number of lodge and fraternal order stones, or the occasional plot with clearly intended plantings. As a result, to truly understand People's takes considerable

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<sup>39</sup> It is this degree of standardization which is most critical in cemetery surveys. Not only must epitaphs be correctly transcribed, but information on the condition of stones must be carefully and consistently noted if the data is to be useful for preservation efforts.

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effort.

The most common monument type is the headstone, accounting for about 41.7% of the stones in the cemetery. The bulk of these represent traditional marble or granite forms, typically with square, rounded, or segmented tops. Although most were plain, there are examples of very ornamented styles. For example, monument #176, in marble, dates from 1859, while #18-C-2, dates from 1932. There are also a number of very classic Victorian styles, indicating that many of Petersburg's African American community participated, in so far as they were able, in the aesthetics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A large proportion of the headstones are simple, relatively small marble lodge stones (see the discussion of these stones in the **Historic Overview**; see also Figure 7 for examples). These typically provide only the name of the lodge or fraternal order, the individual, and (most often) only the death date. We believe that these represent a part of the burial benefit of a number of organizations, which would account for both their modest size and limited carving, as well as the prominent display of the lodge initials. Table 4 lists the lodges identified at People's Cemetery — which take in many of the lodges known to be operating in Petersburg in the early twentieth century. What is perhaps of greater interest is that although only a few of these stones are signed by their carver (or were sufficiently exposed to allow the signature to be noted), those that were carved by Burns and Campbell are most numerous.

In fact, of the 13 stones identified from this firm, at least five (over 38%) are from lodges or similar organizations. If two others, which are fragmentary but of very similar design, are included, over half of the signed Burns and Campbell stones are from organizations (or commemorate an individual's membership in an organization).

First and foremost it seems odd that a stone cutter would sign such a simple and unassuming example of his work. On the other hand, it may be that Burns and Campbell were actively competing for the "lodge market." Although the individual stones are all simple, there are a great many of them and this quantity may have been commercially attractive. It is also possible that there existed some form of agreement

Table 4.  
List of Lodges and other Organizations Identified  
at People's Cemetery

A.F. & A. Sheba Lodge No. 17  
 American Suppliers Stem'ry No. 1  
 B.I.B.C.  
 Honorable Son's & Dau's of Golden Link  
 E.S. & L.C.  
 I.B.P.O.E.W. Lodge No. 72  
 I.B.P.O.E.W. Lodge No. 77  
 I.B.P.O.E.W. Majestic Temple No. 109  
 I.F.L. INC. Of Petersburg, VA  
 I.O. of St. Luke  
 Jr. Gold Key Club  
 Masons  
 N.I.B.S. Blooming Zion No. 275  
 N.I.B.S. Charity Lodge No. 502  
 N.I.B.S. Magnolia Lodge 116  
 O.E.S. Electra Chapter No. 7  
 O.E.S. Grand Patron of Va.  
 Royal Social Club  
 Seidenburg Stem'ry Room No. 1  
 Seidenburg Stem'ry Room No. 2  
 S.L.I.C.  
 Y.M.I.B.A.  
 Y.W.S.L.I.C.

between some of the lodges and various stone carvers. Although beyond the scope of this project, this line of inquiry is potentially very interesting. It also demonstrates just how little we know about consumer choice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century monument market.

Nine stones are signed by C.M. Walsh, although none are for lodges or fraternal organizations. In fact, all of the stones are relatively "high status," by which we mean they are more elaborately carved, include longer verses, and are more "typical" of stones that might be found in white Blandford.

Also present are stones carved by Pembroke Granite Works and M.R. (Milton Rivers). These are all relatively modern and none are associated with fraternal organizations.

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The number of headstones likely includes many die in socket forms, which are identifiable only if out of their base or socket. We could identify only 0.2% of the stones as definitely being die in socket monuments.

About 18.6% of the headstones are concrete, probably being locally crafted (see the discussion of concrete stone forms in the **Historic Overview**; see also Figure 8). In fact, when these stones are examined there are least a small handful that appear to have been crafted by one artisan, based on the decorative style.

Not included in these percentages for headstones are the 7.9% which are government stones, including 1.0% which are "Civil War" style (largely dating from the Spanish American War) and 6.9% which are "General" style, post-dating the First World War.

The next most common monument form at People's are the die on base stones, accounting for about 22.9% of those examined. The vast majority of these (87.2%) are made from marble or granite. A notable number, 12.8%, were made in concrete. These monuments were cast as one-piece — simply being made to look like the traditional die on base monuments.

Plaque markers are the third most common monument form at People's, accounting for 9.2% of the stones. What is perhaps most interesting about this form is that nearly equal proportions were stone and concrete — 56.8% were either marble or, more commonly, granite, while 43.2% were concrete. One of the concrete stones (# 185) has a marble inscription plaque set into the concrete, combining the two forms.

Bedstead monuments account for only 1.7% of the stones, but they are of special interest since they represent the only monument form found more commonly in concrete than in either marble or granite. Nearly 88% of the bedstead markers are concrete, although we found that the definition was difficult to apply since there were so many graves which incorporated a concrete headstone and concrete coping, often as an oval around the grave outline. There seems to be no doubt that this style served the same purpose as

the more traditional bedstead markers — and both are found in black and white cemeteries.

Lawn-type markers account for 4.4% of the People's assemblage, with all of the identified specimens being in either marble or granite. Unlike at Little Church and East View, we found no examples of locally produced concrete forms. Added to the lawn-type markers, of course, are the 0.4% of government stones in this style.

The cemetery is dominated by fairly simple styles of markers, which account for over four-fifths of the remaining markers. This is likely because these simple markers were inexpensive (in the case of government stones, free) and readily available on relatively short notice. There are, however, exceptions. For example, 1.9% are pedestal tombs; 1.0% are obelisks; 0.4% are pulpit markers; 2.1% are raised-top inscription markers; and 0.1% are examples of base, die, and cap monuments. Of these only 1% of the raised-top inscription markers have been created in concrete — all of the remaining styles are traditionally made in marble or granite. In fact, these more elaborate monuments — which likely were somewhat more costly — all appear virtually indistinguishable from the white section of Blandford Cemetery.

There is only one ledger stone identified at People's Cemetery and it is made from concrete. This may suggest that the form was out of vogue during the period of time People's was used, that it was simply not sought after by African Americans, or that it was out of the price range of those most commonly using People's Cemetery.

Likewise, there is only one burial vault slab identified in People's and it, of course, is made of concrete. These appear somewhat more common at East View and at Wilkerson's Memorial — probably because this is a fairly recent style and these other cemeteries have seen more burials in the past 30 years than has People's.

In addition to these stones, 2.3% of the graves were marked by metal funeral home plaques. Other forms of marking are likely associated with very reduced economic means (although, as previously discussed, we

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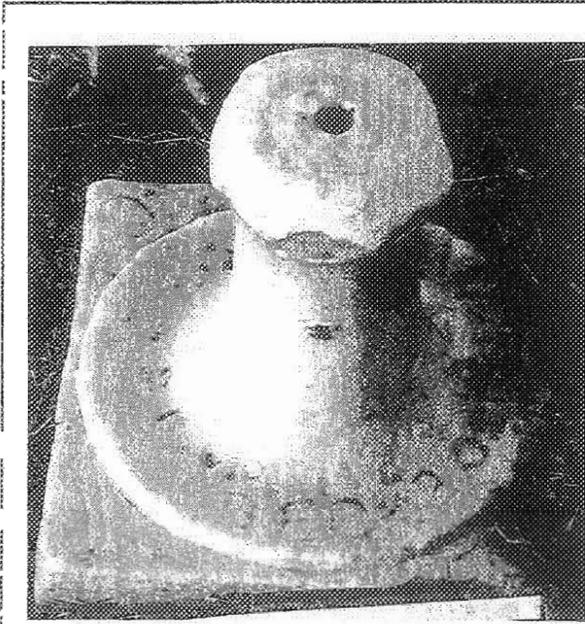


Figure 29. Marker 52-B at People's Cemetery.

can't rule out ethnic differences or even differing cultural norms). For example 1.7% are marked using only chunks of rough stone or partially finished stones — likely either found materials or stones purchased from local stone cutters very inexpensively. About 0.6% are marked with building materials, such as concrete blocks. In one case only a brick was used, written on in Magic Marker (# 103). There are also unique stones which do not fit into any of our established categories (these account for about 1.0% of the monuments). One is a low marble column with an integral base — looking something like a collar stud in cross section — with very crude carving on the base (marker # 52-B; Figure 29). Another (# 239) is a flat marble slab without lettering, but containing two carved half circles. There are also several concrete columns which might, at one time, have been associated with plots, but which today are either isolated remnants or were actually used to mark graves.

Of some interest are three monuments which tell us something about the evolving history of the cemetery. Monument 53-B is an urn-shaped column on a base cast in concrete (see Figure 8). On the base is "A SQUARE." We believe that this was probably used as

a marker for a corner of "A square" or plot in the layout of the cemetery. Another, # 335, is a carved marble tablet on which is "HENRY H. KERR'S / SQUARE" (Figure 30). This is almost certainly the same type of device — used to mark a corner of a family plot sold to Henry H. Kerr. What is curious is not that these are found, but rather that so few mapping monuments still exist in the cemetery. It appears that most have been either destroyed or were removed during the various period of cemetery re-organization.

Another interesting historical remnant is a small oval (3x4 inch) concrete marker found at ground level just inside a family plot with the word "CARE" cast in it (Figure 31). This plot (# 45), in which George E. Boyd and Sarah Boyd White are buried, is surrounded by low concrete coping. The marker likely denotes that at one time the family members were

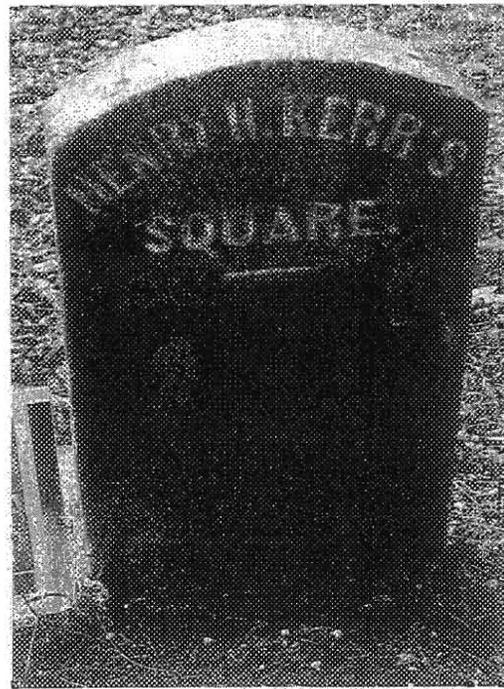


Figure 30. Marker 335, probably denoting a plot or "square."

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participating in an annual care agreement for the plot.<sup>40</sup>

While this study is not intended to explore either the iconography of the People's monuments, or their epitaphs, a few comments concerning our field observations may prove useful to other researchers. They are, however, based on limited data and should be carefully interpreted.

