

All Saints Episcopal  
Open Table United Church of Christ  
151 South Ann St.  
Mobile, AL 36606



August 10, 2025

Dear Mayor Stimpson, City Council, and County Commissioners,

We are writing this letter to ask for your consideration to dedicate thought and funding to the ongoing issue of flooding and stormwater management in historic Plateau Cemetery.

Although this issue has been a longstanding problem in Africatown, it is newly spotlighted due to the groundbreaking and current construction of the new Welcome Center. Despite efforts by the contractors to use best practices for sediment containment, the underlying lack of good stormwater engineering continues to endanger this historic site.

As you are well aware, the cemetery is one of the great historic treasures of Africatown and of Mobile, earning national notoriety with the recent mapping project led by archeologist, Dr. Alexandra Jones. Some of the historic grave sites in the areas between the old and new portions of the cemetery are particularly at imminent risk. (Please see the attached letter from Dr. Major Joe Womack).

Would it be possible to take advantage of this moment to gather together some of our best minds, perhaps a collaboration of city, county, and Army Corps engineers together with the Africatown community to comprehensively assess this issue and put in place a long term plan to manage the storm water runoff surrounding Plateau Cemetery?

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue,

All Saints Episcopal and Open Table United Church of Christ Sunday school class

July 16, 2025 letter from Dr. Major Joe Womack:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pEDCXoAlmbjGA92MIEVhyHWvnBXMJbY0/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pEDCXoAlmbjGA92MIEVhyHWvnBXMJbY0/view?usp=share_link)

"No one should have to grow up in a community and live with BAD AIR, BAD WATER & BAD SOIL and be buried in a grave site where their remains are experiencing flood waters whenever a rain event has occurred."

One of Africatown's most beloved educators, Susie Ansley, has her gravesite located in the area that floods whenever there is a rain event in Mobile. [Photos of Susie Norris Ansley - Find a Grave Memorial](#)

There have been many days in the past when I have driven past our Historic Africatown Cemetery during a rain event and noticed flooding in the cemetery so bad that a 4 to six feet "sinkhole" has developed right in the middle of what is known as "The Old Cemetery" and "The New Cemetery." As I watch the flood waters cover up the entire "sinkhole" I cannot help but notice that there is one gravesite completely covered with water that belongs to a young man that I often played with in the community by the name of Talbert Scruggs. Talbert and his family were not born in Africatown but moved here in the 1960s. Although Talbert and I were born in the same year, he was in a grade two years behind me. Talbert was a good athlete. He was very fast and a good baseball player despite the fact that we never could get him to stop batting "cross-handed". Talbert was not able to play sports in school because his grades would not allow him to play. I imagine that if Talbert could speak to me today he might say, "Joe, I want you to thank the Africatown Community for allowing me to be buried in ya'll historic cemetery even though I was not born in Africatown. However, can you please do something about the flooding occurring in the cemetery whenever there is a rain event because "MAN, THIS FLOODING IS KILLING ME". [Photos of Talbert Scruggs - Find a Grave Memorial](#)

My answer would be, "Yes Talbert, we are looking into it, but things are moving very slowly." We have recruited Jim Ellis, PHD. Jim is a WSU Fulbright Scholar 2000 - 2001 U.S./Japan International Educators Administrators Program. He retired in 2013 as the University of South Alabama Director of International Education. Jim has conducted research about historic cemeteries in Mobile in recent years. Here are some comments from Jim about the recent flow of water during a rain event:

*There are two main sources of the runoff - the obvious one is the land that has been cleared for the welcome center construction (and where plans call for a major runoff retention holding area to be built under the parking lot being built which would either hold water from short low volume storms or overflow into the drainage system when there are the repeated heavy storms flows.*

