Rose Hill Cemetery
National Register Nomination

Location 0 Jasmine Avenue
City of Tarpon Springs, Florida

STAFF REPORT

August 11, 2016

TO: MAYOR & BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FROM: PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT

HEARING DATES: AUGUST 1, 2016 (HERITAGE PRESERVATION BOARD)
AUGUST 16, 2016 (BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS) 2ND READING

SUBJECT: APP-16-67: NOMINATION ROSE HILL CEMETERY-
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff is requesting support from the Mayor and the Board of Commissioners for the nomination of the Rose Hill Cemetery to the National Register of Historic Places.

II. HERITAGE PRESERVATION BOARD

The Heritage Preservation Board held a public hearing on Application 16-67, on August 1, 2016. In a 3-0 vote, the Heritage Preservation Board recommended approval of the nomination of the Rose Hill Cemetery to the National Register of Historic Places.

III. BACKGROUND

The Rose Hill Cemetery is located on Jasmine Avenue just south of E Cypress Street and consists of 4.63 acres of land. The earliest verified burial was in 1904. The Rose Hill Cemetery Association was formed and received a lease for the cemetery in 1916. In 1917 the cemetery was deeded to the Rose Hill Cemetery Association.

The Rose Hill Cemetery is a significant historic cemetery that preserves a strong African American ethnic character. The cemetery has remained in constant use into the present and consists of over 1000 grave plots. Rose Hill Cemetery is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places for local significance under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black and Social History, for its association with racial segregation practices, the development of the Tarpon Springs’s African American community, and as a site at which community
members maintained southern and African American burial practices. Cultural beliefs from the African and southern American traditions are apparent in the east-west orientation of graves, scraping, positioning of couples, chairs and benches, and decorative elements on graves, such as conch shells and symbols engraved on markers. Rose Hill Cemetery maintains its historical integrity and has remained in active use by the African American community of Tarpon Springs since its inception.

The applicant is requesting support for an application to designate the Rose Hill Cemetery as a Historic Place on the National Register. At this time the applicant is also seeking designation as a local historic site.

VI. LIST OF EXHIBITS

1) Maps: Vicinity
Aerial
2) National Register Nomination Application
Aerial: 0 Jasmine Avenue
1. Name of Property

historic name  Rose Hill Cemetery

other names  Rose Cemetery

FMSF Number  PI 11168

2. Location

street & number  0 Jasmine Avenue

city or town  Tarpon Springs

state  FLORIDA  code  FL  county  Pinellas  code  zio code  34689

3. Owner Awareness Statement

As the owner, or official representative of the owner, of the property identified above, I am aware of this proposal for its nomination for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. I have been advised of the procedures for review of the proposal by the State Historic Preservation Office and the Florida National Register Review Board, and for the formal nomination of the property at the discretion of the State Historic Preservation Officer. I understand that I will be notified of the date and place of the public meeting at which the proposal will be considered by the Florida National Register Review Board, and that I will be given an opportunity to submit written comments and to appear in person in support of or opposition to the nomination of the property.

At this time I  support  oppose  reserve opinion on this proposal.

Signature of property owner or representative  Date

4. Legal Description of Property (according to county property appraiser’s office)

Please also provide:

Name of USGS Quadrangle:  

Township, Section and Range:  T  S  R  

Tax Parcel #:  12/27/15/89982/121/0100

Attach continuation sheet if necessary
5. Classification

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

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7. Description

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<td>other</td>
</tr>
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<td>grave markers: granite, marble, concrete, wood, stainless steel, bronze, ceramic</td>
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Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuations sheets.)
8. Statement of significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution broad patterns of our history.
- Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction of represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:
- Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- Removed from its original location.
- A birthplace or grave.
- A cemetery.
- A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- A commemorative property.
- Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.63

UTM References
(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

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Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tina Bucuvalas

organization City of Tarpon Springs

street & number 324 E. Pine Street

city or town Tarpon Springs

date August 1, 2016

telephone 727-937-1130

state FL

zip code 34689

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets (All information on continuation sheets must be typed.)

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) Do not write upon or attach labels to this map.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative digital color or black and white photographs of the property. See Guidelines. (Do not write upon or attach permanent labels to the photographs.)

Additional items
(check with the area Historic Sites Specialist at [904] 487-2333 for any additional items)

Property Owner

name Rose Cemetery Association, Inc.

street & number 531 E. Oakwood Street

city or town Tarpon Springs

date

telephone 727-937-8627

state FL

zip code 34689-4449
ROSE HILL CEMETERY
FNP Form Continuation Sheets

7. Description

Narrative Description

Summary
Located on Jasmine Avenue in north Pinellas County, Florida, Tarpon Springs' Rose Hill Cemetery is a significant historic cemetery that preserves a strong African American ethnic character. The cemetery measures 4.63 acres, and is subdivided by an unpaved road. The primary area is fenced and bounded by East Cypress Street on the north, East Orange Street on the south, and Jasmine Avenue on the west. Established in 1916 in response to segregationist policies, the cemetery has remained in constant use into the present and includes over 1000 grave plots of African Americans from Pinellas County. Markers include both commercial and handmade examples in a variety of materials, such as granite, marble, concrete, wood, and stainless steel. They range from flush with the ground to several feet high. The site shows many earmarks of traditional southern cemeteries, such as scraped landscaping, plantings next to graves, and conch shells on some graves. Although upkeep was sometimes neglected in the past, today the site is in moderately good condition and retains its historical design, setting, and integrity to a high degree.

Setting
The City of Tarpon Springs is located in north Pinellas County approximately thirty miles northwest of Tampa. The City of Clearwater, the seat of government for Pinellas County, lies fifteen miles to the south. The city limits of Tarpon Springs measure approximately twelve square miles. A dominant feature of Tarpon Springs is the Anclote River and its corollary bayous, which have greatly influenced the historical development of the city. The terrain is relatively flat, although the topography in some neighborhoods close to the river displays slight undulations. The Anclote River widens at Tarpon Springs with numerous bayous extending into the city, leaving few points more than several blocks from the water.

Rose Hill Cemetery is located 1.5 miles east of the intersection of Tarpon and Pinellas Avenues, which can be considered the center of Tarpon Springs. It is situated east of and across Jasmine Avenue from Cycadia Cemetery, the city-owned cemetery. A City of Tarpon Springs recreational complex is located directly to the south, and residential neighborhoods are located to the north.

Physical Description
Rose Hill Cemetery consists primarily of flat land with several varieties of native trees and shrubs, such as oaks, pines, palmettos, and azaleas (Photos 1-8). Measuring five acres, the layout of the cemetery is a modified rectangle with the length running east/west. The cemetery measures 4.63 acres, and is subdivided by an unpaved road. There are two entrances, on Jasmine Avenue, both of which accommodate vehicles. The main entrance is framed by a decorative steel arch and gate on the western side of the cemetery (Photo 9). There is a second entrance/exit through a chain link fence on the west end of the cemetery, to the north of the main exit. The cemetery is bordered on the west by a concrete block wall, and chain link fencing on the north, east, and south. There is one unpaved pathway for vehicles that circles the early portion of the cemetery and connects the entrances (Photos 1, 6, 7).
Like many cemeteries in the American South, Rose Hill is not part of the sanctified grounds of a church. Established in 1916 in response to segregationist policies, the cemetery has remained in constant use into the present and includes over 1000 grave plots of African Americans from Pinellas County. The cemetery has been in continuous use from at least the early 20th century until the present. The most recent observed gravesite is of Bobby Lee Humphrey Sr. (1990-June 13, 2016) (Photo 10). With a few exceptions, the graves are arranged in an east-west alignment. When married couples are buried together, the man is usually situated to the right of the woman. Chairs or benches are placed by family members near a few graves to allow for a more comfortable time spent visiting the graves of loved ones, e.g., near the Quartermen family plot (Photo 11).