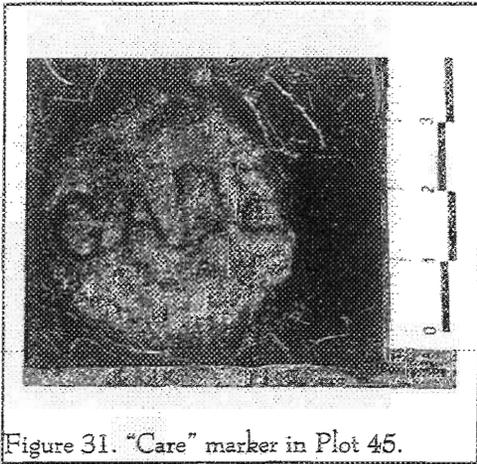


Figure 31. "Care" marker in Plot 45.

We noticed that the vast majority of the names on the People's stones lack any titles. There are only a few exceptions (such as marker #102-2 and 168) which provide titles such as "Bro." or "Mrs." This has been previously noted by Rotundo (1997) during her study of the craftsman Merry E. Veal. She noted that he very routinely used either Bro., Sis., Mr. or Mrs., noting that:

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<sup>40</sup> Annual care programs were begun in American cemeteries at least by the 1880s as superintendents became aware that upkeep would far exceed available resources. Sloane argues that the situation became critical by the 1940s as the small funds set aside "became pitifully inadequate because technological changes, postwar inflation, and labor unionization forced higher costs." Regardless of what was happening on the national level, it seems likely that the People's care fund represents only a short venture. For example, in 1931 Keeper Thomas Brown wrote that an annual care program instituted about 1922 had just about ceased producing any revenue (Thomas H. Brown letter, February 10, 1931).

a title is very important to blacks, especially to older men and women who have too often been called by nothing but first name by all the whites whom they are expected to address by title. During the interview I tried to ask a question that would elicit this information in Veal's own words. Instead, he took the use of the title so much for granted that in response to my question, "What about the way you always use a title before the name?", he said, "Yes, but I tell them if the name is too long." In other words, he was explaining (and excusing) the few times he did not use a title. Interestingly enough, other markers in the cemeteries rarely give titles (Rotundo 1997:104).

Although few stones with titles exist at People, those which do make us wonder if Veal's recognition of respect beyond the grave may have been shared by other craftsmen or by relatives.

Another interesting aspect of the People's stones is their use of Bible verses. Many are simple and commonly used. For example, monument 30-D-1 lists Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd . . ."), while monument 147 cites Revelations xiv, 13 ("Happy are the dead who die in the faith of Christ!"). Another stone, with a very worn inscription, appears to reference Romans ii, 13, in which Paul cautions that both Jew and Gentile will be judged the same: "It is not hearing the law, but by doing it, that men will be justified before God." Even this simple message, however, may have had multiple meanings to African Americans — who may have wondered if it didn't also apply to whites who pretended to be followers of Christ, routinely going to church, while failing to do His work in the black community.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *The Negro in Virginia* cites Nancy Williams of Petersburg, "Ole white preachers used to talk wid dey tongues widdout sayin' nothing' but Jesus told us slaves to talk wid our hearts" (Perdue 1994:120). It may be that this, too,

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But perhaps the most unusual religious feature is the frequent use of the term "Mizpah" (occasionally spelled "Mispah") on stones in People's Cemetery (which does not appear to be duplicated in white Blandford). Mizpah is the name of several places in the Old Testament, including the Hittite land of Mispah near Mt. Hermon (Josh. xi, 3, 8), Ramath-mizpah of Gilead (Josh. xii, 26; Judg. x, 11, 17, 29, 34), Mizpah of Moab (I Sam. xxii, 3), Mizpah of southern Judah (Josh. xv, 38), and Mizpah of Benjamin (Josh. xviii, 26; Judg. xx, 1-3; Hos. v, 1).

The most interesting, and relevant, reference is to Mizpah in Gen. xxxi. There we discover the story of Jacob, husband of Laban's daughters Rachel and Leah. Being tired of Laban's treatment and what he sees as Laban's dishonesty, Jacob decides to take flight and return to his home land — on the other side of the River Jordan. Laban discovers that he has left and goes after him with a party of his own countrymen. During this time God appears to Laban, warning him not to harm Jacob. Eventually Laban catches up with Jacob and, in a meeting, demands to know why he left. Jacob, no longer fearing Laban, recounts the ill-treatment he received at his father-in-law's hands. Warned, Laban has little recourse but to accept Jacob's departure.

At this meeting place Jacob and Laban erect a stone pillar and cairn. The account goes on:

Laban said, "This cairn is witness today between you and me." For this reason it was named Gal-ed; it was also named Mizpah [watch-tower], for Laban said, "May the Lord watch between you and me, when we are parted from each other's sight. If you ill-treat my daughters or take other wives beside them when no one is there to see, then God be witness between us." Laban said further to Jacob, "Here is this cairn, and here the pillar which I have set up between us. This cairn is witness and the

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comments on the distinction between "hearing" and "implementing" Christianity.

pillar is witness: I for my part will not pass beyond this cairn to your side, and you for your part shall not pass beyond this cairn and this pillar to my side to do an injury, otherwise the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor will judge between us (Gen. xxxi, 48-53).

Mizpah is used to mean a benediction wherein God is asked to watch over people in their absence from each other. As an epitaph it might simply be a request that God watch over both the dead and the living until they are re-united. This is a fairly safe, acceptable, and conventional explanation. Although certain to entertain disagreement and controversy, does the term perhaps have a deeper meaning? In other words, might there be a "deep structure" correlating with the "surface structure"? If so, this structure may be largely lost, even to the black community

For example, did African Americans see themselves as Jacob, being ill-treated and cheated by white society — Laban — and finding relief only in the escape of death? Might Mizpah, in that sense, be another example of justice delayed, but not forgotten? A reminder on the stone — in full view of white society, but not easily comprehended — that the injustice was clearly recognized and never accepted.

In addition, the theme of the watch-tower or cairn is also strong in the story. While there are several Biblical references to gravestones as memorials and markers (e.g., 2 Sam. xviii, 18 and Gen. xxxv, 20), perhaps Mizpah expands on the conventional nature of the gravestone, establishing it as separating the dead from the living. In this sense might the term mean that the dead are not to return to bother the living? This is certainly a theme common to African American spiritualism. Could, in this scenario, the term be a replacement for grave goods intended to keep the dead happy?

Furthermore, there are numerous references to the River Jordan in the Bible. In 2 Kgs. ii the chariot comes to Elijah at the Jordan and takes him into heaven. This undoubtedly serves as the source for the

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spiritual, "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" with its references to the angels crossing the Jordan "to carry me home." Jordan is a common theme in African American songs, including "Sabbath Has No End," and "I Got to Lay in Yonder Graveyard," with the latter explaining, "I got to cross that nver o' Jurden, I got to cross there fo' myself." (Parrish 1992:172, 196). Likewise, "crossing the Jordan" is usually accepted as a specific reference to entering the promised land (Josh. 1-1v). Might Mizpah, in the context of a stone set up "on the other side" of the Jordan, be part of this theme?

In another context, I Sam. vii recounts the Israelites victory over the Philistines and the erection of a stone near Mizpah, called Ebenezer or "stone of help." Again this account is one of hope and victory over one's enemies — raising the issue of whether Mizpah should be interpreted in a social or spiritual context, or both?

Obviously, the interpretation of this term and its place in historic black society is far beyond the scope of our work. We offer it here as another line of research which may help better understand African American mortuary patterns and beliefs.

The People's stones also indicate the burial of no less than five individuals identified as "Reverends." And the stones also identify three African American churches — St. Stephen's Protestant Episcopal Church, Zion Apostolic Church, and Gillfield Baptist Church (with the latter representing nearly 78% of the references to a church in the cemetery).

The stones are also heavily dominated by flower or plant motifs, with the dogwood, ivy, rose, and acanthus leaves being common features. All have common, if sometimes inconsistent, meanings in Judeo-Christian iconography. The dogwood flower, for example, is a reminder of Jesus's crucifixion. On at least one stone ivy is intertwined with an anchor — a very old symbol for Christian faith.<sup>42</sup> The rose has been used as a symbol of condolence and sorrow, but in some Christian traditions the red rose grew from the drops of Christ's blood and the Virgin Mary is frequently portrayed holding a red

rose.<sup>43</sup> Acanthus leaves, commonly incorporated into classical buildings, can signify the arts, but the thorns on the leaves symbolize the pain and punishment for sin. In Christian beliefs the thorns are a reference to "crown of thorns" (Mat. xxvii, 29).

Of course, it may be that many plant symbols have more to do with Victorian inventiveness than earlier religious traditions. For example, through time ivy has been a symbol of many things, including fidelity and immortality. This apparently developed from the observation that ivy continues to grow on dead trees (Tresidder 1998:110). Nor can we say that the iconography was accepted, or even understood, by all those who purchased the stones.

Several of the People's monuments (for example #147) show the gates of heaven opening to receive the departed and barring death. This was a common theme, even offered on mail order monuments (see, for example, Little 1998:28). Likewise, several reveal open books (as an example # 30-D-1). Although these are ambiguous, they are typically seen as representing the Word of God. The book is often mentioned in the Old Testament (for example, Exod. xvii, 14 and xxxii, 32). Perhaps more appropriate are the mentions of the book of life in the New Testament (for example, Phil. iv, 3, "whose names are in the book of life;" Rev. xxi, 27, "are written in the Lamb's book of life", see also Rev. xx, 12, 15).

Animals depicted in People's stones include the dove and the lamb — two common Christian motifs. The dove is the symbol of purity and peace. In the Old Testament it was chaste and was sent out from the ark by Noah (Gen. viii, 8-12). And in Is. iix, 11, "we mourn like doves." In the New Testament the holy spirit descended from heaven "like a dove" (Mt. iii, 16; Mk. i, 10; Lk. iii, 22; Jn. i, 32). The dove was also used as a symbol of the soul being carried to heaven. The lamb is the symbol of Christ (Jn. I, 29), as well as a sign

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<sup>42</sup> Heb. vi, 19, refers to the hope of salvation through faith in Christ, "which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sincere and steadfast."

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<sup>43</sup> Can. ii, 1, "I am the rose of Sharon," and Isa. xxxv, 1, "desert shall blossom as the rose." Canticles is also often called The Song of Songs or The Song of Solomon (since his name appears several times in the text). The rose is also incorporated into Freemasonry.

of meekness, sacrifice, and innocence. It was commonly used in the nineteenth century on children's graves. "IHS" is used on at least one stone and is a monogram representing the Greek contraction of "Jesus." It is also sometimes considered an abbreviation of the Latin phrase meaning, "Jesus, Savior of Men."

Common to nineteenth century cemeteries is the shaking or clasped hands motif. Nancy-Lou Patterson terms this "linked hands." Many show a female hand to the left, a male hand to the right and are symbols of holy matrimony or a sacred union. In addition, however, many stones will show one hand, typically on the left, as limp. Patterson interprets this as contact of the living and the dead, "not only at the moment of parting, or at the moment yet to come of greeting in another world, but also, in some mystical way, contact in the present" (Patterson 1989:192). At least one of the stones in People's combines the linked hands with three links of chain. Leonard Huber (1982:5) notes a similar design in New Orleans where it is well associated with the Oda Fellows and taken as a symbol of brotherly love and respect.

