GOSPEL PILGRIM'S PROGRESS:

REHABILITATING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERY

FOR THE PUBLIC

by

EMMELINE E. E. MORRIS

(Under the Direction of Ron Sawhill)

ABSTRACT

Historic cemeteries are ethnographic landscapes containing vital information for linking individuals to their heritage and culture. African American cemeteries are characteristically unique from their initial establishment to the material culture that survives. These cemeteries are endangered cultural resources; their survival is contingent upon resolving a complex set of issues. Reconnecting African American cemeteries with the public is explored as a means of preservation. Specific issues and opportunities associated with African American cemeteries are identified and addressed in this process. A detailed study of The Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, yields recommendations for rehabilitating a cemetery as a public space.

INDEX WORDS: Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, African American Cemeteries, Colored Cemeteries, Anglo American Cemeteries, Historic Cemeteries, Athens-Clarke County, Cultural Resources, Ethnographic Landscapes, Cemetery Preservation, Heritage Sites.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the more than 5,000 souls of those buried

in Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery and to their homecoming.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Cemeteries are good places to accumulate information that can provide insight into a community's social and economic structure, its religious tenets, and its ethnic composition.
—D. Gregory Jeane, Cultural/Historical Geographer

Inspiration for Study

As with many people who spent their formative years visiting historic sites on family vacations, cemeteries have been an integral part of my experience of "place." Consequently, I have long been intrigued by the mystery and complexity evoked by the cemetery landscape. My first memory of such an experience was crafted at age three when I visited a small family cemetery on Jekyll Island off the coast of Georgia. The plot consisted of two mausoleums surrounded by a wrought iron fence, a squeaky gate of similar craftsmanship, and several live oak trees draped in Spanish moss. At the time, even to my young mind (or at least in my memory), this seemed to be the quintessential cemetery setting. I also recall the formal layout of the small plot, the stature of the mausoleums, and prominent display of the family name. These details in concert held a slight air of pretension that I read as a commemoration to an affluent or important family. My parents can still recount the stories I composed on site about those buried in the plot and the two imaginary children I befriended there. This experience is still vivid: one, because of the profound experience of "place"; two, because it has been documented through

oral family history; and three, because of the monuments that provided clues about the people buried there.

Visiting cemeteries continued to be a part of childhood travels to the Georgia coast and family plots in the mountains of Northeast Georgia. They provided me with an early understanding of the cultural differences between these places and an appreciation for these unique landscapes. Cemeteries still find their way into the itinerary of my travels around the United States and abroad, whether consciously or not, as they provide a dimension to understanding the local culture that cannot otherwise be attained. From the consummate "rural" cemetery landscape of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to the iconic gravemarkers of the Whirling Dervish cemetery in Istanbul, Turkey, the experience of cemeteries in various cultures has provided dramatic dimension to the understanding of "place."

Anglo American cemeteries and the occasional Native American burial ground were typical childhood field trips. It was not until I reached early adulthood that I was exposed to an African American cemetery. In my early work experience in Historic Preservation, the opportunity came through my involvement in a Cultural Resource Survey of Colleton County for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. The survey was conducted over a period of three consecutive spring seasons from 1993 to 1995. In the course of documenting over 1,500 historic resources in the county (including a number of rice plantations), I encountered several burial grounds of African American slaves. I will never forget the awe and sorrow that overcame me when I stumbled upon a wooden gravemarker in the dim light of that densely vegetated area. Slowly, my eyes began to make out silhouettes of marker after marker emerging from the darkness of the forest enveloping these otherwise undefined plots. While somewhat knowledgeable about the county's rice culture, the number of slaves that had toiled the land, and

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the African American culture that remained in the area, I felt the research incomplete without considering the burial rituals of these people. Amid the markers, I was emotionally pained by their namelessness and the unknown account of just how many people were buried at that location. The experience provided a deeper appreciation of the area and the culture that reached beyond my research.

Experience working in Chicago, Illinois, for Harry Weese Associates, Architects and Joe Karr Associates, Landscape Architects, provided the opportunity to work in both urban and rural landscapes. Involvement in cemetery projects such as Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC, Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Joliet, Illinois, and smaller municipal cemeteries, oriented me to the funerary landscape. While working with The Jaeger Company, I have managed a variety of cultural landscape projects involving sites such as Civil War battlefields, antebellum plantations, and African American historic sites. These sites include: the Florence Stockade in Florence, South Carolina, the Sallie Ellis Davis House in Milledgeville, Georgia, and Beulah Rucker Oliver Education Center in my hometown of Gainesville, Georgia. This experience provides the frame of reference from which I approach this thesis.

Recently in my professional experience working with The Jaeger Company in the field of landscape architecture, I have had the opportunity to be involved with a cemetery rehabilitation project for the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, an African American burial ground in Athens, Georgia. Public embrace of this project and interest in the local African American culture led me to the topic of African American cemeteries and the benefits of reconnecting these often abandoned sites with the community. The success of the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery rehabilitation efforts to date makes this site a good model for other African American cemeteries in need of rehabilitation.

Having experience in the public sector in historic landscape projects as well as new designs, I find it interesting how our society goes to great length to preserve certain historic sites and great expense to "create" others. Why not go after projects that are already a part of our spirit with inherent sociological implications? Millions are spent building museums to create a learning environment, yet we walk past cemeteries every day without a thought to the heritage, social equity, and resources within. African American cemeteries provide a rare opportunity to impact a significant area of landscape architecture that is relatively untouched.

Research for this thesis discovered limited documentation on historic African American burial traditions. Those available resources contain fairly similar accounts of graveyard findings and folklore. Though documentation is limited, it is interesting how many traditions of African American burials have survived homogenization of time and merging of cultures in the United States. When researching African American Cemeteries as case studies, it is alarming how few have actually undergone restoration or documentation. Accounts of African American cemeteries sold for development appear to outnumber those on the endangered lists or slated for restoration. A great amount of African American history and culture in the United States is untraceable for except what survives in these cemeteries.

Cemeteries are places of meaning. On the surface they are static, simple and orderly. Underneath they offer some of the most complex and dynamic landscapes one can experience. A single headstone marks the life and death of one person and may provide clues as to their social status or how they lived. Collectively, a cemetery can represent an entire culture over several generations. Layers of history and personal beliefs are represented in the layout, grave markings, and care of the landscape.

Providing links to the past, cemeteries are museums capturing attitudes and politics of the period and how they change over time. Art, symbolism, burial customs, gravemarker traditions, vegetation selection, and even what appears to be "trash" found on grave sites provide clues to the cultural patterns that existed in a given place. Some grave marking traditions are more vernacular or representative of the place, utilizing regional materials, artisans, craftsmanship and cultural trends. Other traditions can be traced from the coastal South to the mountains and Piedmont northward to New England.

Purpose of Study

This study strives to: 1) establish the value of saving African American cemeteries by raising public awareness of the unique characteristics and issues surrounding their survival in the landscape; and 2) provide a detailed study of the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in Athens, Georgia, as an example of an African American cemetery rehabilitation project. A value assessment of these cemeteries is made through: 1) contextual study of cemeteries in the United States; 2) understanding the cultural traditions of African American cemeteries; and 3) identifying the need for further documentation and study of African American cemeteries. Recommendations for cemetery rehabilitation are provided based on the opportunities and constraints identified in the case studies explored in this thesis.

Thesis Organization

Chapter two takes a brief look at the history of Anglo American burial grounds in the United States from the 1700's to the present. It provides an overview of gravemarkers and burial traditions and how they reflect culture in a given time period. Chapter three focuses on lesser

known history and traditions of African American burial grounds and the unique conditions and issues that surround their survival in the landscape. Chapter four explores issues and opportunities in rehabilitating African American burial grounds using case studies as support examples. In chapter five this thesis will provide a more in-depth study of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in Athens, Georgia, as it begins the process of rehabilitation for public use. A plan and specific recommendations for the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery Rehabilitation project are provided in chapter six. The discussion and results of this detailed study are presented in chapter seven, providing useful direction for reconnecting other African American cemeteries with the public.

CHAPTER 2

ANGLO AMERICAN CEMETERY EVOLUTION

> *The cemetery is one place where America has tried to present and celebrate its history.*
>
> —Kenneth T. Jackson, *Silent Cities: The Evolution of the American Cemetery*

Much can be learned about the cultural history of America by taking a stroll through a cemetery. The diverse cemetery typologies that have evolved over the past three centuries reveal attitudes toward life and death through the material expression that remains. Settlement patterns can be traced through the location of historic cemeteries. Many trends in gravemarker motifs and mortuary traditions are indicators of a specific spiritual movement that can be traced throughout America while other gravemarker traditions display a regional vernacular. Even the terms used for this type of landscape have evolved, from "graveyard" to "burial ground" to "cemetery" and "memorial garden", reflecting cultural attitudes of the time period. (Jackson 1989)

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Eighteenth Century Graveyards

Settlement in early America was a time of discovery, expansion and hardship. Untimely death was common as harsh living conditions and illness prevailed. Children in particular fell prey to malnutrition and disease, adding another dimension to the melancholy of the times. Burials typically took place in close proximity to the location of the death in isolated areas; in a family plot in rural areas; or in the local churchyard in more populated settlements. Burial plots

were typically cared for by family members of the deceased or abandoned entirely in isolated or rural areas. (Sloane 1991)

Some of the earliest documented graves of White settlers are those of the pioneers in the 1600s and 1700s (Sloane 1991). Gravemarkers were typically made of wood or stone with a simple name and/or date carved into the surface. Many graves were completely devoid of markers. As settlement occurred and homesteads were established, domestic burial grounds were created on the family property of the deceased. These plots were often located on a high point of the property or border of a farm field, beyond the domesticated area of the homestead. The site was typically shaded by tree cover, functional in nature, and sometimes featured a geometric surround of stone walls. Markers were randomly placed and typically crafted of found pieces of wood, stone or slate. Occasionally, markers featured iconic symbols. (Forbes 1967)

New England settlers typically followed Puritan traditions of burial in churchyards or "graveyards." Unsanitary conditions existed as archaic burial methods were practiced in close proximity to the church which often brought on illness to the living. The neglected character of New England graveyards was later reflected in the "grim symbolism in the period's movements" (Forbes 113, 1967). The dead were feared as a threat to the living and thought to be a cause for many diseases as dead bodies were unprotected and often relocated as towns grew. Figure 2.1 shows a more detailed headstone with a carved skull and cross bones motif, emphasizing the "inevitability of death and briefness of life", (Bruce 1964, 113-114).

The condition of burial grounds in the South was worse than in New England. The decentralization of the population had, except in the few more settled areas, led to the general replacement of community burial grounds by individual family plots on private land. Many such family plots did not survive a change in land ownership. Consequently, cemeteries established in

the Southern tradition of family graveyards located in more remote locations are harder to trace than in other regions where churchyards were more prevalent. When affordable, gravestones were usually thin upright tables of slate, soapstone, or sandstone. Some were simple with just the name and date.

Later in the century, attitudes towards life and death began to change, "The Great Awakening, a religious revival that swept the country between 1726 and 1756, emphasized a joyful resurrection for those who repented", (McGahee 2002, 5). Carvings of a winged angel representing the awakening became more common as a marker motif (Figure 2.2). Commercial marker options coexisted with stonework by local craftsmen of the region, with the more sophisticated carvings of this period coming from New England. Architectural ornamentation is also seen in this period such as urns, festoons and floral motifs (McGahee 6). Early eighteenth century colonial settlements in the mid-Atlantic region used heraldic symbolism such as the Coat of Arms, a tradition brought from Great Britain (Little 1998, 23). Folk motifs such as the heart, tree-of-life, sun burst, compass star and tulip were used in German traditions (Little 23).

Nineteenth Century Cemeteries

As space became an issue by the beginning of the nineteenth century, reform was needed from early burial customs. The graveyards of the early colonial period were replaced by municipal cemeteries. Overcrowding led to public health problems such as the Yellow Fever epidemic, and populated areas such as New York City began the closing of city cemeteries in the early 1820s (French 1974, 42). Cemetery establishment beyond city limits became the solution to the inner city issue of where to place the deceased.

In 1825, Dr. Jacob Bigelow established a cemetery outside the City of Boston. This cemetery became known as Mount Auburn and served as the model for what was known as "the rural cemetery movement" (French 1974, 43). What began as necessity revolutionized the entire way of thinking about cemeteries. The movement was characterized by the scenic and natural beauty of the landscape. Cemeteries became more park-like and sought after as a destination for relaxation and reflection to be enjoyed by the living. The siting of Mount Auburn Cemetery in the rolling hills outside of Boston was a "romantic notion" of the cemetery landscape. This location provided an "escape" from the populated urban areas and was particularly conducive to the setting that fueled its popularity (Figure 2.3).

Dr. Bigelow joined forces with the Massachusetts Horticulture Society and retained a staff including a site supervisor, a gatekeeper, and a gardener. The non-profit organization was open to anyone who paid for a lot. Payment was then reinvested in the maintenance and improvements to the cemetery (French 1974, 45). "The appeal of Mount Auburn Cemetery to the lower class was successful" (French 45) as plots were purchased by many "farmers, mechanics and small businessmen who paid in labor or articles used in the improvement of the place", (Dearborn 1831). Regulations were also imposed such as visitation hours between sunrise and sunset, speed limitation for carriages no faster than walking pace, no flowers could be picked and "decorous behavior would be enforced at all times", (Dearborn 1831).

The Mount Auburn Cemetery site and rural cemetery movement put death into a new perspective. The natural setting represented the circle of creation and the goodness of God. "A new awareness of history provided by the artistic memorial of a rural cemetery would reinvigorate the sense of patriotism", (French 1974, 48). This was expressed in the gravestone

and monument trends that evolved as more sculptural and architectural in style such as Greek revival urns and the use of ancient Egyptian burial architecture (Figure 2.4).

The idea of property ownership was embodied by this movement as well, as the practice of fencing individual family plots in iron railing became popular. This trend was opposed by many, as the demarcation of individual plots began to detract from the open rolling landscape that became associated with the rural cemetery movement. In the 1850s, curbstones began to replace the iron railings which were the precursor to "lawn cemeteries" popularized in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The rural cemetery movement dominated as the "type" of cemetery, spreading throughout major cities and towns and influencing a later cemetery type known as the Garden Cemetery. The success of the rural cemetery movement as a picturesque landscape is considered to be the impetus for the establishment of municipal parks and gardens in the United States (French 1974).

"The most important purpose of this type of cemetery [rural cemetery] was its intended function as a cultural institution." (French 1974, 57) The rural cemetery movement inspired works of art such as sculpture and "mourning pictures." These paintings were popular in American folk art during the early nineteenth century, depicting mourners draped over monuments amid a picturesque landscape. Mourning designs appear in many nineteenth century decorative arts, including needlework. Embroidered landscapes often depicted relatives or friends grieving before a monument dedicated to a lost loved one. This artwork captured the new attitudes towards death and the cemetery as a rustic setting.

Twentieth Century Memorial Parks

> *The contemporary isolation of the cemetery is a post World War II*
> *phenomenon that reflects a diminishing sense of mortality as an*
> *organizing principle in the United States.* (Jackson and Vegara
> 1989, 118)

Memorial parks became the dominant type of funerary landscape after World War II

when America lost interest in both cemeteries and monuments. These parks were more

convenient to modern lifestyles largely due to the all inclusive funerary experience of funeral,

interment or cremation, and site upkeep and maintenance (Jackson and Vegara 1989, 29). The

theme of this movement was more heroic and uplifting in nature, "earthly good cheer in the face

of death", (Jackson and Vegara 31). These cemeteries served all faiths as ethnic and religious

communities became more fragmented.