The site retains its historical design, setting, and integrity to a high degree. It contributes to the sense of place, historical development, and culture of the African American community in Tarpon Springs through its location, materials, and associations.

Scrapping
Rose Cemetery is not a lawn cemetery. However, there is sparse volunteer grass growth throughout the cemetery—especially in those areas that have not been consistently raked. Some family plots are still devoid of grass, and the dirt shows the patterns of a rake (Photo 12). This follows the widespread southern practice of scraping (or raking) cemeteries. Alfred Quartermen and Annie Dabbs of the Rose Hill Cemetery Association and Rev. Milton Smith of the Mt. Hermon Baptist Church verified that Rose Hill was a scraped or raked cemetery.1 Quartermen believes that the original term was scraping, but because they eventually used a yard rake to scrape, the term raking came to be used interchangeably (Photo 13). As a justification for the practice, he noted that writings in the Negro National Archives refer to the practice of scraping.

Grave Markers
Grave markers include both commercial and handmade examples in a variety of materials, such as granite, marble, concrete, wood, and stainless steel. They are of various ages, sizes, materials, and influences. However, they are primarily rectangular tablets/headstones, ledgers, and few footstones made of marble, granite, and concrete. Most are commercially made, including numerous marble or granite headstones provided by the federal government for military veterans. There are also numerous small stainless steel markers that were added in 1999, when a survey found 200 unmarked graves (Photo 14). Most markers include the name, birth, and death dates, often with designations such as mother or father, as on the marker for Charity Carter (1869-1944) (Photo 15), or the addition of words of hope, condolence, or faith, such as “Gone But Not Forgotten” on the grave of Amanda Willis (d. 1922 age 56) (Photo 16) or “It Is Well With My Soul” on the grave of Timothy Pitts (1948-1991) (Photo 17). Many headstones are also graced with ceramic portraits of the deceased, such as the graves of George Darling (1960-1968) (Photo 18) or Mahalia Jones (1856-1924) (Photo 19). Common motifs incised on grave markers include clasped hands, praying hands, angels (Photo 20), roses and other flowers (Photo 21), crosses, lambs (Photo 22), birds, ivy, and masons’ symbols (Photo 23). Some graves are covered with paving, i.e., a concrete slab or, in one case, concrete paving stones (Photo 24). The joint graves of Abraham and Julia Lambright are covered with marble slabs (Photo 25).

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1 Alfred Quartermen, telephone interview with Tina Bucuvalas, January 22, 2016; Rev. Milton. Interview with Tina Bucuvalas, March 1, 2016; Annie Doris Dabbs, interview with Tina Bucuvalas, March 30, 2016.
During the mid- to late-20th century, most north Pinellas County funeral services were provided by Larkin’s Funeral Home or Young’s Funeral Home in Clearwater. These black-owned businesses often provided bronze plaques for concrete grave covers. The plaques usually have decorative motifs surrounding the name and dates of the deceased as well as the name of the funeral home (Photos 17, 50, 52, 53).

Several areas are set aside for the graves of a particular family group. Some family plots are surrounded by low curb, usually made of poured concrete or small concrete blocks or sometimes metal or wood, such as that of the McCrary family (Photo 26). Occasionally, a single grave may also be surrounded by a curb, such as that of Eugenia Muniz (1919-1987) (Photo 27).

**Commercial Markers**

Madie Mae Arline’s marble headstone engraved with flowers and containing a ceramic photograph is an example of the many commercially made markers (Photo 28). There is also a large squared vertical marble column on the grave of Annie Mae Reese (1901-1921) (Photo 29). In some cases, temporary metal markers with paper identification tags from the funeral homes still remain, e.g., Amanda Small (December 1942) (Photo 30). The grave of Richard Quarles (1833-1925) has a granite military marker provided by the Sons of Confederate Veterans and Daughters of the Confederacy (Photo 31). There are several marble or granite military markers issued by the federal government to veterans of wars stretching from World War I to Desert Storm, such as those for Tommy Dorsett (1896-1981), WWI (Photo 32), WWII; Eddie Cooper, Jr. (1915-1956), WWII (Photo 33); Robert Edwards Jr. (1929-1996), Korea (Photo 34); David McCray, Jr. (1942-2002), Vietnam (Photo 35); and Arthur Jay Hayes (1958-2006), Desert Storm (Photo 36). The commercially made granite marker for Wilburt Brooks (1898-1958) is also unique in its engraving of a man in scuba gear in an underwater scene. The engraving identifies him as an African American pioneer sponge diver (Photo 37). There are a few footstones, such as the marble one for Florence White (1875-1919) (Photo 38).

**Handmade Markers**

Locally made markers have a variety of forms though they are usually an upright rectangle or crowned rectangle. Often made from concrete, they are frequently inscribed with the birth and death dates, age, and name. Several crowned markers inscribed with a rose. Examples of handmade markers include those for Bell White (1863-1963) (Photo 39) and Wilfred Brooks (d. 1980) (Photo 40). A metal bed frame marks the Morris Lofton (1862-1910) grave site (Photo 41). A number of simple weathered wooden crosses made from 2x2 wooden sticks still mark the graves of Hannah family members, including that of Rev. Zachariah Hannah of Mt. Hermon Missionary Baptist Church (1907-1991) (Photo 42).

**Grave Decoration**

On or beside many graves, family members or friends have left decorative items, such as plastic or fresh flowers; potted plants; crosses; plaster statuary of angels, kneeling children, or praying hands; balloons; candles; snow globes; plaques; or whirligigs (Photo 43). Some graves and family plots have been covered with shredded red wood mulch. On several of these, there are designs (such as a cross, circle, or heart) with small white stones (Photo 44). Conch shells have been placed on several graves, usually on those whose families who were originally from the Bahamas. For examples, there are conch shells on the graves of Willa S. Reese (1868-1948) (Photo 29) and Rev. Jacob Benjamin Reece (1858-1950) (Photo 45). Following common southern practice, some families planted bushes beside the graves. The most commonly planted are juniper bushes—some of which have grown quite large (Photo 46;
also see Photo 8). However, there are also palm trees (Photo 47), rubber plants (Photo 48), and one hibiscus bush (Photo 49)—plants suitable to the subtropical environment or central Florida.

8. Statement of Significance

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Rose Hill Cemetery is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places for local significance under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black and Social History, for its association with racial segregation practices, the development of Tarpon Springs’s African American community, and as a site at which community members maintained southern and African American burial practices. The earliest recorded burial dates to 1904, but it has believed to have been used by black community members to bury their dead since the 1870s. Originally known as Rose Hill, the property was owned by the Lake Butler Villa Company and was located in the back of (i.e., east of) the white cemetery, Cycadia. As a result of local and county segregationist policies that sought to bury African Americans separately from other citizens, the Lake Butler Villa Association gave a ninety-nine year lease to the citizens’ board that was formed in 1916. In 1917 they deeded the property to the Rose Hill Association. Due to limited African American cemeteries, Rose Hill Cemetery also served other black communities throughout Pinellas county through the 1950s. In 1999 volunteers used ground-penetrating radar equipment to find 200 unmarked graves, and dogs found another 20. The period of significance ranges from 1904 to 2000, the approximate date when Cycadia Cemetery and local funeral directors started accepting more African Americans. Veterans from the Civil War and subsequent wars are interred in the graveyard, as are prominent community members and many who worked in the sponge industry. Grave markers, both commercial and handmade, are constructed of marble, granite, concrete, wood, bronze, and stainless steel, reflecting a variety of artistic styles and levels. Cultural beliefs from African and southern American traditions are apparent in the east-west orientation of graves, scraping, positioning of couples, chairs and benches, and decorative elements on the graves, such as conch shells and symbols engraved on the markers. Rose Hill Cemetery maintains its historical integrity and has remained in active use by the African American community of Tarpon Springs since its inception.