Some of the stones combine several images. Stone 272, for example, includes a heaven pointed finger, and a cross and crown. The finger motif was common in Victorian funerary art and is thought to direct attention upwards, toward Heaven. It may also be a symbol of transcendence over death (Patterson 1989:194-195). The cross and crown combine the emphasis of Christ's kingly position with the promise of eternal life (be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life, Rev ii, 10).

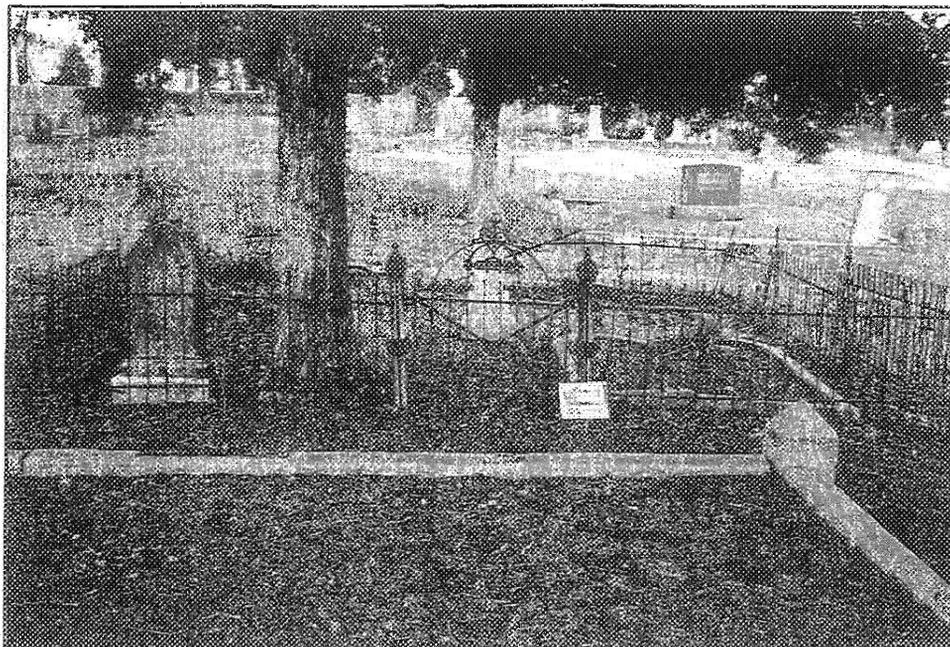


Figure 32. Example of a fenced plot (Plot 21).

Five plots, all at the north end of the cemetery, have remnant iron fencing. Three of these, Plots 21 (Figure 32), 27, and 356 were all manufactured by Valley Forge in Knoxville, Tennessee. Two gates (at Plots 21 and 27) retain their winged shields; although the third has lost its shield, the fence and gate design is identical. These three exhibit a pattern consisting of an apex-topped fence with an ornamented name-plate gate. The only company broadside we have been able to identify shows a bow and picket design (indicating that the company must have manufactured a variety of styles), with the identical gate (suggesting that this gate may have been the "flag ship" of the company and was used extensively to "dress up" the otherwise relatively plain fence).

Plot 25 was once fenced, although today much of the fence is stacked on at one edge of the lot. The remaining gate evidences a circular shield with the name, "C. HANIKA / & / SONS / MUNCIE, IND." As previously mentioned, the firm C. Hanika also produced gates with a shield from Celina, Ohio.

Plot 37 is surrounded by a hairpin and picket

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fence similar to Hanika's styles 26-28, except that there are only two (not three) channel rails. The shield on this gate reveals it was manufactured by Cincinnati Iron Fence Company in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Immediately north of Plot 48 is a remnant section of woven wire fencing set on 4x4-inch wood posts with a 2x4-inch top rail and a 4x4-inch bottom rail (set at grade). The fence consists of formed dart-shaped "pickets" woven among horizontal lines set about 6-inches apart. This is the best preserved section of wire fencing in People's, although it was likely quite common during an earlier period.

Of all the fencing found or known to have been in People's Cemetery, the most enigmatic is that which was originally along Crater Road. It was dedicated in 1906 and specific mention was made of its arched entryway. Several of the companies known to have been providing fencing to the African American cemeteries in Petersburg include these types of gates in their catalogs, including Cincinnati Iron Fence Company (although they illustrate only a straight banner) and Stewart Iron Works (which illustrates several varieties of arched entryways).<sup>44</sup> The fence was still present in 1942, when the City began condemnation proceedings for the widening of Crater Road<sup>45</sup>, but was missing by the time of the second widening in 1968. Whether it was ever re-installed in the 1940s could not be determined.

### A General Conditions Report of People's Cemetery

The investigations conducted at People's Cemetery included a reconnaissance of existing conditions in the areas of monuments, landscape, and maintenance and management. Although the

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<sup>44</sup> This style of gate was relatively common and was produced by a number of additional companies, such as Champion Iron Fence Company in Kenton, Ohio.

<sup>45</sup> At that time the City, in the Hustings Court proceedings, indicated that, "The fence along Parcel A on Crater Road will be moved by your petitioner [the City] and reset along the boundary of the cemetery as it will be after completion of this proceeding."

development of an appropriate conservation plan presupposes a means of evaluating the progress of deterioration, this is not always possible. At People's we have integrated what historical evidence there is for the deterioration of conditions, along with some more specific data from the initial city effort to document the cemetery, undertaken in 1987, with the current survey.

### Monuments

The most visible problem at People's Cemetery is the number of tilted, fallen, disattached, and/or sunken stones (see Figure 15). Many of these problems can be traced back to inadequate maintenance. As graves without vaults have settled, stones have tilted and fallen. Many have sunk below ground level. Others have been broken by the stress of topographic change. A few were almost certainly damaged as a result of various well-intentioned but poorly implemented clean-up campaigns. There is also some evidence of breakage resulting from previous improper repairs, typically with concrete.<sup>46</sup> Dies on bases have either become disaligned or fallen off, often with consequential damage to the dowels. Marble and granite monuments are equally at risk.

While not common, there is evidence of breakage most likely caused by vandalism, especially along the road side, where stones are easily accessible or where they have been involved in automobile impacts. There are also scattered or disassociated markers, perhaps caused by clean-up efforts, vandalism, or simply erosion. We also noticed considerable damage from lawn mowing, most notably mower abrasion or nylon weed trimmer damage (from use of a too heavy cord).

In addition to the displacement, breakage, and abrasion, many of the stones are soiled, at times limiting legibility. A special concern is the inappropriate cleaning of the monuments. Use of harsh chemicals, abrasives, and other typically "modern" methods can cause irreparable harm to the stones and must be

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<sup>46</sup> Concrete (Portland cement) should never be used in cemetery preservation projects. It is far harder than the materials it is used to repair and failure almost always results in damage to the original fabric.

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prevented.

The fences at People's are in varied states of preservation. In several there are sizable losses of original fabric and, in one case, much of the original fabric is currently present, although the fence is disassembled. Several have been recently painted, presumably by associated families, but most exhibit corrosion.

The curbing, which consists of both granite and concrete examples, is also in varied states of preservation. Some are well set and in very good condition. Others, however, exhibit cracking (in the concrete) and displacement (in both the concrete and the granite). Corner posts are often tilted or, in some cases, missing. Some sections of curbing are also missing. Although some of this damage is readily attributed to tree growth, much is more likely the result of either previous clean-up efforts or the use of mechanized equipment, perhaps for grave digging.

### Landscape

Currently the cemetery has no access control, being completely open to the streets and the adjacent apartment complex. The property is routinely used a pedestrian and automobile cut-through. A portion of the cemetery adjacent to the apartment complex is being improperly used by tenants of the complex, while a portion adjacent to housing on St. Andrews Street is being adversely occupied. All of this has promoted littering, excessive wear to grass, and has likely caused additional damage to some stones. Moreover, it creates a situation where visitors will potentially feel uncomfortable.

There is no circulation plan for People's Cemetery. Although it appears to have had a horseshoe drive, allowing access to virtually all parts, this has been closed for at least the past 40 years, being replaced by a gravel drive connecting S. Crater with St. Andrews Street. This has served only to promote inappropriate use of the cemetery and leaves much of the cemetery inaccessible except by foot to visitors. Although this is not a critical issue at the moment, it will become more serious as efforts to promote and preserve the cemetery encourage additional visitation.

There is currently no lighting of the cemetery except for a Virginia Power street lamp at the far southern end of the cemetery on Talliaferro Street. Even this lamp, however, has been inoperative for at least the past three months, suggesting a serious deficiency in maintenance. However, historically the cemetery was never provided with decorative lighting and we do not believe that any should be added at this time. Additional security lighting, on the other hand, is advisable and should be mounted at the edges of the cemetery on poles.

The information we have been able to obtain suggests that the original drives for People's Cemetery were graded soil and were never paved. The current extension of St. Andrews Street is gravel, but is currently in poor condition. Although keeping the pavement soil-based would be more historically appropriate, the steep slopes in some areas are likely to cause erosion and maintenance problems. Moreover, depending on the extent of additional use the cemetery may see, soil drives are not able to support much traffic.

Just as there appear never to have been paved roads at People's, it seems unlikely that the paths were ever more than soil (although they may have been sanded to improve drainage). Today there is no evidence of any original pathways, although we suspect they were placed between family plots, in a fashion typical of the time and organization of such cemeteries. The "new" portion of People's Cemetery, acquired by the City in 1942 for the reburial of the graves removed for the first widening of Crater Road, was to have graded streets and sanded walkways — although neither materialized.

There is today no evidence of site furniture, although some may have existed on individual lots. Likewise, there is evidence that at one time trash cans were placed on site for the use of families tending their plots. These, too, are no longer present.

The lawn is very spotty, being primarily affected by tree cover (which shades out grass, and depletes soil nutrients and water). There are areas, primarily where there are no trees, in good to fair condition. Elsewhere the lawn cover is either absent or in poor condition. There does not appear to be any effort to seed bare areas, establish a more shade tolerant

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grass, fertilize, or convert the current ground cover to a more low growing variety. Mowing appears infrequent, often waiting until the grass is very high (based on the cut and dried grass found caked on some stones). Compaction does not appear to be a problem except at the far south end of the cemetery, adjacent to Talliaferro Street.

Plantings are fairly limited in the cemetery and there is no evidence of any previous landscape plan. Deciduous trees (along with a few old cedars) are the predominant plant material found, mixed with occasional yuccas and a very few shrubs. Otherwise, the most abundant plant material is poison ivy, which heavily infests many of the trees in the cemetery.

The trees evidence little or no effort at maintenance. Many have been seriously damaged by previous storms and are in need of professional trimming, as well as fertilization. There does not appear to be any plan for the removal of trees endangering stones or other cemetery features, nor is there any evidence of a plan to replace vegetation as it dies. Likewise, there appears to be no set schedule for raking and leaf removal (during the time we were on-site a portion of the heavy leaf accumulation had been previously removed, while large areas remained untouched).