The characteristics of Memorial Park cemeteries that have survived in the cemetery

landscape today include: an expanse of open lawn, small planters with flowers, flat headstones or

vertical statues used as ornamentation rather than grave marking (Figure 2.5). Some of the more

elite cemeteries feature expensive statuary, relief, busts, or monuments. The more ordinary urban

cemeteries (Figure 2.6) of the middle and working class families exhibit a "loss of personal

touch" as a whole (Jackson and Vegara 1989, 33).

Burial attitudes changed as planning and development of cities changed. The value of

land began to rise in the 1920s and urban cemeteries typically occupied "the most valuable real

estate in the city" (Jackson and Vegara 1989, 106), which was sought after by developers. In

some cases cemeteries were removed from the city and moved to the hinterlands. Some burial

sites, particularly those of minority groups, were overlooked altogether and developed on top of

rather than relocated. Land designation for future burials and cemetery space was overlooked

entirely in some of the most "well-planned" cities in the country. Urban cemeteries, particularly those lacking scenic quality or those becoming derelict due to lack of maintenance, began to be viewed by desensitized eyes as an unsightly waste of space that could better serve the public through development.

Visitation of cemetery spaces by family and the public in general became more limited, often attended only for the burial and funerary services. Mourning is no longer as vital to the process. More attention was placed on the burial sites of the rich and famous than of picturesque landscapes and monument styles. The American Cemetery Association was formed marking "cemeteries as a business" (Figure 2.7). Perpetual care programs replaced community workdays and thus changes were brought on by maintenance, such as the removal of coping, fencing, and upright monuments so that lawn was contiguous for mowing.

The cemeteries that evolved in rural areas of the South during the twentieth century, particularly after World War II, brought about memorial traditions such as Decoration Day. This cult of piety was an old fashioned cemetery workday that later became more formal as a day of honoring ancestral heritage, monument unveilings, and grave decoration. Fraternal orders were formed around such occasions such as the Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society, which was primarily prevalent in the South. "Part of the membership creed supported the concept of a right to the dignity of a marked grave." (Meyer 1989, 118). A monument style evolved out of this order as pre-cast concrete markers featuring "wood" in various forms symbolized the Woodmen of the World Society (Figure 2.8).

Today, strict laws exist surrounding the disinterment of bodies and movement of cemeteries. These propositions require complex legal agreements that are not easily negotiated and carry a heavy expense. As land becomes more valuable, "space saving" burial trends are on

the rise such as cremation and family mausoleum burial. In some communities there is a renewed interest in community green space or passive recreational space as a desirable amenity. In these cases, cemetery land is being viewed as valuable "scenic land" in need of conservation rather than opportunity for development.

Summary

Cemeteries are a reflection of culture and attitudes towards death. The way of thinking about the cemetery landscape has evolved from unattractive necessity (New England) to sought-after places of enjoyment in the rural cemetery movement and back to unattractive necessity of the urban cemetery. Later it became less about community and more about service. Grim symbolism and fear of death gave way to patriotism and artistry. Historically, these "items of necessity" escaped landscape architectural practices and town planning as population growth and upkeep became perpetual issues. Graveyards have experienced a cycle of neglect due to shifting cultural values placed on their care. Cemeteries once served as museum, historical society, botanical garden and park space for a community. In recent history, less value is placed on the cemetery as a cultural space and more value on the space it occupies.

Where do African American cemeteries fit into the funerary landscape of the United States? While Anglo American cemetery evolution can be traced through centuries tied to the culture of a period, African American cemeteries cannot be described in the same manner. This is due to the circumstances surrounding the establishment of these cemeteries along with a timeless quality they have maintained through strong tradition.

Figure 2.1: Grim symbolism carved into slate gravemarker in the early 1700s. Reprinted from Kenneth T. Jackson and Camilos Jose Vegara. *Silent Cities: the Evolution of the American Cemetery* (New York, New York, 1989).

Figure 2.2: "The Great Awakening" featured a winged angel as a motif. Reprinted from Kenneth T. Jackson and Camilos Jose Vegara. *Silent Cities: the Evolution of the American Cemetery* (New York, New York, 1989).

Figure 2.3: Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Photo courtesy of The Massachusettes Historical Commission

Figure 2.4: Example of architectural gravemarkers in the Egyptian Revival style. Reprinted from Kenneth T. Jackson and Camilos Jose Vegara. *Silent Cities: the Evolution of the American Cemetery* (New York, New York, 1989).

Figure 2.5: Typical layout of a Memorial Park cemetery. Reprinted from Kenneth T. Jackson and Camilos Jose Vegara. *Silent Cities: the Evolution of the American Cemetery* (New York, New York, 1989).

Figure 2.6: Typical monument placement in a Memorial Park cemetery. Reprinted from Kenneth T. Jackson and Camilos Jose Vegara. *Silent Cities: the Evolution of the American Cemetery* (New York, New York, 1989).

Figure 2.7: Cemetery billboard representing "cemetery as a business." Reprinted from Kenneth T. Jackson and Camilos Jose Vegara. *Silent Cities: the Evolution of the American Cemetery* (New York, New York, 1989).
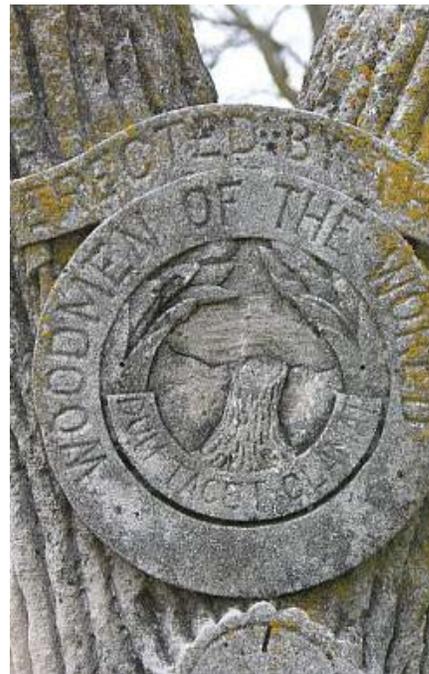
Figure 2.8: Woodmen of the World Life Insurance pre-cast concrete grave-marker. *Photo by Keith Stokes, 2005.*

CHAPTER 3

AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES

Comparatively speaking, much less documentation exists on African American cemeteries and gravemarker traditions than for Anglo American cemeteries. Many cemetery traditions are known only by the community and that knowledge has been passed down through generations. Burial grounds are often misunderstood, as their natural appearance is mistaken for an abandoned site. Personal items that have been placed on top of graves to honor the deceased are often mistaken for common garbage. Survival of these traditions is threatened because so few cemeteries receive the care and documentation required to be preserved. We must rely on what has survived in both the landscape and through oral history to provide information about the evolution and traditions of African American cemeteries.

Location

The earliest established African American cemeteries were those of slaves, some dating back to colonial times—particularly in the northeastern United States. Death was a way of life for slaves in the antebellum South as few children survived to age sixteen. While human rights of African Americans were denied during times of slavery, the right to a proper burial was insisted on by the slave community and usually granted by the slave owner (Figure 3.1). Graveyards were typically a part of the enslaved community on Southern plantations or part of the plantation owner's family plot (Figure 3.2). After emancipation, freed slaves began to establish cemeteries

in postbellum African American neighborhoods, sometimes associated with church burial grounds and attendant congregations. Public cemeteries, primarily associated with urban communities, came about in the twentieth century and were either exclusively African American or segregated in an African American area of a larger Anglo American cemetery. "The placement of Black cemeteries relative to White cemeteries mirrored the spatial relationship of Black and White settlements, from the integration of slavery when Blacks lived among Whites, to the postbellum period when the races remained mutually dependent, to the strict segregation of the Jim Crow era", (Little 1998, 39).

Traditions

Of the many traditions introduced to the United States by the African people, mortuary customs have successfully survived the centuries. Twentieth century African American cemeteries, particularly those in urban areas, have followed a similar evolution to Anglo American cemeteries. However, in rural areas—particularly in the southeast—many burial customs and traditions remain deeply rooted in African tradition. Rural African American cemeteries provide the strongest material culture because they have been less influenced by the evolution of Anglo American cemeteries due to geographical location and a strong ethic towards maintaining tradition. The surrounding community continues to follow the mortuary customs handed down for generations.

A reflection of this strong ethic was the formation of communal burial societies as a result of the convictions by African Americans towards one's right to a proper funeral and burial. These societies, largely established as insurance companies, would sell a plot and the associated funeral rite for a monthly fee. The payment of this fee was given priority over other necessities,

regardless of economic status, further stressing the importance of society's views on a "proper burial." (Wright 1996)

Among these burial customs is the strong belief in communication with the spirit world, the return of ancestors, and that the deceased can continue to affect the living. Hence the practice of burying one's personal items along with the body is to fully put the soul "to rest" as they might return for their possessions. Traditional African graves are decorated with household objects or cherished items last used by the deceased left exposed on top of the grave itself (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). "The type and placement of grave goods with the corpse varies widely in African practice." (Jamieson pp 48-49, 1995) Grave goods often included: seashells, pitchers, jugs, lamps, candles, lights, and shiny objects such as coins and tin foil. It is also believed that these items might be needed while entering the spirit world. Inverted objects are also common and thought to symbolize the inverted nature of the spirit world. Broken objects symbolize the release of the spirit for journey into the next world. (Vlach 1978)

> …the grave, save for its rawness resembled any other marked off
> without order about the barren plot by shards of pottery and
> broken bottles and old brick and other objects insignificant to sight
> but actually of profound meaning and fatal to the touch which no
> white man could have read.

> —William Faulkner, *Go Down Moses*

Seashells were often used to cover graves and thought to symbolize the passage from Africa by sea (Figure 3.5). Another popular belief is that "seashells served as a reminder that the deceased had gone to the watery world of the ancestors and their reflective properties protected the deceased from *haints* or bad spirits" (Malcom-Woods 2004). This may have represented "an image of a river bottom, the environment in African belief under which the realm of the dead is located" (Vlach 1978). Specific placement of different types of shells were employed: "a few

large conch shells are set near the headstone or in line from the head to the foot of the grave; small oyster and clam shells can frame the vessel that had been set down over a conch shell" (Vlach 1978). What further reinforces this practice as a burial tradition is that seashells appear in many inland cemeteries (Figure 3.6). The following observations were made in an African American cemetery in Columbia, South Carolina in 1881 and later published in 1892:

> If you go through a dilapidated weed-grown graveyard which straggles in and out of the hollows on a side hill covering the high bluffs along the river, you will see some very strange examples of this mortuary custom. Nearly every grave has bordering or thrown upon it a few bleached sea-shells of a dozen different kinds, such as are found along the south Atlantic coast. Mingled with these is a most curious collection of broken crockery and glassware. On the large graves are laid broken pitchers, soap-dishes, lamp chimneys, tureens, coffee-cups, sirup jugs, all sorts of ornamental vases, cigar boxes, gun-locks, tomato cans, tea pots, bits of stucco, plaster images, pieces of carved stone-work from one of the public buildings destroyed during the war, glass lamps and tumblers in great number, and forty other kitchen articles. Chief of all of these, however, are large water pitchers ; very few graves lack them.
>
> —Ernest Ingersoll. "Decoration of Negro Graves," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 5, No. 16, Jan-Mar 1892.

Burial orientation is also thought to be steeped in African beliefs and symbolism. "The importance of being buried with the feet facing the east: to allow rising at judgment day, otherwise the person is crossways of the world." (Wright 1996, 19) "It is well known that church members are buried with their feet to the east so that they will arise on that last day facing the rising sun. Sinners are buried facing the opposite direction, the theory is that the sunlight will do them harm rather than good, as they will no doubt wish to hide their faces from an angry God." (Wright 1996, 20) Another interpretation is that east-west orientation is "a shared African concept with the cosmos, that the world is oriented following the sun." (Vlach 147, 1978)

However, some archeological studies of West African burial practices have documented that burial orientation varies greatly between groups—some corpses are buried in a "seated position" others in a "sleeping position" and east-west orientation is not always observed. (Jamieson 1995)

Gravemarkers are typically not placed in rigid rows in African American cemeteries. Placement of individual graves is more irregular, and families are loosely grouped. Enclosure is typically of an individual grave rather than a family. If family plots are demarcated, brick edging or other materials are used that can be easily moved in case more room is needed to allow for family members to continue to be buried together. The notion that "there is always room for one more person" is a uniquely African American view on burial (Wright 1996).

Slave burials took place at night because that was the only time available to them and provided the opportunity for slaves of neighboring communities to attend. "Funerals were in fact the only time slaves in eighteenth century New York were permitted to gather in groups larger than three people", (Harrington 1993, 30). This emphasizes the importance of these ceremonies as an opportunity to hold on to African culture. Torches were carried for light. A horse-drawn carriage carried the body of the deceased followed by a procession of family and friends. Negro spirituals were sung and much pageantry was displayed. The entire event would often last until dawn of the following day. These spiritual events are often referred to as "homegoing" celebrations (http:/histpres.mtsu.edu/tncivwar/aacem/going.html).

"Brudder, keep your lamp trimmin' and a-burnin',
Keep your lamp trimmin' and a-burnin',
Keep your lamp trimmin' and a-burnin',
For dis world most done.
So keep your lamp, & c.
Dis world most done."

— "Negro Spirituals" Thomas Wentworth
Higginson *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1867

Burial Grounds and Gravemarkers

The graves sites of slaves buried in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century were typically marked with fieldstone or had no marking at all. Stones that existed were not dated or inscribed to reveal dates or names of the buried (Figure 3.7). As a result, any material culture during this period is difficult to trace as it has likely disappeared. Wooden markers were also used during this time but many have not survived the elements or insect infestation. Marble markers occasionally appear in slave cemeteries or family cemeteries of slave owners, but these were typically erected by the plantation owners themselves rather than the slave community. Wood headboards and footboards made of cypress, cedar or heart pine were selected for resistance to moisture and decay and occasionally featured shapes carved in the top such as circles and diamonds (Figure 3.8). (Little 1998)

In the later 1800s, gravemarkers were typically "found" materials such as stones and wooden crosses, many of which were inscribed by hand. Often, at the time of burial, a gravemarker could not be afforded by the family of the deceased and a temporary marker was used until a headstone could be purchased. Temporary markers such as a metal plate, a stone, or an existing tree or shrub were used to mark the plot. This may account for headstones bearing the names of two or more people buried years apart (Hayden 1990). Scraped ground maintenance, meaning grass was entirely removed leaving a barren patch of hardened ground, was a ritual particularly noted in coastal African American cemeteries. An example of such an African American burial ground is Behavior Cemetery on Sapelo Island, Georgia (Cyriaque 2001). This represented a form of cleanliness thought of as a "proper" way of showing reverence to the deceased. A similar practice of "swept yards", the literal sweeping of earth that is traced back to West Africa, was common in the domestic setting during this time period in the South and

carried over into the cemetery landscape as a maintenance practice (Westmacott 2002). Neatly mounded dirt over graves marked the site while compensating for settling over time.