HISTORIC CONTEXTS

The name Rose Hill Cemetery was changed to Rose Cemetery in 1979, with a change in the managing association.

Ethnic Heritage and Social History

African American Context

With 12 million Africans forcibly shipped to the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in human history. Although poor in material goods, Africans brought with them extensive knowledge of rich traditional cultures that influenced their new

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lives. Burial grounds manifest the history and culture of the both the departed and the living. In *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, folklorist John Vlach posited that, "Across rural Afro-America the cemetery is very special. Not only is it the realm of the deceased, but it is also where we find the strongest material demonstration of African-inspired memories." He also observed that the decorative expression in black cemeteries throughout the South reflects African religious beliefs and aesthetics.³

In the early years, funerary expressions may have assumed great importance among African Americans because death was the only guaranteed escape from a life of poverty or enslavement—and sometimes the cemetery was one of only a few arenas in which they could express their identity.⁴ Over time, African-based customs and beliefs merged with southern Christian practices, and often the original reasons for rituals or objects were reinterpreted. General beliefs included the idea that the spirit lingers on earth and must be somehow placated, such as by an extravagant funeral. Some southern blacks held a ceremonial second burial a few months after death, during which they eulogized the deceased.⁵

African American cemeteries share many characteristics with the burial grounds of other American groups. For instance, as in white cemeteries, the most commonly preserved grave markers in African American cemeteries are vertical and made of stone. After World War II, the memorial park styles in cemeteries have favored the use of flat, horizontal markers made of bronze or stones. In African American cemeteries, the second most common grave marker material is wood. Too often, the names on these markers become illegible, or the marker itself disappeared. Historical accounts sometimes mention wooden posts—probably the remains of a wooden marker, in African American cemeteries.⁶ In addition, many graves were marked by handmade stones or markers or left unmarked. It was not until the 20th century that more ornate gravestones became common.

A third type of marker encompasses flowers or trees planted to mark a grave—but without the presence of associated oral traditions it is difficult to discern if cemetery plants mark burials or reflect landscaping. Scholars believe the practice of placing flowers or planting flowering trees and shrubs derives from ancient eastern Mediterranean cultures. While some scholars perceive a correlation to ancient pagan mother deities or to the Virgin Mary, others see a relationship to the concept of rebirth or eternal life through plants arising from or near the grave. In particular, the presence of roses and evergreens is so widespread that myriad cemeteries (e.g., Rose Hill) bear their names.⁷

Like British Protestant cemeteries, cemeteries in the American South are not necessarily situated in sanctified ground near a church or chapel. This represents a departure from the general western European custom. Moreover, most adhere to the common practice of locating

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the cemetery on a hill or other elevated place. Certainly, both of these practices are true of Rose Hill Cemetery.

Scraping is a southern folk cemetery practice that rarely occurs outside the Gulf and Atlantic coastal plains where many African Americans have lived. Scraping involves chopping and hauling away the grass and weeds that grow on the family plots, then raking the dirt. Many who practice this tradition do so because they believe it looks nice or that allowing grass to grow on a grave would be disrespectful. However, scholars posit an African origin for this practice, since equivalent bare-earth graveyards are found on the West African coast. Jordan noted this practice in Texas cemeteries, and in Louisiana graveyards respected cultural geographer Fred Kniffen found annual "scrapings," to eliminate grass and leave the ground bare. Jordan also mentions annual days set aside for scraping or grave decoration by men, women and children in Texas. Often they stopped for a mid-day picnic in the cemetery. King also noted that in 19th to 20th century African American cemeteries, there few attempts made to control vegetation so as not to disturb the spirits.

In the South, African American graves are distinctive in the variety of offerings left on top of the burial mound. Pottery and glass are especially prominent, but other objects include conch shells, oyster and clam shells, cups, saucers, bowls, clocks, bottles, medicine bottles, white pebbles, toys, light bulbs, dolls, statues, flashlights, and much more. In the cemetery, these funeral offerings create a virtual world of the spirits, reflecting the needs and character of the ancestors. Placing personal objects on a grave might also encourage the spirit rest easy and remain in the cemetery. Many believed that containers should be slightly broken on the bottom, but their form maintained. This was intended to break the connection with the family and thus assure that other family members would not die. African antecedents for grave decoration with containers and other objects occur widely in west and central Africa.

Like grave goods in Africa, many of the grave decorations in African American cemeteries are white and/or are associated with water. In many African religions, the kingdom of the dead was underwater and the color white is associated with the dead. Thus in African American cemeteries, sea shells and mirrors (representing smooth shiny water) are often placed on graves to symbolize an underwater environment. One or more conch shells are sometimes set near the headstone or in a live to the foot of the grave. Clam and oyster shells can frame or cover the burial plot.

Scholars have noted that in most of the American South and in Central Africa, graves are oriented with the feet to the east and the head to the west—reflecting a shared cosmology. Rural southern Christians interpret this to mean they must be facing east to in order to arise facing Christ on Judgment Day. This is also true in Rose Hill Cemetery.

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8 Ibid. P. 33.
12 Ibid. P. 139.
15 Ibid. P. 143.
In southern graveyards, the male member of the couple is buried to the right or south of the woman. Jordan encountered this arrangement from 60 to 100% of the time in Texas graveyards among Anglos and blacks, though other groups did not share this practice.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, southern cemeteries often cluster family graves together in a family plot or section—sometimes bounded by fencing or objects. This compartmentalization frequently extends to different sub-sections of larger cemeteries on the basis of race, culture, or sometimes religion.\textsuperscript{17}

Through his research into Texas cemeteries, scholar Terry Jordan felt less like an intruder among the dead as he realized that cemeteries were primarily for the living and reflected the customs, beliefs and social structure of the survivors. He found that “The living, singly and in groups, are frequent visitors….in many Texas cemeteries, lawn chairs for visitors are placed alongside some graves.”\textsuperscript{18} And he noted that living visitors...“converse with the dead and leave favorite foods for the departed to consume. Life, death, and afterlife converge in the folk culture of the burial ground. The living have every right to be there.”\textsuperscript{19}

As business leaders and providers of essential services, African American funeral directors have long played a central social role. Since few whites would serve their communities, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, African American undertakers created independent businesses that led to economic independence. The first black funeral home was founded in Savannah, GA, in 1876. Funeral directors prepared the body, counseled the family, and also oversaw gatherings and the “setting up” or sitting up with the body before burial. Their business leadership and financial freedom were important during the civil rights movement, when funeral homes sometimes served as safe meeting places. In a few instances (e.g., the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott), funeral directors provided covert transportation by hearse to demonstrators.

\textbf{Pinellas County Context}\textsuperscript{20}

Despite the challenges Rose Cemetery faces due to periods of neglect and poor maintenance, this site remains better preserved and more intact than nearly all other historically African American cemeteries from the era of racial segregation along the Pinellas peninsula. By comparison, graves and burial sites at many of the original African American cemeteries in St. Petersburg—Pinellas County’s largest city—were removed, disturbed, and/or placed elsewhere, oftentimes at locations with poor or non-existent records that make it difficult if not impossible to locate the exact spot where bodies rest today. Similar challenges face the small cemeteries established for early members of the African American communities in Clearwater and Safety Harbor. Although Rose Cemetery’s condition is far from perfect, it offers the best example of a segregation-era cemetery for African Americans in Pinellas County that has not faced substantial disruption or outright destruction.