*The second flow is very obvious from the west and northern aspect of the drainage (coming from the rail road and Africatown Blvd area). All the flow combined to overflow the really heavy duty sediment fencing the contractor installed (the best install that I have seen in Mobile, most do not add the straw bales and if they do, nothing is well anchored). Fortunately the contractor engineers were present and working with the system and along Bay Bridge Cutoff Road to redirect the water that was on the roadway where the road crosses the drain beneath it. There was also substantial water flowing down Bay Bridge Cutoff Road from the Chin Street intersection both on the western and eastern sides - the flow into the cemetery roadway has now for the most part degraded the eastern edge of the roadway to the point that it is a hazard for cars and pedestrians.*

*The runoff continues to flow heavily into the cemetery from the eastern side of BBCR - and until some form of a diversion system is put in place by the City (or permitted for owners to do) on the ROW shoulders the graveyard alley road way will continue to degrade - along its length and especially the*

*eastern end of the road way through the cemetery. The east end is now a serious hazard to cars in particular with deep erosion cuts on both sides and some are undermining the north east edge where it passes over the outflows from the city system to the intakes to Chin street. Similarly the drainage from the Blvd to the north of the cemetery flows heavily as well and we have seen indications that there have been overflows at the southeastern intakes to the Chin street outflows that feed to three mile creek.*

*The edges of the road way through the cemetery are soft now as well so hopefully cars will stay off the grass and not get stuck. The best suggestion at this point is to close the cemetery road to all vehicles and make it pedestrian only and roping off the heavily eroded areas to reduce probability of accidents and liabilities.*

One conversation from the city traffic div that was shared with the Welcome Center city point of contact (who actually saw and experienced the dangerous truck traffic) - suggested that the BBCR lanes be clearly painted/marked to reflect the actual lanes, that was to try and discourage the heavy THRU truck traffic that continues unabated (the trucks simply occupy more than one lane - ie tend to stay in the center (just off center in either direction)).

Please click on the link below to view the runoff of water currently coming from the Welcome Center area:  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-A5RIpg5MSzQrW3wy4OiybAOmb2YOH3b?usp=sharing>

I suggest that engineers from the city of Mobile (Mobile is responsible for the construction of the welcome center), engineers from Mobile County, engineers from The Corps of Engineers, engineers with The Alabama Department of Transportation and members of The Africatown Cemetery Committee begin roundtable discussions about flooding in The Africatown Cemetery and along Cut-Off Road before the Welcome Center Project is complete. Once those meetings are done there should be a meeting with the entire Africatown Community about plans to eliminate flooding in The Historic Africatown Cemetery.

Dr. Major Joe Womack USMCR(ret)  
Executive Director of [africatown-chess.org](http://africatown-chess.org)  
Co-Founder of [africatownhpf.org](http://africatownhpf.org)  
251-404-9558 & [jnwomack1@yahoo.com](mailto:jnwomack1@yahoo.com)



# Support Needed

For example, estimated costs (detailed costs available on request):

1. Old Plateau Family Fund: \$5.00 or more  
- all contribution levels welcomed
2. Annual Maintenance fund: est. \$50,000 - \$150,000
3. Master Planning Fund: est. \$50,000
4. Landscape Stabilization Fund: est. \$75,000
5. Preservation and restoration fund (various):  
est. \$50,000 - \$750,000
6. Topographic and Boundary Survey Fund:  
est. \$30,000
7. Information and Signage - est. \$30,000

Therefore, we ask for your support to help us continue this work. There are several ways you can make a tax-deductible contribution to this important cemetery mission work.

- Mail a check payable to the Africatown Heritage Preservation Foundation (AHPF) - P.O. Box 66478 Mobile, Alabama 36660.

- Go to our website and donate electronically:  
[www.africatownhpf.org](http://www.africatownhpf.org)

Specific Private Business and Corporate contributions welcomed - contact us for additional information

All levels of contributions and involvement are welcomed, to discuss your interest in supporting the Plateau Cemetery and Africatown community efforts please feel free to contact us.