"Traditional African American artisans created original gravemarker designs and were less influenced by commercial norms." (Little 1998, 237) Creativity in design and use of materials was common (Figures 3.9 and 3.10). Elaborate markers were rare in Black cemeteries which is more a reflection of religious convictions than socio-economic status. However, antebellum and postbellum style markers featuring baroque and neoclassical style cut marble and granite markers did occur in more established and affluent Black communities. By the late nineteenth century, many African Americans were adopting European burial practices and using more elaborate headstones featuring Christian or Victorian symbols, though the practice of decorating with "grave goods" persisted well into the twentieth century. It is typical to see a cross section of class displayed in gravemarkers within the same cemetery (Figure 3.11). African American cemetery additions today combine the traditions of grave ornamentation with more elaborate markers (Figure 3.12). Most notable, is that African American cemeteries display a wide cross section of class in the gravemarkers that is not exhibited in Anglo American cemeteries.

Landscape

As opposed to the park-like setting of the rural cemetery movement or the rigid layout of the memorial parks so often associated with Anglo American cemeteries, the African American cemetery does not attempt to romanticize death nor create an artificial landscape. Typically overgrown with vegetation, Black cemeteries may appear to be neglected. This is often not the case at all, but is a reflection of a philosophy of death and burial. It is also difficult to surmise the

extent of burial area in the landscape due to many unmarked graves. The following observations

were made in a doctoral study published in 1946—when historic African American communities

were still vital burial grounds—of communities in Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama

and Tennessee:

> Negro cemeteries are usually the most unsightly area in the community. Of seventeen cemeteries visited, only two were in even acceptable condition. While this does not reflect directly the lack of interest and respect of the communities for the cemetery, it does show the absence of any effective effort to correct problems involved in providing for its care. Larger areas have been employed than were absolutely necessary, adding to the expanse of upkeep. Generally no thought had been given to the design and layout of the grounds, resulting in an unsightly development at its best.
>
> —H. Hamilton Williams
> "A Study of Landscaping in Negro Communities of the Southeastern States," *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Autumn 1946), pp. 628-637

Typical plant materials found in African American cemeteries in the South include yucca

(Figure 3.13), tree-of-heaven, daffodils, periwinkle, cedar trees (Figure 3.14), and clusters of

perennials. Some plant material is used for symbolic reasons while others are purely aesthetic.

For example, yucca and other prickly plants may have been used to keep the spirits in the

cemetery; evergreen trees such as pine and some species of oak symbolized eternity; and the

weeping willow represented grief (Farber).

Summary

The creativity and symbolism found in the African American burial traditions reinforces

the identity of the African culture and its transportation to the United States. Cemeteries provide

unique insight into the strength of these traditions that is not exhibited elsewhere in African American culture. Misinterpretation and/or lack of documentation of the mortuary traditions of African American cemeteries could result in the loss of this critical dimension to the African American culture in the United States.

There is no single physical feature that defines these cemeteries as African American beyond the individuals that are buried in them. Rather, it is a collection of characteristics that can provide cultural clues about the cemetery. While there are popular beliefs surrounding grave goods, iconography and symbolism there is still more to learn about the origin of these customs. The common threads that these cemeteries typically possess have more to do with establishment. African American cemeteries were typically established in marginal areas with documented interment dates from the mid to late 1800s to the 1960s. Many graves were originally unmarked or temporary markers were used and are now defined by a single stone, specimen plant or grave depression. Vegetation is typically less manicured than Anglo American cemeteries. But, perhaps the most reliable clue is a mixture of class apparent throughout the cemetery that is visible within gravemarker design and fabrication.

Figure 3.1: Above left: "An Old-time Midnight Slave Funeral," Hamilton Pierson, 1881, p. 284. Above right: "A Negro Funeral in Virginia," *A.B. Frost, Harper's Weekly, 1880.*

Figure 3.2: Wooden markers in a rural cemetery plot. Reprinted from Ruth M. Little, *Sticks & Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers* (Chapel Hill, 1998).
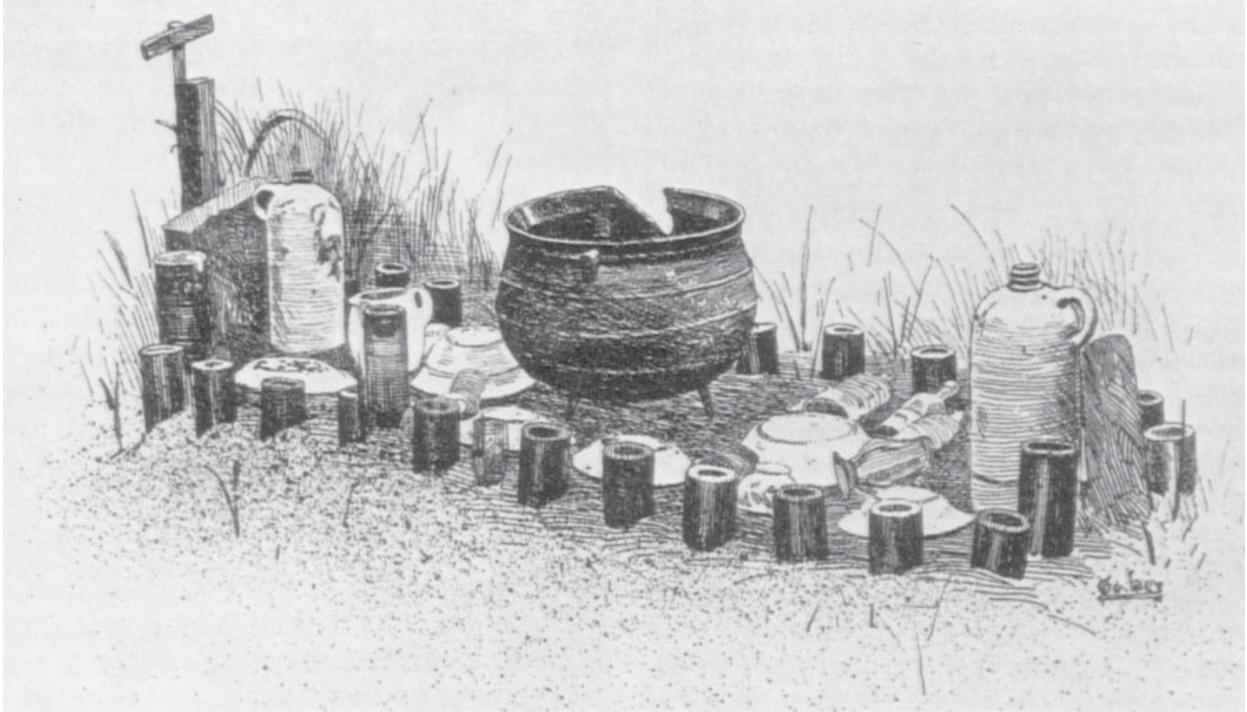
Figure 3.3: 1892 sketch of Congo Chieftain's grave. Reprinted from John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American tradition in decorative arts*, (Athens, Georgia, 1978). Original sketch from E. J. Glave "Fetishism in Congo Land." *The Century Magazine*, XLI (1891), pp. 825-836.

Figure 3.4: 1938 photograph of grave ornaments. *Photograph, collection of the Library of Congress.*

Figure 3.5: Shell-covered grave in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, 1976. Reprinted from John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American tradition in decorative arts*, (Athens, Georgia, 1978).
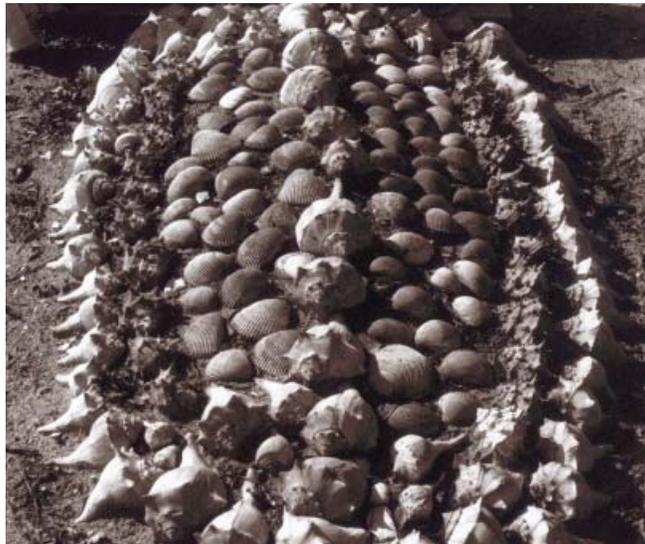
Figure 3.6: Shell covered grave. Reprinted from Ruth M. Little, *Sticks & Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers* (Chapel Hill, 1998). *Photo by Michael T. Southern, 1985. North Carolina Division of Archives and History.*

Figure 3.7: Name of deceased hand carved in stone gravemarker (Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, Athens, Georgia). *Photo by author*

Figure 3.8: Wooden headboard. Reprinted from Ruth M. Little, *Sticks & Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

Figure 3.9: Creativity in gravemarker design in Cedars Cemetery, Camden, South Carolina. *Photo by Carol Bowers Kraus*
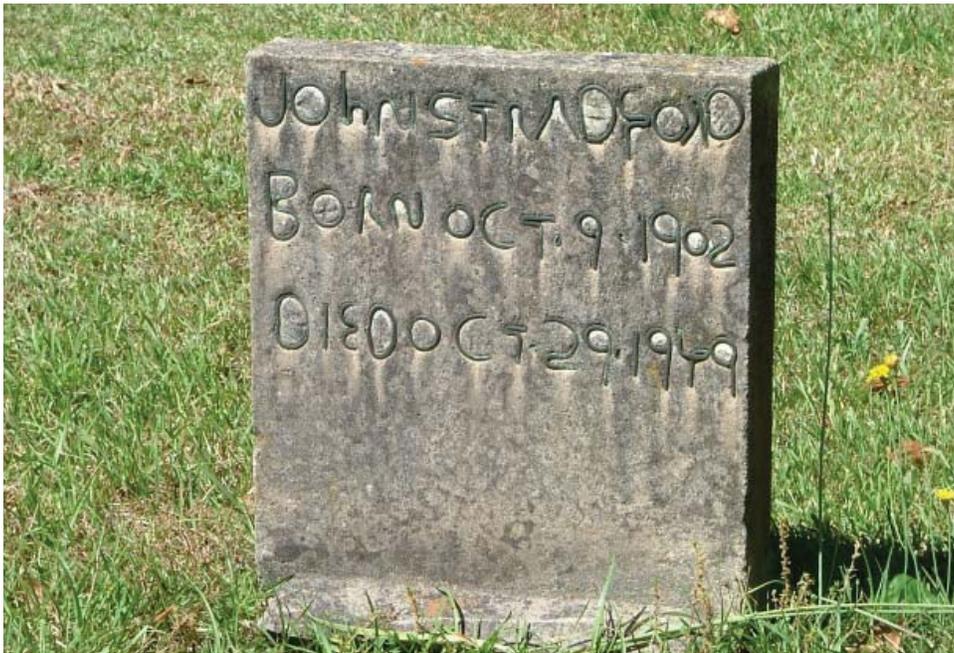
Figure 3.10: Creativity in gravemarker design in Cedars Cemetery, Camden, South Carolina. *Photo by Carol Bowers Kraus*

Figure 3.11: Variety of markers and maintenance in Cedars Cemetery, Camden, South Carolina *Photo by Carol Bowers Kraus*

Figure 3.12: Combining grave ornamentation with more elaborate markers in Cedars Cemetery, Camden, South Carolina *Photo by Carol Bowers Kraus*

Figure 3.13: Yucca plants in Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, Athens, Georgia.
Photo by author

Figure 3.14: Cedar trees in Cedars Cemetery, Camden, South Carolina.
Photo by Carol Bowers Kraus

CHAPTER 4

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN

REHABILITATING AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES

African American cemeteries are important cultural landscapes with complex issues surrounding their survival. Many sites are in decline due to vegetative overgrowth, vandalism, and impending development. The following chapter identifies issues facing these cemeteries, opportunities for rehabilitation, and the importance of raising public awareness of these sites. Several case studies are explored as cemetery examples while illuminating the common issues and opportunities that have been collectively identified. Recommendations are made for potential solutions for rehabilitating these cemeteries.

Property Ownership

Historically, African American cemeteries were established in outlying areas of plantations or marginal areas of town. Those situated in hinterlands are now threatened by residential and commercial development. Unmarked cemeteries go unrecognized in the landscape until construction is underway for development and damage has occurred. Sites often have the physical appearance of being "abandoned" and ownership not properly documented. Cemetery parcels typically contain several acres of land that may be valued by developers. Cemeteries are often mistaken as abandoned due to overgrown vegetation, however, in many cases they are still being used for burial. Consequently African American cemeteries are often

referred to as "forgotten landscapes", an indication that they are in need of immediate attention to avoid becoming "lost landscapes" (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

King's Cemetery in Charleston County, South Carolina. This cemetery provides an excellent example of a cemetery threatened by development and unprotected by law. Situated on the edge of a proposed borrow pit and possible land fill, the cemetery was at first unrecognized by Charleston County government. Only when the cemetery was recognized archaeologically and recorded as a potentially significant archaeological site was the impact of the proposed project on the graves taken into account. Although documentary history was not found, the general location of the cemetery was shown on maps and one of the three individuals identified by stones in the cemetery could be found through death certificates. This record not only identified the individual as African American, but also revealed the name of the graveyard as the "King's Cemetery." (Chicora Foundation, 1996)

Unfortunately, the views and information of the local community were never sought by the county—which missed an exceptional opportunity to involve the African American population in the decision-making process. The county declared the cemetery "abandoned," failing to recognize that the local community was well aware of its presence and still had strong ties to the property. An article in the Charleston, South Carolina Coastal Times found that a local resident, Sarah Middleton, who is nearly 100 years old, vividly remembers walking in funeral processions to King's Cemetery. Other members of the local Black community are equally aware of the cemetery and could point out its boundaries, where the fence used to stand, and even where the gates were which allowed access to the graveyard. (Chicora Foundation, 1996)

African American cemetery property is often not deeded, recorded or otherwise identified as a cemetery. Sometimes the land is deeded to an individual or organization that has no interest

in the upkeep of the site. As cemetery plots have been purchased by an individual or family, that piece of property legally belongs to them, whether living or deceased. The cemetery as a whole may be owned and operated by an organization or an individual land owner.

Some cemeteries are contained within private property that does not allow public access—including the family members of the deceased. Since most of these locations trace back to slavery and have been associated with the Black community, there often has been no feeling that any legal deed or paperwork was necessary. These cemetery sites are rarely shown on maps and almost never appear on plats from the antebellum period. In these cases, the surrounding African American community is likely the best resource for information about a local cemetery.

Ownership distinction between the private property occupied by each individual grave and areas of access by the public within the site can be unclear. In many cases no path system exists to direct visitors around the site or to prevent trespassing on private property (grave sites). Yet, the protection of private property in cemeteries is paramount, out of respect and preservation of the grave sites. A means of directing the visitor around the site should be provided to make this distinction clear whether it is the rehabilitation of an existing path system, providing a site map, or the application of a new material that does not compromise the historic integrity of the site (Figure 4.3).

Community Amenity

A natural quality inherent to the African American cemetery sites is valuable green space. While serving as a burial ground, cemeteries also provide opportunities for arboreal and land animal habitats, mature forests in urban areas, and a park-like setting (Figure 4.4). Some sites contain path systems that allow for public use of the site for passive recreation and reflection.

Vandalism and crime are sometimes negatively associated with overgrown, seemingly unoccupied parcels of land. Studies show that by cleaning up these often derelict areas and creating a regular flow of human use in and around them, crime is reduced.