A drive through the diverse “Midtown” area in southern and south-central St. Petersburg might give an outsider the wrong impression about the cemeteries where families laid early African American settlers to rest. Neighborhoods in this area—including Bartlett Park, Childs Park, Cromwell Heights, Fruitland Heights, Jordan Park, Lake Maggiore Shore, and Thirteenth

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. P. 33.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. P. 4.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. P.6.
\textsuperscript{20} This section consists of the essay by historian and archivist James Schnur on “Uncovering the History of African American Cemeteries of Pinellas County: The Importance of Designating Rose Cemetery as a Cultural Heritage Site,” 2016.
Street Heights—have many churches of various sizes that serve worshippers who are primarily African American and the flocks at these churches maintain well-kept cemeteries on their grounds.

Those unfamiliar with St. Petersburg’s history might assume that these churches and cemeteries have always served African American congregations. They would be incorrect in that assumption. Indeed, in many cases, most if not all of the gravesites at these churches have Caucasians buried within them and, at the time of their establishment, customs and traditions prohibited non-whites from burying their loved ones at these locations. Aside from the Jordan Park neighborhood, restrictive covenants and overt racism prohibited African Americans from moving into the aforementioned neighborhoods or attending the original congregations in these churches until the 1950s or 1960s. For example, the Glen Oak Cemetery located between 26th and Auburn streets South, approximately two blocks north of 22nd Avenue South, became the first established cemetery in what is present-day St. Petersburg when Miss Emma B. Kimball was buried there in 1874, fourteen years before the Orange Belt Railway arrived. At that time, St. Petersburg did not even exist. A small church on that site served pioneer residents. Today, only a few headstones remain and the church at the site, St. Jude United Holiness Church, serves a different population. Although this cemetery sits in the heart of Midtown, it has no known African American burials from its earliest years.  

The two earliest segregated communities for St. Petersburg during the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries were Methodist Town (sometimes known as Jamestown or James Park) and the Gas Plant area (with areas in this tract known also as Pepper Town). Although a handful of older structures, such as the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, do exist in Methodist Town, heavy equipment bulldozed and buried over portions of the Gas Plant district in successive waves during the 1970s and 1980s to construct Interstate 275 and its spur, Interstate 175, as well as to clear the site for parking and facilities at Tropicana Field. Churches within the Gas Plant area that may have had small cemeteries disappeared by the mid-1980s and asphalt parking lots covered the former footprint of homes, streets, churches, social areas, and businesses before 1990.

Prior to 1900, an early cemetery for lower Pinellas residents, Moffett Cemetery, came into use at the western corner of Sixteenth Street South and Fifth Avenue, across the street from present-day Campbell Park and near Tropicana Field. Located adjacent to Evergreen Cemetery (located just west of Moffett Cemetery) and Oaklawn Cemetery (north of Moffett), the boundaries of some burial sites became difficult to distinguish as early as the 1920s. By the early 1900s, Moffett's Cemetery became the primary burial site for residents of St. Petersburg's African American communities; whites occupied graves in some other portions of Moffett and the other, adjacent cemeteries. S. D. Harris, one of the early white merchants in St. Petersburg, acquired the cemetery in 1911. Workers from Sumner Marble and Granite Works (the one-time owner of Lincoln Cemetery along 58th Street South) relocated graves from Moffett to the newly established Lincoln Cemetery beginning in the mid-1920s. Conditions at Moffett deteriorated even further by the late 1920s, though gravesites remained there into the 1950s. Some uncertainty remains as to if all bodies were removed from the site. Like Evergreen, much of the former Moffett's site includes pavement and overpasses from Interstate 175 near its junction with Interstate 275.


22 St. Petersburg Times, 1 April 1921; Evening Independent, 30 January 1939.
Moffett Cemetery, at the western edge of the Gas Plant community, served as the first legitimate cemetery where African Americans could bury family and loved ones in a formal location. Burials continued there until the late 1920s. Although many bodies left this location for Lincoln Cemetery in the 1920s, those that remained sat in a five-acre site that city leaders considered an eyesore, strewn with trash and overgrown with weeds. By mid-1953, a group known as “Future Floridians” hoped to remove the remaining bodies at Moffett and build a new Jim Crow recreation center and swimming pool. The city pursued quitclaim deeds to acquire at least part of the property to facilitate redevelopment. At this time, few of the gravesites even had markings, beyond wooden crosses or posts covered with overgrowth and debris, so clergy and other leaders in the African American community familiar with the cemetery were not even sure of the number of bodies remaining there. This was also due, at least in part, to bulldozers levelling part of the land at and near Moffett in November 1949 and, as a result, obliterating headstones and destroying gravesites, including some of white and black Civil War veterans. By one estimate, approximately 450 bodies remained in June 1953, while others believed the site had somewhere between 50 and 100 bodies at that time.\textsuperscript{23}

Plans to build a recreation center stalled in July 1953 and never materialized at Moffett Cemetery. Civic leaders decided to construct a swimming pool for the African American community—the Jennie Hall Pool—at Wildwood Park instead. It opened in 1954. Deterioration of the remaining white and non-white gravesites at Moffett continued during the mid-1950s. In July 1957, a cypress slab that once marked an 1890 gravesite at Moffett somehow ended up under brush and debris at a nearby used car lot. Some of the lands near and along these former cemeteries of Evergreen, Moffett, and Oaklawn became the Royal Court Apartments, started in July 1949 and opened the following year as housing for non-whites near the Gas Plant. The St. Petersburg Housing Authority bought Royal Court in 1966, renamed the development Laurel Park, and these structures stood until demolished to make parking spaces (Lots 1 through 3) at Tropicana Field. Thus, after years of neglect, the original African American gravesites at Moffett had disappeared by the 1960s; twenty years later, the Gas Plant area was levelled. Although ongoing speculation and common sense assumes that forgotten bodies remain under the parking lots and interstate overpasses near Tropicana Field, no tangible evidence of St. Petersburg’s earliest cemetery for African Americans remains.\textsuperscript{24}

As St. Petersburg’s boundaries expanded during the land boom of the 1920s, city officials sought to contain the African American community into a couple of segregated residential districts while removing African American cemeteries to locations outside of the city limits. After burials at Moffett came to an end, non-whites in lower Pinellas had two other options: Lincoln Cemetery and Oakhurst Cemetery. Established in 1928, Lincoln Cemetery occupies land along the eastern side of 58th Street South between the Pinellas Trail and Boca Ciega High School (BCHS). Although now part of the City of Gulfport, at the time of its establishment Lincoln occupied a remote tract of land near some areas prone to flooding (the Boca Ciega campus) and, literally and figuratively, on the “other side of the tracks” from all-white Royal Palm Cemetery (now Royal Palm Cemetery South). The tracks once sat on the present-day Pinellas Trail right-of-way when that served as the route of the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railway (later the Seaboard Air Line) beginning in the mid-1910s. Isolated from St. Petersburg and Gulfport until the construction of BCHS in 1953 and the construction of nearby homes in the 1950s, Lincoln Cemetery offered a remote location for African American residents of St.


\textsuperscript{24} St. Petersburg Times, 3 June, 1953, 8 July 1953, 23 July 1957, 29 July 1970.
Petersburg to bury their dead. Many of the original burials were reinterments that came from Moffett Cemetery.