Serious soil erosion appears to be limited to the road area, where there are numerous gravel filled ruts. The bare ground in many portions of the cemetery, however, must be promoting sheet erosion, evidenced by the number of stones which had been previously placed in concrete, but are today completely loose. The only drainage system for the cemetery is natural, following the topography. There are no road drains or drains remaining from previous pathways (if they ever existed).

### **Maintenance and Management**

Maintenance at People's Cemetery must be significantly improved. At the present time both our field observations and the condition suggest that the cemetery is under a "deferred maintenance program," with issues being addressed only when they become critical. We saw no evidence of regular trash pick up,

adequately scheduled mowing, or routine leaf raking. Clearly the current staff is not adequate to provide first class maintenance.

There is no signage of any sort at People's (except for several memorial stones along Crater Road which are difficult to identify, hard to read, and offer little historical information).

It does not appear that the City has established any procedures for owners of lots in People's to bury family members. Given the inadequacy of records, there is considerable concern that continued use of People's will result in damage to human remains already interred.

We also understand that there is no line-item budget for maintenance or preservation efforts at People's Cemetery. The issue of funding is very serious and must be dealt with before virtually any of our recommendations can be meaningfully implemented.

### **Recommendations for the Long-Term Preservation of People's Cemetery**

Our recommendations are offered in the same three categories as outlined in the previous section: Monuments, Landscape, and Maintenance and Management. We have, however, added the additional category of funding.

We believe that there is, in hand, adequate information to immediately begin the preservation efforts at People's Cemetery. Although the efforts will clearly need to be phased, we do not believe that additional planning is either necessary or an appropriate use of scarce resources. Projects can too often be "planned to death." It is time to devote the resources and manpower to make substantive changes in the condition of People's Cemetery. Where appropriate we have also provided guidance on prioritizing the different actions within each broad category.

### **Monuments**

It is critical for the City to understand that a historic cemetery is as much an outdoor museum as a park. Consequently, the City must function as much like a registrar and curator as like a grounds keeper. To

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do one, and not the other, is to cause what is often irreparable damage to the resource.

We have heard, during our work in Petersburg, that the City hoped to encourage lot owners to undertake the repair of the stones in their plots. This "self-treatment" is a very poor idea and would result in large numbers of inappropriate repairs that cause extensive additional damage. Moreover, it is the City's responsibility to both repair, and maintain, the cemetery — not that of individual families.

We strongly advocate what we believe is an ethically and professionally appropriate approach. **Physical integrity should be stabilized without cosmetic reconstruction of damaged stones or features.** In this manner the stones, curbing, fences, and other features are retained, *without recreating features that are already lost using modern materials.*

In addition, it is absolutely critical that all treatments be completely documented and that this documentation be maintained (curated) by the City in perpetuity — just as would be a museum object and its documentation.

With this in mind, our **first priority** actions are those which are **critical to ensure the long-term preservation of stones that would otherwise be in immediate danger of either additional material loss due to accelerated deterioration or imminent danger of loss or theft.** These actions should be conducted within the next 3 to 6 months.

- All loose stones should be identified, documented, and appropriately erected. This will minimize the potential that they will be lost, stolen, or damaged by maintenance activities. If a corrected location is identified later, they can be moved.
- All toppled stones (including dies which are off bases) should be documented and appropriately reset. This will ensure that the now disassociated parts are not further damaged or lost.
- All broken stones should be documented and

appropriately repaired. This will ensure that the pieces are not further damaged or lost.<sup>47</sup>

- All stones tilting more than 15° should be documented and appropriately reset.
- All sections of loose fencing should be immediately reset in order to avoid their theft. Gates, in particular, should be attached using one-way or tamper resistant screws and bolts.
- A monitoring or maintenance program should be developed for the treated monuments. This should involve seasonal site visits to identify newly dislodged or out-of-the-ground stones, vandalism, and other problems. Provisions should be made to document, collect, and properly store such specimens until treatment can be conducted.

**Second priority** items are those not considered immediately critical to the preservation of the original fabric of the cemetery. Although classified as a secondary priority, they **should not be delayed more than one to two years.** These are actions that are also essential for the long-term preservation plan, but which may be briefly delayed.

- Conservation treatments should be conducted on all iron work in the cemetery. These will likely involve glass bead abrasion, followed by application of either a high-grade rust resistant paint or a volatile corrosion inhibitor. The different products should be explored as a test of longevity in the Petersburg climate.
- Conservation treatments for several concrete monuments with exposed (and corroding)

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<sup>47</sup> The only exceptions to this recommendation concern the government issued stones, which can be replaced without charge by contacting the Department of Veterans Affairs, Memorial Programs Service, and stones which are too badly damaged for effective repair. These latter stones should be documented and either buried on-site where they are found or curated by an appropriate museum.

reinforcing rods should be developed and tested. This work should avoid the use of coatings and will likely be focused on the use of sacrificial/protective lime mortar based buffers.

- Remnant curbing should be stabilized. In some cases this may require relaying, although typically it may mean little more than slight excavation and releveling.

- Stones whose legibility is severely limited by soiling should be cleaned. However, cleaning itself can cause serious damage to the stone and, in fact, promote additional deterioration. As a result, the cleaning must be carefully planned and implemented only by individuals (including volunteers) appropriately trained and supervised. Moreover, the effects of cleaning are short-lived and the process must be included as a regular maintenance item — likely beyond the ability of the City. Consequently, cleaning is given a relatively low priority in our discussions.

### Landscape

**Issues of highest priority (i.e., should be conducted within the next 3 to 6 months) include issues of circulation, lawns, and plantings.**

- The existing gravel road through the center of People's Cemetery should be blocked using concrete pylons. The gravel should be carefully removed and the roadway converted to a pedestrian pathway. In its place a roadway should be laid out retracing the original horseshoe drive, if this can be accomplished without disturbing either graves or monuments.<sup>48</sup> Eventually the City may wish to completely remove the existing road and convert the area to grass (perhaps leaving only a narrow pedestrian pathway). Although the

original roadways were soil, we recommend that brick with a brick edge or concrete block pavers with a precast concrete edge, both on a stonedust bed, be used. A paving unit is recommended, over concrete or asphalt, because of its greater flexibility and ease of maintenance. Although initially more expensive, the paving unit will last much longer. As an alternative, the City may wish to experiment with soil cement in order to maintain the original feeling of the cemetery. This may prove to be an effective solution, especially since it is unlikely that the cemetery will receive large numbers of visitors within the first five years. If the horseshoe drive cannot be completely re-established, then it will be necessary to establish a parking area more quickly than we propose (currently, we list this as a secondary activity).

- We recommend that the lawn area be extensively reworked. Shaded areas should be established using a shade mix. A slow-growing grass should also be considered, in order to minimize maintenance activities associated with mowing. This may require that some areas be lightly tilled. All such work should be done under very careful supervision in order to ensure that no stones are damaged.

- The poison ivy plants should be immediately removed from the cemetery. This will entail cutting the vines and physically removing the foliage. At ground level the vine stem should be scarified and an appropriate brush killer painted on, in order to kill the roots.

- If any grave depressions are thought to pose a hazard and require fill, their locations must first be accurately mapped.

- Where trees are in conflict with stones or other cemetery monuments, the tree should be removed. We have found little on site that appears intentionally planted, so while the trees have no doubt been encouraged (by not being selectively removed), they do not appear to be part of any landscape plan.

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<sup>48</sup> This will likely require a archaeological survey combined with penetrometer study to verify that no graves are located in the proposed roadway.

- Trees should be selected for use when replacements are necessary. The selected tree should produce minimal sap (which damages stone), avoid sucker growth at their base, and limit the number of surface roots (which both inhibits grass growth and causes stones to be displaced and topple). They should produce only light shade and be suitable for an urban environment without irrigation. Ideally they will be light self-pruners and produce small leaves (resulting in less leaf removal in the autumn).

**Secondary issues include access and security, lighting, paths, and site furniture.** As with the monuments, secondary priority should not be interpreted as long-range, but instead issues which **should be planned for and dealt with within the next 12 to 24 months.**

- The City should acquire appropriate, safe parking facilities for the cemetery. This space will not only encourage use of the cemetery, but will provide space for equipment storage and also interpretive exhibits or kiosks. One choice is residential property at the far southern end of the cemetery on either Talliaferro or St. Andrews street. The other option is adjacent commercial or residential property fronting South Crater. This second option is preferred, since it would allow easier access to the cemetery and greater visibility to attract visitors.

- The entire cemetery should be fenced to eliminate inappropriate use. Along South Crater Street we recommend reinstalling a historically appropriate fence.<sup>49</sup> Along the remaining sides and south edge we recommend using an 8-foot high security chain link fence. This, in turn, should be screened using a fast

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<sup>49</sup> Our recommendation is one of the several fences and gates available from Stewart Iron Works. These fences are not only historically appropriate, but the company is known to have provided fences for African American cemeteries in Petersburg.

growing, low maintenance climbing plant, such as wild rose. The City may wish to install a vehicle gate at the south edge of the fence, especially if the existing road is at least temporarily maintained as a pedestrian pathway<sup>50</sup>

- The current lighting is inadequate for night-time security and the City should install additional pole mounted lighting.

- As previously mentioned, it is unlikely that there were laid in paths when People's was being actively used. At the present time visitation is so low that it is probably unnecessary to establish paths. Nevertheless, the City should develop a pathway plan for the future. We recommend brick pathways since they are easy to maintain, cause minimal disturbance, and provide easy access for the disabled.<sup>51</sup> Wherever possible we recommend that the site be made accessible to all visitors.

- There are currently no benches and we do not recommend their placement at People's Cemetery. We do, however, recommend the placement of several litter containers for use by visitors.

### Maintenance and Management

**There are a number of maintenance changes that the City should immediately**

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<sup>50</sup> This will separate People's Memorial Cemetery from Little Church, which was never the case historically. However, fencing only three sides of the cemetery will not effectively control pedestrian traffic nor provide the necessary security.

<sup>51</sup> As an alternative the City may wish to explore soil cement, but this is likely to require greater maintenance, offsetting its lower initial cost. In addition, the use of a paving material allows at least one edge of the pathway to be raised, allowing visually impaired individuals to more easily navigate. On slopes the City should be careful to ensure that the pathways take into account drainage issues and do not promote erosion.

## PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

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**implement to improve the care given People's Cemetery** Some of these can be done with only limited expense, although like other issues relating to preservation, there are real costs associated with maintaining a cemetery. **The first priority recommendations should be implemented within the next 3 to 6 months.**

- People's Cemetery needs at least one full-time employee, with additional staff rotating in on an as-needed basis. The grounds keeper would provide a higher visibility and promote greater security at the cemetery. In addition, the individual's duties should include opening and closing the site daily; collecting trash at least once a day (more often as public use increases); weeding, emergency pruning, and removal of volunteer growth; leaf raking and pick-up; mowing; and monitoring and reporting vandalism, maintenance issues, and other problems.

- The City police should begin routine patrols of the cemetery immediately. This means that at least two to three times a night and several times during the day, the central road should be patrolled. When this road is no longer in use the police should continue to routinely check the grounds from S. Crater Road and Talliaferro Street during the night.