Mount Olive Cemetery in Clarksville, Tennessee. This African American cemetery provides a case study of a cemetery site that is becoming a community amenity. Volunteer efforts are focused on "creating a place where the community can take a stroll and contemplate the history of the Black men and women of Clarksville." A "rebirth plan" is in place to document history, clean up graves, and propose a city park. Over 1,000 graves are located on the seven-acre cemetery site containing community history and folklore dating to the mid-1800s. A "Save Mt. Olive Cemetery Committee" was formed, which in turn hired consultants for the effort that include: historic preservationists, neighboring land owners, the City Parks Department and grant writers. While cleanup efforts are underway, the committee recognizes the fact that the process is slow and that historic property can be destroyed by moving too fast. The committee is negotiating with the city to accept a donation of the cemetery and neighboring land to establish a park. By creating a park, the committee feels that there will be better commitment from the community to keep the site clean. Additionally, the committee is looking into National Register status for the site. (Ritchart 2004)

Landscape Management

Overgrown vegetation associated with African American cemeteries is a cultural resource as well as an on-going maintenance issue. Historically, certain plants were selected for symbolic reasons and for specific uses such as grave blankets or marking the site of a grave. In Southern cemeteries, a combination of native and invasive plants were typically used. Over time, invasive

species have spread beyond the intended area for the plant (Figure 4.5). Once initial overgrowth is cleared, remaining invasive vegetation will continue to regenerate if it is not consistently maintained. Intentionally planted species containing symbolism or an association with "typical" cemetery plantings should be retained to the greatest extent possible; however, invasive species must be controlled. Removal and maintenance of these plants should be executed in a manner that does not damage private property as removal methods and herbicides can permanently damage gravemarkers and grave items.

Vegetation contributes greatly to the aesthetic of African American cemeteries and is an essential part of the historic fabric. The intended aesthetic for the landscape is to be wooded and natural as opposed to a landscape void of vegetation as seen in the modern highly manicured lawn cemetery. However, thinning of the overstory may be necessary in order to allow specimen and landmark trees to reach their full potential. Overcrowding in the forest overstory and ground layer can result in competition for resources, not allowing any one species to thrive. Historic plant material may lie dormant beneath the soil surface because it has not had adequate resources. Once sunlight is available to the plant, it may bloom once again. Converting a traditional rural African American cemetery into a lawn park cemetery by cutting down all the trees would be inappropriate and compromise the historic integrity of the site. However, judicious thinning can greatly enhance the landscape. Providing openings in the overstory can improve visual access, provide a sense of safety to visitors and an opportunity for varied groundcover growth.

Tree removal within overgrown cemeteries presents several issues. Severe damage can occur to a grave site when a tree becomes uprooted by natural or human forces. Trees that are in poor health pose a threat to both gravesites and the public, yet a tree "snag"—trunk that remains

of a dead tree—can provide habitat for arboreal species of animals and serve as an interesting element in a cemetery landscape and may be worth retaining if it does not pose a threat (Figure 4.6). If left to fall naturally, a large tree can be more damaging because there is less control in the removal process. However, large equipment employed by conventional tree services for removal can also cause damage to a large area.

Development of a landscape management plan can identify site specific solutions for the various vegetative issues that occur in an overgrown cemetery. Enlisting a team of consultants comprised of a landscape architect, an arborist, and a community forester will ensure that correct decisions are made for the existing plant material. Safety of the public, safety of the grave sites, and the value of historic plant material should be carefully considered prior to any removal. Ultimately, landscape management plans should assess the existing conditions and provide specific recommendations for long-term maintenance of the site.

South Asheville African American Cemetery in Asheville, North Carolina. This cemetery provides a good example of a cemetery that has maintained a natural park-like appearance without being overly manicured or requiring a lot of maintenance. Located at the end of Dalton Street behind the St. John A. Baptist Church (Figure 4.7), the South Asheville African American Cemetery is a two-acre tract of land located in what is known today as the Kenilworth neighborhood (Figure 4.8). The property was donated by the prominent Smith-McDowell family to their former slave and care-taker of the cemetery, George Avery. This site was the traditional burial ground for African Americans in the Asheville area from the 1800s through 1943 primarily through the Burial Association/Cemetery Board established by St. John A. Baptist Church and St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. A wide cross-section of the local Black community is buried in this cemetery including: slaves, freedmen, war heroes,

notable civic members, and generations of families. The property contains an estimate of 1500–5000 burials (Figure 4.9). (Hayden 1990)

After the death of Mr. Avery, the cemetery was cared for by the church community. Cleaning of the site was performed twice a year, in the spring and fall. Typically an announcement was made at church and families would prepare a meal to take along and spend the entire day working on the cemetery. Sometimes it would take several days, but the entire community helped. This event was a "major community activity and served to renew community ties" (Hayden 1990). The cemetery entered a period of neglect in the later part of the twentieth century. However, in recent history, various community organizations have volunteered to maintain specific sections of the cemetery (Figure 4.10).

This cemetery appears to have good public support in the form of volunteer groups for site management. The current condition of the cemetery indicates that the site is cared for but left natural and not overly manicured. Maintenance areas are designated with small wooden signs that mark the property boundary of the cemetery and credit the appropriate volunteer organization with the care of the adjacent area. Gravemarkers are legible and unthreatened by overgrown vegetation.

Site Access and Boundaries

Due to the overgrown nature of African American cemeteries, entrances and circulation patterns through the site and its borders are often obscured by layers of vegetation. A dense understory can make it physically impossible to assess the limits of the burial area and what is contained within it. Yet, removal of the vegetation can cause damage to the gravesites.

Furthermore, some burial grounds—particularly those of slaves—never featured a formal path system and graves are typically unmarked, providing an even greater challenge for assessment.

Historic aerial photography is available for most of the United States dating back to the 1920s. Aerial photographs can provide useful site information including: type of vegetation (evergreen/deciduous), topography, circulation, natural features, gravemarker patterns, structures, surrounding area context, fence lines and vegetative boundaries. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) mapping is another resource that can provide useful site information. USGS maps are created by using both aerial photography and field mapping. Sites such as cemeteries may not be captured from an aerial view, but are often discovered in the field. Whether formal cemeteries or "unknown" burial grounds, if discovered in the field they are documented and keyed on the map.

Cemeteries can be intimidating landscapes. Lack of a formal entrance and legible path system—along with a somewhat abandoned appearance—make for an uninviting site. This appearance is successful at keeping the general public out of the site. While this may be a good means of warding off potential human damage, the neglected condition of the site contributes to the deterioration of graves and markers (Figure 4.11). If the condition persists, graves are in danger of never being discovered and properly documented. Therefore, the site must undergo the process of "preservation by public awareness" as opposed to "preservation by neglect."

Once rehabilitation of the site is underway, utilizing sensitive methods of vegetative clearing, it is important to clearly establish an entrance to the site and circulation within. A variety of human disturbance will impact the site during the course of uncovering, documenting, and the rehabilitation of the cemetery. It is important that the site have an inviting appearance to the public as it raises enthusiasm toward this rehabilitation effort and the prospect of a "final

product." Designating "public areas" provides opportunities to perform the work needed and can ultimately serve as public access routes.

Paradise A. M. E. Memorial Gardens in Jefferson, Georgia. This site, locally referred to as Paradise Cemetery, is an example of a small (two acre) African American cemetery with a large presence due to its location on an open hillside above the CSX Railroad northwest of downtown Jefferson, Georgia (Figure 4.12). The cemetery entrance is on the north side of the site along Lawrenceville Street and is marked by a concrete and native stone sign—a remnant of the foundation of one of the former churches that stood on the site (Figure 4.13). The sign contains a National Register of Historic Places plaque (listed in 2002) and the name "Paradise A. M. E. Memorial Gardens." Many gravemarkers are in plain view from the three adjacent roads lining the property (Figure 4.14), particularly an obelisk marking the grave site of Harrison Hawkins (1845-1917) which occupies the southwest corner of the site near the railroad and Mahaffey Circle. A short concrete entry drive is located adjacent to the entry sign with an open field beyond, making it clear to the visitor where to enter the site and where to park. (Cyriaque 2003)

This cemetery site once one included the 1919 Paradise African AME Church, a parsonage, school, and two duplexes owned by the church. Only the cemetery remains today. "Gravemarkers are located southwest and west of the 1919 church ruins in a grid arrangement with approximately 24 square-shaped family plots with low concrete or granite enclosures. The southern portion of Paradise Cemetery is informally arranged with markers from late nineteenth and early twentieth century burials. Burials from the 1950s-1990 are located immediately behind the church site while 1880s-1949 burials are located closer to the Southern Railroad." (Cyriaque 2003)

Artifacts

Extant material culture is a cemetery's most precious resource. Gravemarkers and ornamentation provide the necessary information and insight into the history and culture of a place. Skeletal remains that lie beneath the surface have the capacity to link African Americans with their ancestral heritage through DNA research. Grave goods have stories to tell about those buried at the site as well as the culture. It is paramount that these resources be protected and uncompromised in the process of rehabilitation. Within these materials, great opportunities for research and interpretation can be found. (Figures 4.15 and 4.16)

It is common with cemeteries that have received an endowment for "fixing up" the grounds to want to begin with preserving gravemarkers. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned committees—formed to preserve the cemetery—cannot resist the immediate action of gravemarker "cleaning." By the time a consultant is involved, all vegetation and "trash" has been removed from the site with no record of what the cemetery contained prior to this removal. Gravemarkers are sandblasted or improperly reset causing irreversible damage in a matter of days that is greater than the weathering of stone over several decades.

School Street Cemetery in Washington, Georgia. This case study is a 7.7 acre cemetery located south west of downtown Washington, Georgia contains approximately 1,700 grave sites, many of which are unmarked. The artifacts that have survived in School Street cemetery have stories to tell. "A stroll through School Street Cemetery reveals a variety of important artifacts that assist in understanding African and Afro-European traditions that have survived for centuries: kinship networks, death and burial practices, material and nonmaterial culture including pottery, ceramics, crafts, superstitions and folk medicine. A few of the marked gravesites contain bits of biographical information that could prove useful for genealogical and

family history purposes" (Glass-Avery 2007). The material culture that remains in this cemetery provides important information linking local African Americans in Washington Georgia to their history and to the community. (Figure 4.17 and 4.18)

> Carolyn Barnes, a lifelong resident of the community, recalls her now deceased grandfather, a former gravedigger, walked her through School Street cemetery when she was growing up. "He would point out where certain family members were buried and this was his way of sharing our family history. I remembered that in our family babies were buried at the foot of trees. So the rock at the bottom of trees in our family plots are not just rocks. Somebody, a baby is buried there. I am not sure if this was practiced by everybody in the community. But we did it. (Glass-Avery 2007)

The practice of placing a stone at the base of a tree was also observed at the South Asheville Colored Cemetery in Asheville, North Carolina, which could indicate a cultural connection, however more information is needed to confirm similarity in practice. The study of artifacts that remain in these cemeteries has potential to reveal many cultural patterns and traditions.

Site Understanding

When involving the public, it is critical to provide site orientation and education up front. Whether enlisting a group of volunteers or providing the opportunity for a self-guided tour, understanding the site and what is contained within it must be provided with clarity. Cemetery sites in general are coherent landscapes. There is some predictability and order to the appearance of their contents. African American cemeteries can be more complex in appearance because gravemarkers are more randomly placed, not always marked, and typically do not exhibit a consistent style or size. This can be unsettling to those unaccustomed visitors.

The natural aesthetic of the cemetery site can be retained while providing a sense of order that is visually comforting to the visitor. This can be achieved by maintaining a clean edge along the path system by mowing taller vegetation or providing an edging treatment (Figure 4.19). In cases where a path system is not a part of the historic fabric, a non-intrusive route may need to be defined. This can be accomplished through a maintaining a lower mowing height to define a path in vegetated area and allowing adjacent areas a few more inches of growth; or apply a light mulch path to provide a visual clue as to the intended public route. A vegetative border or low stone wall at the site entrance and along the perimeter provides a human element that is comforting in the foreground of a densely vegetated site. Strategic ornamental plantings in groups of similar species can identify points of interest. These additions to the site can be appropriate for the purpose of bridging the historic gap for the visitor as long as they are thoughtfully planned in a way that is in keeping with the historic character of the site. Appropriateness must be assessed on a case by case basis and should involve a landscape architect and preservation planner.

When approaching the site, the visitor needs know where to enter and how to get around. This reinforces the need for a marked point of entry for the site as well as a path system. The entrance need not be elaborate, but should be sympathetic to the historic fabric of the cemetery. A low wall, post or entry gate serves to welcome and direct the visitor into the site. A simple path system can provide access only where access is intended using appropriate widths and materials. Basic directional markers can provide useful information, but should not compete with gravemarkers (Figure 4.20).

Site interpretation is an opportunity to provide an understanding of the cemetery's history and cultural traditions while re-enforcing the importance of protecting the site's cultural

resources. By engaging visitors with this information upon entering the site, they develop a better appreciation of what they are seeing and are empowered with a sense of stewardship for the site. This can be accomplished on many levels from informing the public on the rehabilitation efforts with a temporary sign (Figure 4.21) to providing history of individuals buried in the cemetery. Interpretation of "grave goods" for example, would inform the visitor of the spiritual significance of these objects that might be thought of as trash in need of removal. Drawing attention to the details and symbolism in the gravemarkers provides a level of experience that cannot be otherwise be attained in a casual stroll through the cemetery. Visitors must be told what they are viewing in order to develop an appreciation for it.

God's Little Acre in Newport, Rhode Island. This case study places importance on educating the public through interpretive signage and a supporting website. Newport is home to a historically significant burial ground known to the African American community as "God's Little Acre." This burial area on Farewell Street has been recognized as having some of the oldest, and possibly the largest, surviving collection of markers of freed slaves dating back to the late 1600s. It is also the place where we find perhaps the first artwork signed by an African American: Zingo (aka: Pompey) Stevens, a stonecutter who worked for the John Stevens Stone Shop during the late eighteenth century." (Stokes 2004)

Newport, Rhode Island, one of the most prosperous of Colonial American ports, saw unprecedented growth throughout the eighteenth century; mostly from the export and trade of rum, spermaceti candles and slaves. Many of Newport's slaves came from Guinea, and the Gold, Ivory and Cape Coasts of West Africa. Africans were also taken from Sierra Leone and Gambia. Many others were taken from West Africa to Charleston, South Carolina and the sugar plantations of the West Indies particularly Barbados, Jamaica and Antigua." (Stokes 2004)

This colonial era African American cemetery has interpreted the site's history and symbolism in their entry sign. Figure 4.22, shows the front of the sign which includes "the image of an Angel from the marker of young Solomon Nuba Tikey who died at five years of age in 1785." The iron decorative sides on the sign represent the iron chains of slavery that brought these Africans to seventeenth and eighteenth century Newport. The top of the sign is adorned with golden pineapples that have come to be the official symbol of Newport, Rhode Island, Charleston, South Carolina and Nassau, Bahamas, all leading slave ports during Colonial times." (Stokes 2004)

The rear of the sign is "adorned with the golden Star of Ghana reflecting the fact that many Newport Africans came from the Gold and Cape Coasts of West Africa and what is modern day Ghana. A West African proverb states that: "Life is a shadow and mist, it passes quickly by, and is no more." This accurately reflects the shortness of life and the importance of recognizing these Africans and their vibrant lives in Colonial Newport." (Stokes 2004) Additional cemetery history and current news is available via the World Wide Web at: www.colonialcemetery.com.