There is a general—and incorrect—perception that Lincoln was the original cemetery for African Americans in lower Pinellas. During its early years, the grounds of the cemetery remained well-maintained, but owners failed to collect funds to address matters related to perpetual care. Over time, ownership passed back and forth between Sumner Marble and Granite Works that formerly operated in St. Petersburg along First Avenue South across the street from Royal Palm and a funeral home that catered to African American families during years of segregation. By October 1952, the St. Petersburg Times documented deplorable conditions at Lincoln when compared to its neighbor, Royal Palm, north of the railroad tracks. Part of the front section of the cemetery had become a site for piles of trash, grass and weeds covered headstones, and some gravesites began to cave into the ground. Standing water in depressed gravesites led to swarms of mosquitoes and rattlesnakes larger than six feet in length roamed the site during daylight hours. A massive cleanup of the cemetery and the approximately 3,000 gravesites occurred in 1953, leading the Times to hail the site “one of best in state.” This situation changed again, however, over the next decade: Debris and waist-high weeds cluttered the site by mid-1964.\(^{25}\)

During the past half century, Lincoln Cemetery has faced many instances where tall weeds, missing headstones, and exposed gravesites attracted the attention of families with loved ones buried there, as well as the press. In August 1968 the city’s afternoon newspaper, The Evening Independent, published an article entitled “Lincoln Cemetery: Rest in Rubbish.” The reporter accurately claimed that “a lawn mower is the method for finding some resting places [while] five minutes with a weed-cutter might net the discovery of a long-lost headstone.” Bodies have occasionally disappeared as gaping holes appear in front of overturned and damaged headstones with beer cans and other evidence of trespassers abundant. This situation persists today despite new owners for the cemetery. As of May 2015, Gulfport city officials had tallied more than $17,000 in liens placed on the nine-acre site due to city crews having to mow lawns and deal with some upkeep. More recently, the Gulfport Historical Society, a white resident of Gulfport who considered volunteering hours to help with upkeep as a “personal cause,” and others, including the St. Petersburg NAACP, have taken interest in the cemetery. Much remains to be done, and despite the noticeable improvements in 2015 and 2016, Lincoln continues to suffer from higher levels of neglect than Rose Cemetery in Tarpon Springs.\(^{26}\)

A second, and even more remote, cemetery opened in the 1920s at Oakhurst. Also known as "Memorial Cemetery (Colored)," Oakhurst sat at a site far away from St. Petersburg, in unincorporated Pinellas County on part of the lands now known as Garden Sanctuary near Seminole High School. Originally occupying five acres south of 82nd Avenue and west of 131st Street, at a time when few residents lived in this area with a handful of farms and large groves, African American began to bury their dead at Oakhurst. Similar to Lincoln, at the time of its establishment this cemetery occupied lands far away from residential communities. Although few African Americans lived anywhere near Oakhurst Cemetery, the site on a slight hill offered a

\(^{25}\) St. Petersburg Times, 26 October 1952, 3 January 1954; Evening Independent, 8 June 1964.


quiet location for them to bury their dead without any challenges. Few records were kept and
many headstones were simple in form.

By the early 1950s, white residential subdivisions sprouted amidst the nearby groves. As
developers planned to build additional communities, bulldozers came to Oakhurst in November
1953 and leveled many of the headstones in this cemetery as the new landowners planned to
create Oak Hill Cemetery for whites. Some gravesites suffered damage, and many in St.
Petersburg’s African American community believed that the intent was to destroy Oakhurst
entirely, without regard to those buried on the land. One grave, that of a Sgt. John Whitaker who
was buried in 1933, even sat under the right-of-way for a paved road. By the early 1960s,
vandalism at the site on the remaining headstones became so problematic that workers erected
a barbed wire fence around the handful of remaining headstones. Without records, loved ones
lost track of burial sites. The lands that comprised the bulk of the former Oakhurst Cemetery—
now absorbed as part of the larger Garden Sanctuary funeral home and cemetery site—consist
of unmarked graves and only a few headstones clumped together that may not even have the
proper bodies buried beneath them.27

Similar to the disruptions that occurred to cemeteries serving St. Petersburg’s African
American population, the small cemeteries originally established for non-whites in Clearwater
and Safety Harbor also have suffered from neglect far worse than Rose. The county seat of
Pinellas, Clearwater had a segregated African American community in an area known as “North
Greenwood” by the early twentieth century. In January 1940, city commissioners in Clearwater
blessed a resolution that set aside a tract of land in this community near Stevenson’s Creek as
a cemetery for African Americans and called for a group of trustees to manage the site. The
small cemetery began operations shortly thereafter. By 1948, the Pinellas County Board of
Public Instruction (now the School Board of Pinellas County) set its sights on acquiring thirty
acres adjacent to the cemetery for a new school to serve the African American community.
Under this plan, the city maintained title to the cemetery and informed school officials that it
planned to “continue to dump trash in the low ground along Stevenson's Creek” adjacent to the
cemetery, something the city did not do at that time adjacent to the much larger Clearwater
Municipal Cemetery south of downtown by S. Myrtle Avenue, Lakeview Road, and Tuskawilla
Street. After the meeting, school officials apparently came to an agreement that the “Negro
cemetery” would be eliminated without a specific plan of a new cemetery or for moving those
already buried. During the next few years, the fate of the cemetery remained unresolved as
school officials began plans to build a new campus for Pinellas High, the secondary school for
African Americans in the northern part of the county.28

By the early 1950s, white public officials decided to move forward with the construction
of the segregated high school at the expense of the small cemetery. In August 1953, hoping to
maintain Jim Crow facilities, the city and school board discussed plans to build a “Negro
swimming pool” and recreation facilities, the new Pinellas High campus, and move the graves
from the 1.5 acre cemetery to another, still undetermined location so high school students could
attend classes on the soon-to-be former cemetery site. As construction of the new high school
began, negotiations ensued about the best site for a cemetery to replace the one city officials
planned to abandon. Chester B. McMullen Jr. offered land in unincorporated Pinellas along
Highland Avenue as a site for the cemetery in the spring of 1954 and city leaders planned to
allocate $25 per body to disinter and reinter them at the new site. As they debated this proposal,

27 St. Petersburg Times, 22 June 1966; James Anthony Schnur, Seminole. Images of America Series
28 St. Petersburg Times, 4 January 1940, 9 December 1948; Evening Independent, 9 December 1948.
a neighboring landowner implored for the court to get involved by claiming that “all of the nearby [white] families have shallow water wells and the cemetery would endanger their water supply.”

Court hearings debated the fate of the bodies that soon found themselves without a resting place. White residents of the nearby Dunedin area protested plans for the reinment of approximately 350 bodies from the former Clearwater site. Some whites filed a lawsuit in mid-1954 to prohibit Clearwater from moving the bodies to McMullen’s land, leading a circuit judge to issue a temporary injunction in May 1954. Attorneys for the white residents whose lands surrounded this site claimed that “the proposed Negro cemetery in the midst of a white neighborhood would constitute a nuisance and a health menace” and that drinking wells and water for some of their swimming pools would suffer from “drainage water from the Negro cemetery.” Many reiterated their fears about water contamination, while a few openly told the judge that having the cemetery near or adjacent to their property made them unable to sleep at night. McMullen’s attorneys—M.H. Jones and his son, Milton Jones—did their best to dispel these fears, ones that whites in other areas of the county had never publicly expressed about living in close proximity to whites-only cemeteries. The judge issued a permanent injunction in July. As debates ensued, residents implored the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce to come out against this plan in August 1954.

As both sides argued in the courtroom and the court of public opinion, the bodies still needed a new home. By the late summer of 1954, Chester McMullen Jr. and Milton Jones located another site in a less developed area east of Dunedin. Once again, protestors opposed the creation of this cemetery, this time largely on the grounds that it might inhibit future development in an area with few existing homes. After the new proposal gained approval, protests resumed. At a municipal meeting in September 1954, eighteen residents asked Dunedin city commissioners to demand that the Pinellas County Health Department end burials at this new cemetery. These residents claimed that “disintegration of the bodies would pollute the waters of Curlew Creek and eventually the bay near Dunedin.” They started petitions. City officials had little recourse, however, since the site clearly rested outside of city limits. By October 1954, Clearwater’s city manager acted on a work order to finish the transfer of bodies to the new site.