- The best approach to the maintenance of the lawn at People's without damaging the stones is to use power mowers within 12-inches of stones and then to use line weed trimmers with nylon whips to trim up to the markers. However, the current use of very heavy duty line must stop immediately. We have found that the cord being currently used is at least 0.12-inch and is itself abrading and damaging the stones. Instead a much lighter line — no heavier than 0.08-inch should be used in the future. This change should be implemented immediately.

- An ideal mowing schedule is about once a week during the beginning of growing season (perhaps May through early-June), with

mowing twice a month during the heat of the summer (from mid-June through August), and then returning to a weekly schedule toward the end of the growing season as the grass approaches dormancy. We recognize that this is an ideal, but the point is that the grass should not be allowed to become as high as it apparently has in the past. Not only does that encourage more damage to the stones (since they can't be easily seen), but it also creates greater hazards for site visitors. In addition, the longer and thicker grass becomes, the more difficult it is to remove with line trimmers using the light-weight line necessary to prevent damage to the stones.

- No chemical weed killers should be used at People's (with the exception of the previously discussed use of a brush killer to eliminate the poison ivy). Likewise, we specifically recommend against the installation of a sprinkler system at People's Cemetery. It would be very damaging to headstones and would be almost impossible to install without damaging graves.

- A tree maintenance program should be initiated immediately. All trees should be pruned at least once a year to remove dead wood. This should be coupled with professional pruning every three years by a trained arborist. Likewise, only individuals with special training should be allowed to remove dead trees since this work must be done with the greatest care to avoid damage to monuments.

- Leaf removal should be scheduled for at least every other week — and preferably once a week — during the fall. At non-peak seasons they should be removed at least monthly. A neglected appearance seems to encourage vandalism.

**Issues of secondary priority should be implemented by the city within the next 12 to 24 months.** Although not as critical as the previously discussed first priority maintenance and management issues, they must not be neglected.

- As part of the lawn maintenance program, the City should begin fertilizing the grass on a schedule appropriate to the zone and dominant type of grass present. The formula should be approved by a stone conservator before use since many products contain high levels of materials (such as salts and acids) which can damage stones.

- The City, as previously discussed, should begin the process of reseeded bare lawn areas using a shade tolerant, slow growing grass suitable for the climate. The seed mixture should also be drought resistant since artificial watering is not possible.

- Just as the grass needs fertilization, so too do the trees. The City should have all of the trees evaluated by a professional arborist and individually feed on a prescribed basis. If the fertilization is injected it is less likely to damage the stones than if broadcast.

- The City should develop appropriate signage for the cemetery. This should include regulatory and informational signage which indicates what may, and may not be done in the cemetery (including how the City will deal with memorial flower arrangements placed on graves); the times during which the cemetery is open; and other legal notices concerning vandalism, theft, and damage to plants or stones. It should also include interpretive signage that helps the visitor understand the nature and importance of the cemetery. It may also be appropriate to include signage explaining various conservation activities being conducted on the cemetery, as well as why the security steps have been taken. It is our experience that when these details are explained to the public they are much more willing to cooperate. Eventually the City may wish to install signage that points out the grave sites of notable individuals in Petersburg's African American community.

## Funding

The City must recognize that the ownership of a cemetery involves on-going expenses and, in order to meet these routine needs, establish an appropriate line-item in the budget for the care, preservation, and maintenance of People's Cemetery. While we encourage inventive and non-traditional funding approaches, the City must recognize that ultimately People's Cemetery requires constant maintenance funding, just like the streets, the schools, or the various city parks. Funding must be found internally to allow the City to fulfill its commitment to People's Cemetery, made when the property was purchased in 1986.<sup>52</sup>

It is critical that an appropriate funding level be established and included, as a line item, in the yearly appropriations. Cemeteries must not compete with other city activities for funding. They require a certain level of care on an on-going basis. This can only be achieved by a stable funding base.

The City must realize that state and federal resources for preservation money (most especially for on-going maintenance) are limited and it is unlikely that sufficient funds can be acquired from these sources to do the work necessary in People's Cemetery. As a result, the search for funding sources must begin at the local level. Although it may be natural to begin that search in the African American community, the City must also realize that it accepted responsibility for People's Cemetery and therefore its preservation has become a duty of both the white and black populations of Petersburg. As we have recommended previously, the City will need to identify consistent funding sources and include People's preservation and maintenance as a line-item in the budget. In fact, it is unlikely that granting sources, either inside or outside the City, will want to contribute funds to a project that the City itself is not fully supporting.

There are, of course, some activities that volunteers can undertake. But the City must realize that volunteers should not be asked to perform as

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<sup>52</sup> The deed for the purchase indicates that the City will "properly and perpetually maintain the cemetery."

## PEOPLE'S MEMORIAL CEMETERY

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professional stone masons, landscapers, ironworkers, or stone conservators. The importance of "friends groups" is in the support functions that they can contribute — providing assistance in fund raising, helping on cleaning projects, serving to monitor security until permanent provisions are established, and so forth. These functions will be critical to the success of the program.

## LITTLE CHURCH CEMETERY

### Extant Environment and Current Condition

Known locally as "Little Church," this cemetery is situated at the corner of South Crater and Mingea roads, with the main access, a single-lane gravel drive, running off Mingea at the foot of Little Church Road (Figures 33 and 34). There is also a pedestrian gate off Mingea, at the northern edge of the cemetery.

The cemetery incorporates approximately 2.5 acres and has a roughly triangular shape with its long dimension oriented northeast-southwest. It is separated from People's Cemetery by a windrow of recently cut trees. In fact, this southern boundary is so unclear that it appears several of Little Church's burials are actually over the legal property line on land owned by People's

Cemetery. As briefly discussed in the Historical Overview below, this cemetery has a long and convoluted history and ownership. There is some question whether it has ever been truly distinct from People's.

To the west of Little Church is another strip of land owned by the City of Petersburg, bordering Talliaferro Street, while to the east the cemetery extends to South Crater Road on only one lot (Figure 35). There is a commercial establishment on the corner lot and two residential lots to the south, one bordering only Little Church and the other bordering both Little Church and People's. Across Mingea to the north and Talliaferro to the west there is a predominantly African American neighborhood, largely consisting of elderly,

lower and middle income individuals. The Petersburg Police Department reports that this area, several years ago, was considered one of the city's more dangerous areas, but is today considerably quieter and more secure. To the northeast, across South Crater Road is Petersburg's historically city-owned and predominantly white Blanford Cemetery, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Figure 33. Little Church Cemetery, view to the west (showing the Williams monument on the left).

LITTLE CHURCH CEMETERY

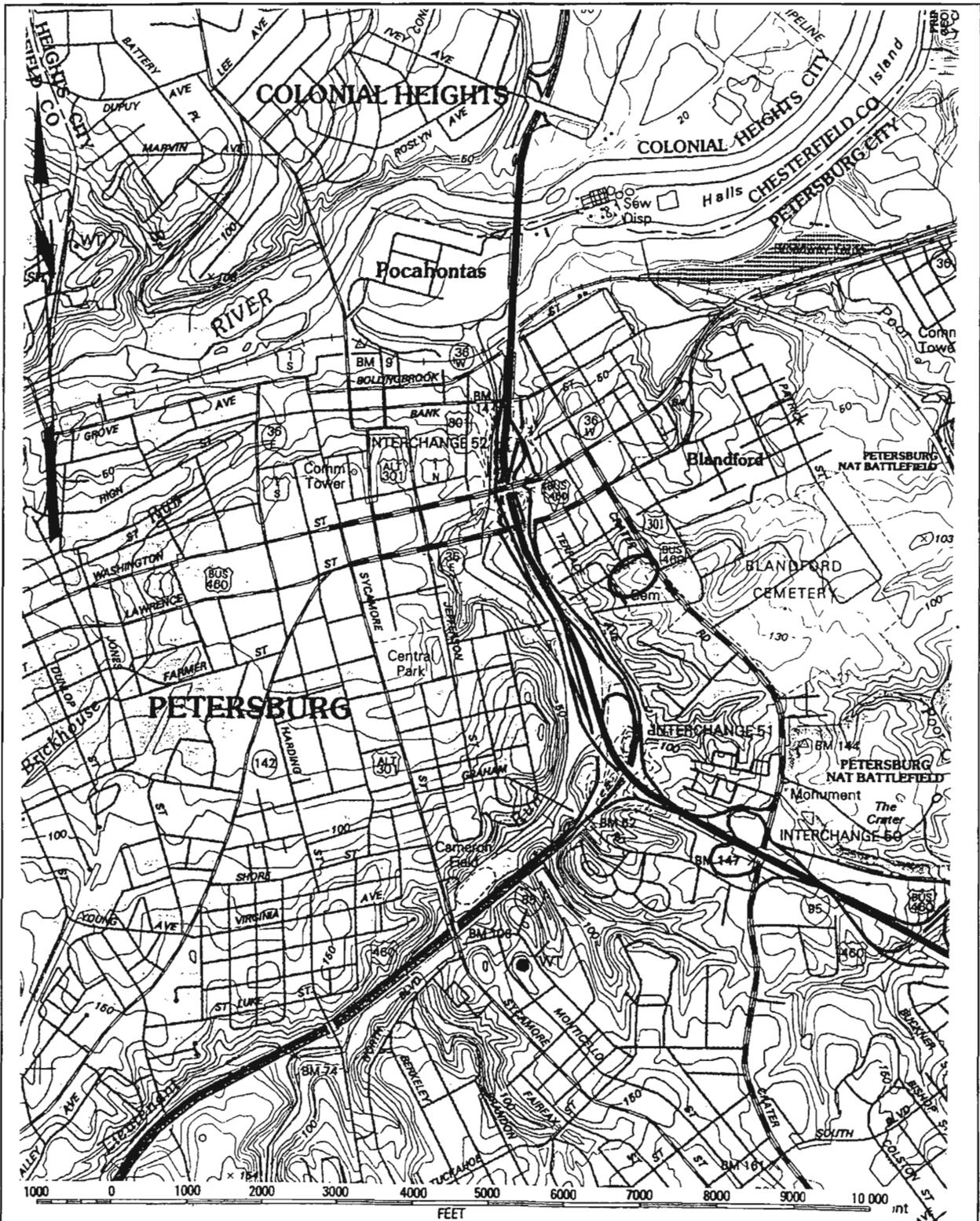


Figure 34. Location of Little Church on the Petersburg 1994 USGS topographic map.