Perpetual Care Arrangement and Funding

Of the many daunting questions that arise in the process of rehabilitating African American cemeteries, the biggest and perhaps the most obvious are: Who will take care of the site once the work is done? How will the maintenance be funded? Unfortunately, there is no one solution as each site has its own complex issues including ownership, a volunteer pool, and funding sources. However, looking at successful operations as examples on how these issues are managed can provide cues on how to generate revenue for future care of the site. Ideally, an

endowment for the perpetual care of the cemetery should be established before rehabilitation begins so that efforts towards site improvements are not in vain. Endowments are not always easily obtained. Creative efforts may be required to generate revenue to reinvest in the site.

Maintaining the site and providing for some enhancement can be a benefit to generating interest and revenue. "Simply cleaning up a neglected yard can sometimes transform it from a public embarrassment into an object of civic pride." (Strangstad 1988, 43) Endowments can come from many sources, such as the families of the deceased or organizations associated with the history of the site. Community involvement is critical to the process to involve stakeholders from the beginning and throughout planning to generate support. In the effort of generating site funds, it is important to balance enhancement with revenue and not exploit the site's inherent features for the sake of financial gain. Recognize that some compromises will have to be made.

Cedars Cemetery in Camden, South Carolina. This cemetery exemplifies using creative efforts to generate funding. Cedars Cemetery (Figures 4.23 and 4.24) was established in the mid-1800s when freed slaves had no place for burial within the city as land had not been dedicated for the African American people of Camden to be buried and area churches did not have cemeteries at the time. (Beeker 2007)

As part of a clean-up effort for this site by Kershaw County Clean Community Commission, grant money was acquired to erect a 350-foot brick fence to protect the grounds (Figure 4.25). Memorial plaques to be displayed on the front columns are available for purchase to honor those buried in the cemetery and raise funds for its upkeep (Figure 4.26). The cemetery is also continuing interment on the property to generate revenue for perpetual care. Once the site has been "cleaned up" and the community knows that the site has a plan for future care, there is a greater likelihood that people will take pride in the site and want to purchase lots.

Figure 4.1: Overgrown cemetery. Reprinted from Kenneth T. Jackson and Camilos Jose Vegara. *Silent Cities: the Evolution of the American Cemetery* (New York, New York, 1989).

Figure 4.2: Uninviting appearance of an abandoned cemetery. Reprinted from Kenneth T. Jackson and Camilos Jose Vegara. *Silent Cities: the Evolution of the American Cemetery* (New York, New York, 1989).

Figure 4.3: Family plot with stone walls defining the limits of private property. (Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, Athens, Georgia) *Photo by author*

Figure 4.4: Hilltop cemetery with mature canopy provides a park-like setting. (South Asheville African American Cemetery, Asheville, North Carolina) *Photo by author*

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Figure 4.8: South Asheville African American Cemtery in South Asheville, North Carolina. *Photo by author*

Figure 4.9: An estimated 1500-5000 burials are contained in South Asheville African American Cemetery. *Photo by author*
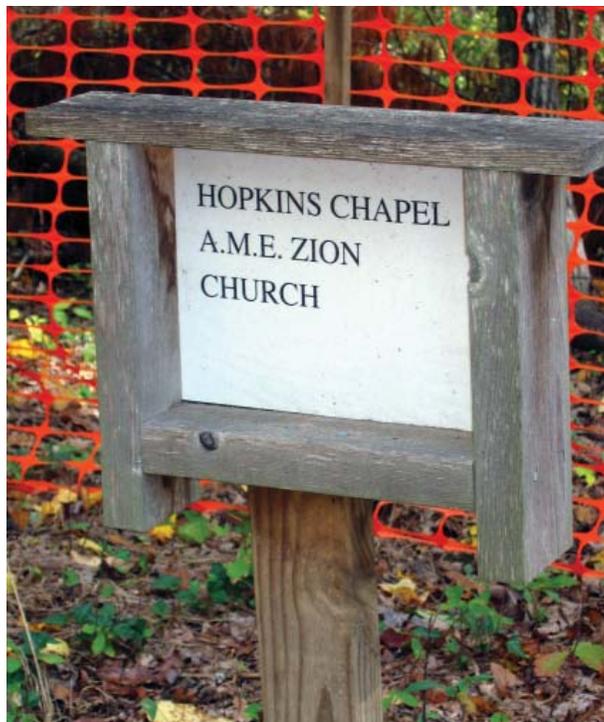
Figure 4.10: Wooden marker crediting caretakers of South Asheville African American Cemetery. *Photo by author*

Figure 4.11: Overturned gravemarker. (Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, Athens, Georgia) *Photo by author*

Figure 4.12: CSX Railroad border of Paradise A. M. E. Memorial Gardens in Jefferson, Georgia. *Photo by author*

Figure 4.13: Entry sign to Paradise A. M. E. Memorial Gardens in Jefferson, Georgia. *Photo by author*

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Figure 4.17: Variety of gravemarkers in School Street Cemetery in Washington, Georgia. *Photo courtesy of Jeanne Cyriaque*
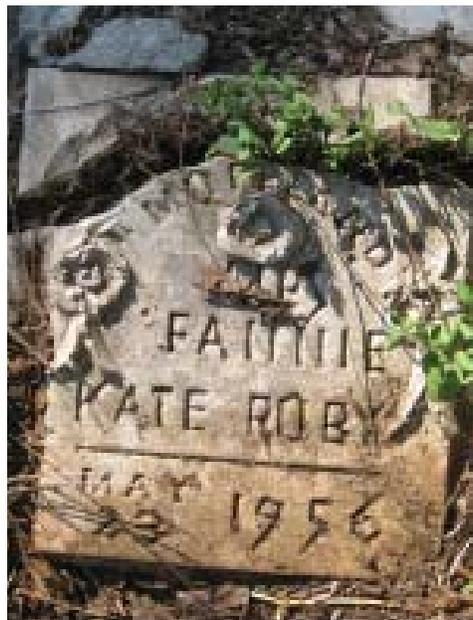
Figure 4.18: Broken of gravemarker in School Street Cemetery in Washington, Georgia. *Photo courtesy of Jeanne Cyriaque*

Figure 4.19: Edging treatment. *Photo and sketch by author*
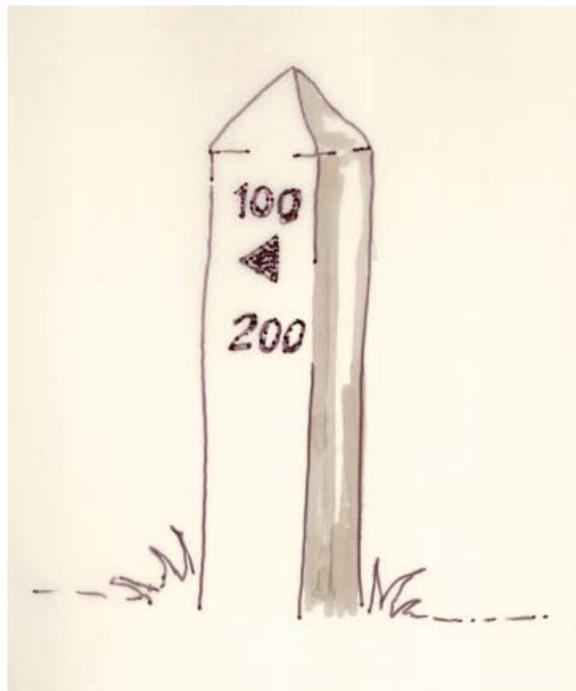
Figure 4.20: Directional marker. *Sketch by author*
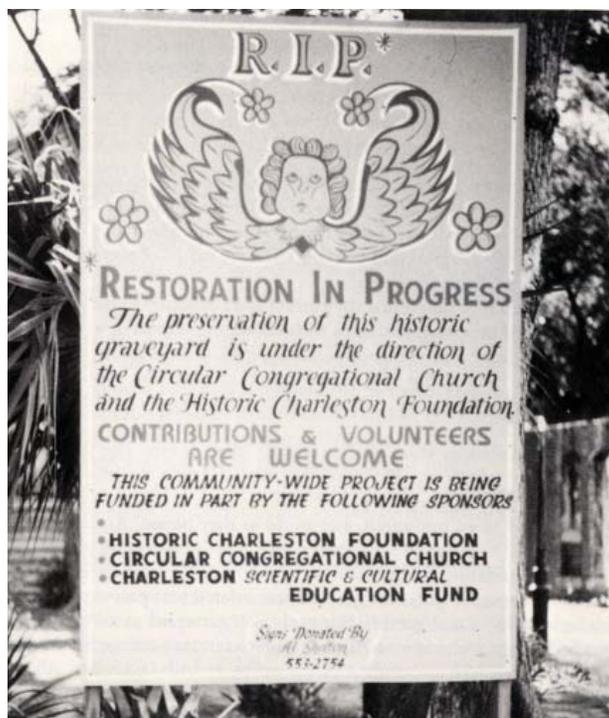
Figure 4.21: Restoration in progress sign. Reprinted from Lynette. A Strangstad, *Graveyard Preservation Primer* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1988).

Figure 4.22: Interpretive sign at God's Little Acres Cemetery in Newport, Rhode Island. *Photos by Randy Santerre, 2005.*

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Figure 4.24: Cedars Cemetery in Camden, South Carolina. *Photo by Carol Bowers Kraus*

Figure 4.25: Perimeter wall at Cedars Cemetery in Camden, South Carolina. *Photo by Carol Bowers Kraus*
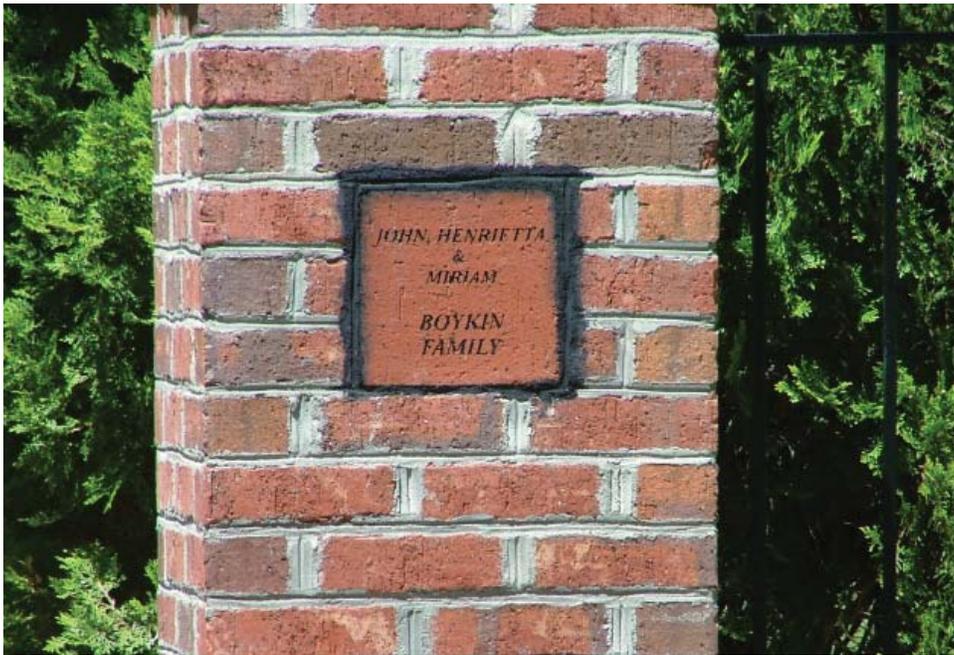
Figure 4.26: Memorial plaque in wall at Cedars Cemetery in Camden, South Carolina. *Photo by Carol Bowers Kraus*

CHAPTER 5

DETAILED STUDY: GOSPEL PILGRIM CEMETERY

The Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery is an African American burial ground in Athens-Clarke County, Georgia. The cemetery was established in 1882 by the Gospel Pilgrim Society, a Black benevolent society. This site contains significant African American history and cultural value due to the large number of intact gravemarkers and artifacts representative of the burial traditions from the cemetery's period of establishment. Additionally, there are many notable educators, doctors and artists buried at this site.

History and Evolution

Following the Emancipation Proclamation, the African American population of Athens, Georgia, settled in outlying areas of town, which were largely farmland. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, these marginal areas developed into more formal neighborhoods for the Black community. In 1865, one group, an African American community known as the "Blackfriars", settled along the east-bank of the North Oconee River along what was known as the eastern edge of downtown (Thomas 1992). This area eventually became known as "East Athens."

The Gospel Pilgrim Society acquired a nine-acre piece of land along Fourth Street in East Athens with the intention of creating a burial ground (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). The property was acquired through three separate warranty deeds, beginning with the largest section, 8.25 acres,

which was acquired on July 25, 1882, from Elizabeth A. Talmadge and was a portion of the estate of William P. Talmadge. The Society also received a contiguous plot of three-quarters of an acre from George P. Brightwell on June 24, 1902. On June 3, 1905, the Gospel Pilgrim Society transferred a parcel measuring one hundred feet by sixty feet to the Springfield Baptist Church. According to a 2004 boundary survey, the current landholding of the cemetery is a total of 10.071 acres. (The Jaeger Company 2003).

Until the 1960s, Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery served as Athens' principal African American cemetery. The cemetery was founded and cared for by the Gospel Pilgrim Society, a lodge-type organization founded on providing burial insurance. These benevolent societies were common among the African American community. They sometimes offered medical and disability benefits to participants but primarily provided for a proper burial (Wright 1996). According to a University of Georgia study, by 1919 seventy-five percent of African Americans in Athens were members of lodges organized around burial and life insurance programs. Approximately seventeen different societies are represented in the graves of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery (Thurmond 2001). This fact suggests that the Gospel Pilgrim Society provided a cultural foundation within the African American community. In the case of the Gospel Pilgrim Society, members paid dues amounting to ten cents a week, ensuring them a funeral and full burial in the cemetery. (The Jaeger Company 2003; Cyriaque 2005; LaBrie 2005).

Most families accepted responsibility for maintaining their own plots, as perpetual care was not included in member's dues. Families would traditionally visit relatives' graves on Sundays, holidays or birthdays and spend the afternoon visiting and cleaning up the family plots. The Society, too, oversaw the management of the cemetery until its last surviving member, Alfred Hill, passed away in the early 1970s. In the ensuing decades, the cemetery entered a

period of neglect and abuse. Since then, the property has been cleared of debris twice: first in 1986, and most recently in 2002, when thirty tons of garbage was removed from the site. Early in 2003, an entrance gate was installed to prevent littering and trespassing. No record exists of the formal events or organized activities that transpired at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. After church services, family members would often stroll through the cemetery to visit graves of immediate family members. Families, including children, would visit the site not only to spend time at the grave, but also to clean the plot. This activity reflects the cemetery's importance to East Athens not only as a burial ground, but also as a community gathering place and park. (The Jaeger Company 2003)

A 1938 aerial photograph of the area, the earliest available, shows the cemetery as a wooded, roughly rectangular parcel. The property was covered with mature growth and is surrounded by several open, terraced agricultural fields. Similar forested areas are also evident in the surrounding area, though less common. A curvilinear path system within the site is also apparent on the aerial photograph and a 1964 topographic map (Figures 5.3 and 5.4). A later 1973 aerial photograph shows an increasingly forested property, though the path system is visible. Surrounding agricultural areas, however, are noticeably more developed. By 1973, a great number of residential buildings existed in the area, including a government housing complex and several single-family structures still extant today. In recent years, overgrowth has covered the property, although the path system is still evident. (The Jaeger Company 2003)

The Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery was determined to be abandoned in 2002, pursuant to the Official Code of Georgia, OCGA §36-72-2. This meant that ownership of the property could not be traced and was not claimed by any living person (Van Voorhies 2003). The East Athens Development Corporation (EADC), a nonprofit organization that seeks to revitalize East Athens,

through planning and economic development, has undertaken the revitalization of the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. Technical assistance in the form of grant writing and drafting the National Register Nomination for the cemetery was received from the Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center. To initiate revitalization of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, a resource study was commissioned, including archeological research and field study. Southeastern Archeological Services (SAS) performed the archeological survey in July and August of 2003 to determine the extent of grave sites, quantity, associated dates, and general condition (Figures 5.5 and 5.6). In July and September 2003, The Jaeger Company conducted field research and developed the master plan for the cemetery. The master plan is designed to guide EADC through the process of rehabilitation. (The Jaeger Company 2003)

Site Inventory and Analysis

       Existing Conditions: The Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery is oriented along Fourth Street and is bordered to the west by Springfield Baptist Church and a Georgia Power easement. The CSX Railroad runs along the southeastern border of the site. The surrounding neighborhood is largely residential including government subsidized housing as well as new residential development (Figures 5.7-5.10). East of the site, across the railroad, is the newly developed East Athens Community Park.