Much of the nation debated the issue of racial integration in 1954, especially after the United States Supreme Court deliberated on the historic Brown v. Board of Education case that led to a unanimous decision in May 1954 calling for the end of “separate and equal” facilities since they were inherently unequal. As white supremacists throughout the South, the Midwest, and other areas sought to defy this court ruling, residents in mid- and upper-Pinellas did their best to keep the remains of African Americans from “integrating” white neighborhoods or lands that white developers planned to develop in the near future. The bodies ultimately did move during the fall of 1954, the same timeframe that the city of Clearwater celebrated the opening of two new high school campuses: a larger and much improved Clearwater High site on Gulf-to-Bay and a new, smaller Pinellas High for African American students. While the bodies finally had a new place to rest, those white and non-white students alive at the time remained in “separate and unequal” facilities despite the ruling of the Court.

29 St. Petersburg Times, 4 August 1953, 7 June 1954, 8 September 1954.
31 St. Petersburg Times, 3 August 1954, 8 August 1954, 8 September 1954, 4 October 1954.
The fate of one last cemetery illustrates how “separate and unequal” resting places for African Americans led to neglected and forgotten burial sites in Pinellas County. Safety Harbor is a city along Old Tampa Bay east of Clearwater. Small African American settlements such as an unincorporated one known as “Brooklyn” took shape “on the other side of the tracks” to support the businesses of this city. Lacking a site nearby to bury their departed, they established a cemetery on a small piece of land once owned by Solomon Smith Coachman, a white landowner and business leader who came to Pinellas in the late 1800s and who served as a forceful advocate of the county’s creation. Burials on this land quietly took place by the early twentieth century, with the earliest known burial being that of a man who passed away in 1896. It remains uncertain whether he was buried there at the time or reinterred there. By the 1930s, Coachman lost this land and some of his other holdings to the state for delinquent taxes. Alfred and Louisa Ehle acquired some of Coachman’s land and platted a subdivision for much of it except the lot where burials had occurred. In 1951, the Ehles deeded the cemetery to the St. Vincent Helping Hand Society and two years later this lot was transferred by deed to the “Safety Harbor Colored Community.” Burials continued, but the site fell into a terrible condition by the 1960s and 1970s as adjacent lands became a subdivision with white residents. In time, Clearwater annexed the formerly unincorporated land that included this cemetery and adjacent subdivisions.\textsuperscript{32}

The residential subdivision expanded, while grass covered this all-but-forgotten cemetery by the 1990s. In the mid-1990s, a Pinellas County work crew “discovered” this cemetery while clearing the overgrowth on the land surrounded by ranch homes with manicured lawns. The exact number of burials remains a mystery. During a canvassing of the cemetery site in August 2000, a handful of markers were located. One tombstone had cracked into more than thirty pieces. Although the grounds of the site are better maintained today, those presently alive know very little history about the Safety Harbor African American Cemetery within the present-day confines of Clearwater and its rediscovery has led to more questions than answers.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Tarpon Springs African American Community Context}

Tarpon Springs is a unique community with a rich heritage, which the African American community helped to shape. African Americans first arrived in Tarpon Springs after the Civil War, and many more arrived from other parts of Florida and the South during the 1880s. Tarpon Springs became a winter home to wealthy northerners by the early 1880s. Hamilton Disston, a wealthy manufacturer from Philadelphia, acquired 4,000,000 acres of state land from the Florida Internal Improvement Fund in 1881. Disston formed the Lake Butler Villa Company (Lake Tarpon was then called Lake Butler) and made centrally located Tarpon Springs his base of business operations. In 1887 not only did Tarpon Springs become the first incorporated town in the Pinellas peninsula, but the Orange Belt Railway also arrived, making travel more convenient for the wealthy northerners to whom Disston sold land for winter homes.

During the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, African Americans worked in the lumber mill, citrus groves, livery stables, hotels, and cutting railroad ties. In the early days, many women worked as housekeepers for wealthy families. As time went by, African Americans also found work in fish houses, sponge harvesting and processing, ship building, construction, the railroad, and government jobs—while others established small businesses or community schools.


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
Harvesting sponges was an important economic activity in Florida during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1873, Key West turtle fishermen near the mouth of the Anclote River in Tarpon Springs found the first sign of 9000 square miles of untouched sponge beds. Before 1890, commercial sponging was centered in Key West, the Bahamas, and Cuba, but it accelerated in the Gulf during the late nineteenth century. In 1886 (or 1889 according to some sources) John Cheyney began supplying sponges on a small scale from Tarpon Springs to the U.S. market through Anclote and Rock Island Sponge Company. During the 1890s, the industry began shifting to the Tarpon Springs area, where buying and selling were originally conducted at the mouth of the Anclote River. With the Spanish American War of 1898 in Cuba, sponging vessels from Apalachicola to Key West came to Tarpon Springs rather than Key West to sell their harvest.

African Americans were particularly important to Tarpon Springs’s sponge business. In the early 1890s, African American families arrived from Key West, the Bahamas, and other Caribbean islands to work in the sponge industry. Throughout the 20th century, these early connections continued to attract Bahamian immigration, as did opportunities for migrant workers in the fishing and sawmill businesses. Early documents, such as the ledger of the all-black Odd Fellows Lodge No. 3116, reveal that the most common occupations among black men in the late nineteenth century were sponging and general labor. As the sponge industry expanded during the 1890s, blacks worked across the river at Bailey’s Bluff, and especially the Union and Sawyers kraals. Most African Americans hooked or processed sponges, but many also owned boats and eventually some dove for sponges.

Beginning in 1905, Greek immigrants significantly expanded and changed the sponge industry. Using deep sea diving rather than hooking techniques and boats with both sails and engines, they quadrupled the number of sponges harvested and soon dominated the industry. The focal point of the industry shifted to today’s Dodecanese Avenue, where they created the Sponge Exchange and Sponge Docks. By 1913, as many as half of Tarpon Springs residents were reputedly Greek—and they remained the numerically dominant population segment for many decades.

After the arrival of the Greeks, some African Americans retained their own boats while other worked on Greek boats as crew or divers—often learning to speak Greek with a Dodecanese accent and developing life-long friendships. While they were not without some feelings of racial superiority, Greeks did not share the ingrained racial prejudices held by many Anglo-Americans. In the 1930s, the Greeks gradually began to exert greater control over municipal politics as the numerical majority or by allying themselves with Black Tarponites. When it came time to raise money to build St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, African American spongers joined the Greeks in donating a portion of their catch to pay for building supplies—and some also donated their labor.

Neighborhoods

Initially many black Tarponites lived in cabins built to accommodate them in the “Quarters,” east of Patten’s sawmill near the Anclote River by today’s Highway Alternate 19 bridge. The area gradually expanded south and west to the Fish House neighborhood (a part of the Greektown Historic District), where many black families lived alongside Greeks.

In the 1890s, the small community of Sponge Harbor (Pointe Alexis) developed at the mouth of the Anclote River, across the river from the Anclote settlement. Many of the boats
working out of Bailey's Bluff docked there, and the black sponge men and their families lived in several blocks of houses.

Some early African American families built homes in the southeast section of town, where they could maintain gardens and farm animals. Known as "Charlestown," the area was located east of Lemon Street, between South Levis and South Pinellas Avenues near East Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, and is the site of today's community. Most black families relocated to the Charlestown area after World War II.

Education

Florida's 1885 constitution mandated segregated education. From the early 1900s until the opening of Union Academy, many African American children in north Pinellas County attended Tarpon Springs' "Negro school." It followed Booker T. Washington's educational model focusing on practical skills. In 1919, the Pinellas County School Board purchased a site at Oakwood (Wall) Street and Grosse Avenue for Union Academy. They built a four-classroom school and hired excellent teachers from the Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes to teach primary and secondary grades. Later, many excellent teachers—some from the Tarpon Springs community, were trained at Florida A & M University. Classes expanded to include most academic subjects as well as home economics and manual training. Throughout its long history, Union Academy also served as a community center for African American youth. Despite official "separate but equal" policies, there was wide racial disparity in school facilities, teacher salaries, funding, and length of school terms. Union Academy compensated for this by welcoming philanthropic donations.