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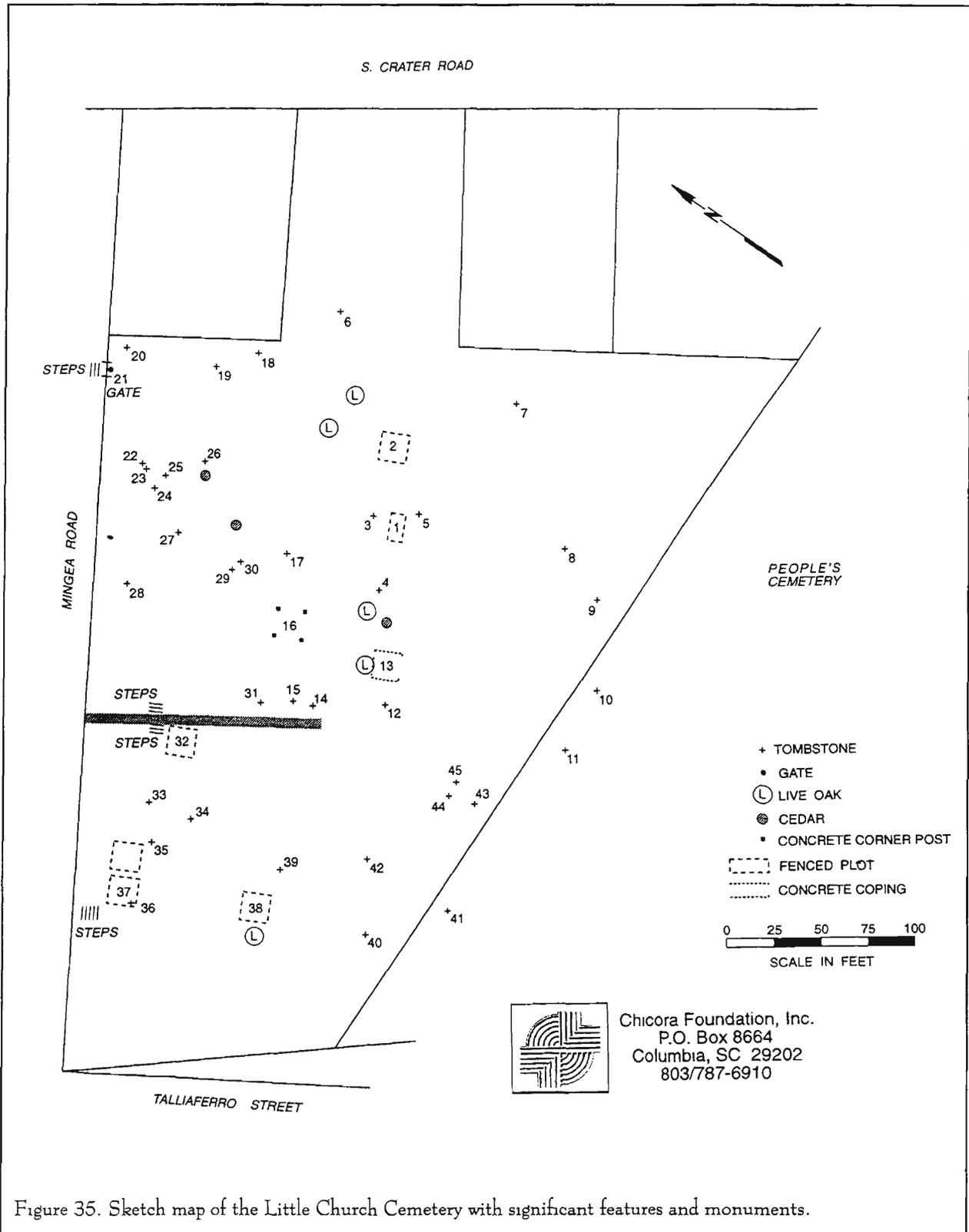


Figure 35. Sketch map of the Little Church Cemetery with significant features and monuments.

## LITTLE CHURCH CEMETERY

The topography at Little Church slopes from the north to the south. In this area Crater Road follows a ridge, with Little Church occupying the western portion of that ridge at an elevation of about 130 feet above mean sea level (AMSL). The ground drops precipitously at the west edge (on Talliaferro) and drops more gradually to the south, into People's Cemetery. Locally, there is considerable undulation in the topography at Little Church, suggestive of many unmarked graves.<sup>1</sup>

Dominating the central portion of the cemetery, at the highest elevation, is the largest monument in Little Church, dedicated to the Reverend Henry Williams (Figure 36). Since his death in 1900 clearly post-dates the formation of the cemetery it is unclear whether this monument is situated on a pre-existing family plot or was added later. Regardless, today it dwarfs the other monuments in the cemetery. This monument also provides silent testimony concerning the changes that have taken place at Little Church. A photograph of the monument's dedication clearly reveals a bow and picket fence around the obelisk — a fence which has disappeared since that time.

The soils present in the cemetery, based on a recently excavated grave, are red and reddish-yellow clays characteristic of the Cecil-Applying area of what has been known as the red-clay hill region stretching from Alabama through the Carolinas and into Virginia. Known also as the Southern Piedmont, the topography consists of rolling or undulating hills, often eroded (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1939:1059).

The cemetery, prior to this study in the summer of 1998, had been overgrown with herbaceous vegetation, including much poison ivy and honeysuckle on the fences in the cemetery. Also present were numerous second growth scrub trees. The cemetery is characterized by an unnatural, disturbed environment open to plants typically called "weeds," many of which

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<sup>1</sup> This is further supported by the identification of a number of human remains, as well as a coffin handle in the backdirt of a recent burial which appears to have intruded into an earlier grave.

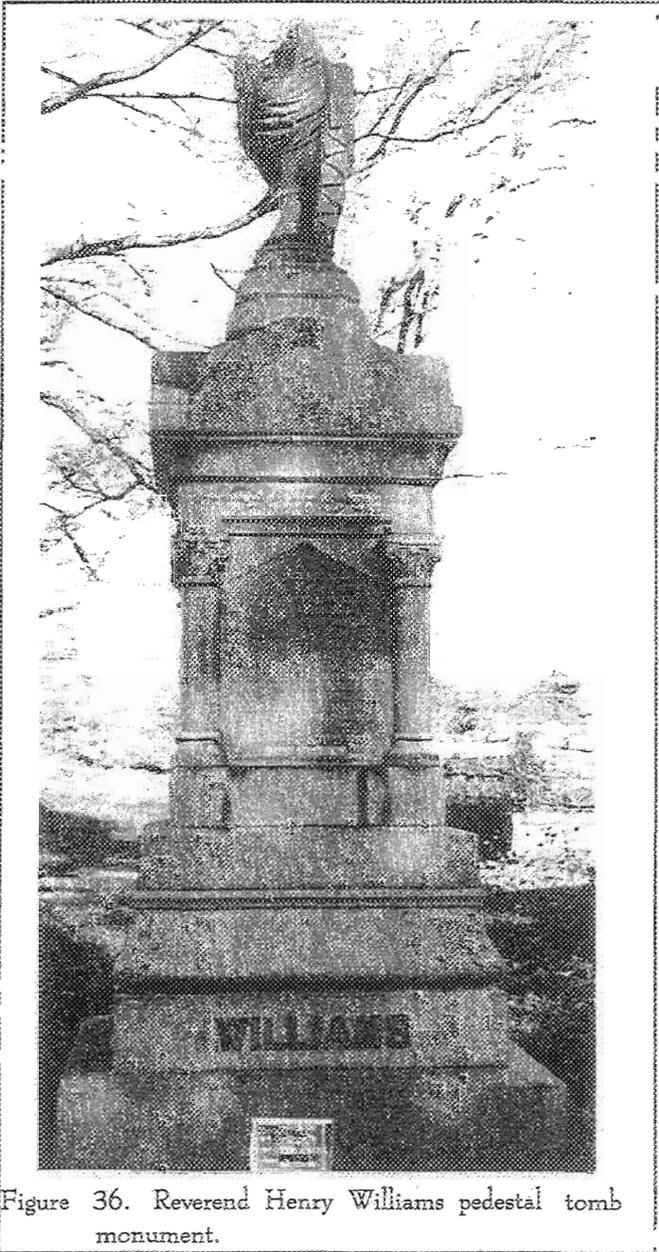


Figure 36. Reverend Henry Williams pedestal tomb monument.

are stenotrophic and thrive on enriched (or polluted) conditions typical of the urban environment. It seems likely that the vegetation was cleaned out only when a burial was to take place, with the cleaning largely limited to the burial spot and appropriate access.

By the fall (at the time of our study), considerable efforts were being made to clean up the cemetery. The tree line separating People's and Little

Church was being removed, graves and fences had been cleared of vines, scrub trees had been removed, and portion of the cemetery previously impassible had been opened up. Only at the southern edge of the cemetery were there still graves obscured by vegetation.

These endeavors, however, revealed that residents (either current or former) had been throwing large quantities of household trash and debris over their fences and into the cemetery, where it was obscured by the thick vegetation. Now that nearby portions are cleared of vegetation this trash is a significant eyesore, as well as presenting a hazard to health and safety.

A few portions of the cemetery, probably representing those areas most commonly used, have been established in low grass. Other than several cedar trees (which may, or may not, be intentionally planted for their religious or spiritual significance), there are no grave or lot plantings in Little Church. In fact, this cemetery has a rather stark appearance. As discussed below, the use of curbing and other features suggests that it was laid out, or evolved, along lines typical of the rural cemetery movement. It seems likely that the landscaping has simply fallen victim to years of neglect.

### Historical Overview of Little Church

The first definite description of Little Church Cemetery can be dated to 1883. In August of that year, John C. and Eloise Drake conveyed a piece of land to James Wilkerson, Jr., described as all of Lot #99 and part of Lot #98, a parcel in the "heights of New Blandford" measuring 372' along Fifth (Mingea) Street, 177' on the west (Talliaferro Street) boundary, and about 387' on its southern line (Figure 37). The purchase price was \$900, secured by a lien on the property.<sup>2</sup>

The identity of the Drakes is unclear, but they are known to have been heirs of William M. Jackson, who had been a partner in acquiring the southernmost section of today's People's Cemetery. The Drakes conveyed their interest in that land to Thomas Scott in

1879.<sup>3</sup>

John C. Drake had owned the land he sold to Wilkerson for only a year, having paid \$600 to the heirs and legatees of John W. Mingea in 1882. That deed (for Lot 99 and part of Lot 98) referred to buildings on the land, and also to an agreement to keep the "burial ground thereon from use or molestation."<sup>4</sup> There is no indication of when the burial ground was established, or for whom, but the deed makes clear that as early as 1882 Little Church Cemetery was considered a designated place for burial.

The 1883 boundaries are much different from today's. At some point the cemetery was enlarged eastward to include all of Lot 98 and part of Lot 97. Lot 97, originally 100' wide by about 400' along South Crater Road, is today occupied by a commercial business, two houses, and a lot with graves that extends Little Church east to South Crater Road. The deeds that might reveal how a portion of Lot 97 became part of Little Church Cemetery have not been researched.

The south boundary of Little Church Cemetery has also been relocated over time, but to reduce, not enlarge, the site. The People's Memorial Cemetery complex lies along the south side of Little Church. A strip about 80' wide that was historically part of Little Church is presently incorporated into the city-owned People's. The present boundary was marked by a row of hardwoods less than twenty years old which were cut during the winter of 1998-99.

The early record of Lots 99, 98 and 97, before the acquisition of the burial ground lot, is confusing. In 1835 Samuel and Mary Robbins conveyed Lot #98, with a dwelling house, to John Mingea for \$335.<sup>5</sup> Lot

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<sup>3</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 40, p. 554.

<sup>4</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 43, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> The price further confuses matters: two years later, the same Robbins sold 16 acres, part of which became People's Cemetery, to William H. Williams for \$350.

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<sup>2</sup> Hustings Court, City of Petersburg, Deed Book 44, p. 622.