       Approaching the cemetery on Fourth Street, it is not immediately apparent that a cemetery exists accept for the newly constructed stone wall and entrance gate. The border of the cemetery property along Fourth Street is lightly wooded with young eastern red cedar and dogwood trees (Figure 5.11). Several gravemarkers and walled plots are visible through the vegetative border (Figure 5.12). The site appears densely wooded and overtaken by English ivy.

The cemetery has been cleared of overgrowth in the past few years allowing for greater visibility and access through the site, however, it still remains heavily vegetated in areas. An abundance of invasive groundcover, vines and shrubs, including wisteria, and Chinese privet, has spread throughout the cemetery. Some of the historic path system remains completely obscured by vegetation and therefore has not been thoroughly assessed.

Despite the overgrown character of the site, cultural resources found within are relatively intact. These resources include: the historic path system, symbolic plant material, stone walls, coping, gravemarkers and grave items. Each site visit conducted during this study yielded new information to the history and understanding of the evolution of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. Due to the large number of resources contained within the site and the layers of information that exist, this study can only provide an overview assessment. A thorough assessment and documentation of cultural resources should be a priority of the Gospel Pilgrim Steering Committee.

Topography: The site is situated on top of one primary ridge with two drainage channels on either side (Figure 5.4). The overall site elevation ranges from 728 feet at the highest point in the far western corner along Fourth Street, to 664 feet at the lowest point in the eastern corner at the railroad. The Fourth Street frontage of the property varies in topography. West of the entry gate the cemetery is at relatively the same grade as the street, allowing views into the cemetery. East of the gate, the property increases in elevation as the road starts to descend about five feet below the adjacent cemetery grade. This area appears to have mounded earth, potentially spoils from road construction, and is thought by SAS to contain graves within.

Circulation: Vehicular use of the site is permitted, however it appears to be limited by the narrow width of the existing one-mile path system and small turning radii at path intersections. The path averages ten feet wide, but is as narrow as seven feet in several places

throughout the system and approximately fourteen feet at the widest points. The existing path consists of well-compacted soil with natural leaf mulch as the surface layer (Figures 5.13 and 5.14).

The granite wall at the site entrance was constructed in 2003 and incorporated a pre-existing iron gate. While the wall and gate are non-historic, they serve as a human element alerting the public that a cemetery is present along Fourth Street as well as where to enter the site. The design and construction of the wall is similar in aesthetic to the wall style currently used by Athens-Clarke County on many municipal projects.

Vegetation: The vegetation on the site can be categorized as trees, shrubs, groundcovers, herbaceous perennials and bulbs. Chinese privet is the dominant shrub species, along with a few ornamental boxwoods. Yucca appears throughout as an ornamental plant. Groundcovers, primarily vinca, were historically planted for grave blankets. Wisteria and English ivy, planted ornamentally, have not been pruned in years and therefore have become very mature and wide-spread throughout the site. Grasses and flowering herbaceous perennials appear to be volunteer growth in disturbed soil. Assorted hyacinth, crocus and jonquil bulbs, planted on the grave tops, along walls and markers, offer spring color to the site (Figure 5.15).

A detailed tree inventory was conducted in June 2004 by the University of Georgia's Horticulture Department, under the direction of Professor David Berle. According to this field study, over thirty species of trees are represented on the site with oaks, black cherries, and pines being the dominant species. Eastern red cedar is a notable species as a symbolic cemetery tree (Figure 5.16). Another cemetery indicator species that is found is English ivy that taken over the majority of the trees and poses a tree health threat. (The University of Georgia Department of Horticulture 2004).

The site is densely wooded with a fairly young, even age stand of trees. Only a few species are identified as historic (over 50 years old). At the time the cemetery was established, the land was likely an open agricultural field and therefore not wooded. Currently, a park-like environment exists on the site due to the tree canopy that has formed over the property. This inherent quality should be maintained and enhanced as it is conducive to the reflective nature of the site and contributes to the quality of experience for the visitor. The existing canopy also represents how the landscape has evolved over time. Some trees, however, have been identified as diseased or dead and in need of pruning and/or removal. Strategic clearing of trees would lessen competition, allowing specimens to thrive and reach their desired form at maturity.

Notable Site Features: Archeological efforts conducted by Southeastern Archeological Services have yielded many interesting gravemarkers and ornaments. A variety of gravemarkers exist, from a simple fieldstone with no apparent markings to more elaborate markers—mostly form the early 1900s—featuring iconography and epitaphs.

<div align="center">
ANDERSON
MATTHEWS
JULY 15, 1888
May 17, 1918
Sleep on dear husband
and take thy rest
I loved you but
God loved you best
</div>

—Typical period epitaph,
Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, Athens, Georgia

Many graves are unmarked and indicated only by earthen depression. Several benevolent societies are featured in the gravemarker iconography such as the Odd Fellows, represented by three chain links on headstones as well as fashioned in wrought iron gravemarkers (Figure 5.17). A variety of materials have been used for headstones and enclosures including a remarkable

amount of granite and marble. Family plots feature granite wall enclosures along with marble, granite and concrete coping.

The cemetery is very organized in terms of arrangement. Graves are oriented on a northeast to southwest axis as opposed to the traditional east-west axis. The graves and path system are laid out on a grid which is atypical of most African American cemeteries from this time period. Gravemarkers tend to parallel and face the adjacent path system as if to be viewed from the nearest path. It appears that the cemetery was well planned with consideration given to access for visitation and interment.

While many grave ornaments have likely been removed from the site, recent vegetation removal and archeological research by SAS has revealed that the tradition of grave ornamentation was practiced at Gospel Pilgrim. Recently discovered grave ornaments include: conch shells placed at the headstone of approximately thirty graves (Figure 5.18); pieces of coral on top of the grave; various pottery, glass and porcelain containers; and a sword used in a funerary procession by a benevolent society member. Some iconography will require further study to interpret due to weathering or marker damage (Figure 5.19).

Natural features in the landscape, such as granite boulders, also add interest to the site (Figure 5.20). Symbolism can be found in the selection of plant material, some of which serve as gravemarkers. Interesting oddities such as pieces of felt cut into a star shape are nailed to several mature pine trees near the entrance of the cemetery. These stars are not fully understood and therefore require more research. At this time, they appear to be unique to Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery (Figure 5.21).

Notable Burials: Prominent members of the African American community in Athens have been buried at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. These citizens of Athens were civic, moral and

political leaders for the local and national African American community. Notable burials in this cemetery include (Thurmond 2001; Coleman and Gurr 1983):

- *Monroe Bowers "Pink" Morton* (1856-1919): founder of the Morton Theater in Athens and delegate to the Republican National Convention (Figure 5.22)
- *Alfred Richardson* (1837-1872): elected to the State House from Athens-Clarke County in 1868
- *Madison Davis* (1833-1902): elected to the State House from Athens-Clarke County in 1868
- *Annie Smith Derricotte* (1890-1964): local teacher
- *Samuel Fredrick Harris* (1875-1935): first Black graduate from the University of Georgia
- *The Jackson Brothers:* local physicians with offices in the Morton Building (Figure 5.23)
- *Harriet Powers* (1837-1910): nationally recognized quilt artist (Figure 5.24)
- *William A. Pledger* (1852-1904): co-founder of the *Athens Blade.*

Opportunities and Constraints

At the onset of this rehabilitation effort, SAS was asked to determine the extent of graves within the site. Because each burial plot was purchased and therefore deeded to an individual (though the location of these documents is not known), all graves within Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery are considered private property. This distinction was necessary to establish prior to making site improvements primarily because tax money, approved by Athens-Clarke County, was used to fund the rehabilitation project. Public monies were not to be used to fund improvements on private properties, hence funding was limited to the public portions of the cemetery.

While the entire site is considered sensitive in nature, it is also important in the design development and construction process to know what areas need to be treated more sensitively

than others. SAS flagged the limits of graves and grave items such as associated plant material and enclosures for the entire site. The site was then surveyed as record of the flagged areas.

Figure 5.25 is the result of the surveyed archeology field marking which was then used to analyze the site and develop a list of opportunities and constraints. The shaded area on the map labeled "private property" contains all land associated with graves. The remaining non-shaded areas are considered public areas, which essentially is the historic path system. The varying widths of public areas were categorized into four measurement classifications to determine functionality of the site for vehicular and pedestrian access. The classifications and significance are as follows: seven to eight feet width is impassible by a vehicle, eight to nine feet width is difficult for vehicle turning radii and the protection of adjacent graves, nine to ten feet width is acceptable for vehicular movement and above ten feet allows ample path width to accommodate vehicles. Path radii were also assessed in terms of vehicular turning movements. Site topography was analyzed on a cursory level to determine drainage issues and areas of steep grade. Walls and large trees within five feet of the flagged line were also surveyed for added precaution in planning.

Based on field research, study of existing maps, aerial photography, and analysis of the site survey, the following opportunities and constraints have been identified for the site:

Opportunities

Historic and Cultural Resources: Over 5,000 graves have been located within the cemetery and are in the process of being documented through written narrative and archeological research (approximately 1,000 to date) as well as mapped via Global Positioning System (GPS) mapping for the entire site (Figures 5.26 and 5.27). This documentation has been generated by The University of Georgia Horticulture Department with assistance from Southeastern

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Archeological Services. This form of documentation can serve many purposes as GPS points can be made highly accessible and exchangeable. Once resources are mapped, the map itself becomes a useful tool for locating relatives to further future preservation of the site. Detailed records will be kept for every grave including GPS point, photographs, physical description of materials, iconography, monument style, name(s), date(s), epitaph, measurements, grave goods, and plant material.

Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery is rich in cultural resources, many of which need further study to fully understand. These resources are significant on many levels as they appeal to a variety of patrons including those pursuing general research, those identifying family members, local interest groups and followers of heritage tourism. In addition to known artifacts, further research remains to be done holding promise for more discoveries. Figure 5.28 illustrates some of the cultural resources found on site to date.

Historic Path System: The historic path system is a cultural resource unto itself as evidence of this cemetery as a well planned landscape. The route that has been traced through aerial photography and on-site research remains intact and apparent in the existing landscape. This system appears to be laid out on a consistent grid with connections throughout. It is important to the history of the site to restore these paths in a manner that will demarcate the system visually, that is in keeping with the site's historic integrity, and allow for maintained access throughout the cemetery. The existing trace of the historic path provides an opportunity for a one-mile path system throughout the cemetery that will cause minimal site disturbance.

Park-Like Setting: Inherent qualities of the site provide a unique open space for the East Athens community. Of the natural features within the site, the existing tree canopy is the site's most important organic feature and contributor to the park-like character. The one-mile path

system provides for access and enjoyment of the site by visitors. A walk along the path system, shaded by the contiguous tree canopy, makes for a peaceful and reflective experience within the cemetery. A plant palette based on existing plant material will be used to soften the visual intrusion of the non-historic entrance wall and sidewalk (Figure 5.29). Rehabilitation of the site will enhance these qualities for use of the site by local residents and visiting family members.

Site Access: Vehicular access throughout the site, while limited by the narrow path width, had been permitted until the front gate was installed in 2003. Vehicular access will be controlled in the future by EADC via gated entrance, allowing access only for periodic maintenance and interment. This vehicular access route will be limited to portions of the path system where path widths are wide enough to accommodate an automobile at a slow speed (5-10 mile per hour) without posing a threat to adjacent graves. A path width of nine feet is designated the vehicular route and a path width of six is designated for the "pedestrian only" route. Granite bollards will be placed at intersections to further control traffic and serve as a wayfinding feature. (Figure 5.30)

While constraining to vehicular traffic, the proposed site access offers many opportunities. Limiting vehicular access does permit alternative paving materials to be used, such as an aggregate surface that will remain permeable and not contribute to drainage issues. The aggregate is available locally—which is important as it will require some maintenance application over time—and is much lower in cost than asphalt or concrete. Limiting vehicular access will also protect graves from damage in areas where the paths are narrow and turning radii are tight. Maintaining the cemetery as "pedestrian only" will also contribute to the desired park-like atmosphere.

The front entrance will be modified to accommodate a drop-off area for cars, tour buses and shuttles as well as access according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The west side of the entrance is designed at a five percent maximum slope to accommodate ADA access to the pedestrian entrance within the entry gate. The east side contains a five foot drop in elevation from the cemetery to the existing curb which does not permit ADA access on that side. The existing granite wall will be extended to the west to hold the slope back from the curb and allow for a five foot width sidewalk with a two feet wide planting strip along the curb. This sidewalk will continue west to the crosswalk in front of Springfield Baptist Church. An agreement has been made with the church for use of auxiliary parking across Fourth Street. (Figure 5.30)

Constraints

Private Property: Protecting private property (graves) while allowing public access will be an on-going challenge on this site. A primary goal of this project is to make improvements to the site while protecting graves and associated resources throughout the design and construction phases. The width of public area, which is essentially the existing path system, is very narrow and will limit vehicular access. This constraint is also an opportunity to establish this site as being primarily pedestrian in nature, which will also aid in protecting the site's resources.

Invasive Vegetation: While overgrowth in the cemetery has been significantly cleared, more needs to occur. This must be an on-going effort as the existing invasive vegetation will continue to grow back if it is not consistently maintained. The removal and maintenance of these plants must be executed in a manner that does not damage gravemarkers, specifically the use of commercial pesticides which can damage headstones. However, in order to access many of the

grave sites for research and restoration efforts, the vegetation must be removed. The goals are to both make the site safe and a more desirable place to visit.