In the 1940s, Union Academy was expanded by the addition of two portable facilities. After completion of 8th grade, students could attend the all-black Pinellas High School in Clearwater. Although Union Academy received an additional facility (now Tarpon Fundamental) in 1963, desegregation soon sent African American students to other Tarpon Springs schools. Union Academy officially closed in 1969, but it remains important in community memory for the positive school environment and fine, nurturing teachers. As a result of the community's early dedication to education, many former students became educators, school administrators, doctors, musicians, politicians, and religious leaders.

Community Life

In the first half of the 20th century, there was a thriving black business district along Safford Avenue, between Lemon and Lake Streets. Among black owned and operated shops were several restaurants, a cleaner, pool hall, barber shop, and jewelry store. African American businesses were also established in other parts of town.

Communities everywhere form organizations that provide services to members and the general public. In Tarpon Springs, the African American community historically supported the Saint Safford Masonic Lodge #67 F&AM-PHA, W.E. James Court #76—Heroines of Jericho-PHA, Odd Fellows Lodge No. 3116, Better Boys Club, Fillmore Baker Post of the American Legion, and many more. Today the Citizens Alliance for Progress, Inc., located in the former Union Academy building, creates and implements such community services as youth programs, family support, job/career assistance, and community events, and more.

Music has been an important part of life for many Tarponites. In the early days, Richard "Christopher Columbus" Quarles reported for the newspaper on dances featuring Handy Williams on the fiddle and John Hayes on tambourine. Residents remember many other highly skilled musicians, such as Robert Solomon Hall, Jr., John Hannah (piano), and Joel Hannah
(horn), who played in local clubs. Tarponites still recall "Nassau Shake" music and dance gatherings from the 1930s through the 1950s that were led by Caribbean migrant workers in the sponging, fishing and sawmill industries. With mouth harps, washboards, pots beat with sticks, jugs, spoons, and voices, participants created music that had everyone dancing.

From the early days into the 1980s, the black community celebrated January 1 as Emancipation Day. During the 1920s, there were numerous parades—and one parade float consisted of a sponge boat with an all-black crew. In later years, the event was commemorated at a ceremony attended by all the churches. Following the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, there were speeches, singing, and a shared meal. In recent years, the community observes Martin Luther King Day with a parade.

Religion
Members of the African American community have always maintained strong religious faith. According to the State Archives of Florida, their churches were among the first in Tarpon Springs. Mt. Hermon Baptist Church was officially constituted in 1884 at the corner of Athens and Eagle (now Pinellas) Streets in a house built by sponge entrepreneur John Cheyney—making it the first church established in Tarpon Springs. Services were held in homes until a white frame structure with a belfry was erected in 1887.

Mt. Moriah African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1890 at the corner of East Pine and Eagle (now Pinellas) Streets. The first services were held in a square frame building (1890-1931) designed and built by Rev. George Washington Archie. The present rectangular block building was erected in 1931 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to traditional churches, ministers from various denominations held services for sponge fishermen at the processing centers across the Ancolte River in the 1890s and early 1900s. These Sunday services, replete with gospel singing, were held under the trees at the kraals.

Macedonia Missionary Baptist was constituted in 1901 on Railroad Avenue near Wall Street. The church building suffered a number storm related damages, but the new building was erected in 1947 and it continues today on the corner of East Oakwood Street and South Levis Avenue.

Rose Cemetery Context
Rose Cemetery, historically known as Rose Hill Cemetery, is one of the oldest African American cemeteries in Pinellas County. The earliest recorded burial dates to 1904, but there are strong indications of earlier interments and some believe that the property had been used by black community members to bury their loved ones since the 1870s. Originally known as Rose Hill, the property was owned by the Lake Butler Villa Company and was just east of the city cemetery, Cycadia.Originally, Rose Hill was considered to be at the back of Cycadia Cemetery—and was contiguous with it. Members of the African American community believe that Jasmine Street, which forms the western edge of Rose Hill, is either paved over graves or that the graves were disturbed in order to build the road.

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34 Roane 2012.
Rose Hill Cemetery was established as a private entity to officially create a separate black burial ground in accord with the segregationist practices of the era. In 1916, the Lake Butler Villa Association, operated by the Disston family and John Cheyney, gave a ninety-nine year lease to the citizens' board that was formed on November 22, 1916. In 1917, the property was deeded to the Rose Hill Association. The original board members were Florence White, Mahalia B. Jones, Susie Holmna, Matilda D. Castro, and Mahalia Perry.

In the late 1940s, the Rose Hill Association petitioned the City of Tarpon Springs and the State of Florida for land surrounding the cemetery in order to accommodate increased usage. Property owned by the state was deeded to the Association in March 1949, and by Tarpon Springs in February 1953—raising the total cemetery area to about 4.63 acres. With the potential for about 2000 grave sites, spaces were sold to individuals and families.

Through the 1950s, Rose Cemetery served other black communities throughout the county. Many difficulties through those years, including destroyed records, haphazard burials, and limited funding, resulted in many unmarked and misplaced graves. By the 1960s and 1970s, care of the graves became inconsistent as family members died or moved away. There was no funding or plan for maintenance, and the cemetery fell into neglect. Although burials continued, dates and details of ownership were not always accurately recorded.

In 1978, attorney Herbert Elliott assisted the African American community in setting up a non-profit organization. In September, 1979, Rose Hill Cemetery became Rose Cemetery Association, Inc. The first board members included Edward Dorsett, Samuel Davis, Iola Brown, Joseph Copeland, Malachi Fields, Essie Mae Williams, Mamie Singleton, Kate Tallie, and Doris Dabbs. In 1998 the Association received federal non-profit 501c3 status.

Beginning in the early 1990s under the presidency of Alfred Quarterman, the Association made significant improvements. These included organization of clean-up and awareness campaigns, installation of a decorative steel gate and archway with rose-shaped handles at the southern entrance, and establishing Rose Cemetery as a state-recognized historic site.

In 1999, a survey of cemetery headstones found approximately 600 marked graves though caretakers were aware of about 1000 who were buried there. Volunteers recovered the names and dates of burials. Volunteers used Pinellas County ground-penetrating radar equipment to find 200 unmarked graves, and cadaver-sniffing dogs found another 20 unmarked graves. The newly found graves were given stainless steel markers. Polaris Surveying made a map documenting all the grave locations so that no new graves will be dug at existing grave sites. In addition, gravestones were donated by a local company to replace some of the temporary markers.

According to local sources, burial practices started changing around the turn of the 21st century. Previously to that time, few African Americans were taken to local white-owned funeral homes, such as Vinson or Dobies. Instead they were received by black funeral businesses in central Pinellas county. At the same time, Tarpon Springs's city cemetery, Cycadia, saw more

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36 Although segregation officially ended in the 1960s, lay community historian Annie Dabbs and African American funeral director Robert Young believe that very few African American burials in nearby Cycadia Cemetery took place before about 2000 (Dabbs 2016, Young 2016).
37 Danielson 2002.
38 Young 2016, Emerson 2016.
African American burials. In 2003, Rose Hill Cemetery was recognized by the State of Florida as a Historical Heritage Landmark and later obtained an historical marker.