Rev. Chris Williams - 251-421-0809  
Pastor Yorktown Missionary Baptist Church

Anderson Flen - 404-219-7890  
AHPF Founder  
[info@africatownhpf.org](mailto:info@africatownhpf.org)



# Cemetery Support



Donations are needed to continue the maintenance and upkeep of the Old Plateau Africatown Cemetery.

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- Go to our website and donate electronically:  
[www.africatownhpf.org](http://www.africatownhpf.org)



## Old Plateau Africatown Cemetery

### Highlights & Support Needed



P.O. Box 66478 Mobile, Alabama 36660  
[www.africatownhpf.org](http://www.africatownhpf.org)  
[info@africatownhpf.org](mailto:info@africatownhpf.org)

Contacts:  
Rev. Chris Williams - 251-421-0809  
Anderson Flen - 404-219-7890



# Greetings

## Hello Friends and Supporters of the Plateau Cemetery!

In April 2022, Mr. Trent Walker, Director of the Old Plateau cemetery committee, shared with Pastor Chris Williams of Yorktown Baptist Church, in writing, that the few Old Plateau Cemetery committee members remaining could no longer perform their duties. The committee requested the Africatown Heritage Preservation Foundation (AHPF) assume the care of the Old Plateau cemetery. The AHPF board agreed to continue in both spirit and style to maintain the Old Plateau Cemetery.

The AHPF Cemetery Committee also works in partnership with the five churches and their members who represent both the old and the newer areas of the cemetery. Coordination of the efforts taking place across the entirety of the cemetery properties is not only key to the future health of the cemetery but also to the telling of the history and story of all who came before and carry that story into the future.

The purpose of this brochure is to bring you up to date on a few of the recent activities, appeal for donations and to hear back from you about your families and suggestions for additional people who may be interested in connecting with the cemetery and relatives.



# Highlights

- Digital survey mapping of the cemetery, led by Dr. Alex Jones, Archaeology in the Community, began in June 2023 with community volunteers. Information on each gravesite is stored in a database accessible at the Africatown Heritage House.
- Property boundary surveys for the cemetery parcels were completed in 2023, adhering to Best Practices for cemetery management. Plans for a comprehensive topographic survey are in progress.
- Aerial surveys by Dr. Alex Beebe, Univ. South Alabama, document the cemetery's condition and topographical changes over time and annually.
- Drainage and runoff studies continue with the support of Dr. Bob Brzuszek, Ret. Mississippi State University.
- Bioswale concept as a solution for the drainage system affecting the cemetery with the support of Dr. Roald Hazelhoff, Birmingham Southern College
- "Do No Harm" approach prioritizes best practices in all management aspects, including maintenance and restoration planning.
- Adherence to Alabama Historical Commission Cemetery Permitting regulations is paramount for all work being done in the cemetery.
- Efforts to prevent further deterioration of burial sites and coordinate with families for headstone installations are ongoing.
- Lawn Trouper continues to assist with maintenance in the Old Section, while collaboration with the New Section Committee is ongoing.
- Research into the cemetery's history and efforts to preserve its heritage, including an Information and Education Signage plan, are underway.
- Establishing short and long-term funding programs, including an "endowed care" program, is recognized as crucial for the cemetery's future.
- Discussions are underway with the goal of developing not only short term but also long term plans via the development of a Master Plan, Preservation and Restoration plans and Landscape restoration/stabilization planning.

# Support Needed



Given its age the Old Plateau cemetery is one of our major priorities for care and attention. It holds a wealth of history reflecting the best of the minds, body and spirit of this once vibrant community. There are also many challenges in landscape stabilization, preservation and restoration and master planning that must be done for the cemetery. It is only through the mobilization of resources and community involvement that the revitalization and care of this sacred place will be possible.

With your help and contributions, we believe this community will move forward into the future with renewed prosperity and uncompromising faith. If you have an interest in contributing to this effort, we welcome your sharing your interests and resources in a discussion of the many different elements of projects that have been and continue to be identified. All contributions no matter how small or large, financial, volunteering of time and expertise, or other are welcomed.