Reconnecting the Cemetery with the Public

The Gospel Pilgrim Citizens Steering Committee is comprised of business, community, and educational members whose goal is to restore Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery and inform the community of its historical presence. Cemetery supporters have worked since 1986 on this effort. "State Labor Commissioner Michael Thurmond spearheaded early efforts to clean up and protect the historic cemetery" (Nelson 2003). Financial aid in the form of a Georgia Department of Labor grant of $100,000 was secured through Mr. Thurmond and has since been administered by the EADC to furnish employment opportunities and to initiate restoration and maintenance of the cemetery. This grant has funded a master plan study, much of the archeological work and documentation of graves completed to date, as well as securing maintenance personnel for the site. A considerable effort has been made to clear the site of overgrowth by volunteers of the committee and annual clean-up efforts by the community on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

> In the U.S. state of Georgia, a special-purpose local-option sales tax (SPLOST) can be levied by any county, for the purpose of funding the building and maintenance of parks, schools, roads, and other public facilities. Georgia's state sales tax is currently 4% (groceries and prescription drugs exempted), with the counties allowed to add up to 2% more for SPLOST. A SPLOST is passed by a county commission and voted up or down by residents in a referendum, usually during the next scheduled election. A SPLOST only lasts five years. At that time, if the funds are still needed, it must be voted upon again. All expenditures of SPLOST funds must be in compliance with Article VIII, Section VI, Paragraph IV of the Georgia Constitution and Official Code of Georgia (O.C.G.A.) 48-8-141.
> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SPLOST

On November 2, 2004, a SPLOST 2005 Referendum was approved by the Citizens of Athens-Clarke County. This Referendum included Project # 024, Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery Restoration. On July 5, 2005, the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission approved the Master Implementation Plan and Funding Schedule for the SPLOST 2005 Program. The Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery Restoration Project (A.K.A. Rehabilitation Project) was programmed for Tier II (FY07) of the program. This funding was allocated for design services and cost of construction for the improvement of public access to the cemetery. These include: entrance access, streetscape improvements, landscape management, interpretive opportunities and identifying and restoring the historic path system A Request for Proposal to provide design services was issued in September 2006 and The Jaeger Company was awarded the contract on January 30, 2007. In the spring and summer of 2007, The Jaeger Company completed a Concept Plan and Construction Documents for the rehabilitation of the Cemetery. Construction for site rehabilitation is expected to commence by January 2008.

A high level of public interest in Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery has developed in the past five years. Starting with a clean-up effort in 2002, volunteers from the community have contributed to the biannual effort to remove dense overgrowth throughout the site. A wide range of interest groups have followed EADC and Athens-Clarke County's efforts to rehabilitate the cemetery including: families of the deceased, archeologists, historians, preservation planners, landscape historians and media specialists. The public attention this effort has received, has yielded positive results for the site including a supportive public, funding from grants and local taxes, an increase in volunteer efforts, identification of heritage tourism opportunities, and research from student projects within The University of Georgia. There is also a raised awareness of what undocumented resources may yet exist within the community in regard to site history.

Figure 5.1: 1893 map of the city limits of Athens, Georgia, with the location of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery added. *Photo* courtesy *of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County*
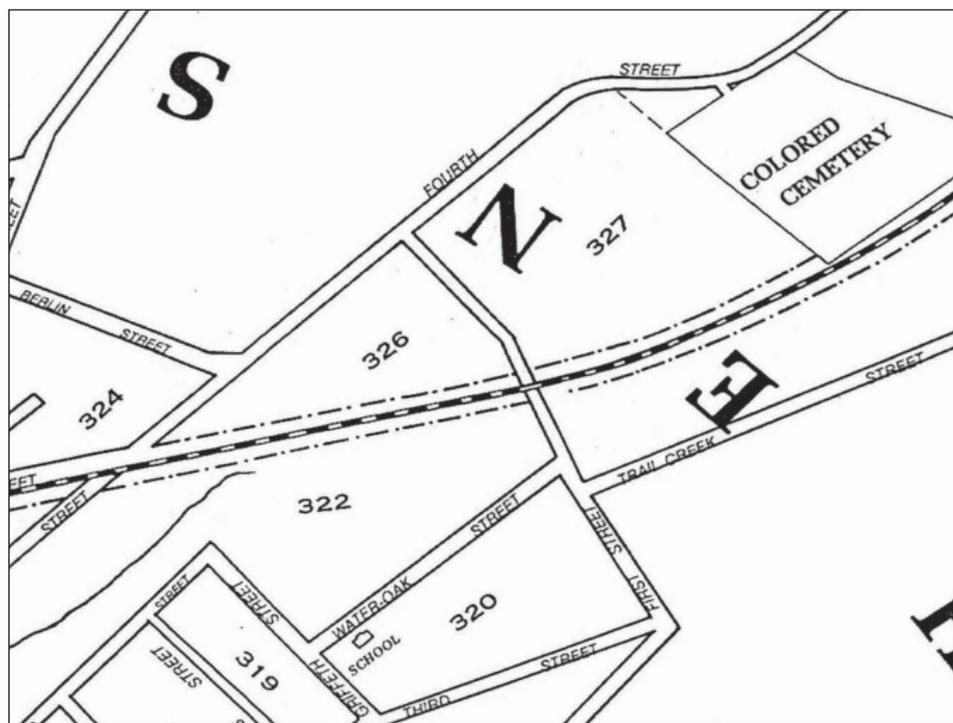
Figure 5.2: Portion of an 1895 J. W. Barnett Map of Athens, Georgia. Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery is labeled as "Colored Cemetery." *Map courtesy of The Jaeger Company 2003*

Figure 5.3: 1938 Aerial Photograph. *Photo courtesy of The Jaeger Company 2003*
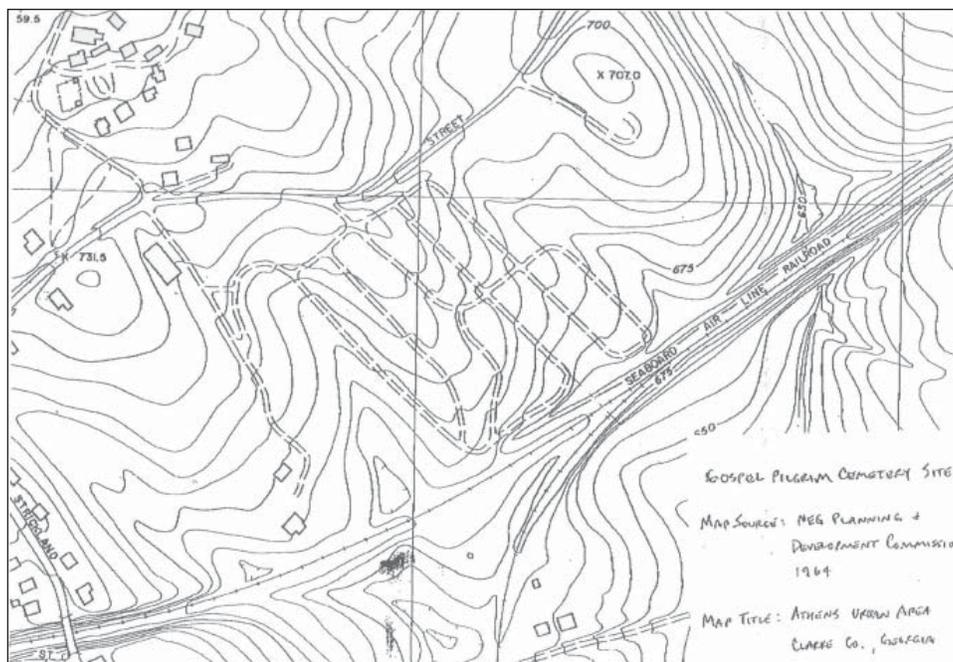
Figure 5.4: Portion of a 1964 topographic map of Athens, Georgia, depicting the location and path layout of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. *Map courtesy of The Jaeger Company 2003*

Figure 5.5: Site map illustrating distribution of burial dates. *Map courtesy of Southeastern Archeological Services, Inc.*

Figure 5.6: Site map illustrating distribution of vegetation. *Map courtesy of Southeastern Archeological Services, Inc.*

Figure 5.7: Site context - facing northwest from entrance on Fourth Street. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.8: Site context - new development northwest from entrance on Fourth Street. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.9: Site context - facing northeast from entrance on Fourth Street.
Photo by author

Figure 5.10: Site context - new development facing northeast from entrance on Fourth Street. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.11: Fourth Street border of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.12: Fourth Street border of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.13: Existing path within the undulating topography of the center of the site. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.14: Wide existing path with open views of the southwest corner of the site. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.15: Spring emerging bulbs on picturesque grave. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.16: Stand of Eastern Red Cedars at entrance gate. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.17: Wrought iron gravemarker with three chian links representing the Odd Fellows benevolent society. *Photo by Gail Tomczak Tarver*

Figure 5.18: Grave featuring conch shells. *Photo by Gail Tomczak Tarver*

Figure 5.19: Broken gravemarker with iconography. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.20: Boulders are a natural feature in the cemetery landscape.
Photo by author

Figure 5.21: Felt stars nailed to pine trees. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.22: Family plot of Monroe "Pink" Bowers Morton. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.23: Jackson Brothers' graves. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.24: Harriet Powers' quilt and grave. *Quilt image from Wikipedia. org; Grave photo by author*

PROPOSED DROP-OFF AREA AND CROSSWALK

WALL REMNANTS AND POSSIBLE GRAVES

CONFLICT WITH POWER LINES

GRANITE BOULDERS

SPRINGFIELD BAPTIST CHURCH

10.071 ACRES (CEMETERY)

ROAD IS CURRENTLY IMPINGING ON GRAVES

GEORGE PEEK (CEMETERY)

PROPOSED PATH SURFACE TO BE PERMEABLE AGGREGATE

LARGE NATURAL GRANITE BOULDER

SEABOARD COASTLINE RAILROAD

100' R/W

PROPOSED DROP-OFF AREA AND CROSSWALK AT ENTRANCE TO CEMETERY

PROPOSED PATHWAY THROUGH CEMETERY

THE JAEGER COMPANY

Landscape Architecture · Historic Preservation · Planning

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GOSPEL PILGRIM CEMETERY REHABILITATION

ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY, GA

Date: 04.05.07
Revisions:

Project No.: 06059
Scale: 1"=40'

Drawn: CP
Checked: EM

N

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

ILLUSTRATION 5

LEGEND

—·— EXISTING PATHS / LIMITS OF PUBLIC AREAS
▬ 7 TO 8 FEET WIDE
▬ 8 TO 9 FEET WIDE
▬ 9 TO 10 FEET WIDE
☐ ABOVE 10 FEET
⊛ EXISTING TREES NEAR PUBLIC AREAS
⋀⋀ STEEP GRADE
▬ PROPOSED SIDEWALK
▬ PROPOSED LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS
⬭ DRAINAGE ISSUE
✕ POTENTIAL PRUNING OR DEAD TREE REMOVAL
—·— CEMETERY PROPERTY LINE
☐ PRIVATE PROPERTY

0 40 80 120

Figure 5.25: Opportunities and Constraints Map

90

Figure 5.26: Gravemarker documentation with GPS. *Photo by author*

Figure 5.27: Gravemarker documentation with GPS. *Photo by author*

Historic granite wall surrounding family plot.

1907 child's gravemarker featuring Victorian lamb motif.

Grave depressions.

1903 Odd Fellows gravemarker featuring three chain links.

1905 gravemarker featuring African motif.
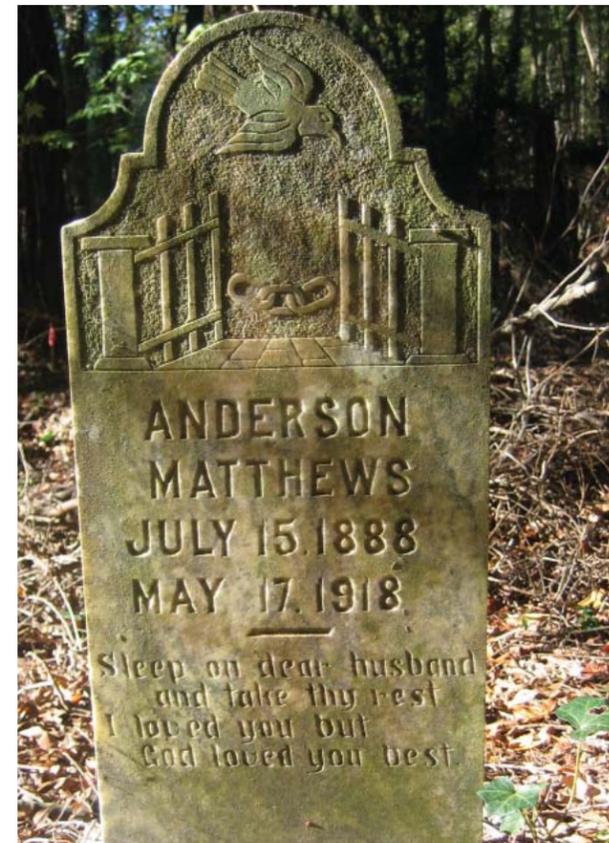
1918 gravemarker featuring dove, gates and three chain links.

1920 gravemarker featuring fraternal order crest.

Figure 5.28: Cultural Resources within Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery

Yucca

Jonquil

Virginia Creeper

Pachysandra

Eastern Red Cedar
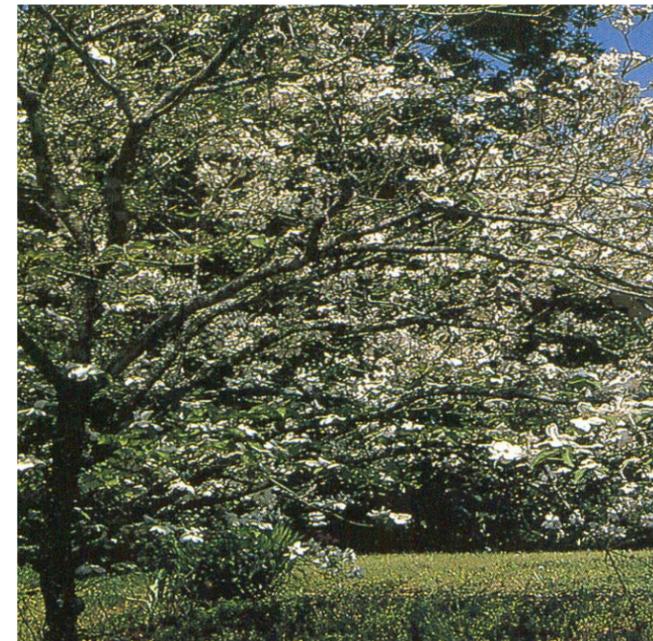
Dogwood

Red Maple

Post Oak Leaf

Figure 5.29: Proposed Plant Materials for Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery

Proposed sidewalk improvements along Fourth Street

LEGEND

- 3" MULCH PATH
- 9' VEHICULAR ACCESS SLATESCAPE PATH
- 6' PEDESTRIAN SLATESCAPE PATH
- GRANITE CURB
- BOLLARD AND CHAIN
- DIRECTIONAL BOLLARD
- GRANITE BENCH (10 TOTAL)

Figure 5.30: Proposed Path System at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REHABILITATING

GOSPEL PILGRIM CEMETERY

*My favorite walk, especially when it is raining, when it is pouring
with rain, is through Montmartre Cemetery, which is near where I
live. I often go there, and I have many friends there.*
—Hector Berlioz, February 22, 1863

The intent of the following recommendations is to provide direction for rehabilitating historic Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery in a way that improves public access without compromising the historic integrity of the site. Technically, in historic preservation terms, a "rehabilitation" effort is defined as: "the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values." (Birnbaum 1994).

The program for the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery site strives to enhance and make accessible this historic African American cemetery and to raise awareness of its value as a sacred community treasure. Enhancement includes: entrance improvements, landscape management, interpretive opportunities and identifying and restoring the historic path system while preserving the historic integrity of the site. Based on the opportunities and constraints identified for the site, as well as lessons learned from cemetery case studies, the following site specific recommendations have been made.