LITTLE CHURCH CEMETERY

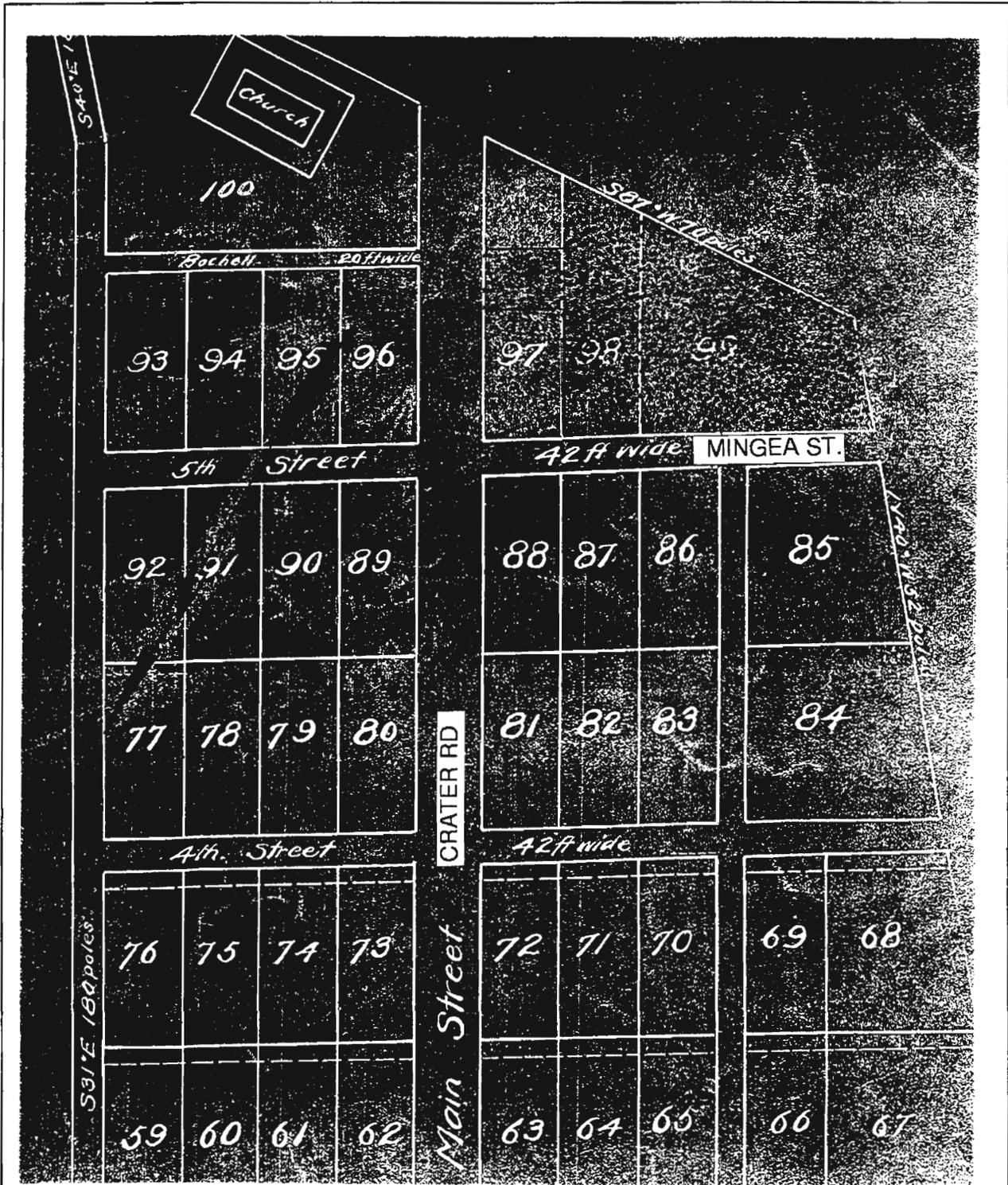


Figure 37 Plan of New Blandford showing the location of Little Church Cemetery (Lots 98, 99, and part of 97).

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98 was described as two acres in 1835,<sup>6</sup> but the 1780 plat shows it as less than one acre. Mingea acquired Lot #97 in 1847. His price of \$110 was the high bid at an auction of some of the land of Patrick Foley, being sold to settle a mortgage debt.<sup>7</sup> The deed by which John Mingea acquired Lot #99 has not been located. According to Richard L. Jones, Mingea subdivided #98 and 99 in 1854, by an unlocated plat.<sup>8</sup>

The issue of how Mingea came into this land, and how it was subdivided differently from the 1780 plat, is not so important. The more interesting questions concern the late-nineteenth century relationship of J. C. Drake with the cemeteries that became People's and Little Church, and the origin of the Little Church burial ground. No reference to a cemetery is made in the 1830s deeds to Mingea of Lots 97 and 98, but there could be a mention in the deed to Lot 99 (we did not find the deed or the 1854 plat cited by Jones). Therefore, the initial establishment of the cemetery that became Little Church has not been dated. Further, there is no evidence as to whether it began as a burial ground for whites, slaves, or free persons of color.

From his acquisition of the cemetery in 1883, James M. Wilkerson, Jr., operated it as part of his successful undertaking business. The purchase of this cemetery lot seems to coincide with establishing an independent firm: in 1880 Wilkerson was a partner in Parker & Wilkinson [sic], and by 1888 James M. Wilkerson was listed as an independent funeral director. The city directories do not specify that either, or both, listings may represent Wilkerson Jr. rather than his father.

The Wilkerson family were staunch members of Gillfield Baptist Church, and were surely proud that Rev. Henry Williams Jr., pastor from 1866 until his death in 1900, was buried in Little Church Cemetery.

A history of the church written in 1903 reports that "this church is his monument; that granite shaft erected by this church in Blandford Cemetery helps to perpetuate his memory... His wife rests with him." Not long after Williams' death, the church members determined to erect the monument, which cost \$1,800 (Johnson 1903). The dedication was an important community event, attended by many of Gillfield's finest families. Photographs taken at the time also show the Williams plot enclosed with a cast-iron fence, which is no longer present.<sup>9</sup>

The business of undertaking in Petersburg was very competitive in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There were usually three or four in operation in any given year, and city directories for the period list a number of enterprises that lasted only briefly. Only two proved successful over a long term: Thomas Scott and his successor Thomas Brown, and James M. Wilkerson's establishment. These firms had in common ownership or management of burial grounds, where they sold lots and sometimes individual grave plots. Consolidation of services - offering a plot as well as embalming and other funeral needs - was probably a factor in the longevity of these businesses.

With Wilkerson's success in selling plots, eventually there was no more space available in Little Church Cemetery (families who already owned lots could continue to bury). In the early 1900s Wilkerson solved this problem by acquiring a larger property, now known as East View Cemetery, at the east side of South Crater Road.

During the 1920s, Little Church Cemetery was considered part of the People's Memorial Cemeteries (Beneficial, Providence, Jackson) by the City of Petersburg. New sections of the city code provided

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<sup>6</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 9, p. 279.

<sup>7</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 16, p. 365.

<sup>8</sup> Richard L. Jones, "People's Memorial Cemetery," (n.d., Siege Museum files).

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<sup>9</sup> Photographs of monument dedication, ca. 1901, in undated scrapbook, Major William Henry Johnson Papers, VSU library Special Collections. Bushev et. al. 1994:51 state that Williams was buried elsewhere, but this may be a misreading of Johnson's 1903 work. In the early twentieth century, "Blandford Cemetery" could refer to the People's/Little Church complex (see 1906 fence dedication notice) as readily as to Old Blandford, the white cemetery.

## LITTLE CHURCH CEMETERY

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regulations for the cemetery complex, assigning responsibility for reporting burials to the Health Office, and giving authority to a designated Keeper for assigning plots, supervising maintenance, and similar powers. For the first time, the land was acknowledged to be tax-exempt as a burial ground.<sup>10</sup> James Wilkerson was one of the members of the Cemetery Committee of the Colored Cemetery Association, which elected Thomas H. Brown the Keeper. Although Wilkerson had previously superintended Beneficial and Providence, there is no evidence that he challenged Brown for the post. In fact, without space available in Little Church, he may have been pleased to leave it in Brown's hands. Thomas Brown had been viewing the tract as one with People's for several years. His plans for improvement in 1925-26 included continuous iron fencing along Mingea Street and the back of the cemetery, and extended People's new gnd and road system across Little Church (see Figure 21).

In late 1931 members of the People's Cemetery Committee and James M. Wilkerson agreed that Little Church Cemetery should be merged with People's, to formally eliminate taxes on Little Church and combine the two plots for use and maintenance. Wilkerson deeded Little Church to the committee, which accepted the plot with thanks,<sup>11</sup> but the deed seems not to have been recorded in the Hustings Court (and may not have been prepared as a legally binding document).

Because the ambitious landscaping and maintenance plans made by Thomas Brown, and attempts to map the cemeteries under his management, never came to fruition (even his map of Peoples shown as Figure 26 does not include Little Church), there is little evidence that combining Little Church with the People's Cemetery complex had any definite impact. During the decades after Brown's death (1952) when People's became overgrown and largely impassable,

Little Church could still be accessed from Mingea Street, and the public perception was that the two were separate.

Whether or not the deed conveying Little Church to the People's Memorial Cemetery Association was registered, People's Cemetery as acquired by the City of Petersburg in 1986 includes the south portion of the original Little Church Cemetery. The balance of the property belongs to J. M. Wilkerson Funeral Establishment.

### Stones and Other Features

The cemetery is unenclosed, although a pedestrian gate is found at the north edge of the cemetery on Mingea Street (identified as number 21 on Figure 35). A series of concrete steps, bordered by welded pipe handrails, lead up from the road to the gate (Figure 38) which is in fair condition. The opening for this double gate is six feet in width. Each gate has a Cincinnati Iron Gate Co. shield attached at the top rail and the gate hinges are welded to the top pipe railing post, perhaps suggesting that the gates have been reset or modified. The design is a typical bow and picket style, common to a variety of manufacturers.

The cemetery and its graves are oriented on a rough northeast-southwest axis, although variation between individual markers is noticeable. The cemetery consists of a number of recognizable plots, distinguished by concrete or granite coping, fences, or posts, which seem to focus on the central portion of the cemetery (i.e., as you move to the northeast, south, or southwest the number of marked family plots seems to diminish). Full plots consistently measure 16 feet square, while half plots measures about 7 to 8 feet in width. This suggests that at least some areas of the cemetery were laid out using the standard design techniques of the period. It is not possible to determine if graves not bounded by plot limits are individual graves or if plots were simply not marked. As previously discussed, the title for this cemetery is complex and there are no good ownership records for the individual plots (although the cemetery continues to be used).

There are five fenced plots within the cemetery (identified as numbers 1, 2, 32, 37, and 38 on Figure

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<sup>10</sup> Rules Governing People's Memorial Cemetery, Petersburg City Code Sections 525-539, adopted 1925.

<sup>11</sup> 1931 Minute Book, People's Memorial Cemetery, (F H. Norris, secretary).

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manufactured no earlier than 1910 and no later than about 1914.

