AFRICAN AMERICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT & TROPICANA FIELD

Oaklawn, Evergreen & Moffett Cemetery Site Report

OVERVIEW

The African American Burial Ground & Remembering Project is an ongoing USF research study which addresses the erasure of historic black cemeteries in the Tampa Bay area. Research sites currently include Zion Cemetery in Tampa (located beneath Robles Park Village) and Oaklawn Cemetery complex in St. Petersburg (located beneath VIP Lot 1 of the Tropicana Field Site). This document serves as an introductory reference to project sites within Oaklawn Cemetery complex - Oaklawn, Evergreen and Moffett Cemetery - to help inform plans for redeveloping and reenvisioning the Tropicana Field Site.

1888 Founding of Moffett Cemetery

1905 Founding of Evergreen & Oaklawn Cemetery

1926 City ordinance issued to close and condemn the three cemeteries

1949 Royal Court Apartments built on Oaklawn site

1976 I-275 construction begins

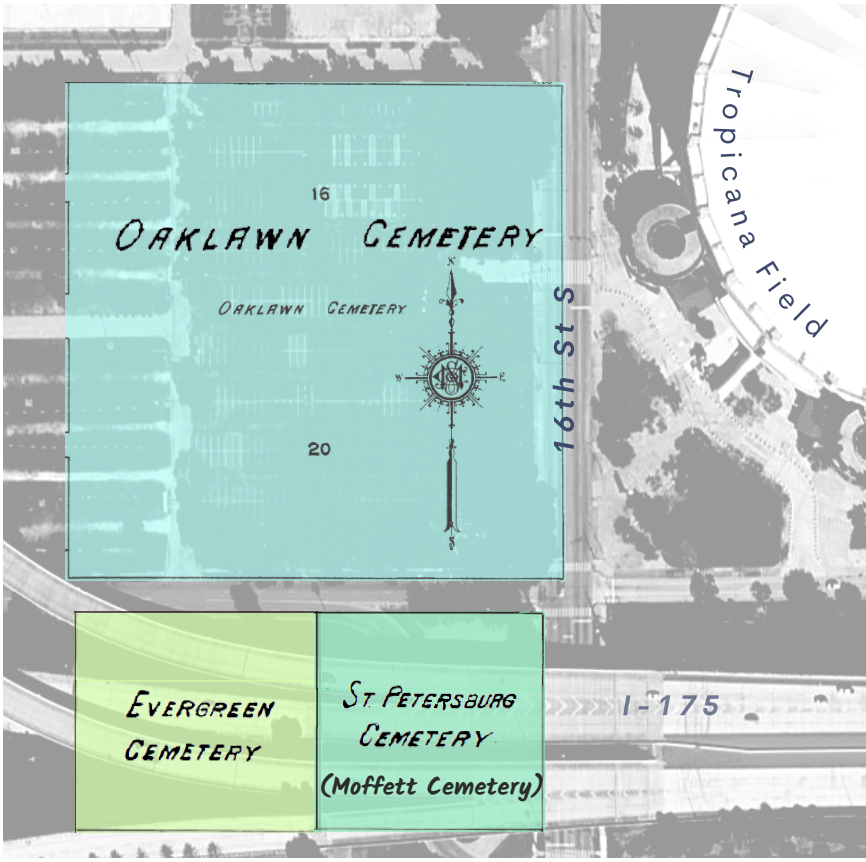
1990 Laurel Park (formerly Royal Court Apts at Oaklawn site) razed for Trop Field

HISTORY

The former sites of Oaklawn, Evergreen and Moffett cemeteries were established between 1888 and 1905. Moffett cemetery, originally designated for Civil War veterans and later used for African American burials, was the first of the three sites to be founded. Oaklawn and Evergreen were founded soon after as segregated cemeteries, with Evergreen designated as the African American cemetery, and Oaklawn segregated by section. The cemeteries operated until 1926 when all three properties were closed and condemned by order of city officials. Per city ordinance, persons buried at Oaklawn, Evergreen and Moffett cemeteries were to be relocated based on race, with African Americans moved to Lincoln Cemetery and whites moved to Royal Palm Cemetery.

THE GAS PLANT DISTRICT

All three sites were located within the Gas Plant District, an area of St. Petersburg originally named for its location in and around the city's two natural gas cylinders. The district was a hub for African American businesses, churches, and schools that shaped much of black life in St. Pete, particularly during Jim Crow segregation when laws restricted Black mobility. The Gas Plant District was eventually razed and redeveloped to accommodate a new interstate and baseball stadium, subsequently erasing the history of the three cemeteries and that of the surrounding communities.



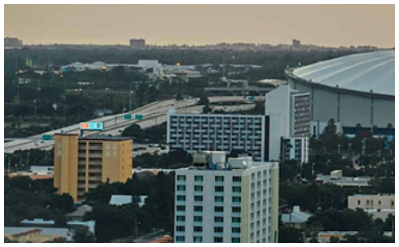
Map depicting the locations of Oaklawn, Evergreen & Moffett Cemetery using a 1923 map overlay

THE NATIONAL PROBLEM

BLACK CEMETERY ERASURES IN THE U.S.

Oaklawn, Evergreen & Moffett cemeteries represent one piece of a broader national story. From New York City; to Tulsa, Oklahoma; Richmond Virginia; and Portsmith, New Hampshire, African American burial sites were paved over in the name of "progress." Such cultural erasures reflect just one aspect of systemic injustice and profound discrimination that has often been ignored in public discussion of hometown histories. Our project addresses these erasures.

The Gas Plant District pre-redevelopment



Recent aerial of Tropicana Field post redevelopment

This is a multi-campus, multi-disciplinary USF faculty-staff-student team led by Dr. Antoinette Jackson, Director of the USF Heritage Research Lab. We collaborate with local artists, African American communities in the Tampa Bay area, and people working on projects which are taking action against racial injustice by telling inclusive stories.

For more information about our research or to participate in the project, please contact Dr. Antoinette Jackson, Director of the USF Heritage Research Lab. Email: atjackson@usf.edu

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