Site Legibility

Entrance and boundaries: As evidenced in cemetery case studies in Asheville, North Carolina, Camden South Carolina, Jefferson, Georgia, and Washington, Georgia, rural African American cemeteries were rarely fenced or bordered by a wall. The addition of non-historic walls and gateways must be assessed on a case by case basis, but typically should not be constructed if they are historically inappropriate. However, a simple sign can provide a human element identifying the entrance to the site. A good example of a sign and entry addition is the building foundation remnant used for the Paradise Cemetery sign in Jefferson, Georgia. The existing sign and entry walls at Gospel Pilgrim serve this purpose while utilizing indigenous materials.

A visual border to identify the cemetery property and delineate access points to the site may be warranted for the protection of private property. A border may be a vegetative buffer, a wall or a fence line. Before erecting a border of any kind, however, an assessment should be made as to the impact on historic integrity. All graves sites should be identified and their boundaries clearly marked to be certain that additions will not be impinging on existing graves.

At Gospel Pilgrim, it is recommended that the natural vegetative border be maintained with openings left within to allow for viewing into the site. Allowing an outsider a partial view of the site provides the prospect of what is contained inside. This creates an element of mystery to the landscape, inviting the visitor inside. Allowing for partial views into and from the site is also beneficial for creating a feeling of security. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate the proposed entrance enhancements.

Streetscape Improvements: Once improvements are made to the site, visitation will likely increase due to the interest level the public has already expressed. In order to

accommodate visitors, access to the site must be logical and safe. This site is intended to be primarily pedestrian with limited vehicle access for maintenance and occasional family visitation. A vehicular drop-off is proposed by modifying the existing entry drive. The concrete drive will be extended on each side to allow for vehicular pull-off and standing room for passengers. A sidewalk is proposed on the west side of the gated entrance that connects to the existing pedestrian entrance to the site (Figures 6.3 and 6.4).

The existing informal landscape along Fourth Street should be maintained and not compromised by extensive sidewalk improvements. The mossy slope along the Fourth Street frontage is in keeping with the desired natural aesthetic of the cemetery. Enhancement of the landscape border along Fourth Street should be in keeping with the informal and natural aesthetic that currently exists within the site. Canopy and flowering trees, a few low evergreen shrubs and strategic perennials and bulbs inspired by the historic plant palette would be appropriate additions, but should not detract from the existing ornamental trees found on site that may be considered sacred or symbolic.

Circulation/Path System: An existing path system is atypical in the layout of an African American cemetery. Of the case studies explored in this thesis, only the Cedars Cemetery in Camden, South Carolina features a formal circulation network; it consists of a wide swept dirt path to accommodate limited vehicular traffic. Mount Olive Cemetery in Clarksville, Tennessee plans to install a passive recreational trail to provide a system for circulation. The existing path system at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery appears to be unique in that it was uniformly planned and maintained for almost a century. This further underscores the need to highlight this as a historic site feature as well as a means of accessing the entire site.

The proposed surface for the existing path system should maintain a permeable quality so as not to contribute to potential erosion of private property. Slatescape® is an aggregate product consisting of slate that is milled into flat pieces approximately ½" – 1" in length. This surface is permeable and compacts well so that it does not shift on sloping surfaces. It is low cost, low maintenance, and durable to foot traffic and light vehicular use. The aesthetic of an aggregate surface is also in the keeping with the historic quality of the site (Figure 6.5 and 6.6).

Engaging the Visitor

Landscape: The landscape at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery shares a similar aesthetic to Mount Olive Cemetery in Clarksville, Tennessee, South Asheville African American Cemetery in Asheville, North Carolina, and School Street Cemetery in Washington, Georgia, in that these cemeteries have been enveloped by an even aged stand of young evergreen and hardwood trees. Contrary to Gospel Pilgrim, the other cemeteries have managed to keep the understory plantings under control, either through perpetual care or because invasive groundcovers were not planted. These cemeteries all possess a similar park-like quality conducive to use as passive recreational area.

Cedars Cemetery in Camden, South Carolina, features a more formally planned layout of graves and highly manicured landscape as compared to the other case studies. Its cemetery board has secured an endowment for maintenance of the site including: lawn maintenance, string mowing of fence lines and coping, repair of gravemarkers, and filling sunken graves. The Cemetery Board has also developed guidelines for use of the cemetery in a formal policies and procedures manual.

At Gospel Pilgrim, the judicious pruning and strategic planting of ornamentals in groups will create site coherence in Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. Additional plant material at the entrance, based on the native historic palette, will soften the visual intrusion of the proposed sidewalk along Fourth Street and non-historic stone wall at the site entrance. Tree pruning and removal may be required adjacent to public areas within the site to minimize potential human hazard. Condition of the trees will be determined by the Athens-Clarke County Community Forester and a Certified Arborist. Means of removal and pruning shall be accomplished in a manner that does not harm grave sites, by utilizing older methods of felling trees as opposed to using large equipment. Pruning of trees will improve visual access by opening the overstory and thinning the understory.

Site Interpretation: Out of all of the African American cemeteries visited during this study, none provided any information about the history of the site on location. Likewise, it was difficult to find a model for cemetery interpretation. Ms. Carolyn Hampton, the Commissioner of the Cemetery Board for Cedars Cemetery, provided a lead to the God's Little Acre Cemetery in Newport, Rhode Island, website, as she had visited the cemetery in her extensive travels to African American cemeteries. She recalled colonial era slate markers featuring a winged angel motif within the cemetery as well as some of the site history, primarily because it was provided at the entrance. This example may serve as a good model for cemetery interpretation methods because it incorporates symbolism in its design, makes a connection to the African heritage, and provides information for the site in a manner that is in keeping with the historic integrity of the site.

Historical information about the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery should be located on-site and accessible to every visitor. A State Historical Marker and National Register Marker are both

proposed near the entrance of the site (Figure 6.7). Additional interpretive signage (Figure 6.8) may be warranted to provide additional cultural or historic information around the site, such as interpretation of sacred items associated with graves. Interpretation is important to foster a sense of stewardship and respect by visitors. Numerous opportunities exist within the African American burial traditions and notable burials throughout the site. Developing a matrix connecting potential interpretive opportunities with potential interest groups can be beneficial in marketing the site for heritage tourism.

An enclosed structure is needed in association with Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery for larger exhibits and display of artifacts. The current landholding of the cemetery does not allow space for such a structure. Future land acquisition should be considered. Another option may be to form an agreement with a separate facility to house exhibits as part of a tour of the cemetery site.

Opportunities exist through heritage tourism to link Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery to other historic African American sites in Athens and thereby making a connection with the community. In particular, the corner of West Washington and North Hull Streets known as the "Hot Corner" in downtown Athens has a direct connection to Gospel Pilgrim. It is the historical African American business district containing the Morton Theater and former offices of doctors and businessmen buried in the cemetery. West of downtown are two other African American neighborhoods listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the West Hancock Avenue and Reese Street Historic Districts.

Many businesses and residences within these historic districts are still owned by the original families—handed down through generations. East Athens neighborhoods surrounding Gospel Pilgrim evolved later than West Hancock and Reese Street, but contribute significantly to the history and evolution of African American neighborhoods in Athens. These sites, along with

the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, tell a collective history of African American heritage in Athens. The interrelationship of these sites is an important asset to the community and heritage tourism. At the heart of these sites is the Athens Welcome Center, providing an appropriate hub for distributing walking and driving tours.

Site furnishings: Benches should be included around the path system at Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery to enhance the park-like experience of the site and to prevent the temptation of using a gravemarker as a bench. Natural materials that are found regionally are best suited for the site. Elements such as granite boulders or slabs could be used for constructing a backless bench. These should be located at one-quarter mile intervals at a minimum and also be located at the entrance to the site. Ideally benches would be available on each long stretch of path. Trash receptacles should be located near the entrance of the site as an alternative to littering. They should maintain a similar aesthetic to the benches in terms of natural materials (Figure 6.9 and 6.10).

Preserving the Past

The following is a list of items for preserving the cultural resources contained within the cemetery:

1) Determine site significance – research documented and oral accounts about the site's history and material culture.

2) Assess site contents – map the site's physical features, private property limits, gravemarkers, and significant vegetation. Archeological survey can reveal locations of marked and unmarked graves as well as grave items, and types of markers.

3) Document – record gravemarkers with GPS locations. Cultural resource management guidelines should be consulted for this effort with consideration given to writing a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) following National Park Service (NPS) guidelines. The Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS) of the Heritage Documentation Program through NPS can also provide guidelines for documenting historic landscapes (see Appendix for websites).

4) Preserve what you have – procure a group of consultants to address specific areas of preservation of the site and cultural resources (i.e. gravemarkers).

5) Target your market – determine who might be interested in the site for planning heritage tourism and interpretation.

Planning for the Future

1) Enlist help – acquire professional help from consultants who have expertise in the various aspects of the site; seek help from volunteers.

2) Spread the word – educate the public about the unique aspects of the site as well as the efforts towards rehabilitation to generate interest.

3) Keep the site accessible – manage the landscape and maintain site legibility for the public. This will ensure that future preservation efforts are feasible. "Good maintenance is the best preservation procedure." (Strangstad 43)

4) Generate support – volunteer efforts and funding sources are the best insurance for maintaining a historic cemetery.

5) Write a Preservation Plan – address how this dynamic landscape will be maintained, documented, interpreted, make a connection with the public, and funded.

Figure 6.1: Existing entrance to Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery. *Photo by author*

Figure 6.2: Sketch of entrance with plantings. *Sketch by author*

Figure 6.3: Proposed sidewalk area. *Photo by author*

Figure 6.4: Sketch of proposed sidewalk. *Sketch by author*

Figure 6.5: Slatescape® path and granite steps. *Photo by author*

Figure 6.6: Proposed Slatescape® path. *Photo courtesy of The Jaeger Company*

Figure 6.7: State Historic Marker example. *Photo courtesy of The Jaeger Company*

Figure 6.8: Interpretive panel example. *Photo courtesy of The Jaeger Company*

Figure 6.9: Proposed granite bench. *Photo courtesy of The Jaeger Company*

Figure 6.10: Proposed granite bollard. *Photo courtesy of The Jaeger Company*

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Few landscape features are as enduring as a burial ground.
Although they disappear from the landscape through both neglect
and intentional destruction, cemeteries, once sited, usually remain
relatively resistant to change.

—D. Gregory Jeane

While different cemetery types have evolved through the centuries, the historic significance of these landscapes is unchanged. The original features are typically intact and rarely have these landscapes been redesigned. Nature takes its course as vegetation envelopes the site causing upheaval to gravemarkers and change in canopy structure. However, the basic layout of the gravestones and circulation patterns can typically be seen even in overgrown cemetery sites.

Death imitates life as cemeteries are a reflection of society and culture. Through burial practices and material culture—or lack there of in some cases—knowledge can be gained about those who have gone before us. Burial traditions in the African American culture have proven to be steadfast in their survival from being passed down through generations. The survival of these traditions is a reflection of the African American culture.

Complex issues surround the survival of African American cemeteries. Property ownership is often unknown and not properly documented. Their overgrown appearance is sometimes mistaken as abandonment. Typically there is no longer a caretaker for the site and

vegetation is allowed to take over. Cemetery access is prevented by the overgrowth which also contributes to security problems. Ultimately, these common issues can result in the total loss of this cultural landscape.

In contrast to the constraints relative to African American cemeteries, many opportunities exist. These sites can be considered a community amenity as they provide greenspace, cultural value and a park-like setting. Site access and circulation opportunities may exist within the historic layout of the site for accommodating public use. Artifacts contained within the site have enormous potential for understanding African American culture.

> *The place of the cemetery in everyday life is denied by neglect and erosion. Even the idea of the grave as an inviolate resting place does not attract eager defenders.* (Jackson and Vegara 1989, 118)

By reconnecting a cemetery to the public, an awareness of site, history and traditions is created. This fosters understanding and a stewardship of the site and can go further in protecting the site than sheltering it from the public. A raised awareness of the site and public interest may be the only catalyst to finding oral histories and documentation. While the site lays fallow or abandoned there is no desire to share this information and important links to history go untold and taken for granted. Illuminating burial patterns can reveal religious beliefs and social distinctions. Retelling burial rituals manifests and reinforces different social and cultural identities, thus promoting greater cultural understanding. As traditions are lost, cultural differences are lost.

What's next for Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery?

Once improvements to the entrance and internal path system are complete, priority should be given to a perpetual care plan for maintaining these improvements. The next priority should be to provide public access to the information associated with individual grave documentation via a website designed for genealogical research. Additionally, two detailed studies that would significantly augment the history and add value to the understanding of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery are an iconography study and a site interpretation study.

An iconography study could provide intensive focus on gravemarker symbolism and fabrication represented in this cemetery. Research could reveal cultural influences on gravemarker style—for example the Victorian tradition of using a lamb motif on top of a child's gravemarker (Combs 1996) as seen in this cemetery; or the link between African ideograms evident in West African textiles and language symbols that appear to have influence in gravemarker design (Malcom-Woods 2004). Iconography representing various benevolent societies associated with the Athens community, such as the Odd Fellows, could provide insight to the history of these organizations. These secret organizations played a major role in the African American Community, influencing the foundation of Black fraternities and sororities in the early 1900s, but very little is written about them (Brown 2002).

Interpretation of this site is critical and complex. More research is needed to fully understand some of the traditions exhibited. There is a great amount of information to interpret that must be accomplished in a way that adds to the experience of the site for all visitors without compromising historic integrity. A study focused on appropriate interpretation of this site would be a significant contribution to this cemetery as well as to public understanding of African American burial traditions.

Follow-up Study

Within the limited documentation available, many sources will argue that the burial traditions and grave decoration found in African American cemeteries, particularly in rural areas, are uniquely African and are the physical manifestation of strong religious beliefs. However, similar traditions can also be traced in rural White cemeteries and seem more related to a vernacular means of "making do with what you have." Several authors have published material on burial tradition comparisons between Southern Folk Cemeteries (White) and African American Cemeteries such as the practice of mounding and scraping graves and grave ornamentation—shells in particular. This comparison begs the question "did one group influence the burial traditions of the other?" Authors on this study include: D. Gregory Jeane, Richard E. Meyer and Terry Jordan. This topic is clearly a study unto itself, but deserving of inquiry to fully understand these traditions.

A cemetery conference titled "Eternal Places Discovering Georgia's Historic Cemeteries" was held by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Historic Preservation Division in Augusta, Georgia on November 1-2, 2007. The information presented at this conference underscores the point that cemeteries in general are valuable cultural resources that need more attention. It also confirmed the timeliness of this thesis topic as cemeteries are anticipated to be the next sought after destination for heritage tourism. As one of Georgia's largest industries, tourism is benefiting from a high volume of "heritage travelers" looking for the "experience of place." Also, Georgia DNR is creating a grant program specifically for cemetery preservation. The current momentum generated towards the preservation of cemeteries in the state provides an excellent opportunity for Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery to establish itself as a viable cultural resource and serve as an example for other cemeteries.

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APPENDIX

Useful Websites:

"African Burial Ground,"
http://www.africanburialground.gov/ABG_AnAfricanAmericanHomecoming.htm

"African-American Cemeteries," http//histpres.mtsu.edu/tncivwar/aacem.html

"African American Cemeteries in Albemarle & Amherst Counties,"
http://www.virginia.edu/woodson/projects/aacaac/AACemeteries.shtml

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