Fence 32 is a hairpin and picket motif. A broken shield on the gate provides only a partial identification: "H[?] ] FE[NCE] C[O] ] CINCINNATI, OHIO]. In spite of this shield, the design is that of Stewart Iron Works. The fence is their design 6R, while the corner and gate posts are their Style J. These posts are topped with an unidentifiable ornament, although the fence used their Style K picket top. The interior of this plot, which measures 16 feet square, has been topped with

35). Fence 1, representing a half plot measuring 7 by 15 feet, is a hairpin and picket style manufactured, according to a shield attached to the gate, by "C. Hanika & Sons, Celina, OH." It enclosed a single marble obelisk. This plot is apparently still being actively cared for. Although a portion of the fence has been damaged, probably by a tree, it has recently been cleaned and painted.

Fence 2 is a Stewart Iron Works fence, consisting of a bow and picket design that is still listed in their catalog (Design 10R). Corner and gate posts are Stewart's Design 2. This fence, and the plot it encloses (which measures 16 feet square), are in poor condition, being heavily overgrown with a portion of the fence missing.

The script "S" in Stewart on the gate's shield indicates that the gate was produced after 1910. In addition, careful inspection of the underside of the horizontal channels reveals the presence of a rib. This was an option offered by the company only between 1903 and about 1914 (Mr. Tony Milburn, personal communication 1996; Mr. Mark Rottinghaus, personal communication 1998). Consequently, this gate was

concrete and a single granite marker is situated in the middle. The plot has recently been cleaned out by Wilkerson's, suggesting that it is no longer routinely maintained by the family. In spite of that the fence is in good condition, except for one section where the original hairpin and picket has been replaced with a non-matching bow and picket style. This replaced section has been damaged and is in poor condition.

Fence 37 consists of a cast iron fence about 2 feet in height set on a low concrete coping. The shield on the gate identified its manufacturer as Stewart Iron Works. The fence is an ornamented picket design and is unusual for any of the African American cemeteries investigated in Petersburg.

Fence 38 consists of concrete posts and iron pipe railings. Although clearly not as "formal" as the previously described fences, designed specifically for cemetery enclosures, this fence has a dignified simplicity and is seen in other cemetery settings. It is in good condition, although the gate is missing and the pipes are bowed on the southwest side where a cedar tree has grown into the fence.

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Table 5. Stones and Features Identified at Little Church Cemetery

1. Fenced Plot	24. M.R. stonecutter (1898 and 1907)
2. Fenced Plot	25. I.B.P.O.E.W Royal Lodge No. 77 (1950)
3. Williams Monument	26. I.B.P.O.E.W Royal Lodge No. 77 (1931)
4. Granite marker with block letters	27. Pedestal tomb (1889)
5. Concrete marker with hand lettering	28. Obelisk (1889)
6. Lee, 1913-1958, painted stone	29. Marble tabletstone (1895)
7. I.B.P O.E.W., Royal Lodge No. 77 (1957)	30. I.B.P O.E.W Royal Lodge No. 77 (1923)
8. Grave curbing	31. B.I.B.C. (1927)
9. N.I.B.S. Blooming Zion No. 275 (1954)	32. Fenced plot
10. Y W.S.L.I.C. (1949)	33. Government Issue stone (Jewish, 1987)
11. Name on whitewashed coping in metal letters	34. Rosetta Tent No. 433 (1971)
12. I.B.P O.E.W., Majestic Temple No. 109 and N.I.B.S. Blooming Zion No. 275 (1949)	35. Granite posts delimit half lot
13. Concrete coping for lot	36. Marble tabletstone (1884)
14. "From the Employees of C.S.H." (1933)	37. Fenced plot
15. I.B.P O.E.W Royal Lodge No. 77 (1960)	38. Fenced plot
16. Concrete corner posts for lot	39. Granite marker, Mason (1888)
17. Y.M.I.B.A. (1922)	40. N.I.B.S., Magnolia Lodge No. 116
18. Whitewashed concrete marker	41. Concrete marker (1947)
19. M.R. stonecutter (1899)	42. I.B.P O.E.W., Majestic Temple No. 109 and Y W.I.B.A. (1933)
20. Mason, Pocahontas Lodge No. 7 (1920)	43. Deacon of Third Church, MR stonecutter (1933)
21. Cemetery gate	44. Rosetta Tent No. 433 (1950)
22. Y.M.I.B.A. (1922)	45. I.B.P.O.E.W Royal Lodge No. 77 (1943)
23. Iron fence posts at plot (fence missing)	

There are several areas along the southern boundary of Little Church that are worthy of brief comment since they stand in contrast to the remainder of the cemetery. In these areas there is extensive use of concrete lawn-type markers, all of which appear to be cast in a similar fashion, if not by the same hand (Figure 39).

At the end of the access road there are six rows of concrete markers, further recognizable by the undulations in the ground. These appear to represent an area of individual grave plots (called single sections in the business) and no family plots are found intermingled. The practice of selling both family and individual plots was common at cemeteries during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as cemeteries attempted to provide services fitting the needs of all people. These single sections, however, were typically segregated from the family plots, usually at the edges of

the cemetery — much as we see at Little Church (see Sloane 1991:83-84). While there was a strong feeling of democracy associated with the rural cemetery movement, the limiting factor was consistently money. Sloane explains, "the only barrier to owning a plot in most rural cemeteries was money" (Sloane 1991:83).

To the east there is a concrete marker for Spencer Green which is marked "FULL," almost certainly indicating that he had purchased a full lot. Further east is another stone marked, "HOSEA HOLCOMB / FULL," again probably designating a corner and the amount of land owned. Another marker is found in the southeast quadrant of the cemetery, for Nathaniel Bullock, Jr.

A survey of the stones in Little Church reveals that the earliest marked grave (that of Robert Lee) is

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1883. Lee was born, likely a free person of color, in 1835. The next oldest stones are of the Wilkerson family, including the child, Mana Wilkerson (1867-1884).<sup>12</sup> These stones are all found south of the access to the cemetery along Mingea Street. The most recent grave dates from 1997, reflecting a use range similar to the adjacent People's Cemetery. The stones represent the same range of forms as seen in both People's and Blandford, including tabletstones, obelisks, dies on bases, plaque markers, government stones, and lawn-type and/or raised-top markers. Many of these are found in several materials, such as the plaques, which occur in granite, although concrete is far more common, representing one of the characteristic vernacular styles. Likewise, both concrete and granite lawn-type and raised-top markers are present throughout

the cemetery. Also present are thin marble tablets which appear to be remnant furniture tops. There are 11 extant obelisks at Little Church, ranging in date from 1889 through 1921, with a mean date of 1902. Table 5 provides an listing of the stones or other features which are marked on Figure 35.

Two churches were specifically represented in the stone inscriptions: Gillfield Baptist Church (identified on the Reverend Henry Williams monument in the center of the cemetery) and Third Church.<sup>13</sup> Funeral homes identified on modern metal plaques

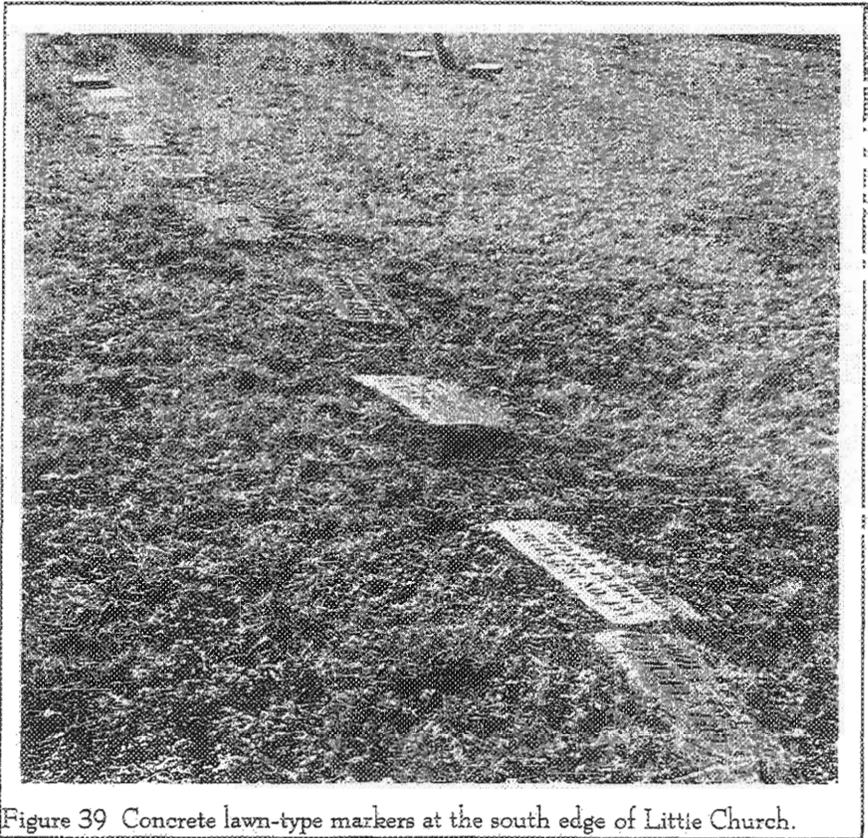


Figure 39 Concrete lawn-type markers at the south edge of Little Church.

include Tucker's, Wilkerson's, and Winfree-Wright, all historically black mortuaries. The first two operate in Petersburg, while the third is an out-of-town firm.

Six stonecutters were also identified in the cemetery, including Hess-Trigard (successor to V.H. Poppa of Petersburg), Arlie Andrews, Crowder, Oakwood (a Richmond firm), M.R. (Milton Rivers), and Burns and Campbell. All except the last two are either known or thought to be relatively modern monument firms.

There are 10 distinct fraternal organizations or lodges represented at Little Church (Table 6). Most occur singly, with only three accounting for two or more stones. The most common provider were the Elks, including Royal Lodge No. 77 and Majestic Temple No. 109. These two lodges were found on at least seven stones. Following it were two Y.M.I.B.A. (Young Men's Industrial Beneficial Association) stones and two Rosetta Tent No. 433 stones. Most of these stones

<sup>12</sup> The Wilkersons have a family plot measuring about 17 feet square, shown in Figure 35 as number 37.

<sup>13</sup> The Third (Baptist) Church at 630 Halifax Street was built in the 1820s and became a free black church in 1846, forming from the Gillfield Baptist Church (Bushey et al. 1994:49).

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Table 6. Lodges Identified from Little Church Stones

B.I.B.C.  
I.B.P.O.E.W., Royal Lodge No. 77  
I.B.P.O.E.W., Majestic Temple No. 109  
Masons, unspecified  
Masons, Pocahontas Lodge No. 7  
N.I.B.S., Blooming Zion No. 275  
N.I.B.S., Magnolia Lodge No. 116  
Rosetta Tent No. 433  
Y.M.S.L.I.C.  
Y.M.I.B.A.

post-date 1900, seemingly reflecting the glory days of African American lodges during the first two or three decades of the twentieth century. Also identified was one stone "From the Employees of C.S.H." It is unclear whether this was simply an act of kindness or whether it was somehow formalized benevolence.