SIGNIFICANCE

Historical Significance

In terms of local historical significance within Pinellas County, African American cemeteries established along the Pinellas peninsula prior to the end of segregation offer a sad tale of neglect and malicious destruction. The original Jim Crow cemeteries serving the populations of St. Petersburg and Clearwater no longer exist. Replacement cemeteries, such as Lincoln, continue to suffer in 2016. By comparison, Rose Cemetery in Tarpon Springs remains viable and in better condition than its peers. Gravesites have suffered less disruption or destruction. Similar to an old home or building on its original site that needs tender loving care, Rose Cemetery occupies the same land, has not moved or disappeared, and continues to have strong support by families with loved ones buried there. Among municipal cemeteries created for African Americans in Pinellas County, it is the best example of an intact cemetery and worthy of inclusion on the National Register for the cultural heritage it preserves and maintains by its very existence. In addition, Rose Hill Cemetery has an unusually long period of significance (1904-2000) because interviews with community members and an African American funeral home director indicate very few African American burials in the municipal cemetery until approximately 2000. This reflects an extended period of social, though not legal, segregation.

Historical Significance: Local History through Markers

Significant burials in Rose Hill Cemetery include founders of the local African American churches first established in the 1880s and 1890s, veterans from the Civil War to Desert Storm, and various men and women important in community history. Among these are the following:

- One of the most interesting graves is that of Richard "Christopher Columbus" Quarles (1833-1925) (Photo 31), a former slave born on a South Carolina plantation. Quarles served in the 7th Regiment of South Carolina's K Company during the Civil War with his master's son and fought several battles against the Union Army. After the war, he changed his name to Christopher Columbus to obscure his Confederate service, and moved Tarpon Springs around 1910 with his second wife and child. Quarles became a respected businessman who owned a horse and carriage service and chicken farm, and reported on African American community events for the local paper. He received a Confederate pension from the State of Florida beginning in 1916, and attended a National Convention of the United Confederate Veterans in Washington DC, probably in 1917. Quarles's original headstone disappeared, but in 2003, the Sons of Confederate Veterans and Daughters of the Confederacy honored him. At a ceremony attended by four generations of his descendants and the Confederate Honor Guard, they installed a new headstone marked by a beveled top edge and the Confederate seal.

- Rev. George Washington Archie II (Photo 50) was the minister of Mt. Moriah A.M.E Church. He had attended Howard Academy, which had an architectural curriculum, so planned the new church that was built in 1896 on the corner of Pine and Eagle (Pinellas).

- In addition to being among the original members of the Rose Hill Association, Mahalia B. Jones (1856-1924) (Photo 19) was a respected midwife and charter member of Mr.

38 Schnur 2016.
40 A major source for information about the deceased is Rooks and Mountain 2003.
Mariah A.M.E. Church. Affectionately known as “Aunt Hay,” she and husband Handy Jones came to Tarpon Springs from Cedar Key. Jones was also considered an excellent cook, seamstress, and laundress. The marker is upright granite engraved with her name, birth and death dates, and roses. A ceramic portrait of Jones is above her name.

- Originally from Nassau, Bahamas, Wilfred Brooks (d. 1960) and his wife Mary came to Tarpon Springs after the massive Okeechobee hurricane hit south Florida in 1928, killing three of their children. Brooks captained his own hook boat, the Doris B, worked as a sponge hooker, and made and repaired sails. On the concrete marker, directly behind that of Wilbur Brooks, his name and death date were inscribed by hand (Photo 39).
- The granite marker for Wilbur Brooks (1898-1958) (Photo 37) is engraved with an unusual underwater scene of a diver with fish and sea plants. The marker states that Brooks was the father of one of the founding families of Tarpon Springs, the first African American to own his own boat, and an African American pioneer sponge diver.
- The grandson of a sponger, Edward Dorsett (1913-1999) (Photo 51) worked as a sponger and stringer during his youth. He opened Dorsett Barber Shop at Lincoln Ave. and Harrison St. in the 1940s. Dorsett was instrumental in encouraging the City to establish recreational programs and spaces for the black community prior to desegregation. In the 1960s he worked for civil rights through efforts to desegregate Tarpon Springs High School. In 1984, the City of Tarpon Springs honored him for outstanding community leadership by dedicating Ed Dorsett Park on Harrison Street.
- Samuel C. Archie, Sr. (1914-2009) (Photo 50) was an auxiliary deputy sheriff and owned a small store and rental properties, but he is best known for his community service. When the Boys Clubs refused to open a branch in his predominantly African American neighborhood, he started the Better Boys’ Club to promote good values and citizenship in young men. When he recognized inequalities such as unpaved streets and inadequate facilities, he sued the city for withheld services in African American neighborhoods. His son, David, became the first African American mayor of Tarpon Springs and the first African American mayor in Pinellas County.
- Ruth Lambright (1913-1996) (Photo 52) was educated at Union Academy, Edward Waters College in Jacksonville, Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, and did graduate work at Columbia University in New York. She began work as a teacher at Union Academy in 1937, where she became assistant principal, but retired from Sunset Hills Elementary School after segregation ended. Lambright also wrote a column for the Tarpon Springs Leader for many years.
- Johnnie Mae Woods (1914-2003) (Photo 53) was a dedicated educator who established the first day care center serving Tarpon Springs’s African American community as well as one of only two private preschools.

Cultural Significance

Tarpon Springs’ Rose Hill Cemetery reflects many southern historical and cultural burial practices. For instance, some family plots are scraped with a rake to clear grass (Photo 12). Common in the American South, this practice can be traced back to West Africa. Another southern custom of African origin is the decoration of graves with conch shells. In Rose Cemetery, the few graves with conch shells belong to families with Bahamian roots (Photos 11, 29, 44). The east-west alignment of graves reflects the Christian belief that the dead must face east when they rise on Judgment Day (all but 2 of the submitted photos have this orientation). Gravesites also consistently place the husband to the right—again following Christian tradition.
(Photos 25, 47). The tradition of planting evergreens or other plants near graves is a common cultural symbol of resurrection (Photos 45-48).

Among the nomination team, Dr. Tina Bucuvalas/Curator of Art and Historical Resources, City of Tarpon Springs, conducted ethnographic research in the community to determine the current integrity of Rose Hill Cemetery’s cultural heritage. Christopher Moore, Principal Planner with Pinellas County Planning Department, and historian/archivist Dr. James Schnur with the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, conducted historical research and oral history interviews. Alan Shellhorn, Dept. GIS Applications Specialist/Pinellas County Planning Department, prepared the maps. The team’s research, as well as that of scholars who conducted past surveys, verifies the tenacity of African American culture in Tarpon Springs, and validates the status of the Rose Hill Cemetery as an important historical and cultural property.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography


_________. “Uncovering the History of African American Cemeteries of Pinellas County: The Importance of Designating Rose Cemetery as a Cultural Heritage Site.” Manuscript. 2016.


10. Geographical Data

Additional References

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

1. Longitude: -82.73038 Latitude: 28.149009
2. Longitude: -82.734112 Latitude: 28.149002
3. Longitude: -82.734112 Latitude: 28.149059
4. Longitude: -82.734050 Latitude: 28.148139
5. Longitude: -82.734058 Latitude: 28.148139

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Rose Hill Cemetery is bounded by:
South: fence between the Cemetery and the City of Tarpon Springs' East Tarpon Springs Recreation Complex;
East: fence between the Cemetery and the City of Tarpon Springs' East Tarpon Springs Recreation Complex;
North: East Cypress Street
West: Jasmine Avenue
The specific boundaries of the district are shown as a dashed line on the map accompanying this National Register nomination.

**Boundary Justification**

Boundaries were defined by the Pinellas County Property Appraiser.

**Legal Description**

According to the Pinellas County Property Appraiser, the legal description of the property is:
Tarpon Springs Official Map Blk 121, Lots 1 and 2 and W 1/2 Of Vac Camelia Ave Lying E & Ne'ly of Sd Lot 1 (See S07-27-16).^41

^41 See [www.pcpao.org](http://www.pcpao.org) under Rose Cemetery Assoc., Inc., Tarpon Springs, FL 34689.