

## **Decimated and Lost Cemeteries (Flagler County Black History)**

Most people believe the assumption that humans are supposed to honor their dead. Because of such beliefs, many find it surprising to discover that in the United States there are now untold numbers of lost and nearly forgotten cemeteries and graves that remain undocumented, unmarked, unreported, unrecognizable and sometimes looted or vandalized.

Several factors contribute to the reasons why many of these cemeteries and graves are now lost or nearly forgotten. Nationally, it is unfortunately common that many African American cemeteries fall into disrepair, as they are notoriously underfunded and neglected. A local example in Flagler County is the Black Masonic Cemetery (*fig. 1*) located off Old Kings Road and nearby State Road 100 in Palm Coast, FL. Lewis Edward Wadsworth, Jr.<sup>1</sup> sold this land to the Espanola Masonic Lodge No. 161 for \$1.00 on March 26, 1948, which led to the establishment of this cemetery. The Black Masonic Cemetery has been neglected over the years, but has had several recent efforts that made repairs and facelifts only to fall back into disrepair and neglected status.

When considering Florida, it is important to realize that there were many wars<sup>2</sup> and changes in political and economic conditions including several Land Booms over the centuries. These upheavals have resulted in the scattering or forced relocation of people from their property and locality. Other factors include subdivision or selling of family-owned properties, the moving, closing or demolition of local churches, community abandonment, foreclosure auctions, and callous development of land containing human remains and the relocation or death of family and community members. The loss of the people who once remembered, visited and maintained local gravesites has consequently led to many being lost, unmaintained or nearly forgotten.

### **Desecration of Cemeteries - A National Phenomenon**

The destruction and desecration of cemeteries (including predominantly black cemeteries) is a national phenomenon, which has been occurring for hundreds of years, and continues to this day. Some examples include the 1857 condemning and destruction of the black owned community of Seneca Village (which included its cemetery at the AME Zion church) to build Central Park in New York City. The Laurel Cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland was the first non-religious cemetery for the area's blacks and was established in 1852. After 5,000 people were buried here including civil rights leaders, Union soldiers from

the American Civil War, African Methodist Episcopal bishops and middle class professionals the cemetery fell into disrepair and neglect. In 1957, it was declared a health hazard and the General Assembly approved legislation to destroy it. A few hundred graves were relocated, but the majority were bulldozed as a shopping center, parking lot and roads were then built over top of the former cemetery. The San Sebastian-Pinehurst Cemetery (known as the African American graveyard) in West Augustine, FL fell into disrepair in the 1960s when the original owner passed away. It is now neglected and unmaintained as overgrown bushes, trees and vines cover many cracked and broken headstones. Additionally, vandalism has contributed to its desecration. Family members now have a hard time even locating a buried relative in this cemetery. In the early 2000s, two cemeteries in Palatka, FL: The Francis Community Cemetery (white) was destroyed as it now lies under the Kelley Smith Elementary School, and the Francis Community Cemetery (black) was destroyed as it now lies under the paved parking lot of Sunrise Foods at the corner of Highway 20 and Round Lake Road.

A February 8, 2004 article in the *New York Times* titled “Histories Vanish Along With South's Cemeteries” reveals major problems associated with vanishing cemeteries and graveyards. It reported that a local historian from Montgomery County, TN estimates that there are as many as five hundred black cemeteries that are now lost or abandoned in that county alone. Additionally, it reported that Glenn Jones, a cemetery preservationist from Benton County, AK, states that approximately twelve cemeteries are buried under asphalt each year in Arkansas. Jones also said he discussed graveyard desecration with a local developer who told him, “Life is for the living, not for the dead.”

### **Flagler County's Family Cemeteries**

In the area now known as Flagler County, family cemeteries were once numerous as 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century settlers commonly built them on or near their property. There are now only a few known to exist as most have been lost to development or were abandoned and forgotten and are now lost to history. One of the existing family cemeteries is located on the property of the Flagler Executive Airport. This family cemetery includes four concrete pillars that once held rope or chain link that surrounded the graveyard and three existing headstones for Robert and Julia White who both died in 1914: two are original and the other is a newer memorial tombstone (*fig. 2*). Robert White was an American Civil War veteran who served as a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, in Company D, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, Kansas Calvary.

Another family cemetery, the Durrance family, was known to exist in the same area but was plowed over when the U.S. Navy built the Naval Outlying Field Bunnell<sup>3</sup> military facility during World War II, so it is unknown how many people, and where, they are actually buried on today's airport property. Fortunately, Flagler County assigns employees to actually maintain the small White family cemetery and currently claim that it will not be built over or relocated.

## **The Decimated Bunnell Black Cemetery**

The 1940-1941 Works Progress Administration's Veterans' Registration Graves Project listed a cemetery located at Section 10, Township 12, S., Range 30, E. in Bunnell, and referred to it as the Bunnell (Colored) Cemetery. The directions to this cemetery were listed as "From the courthouse in the town of Bunnell, go east on Moody Boulevard 4 blocks. Turn left (north) on Bacher Street and go 5/10 mile to cemetery which lies on right (east) of road." No burials of veterans were reported here. This cemetery had at least fifty people, possibly as many as one hundred, all black, and was (is) located where the present-day Colony Park neighborhood (*fig. 3*) now stands. This cemetery began in the early 1900s when Isaac I. Moody<sup>4</sup> set aside a plot of land to be used as a cemetery for Bunnell's black community. The property was later sold to Lewis Wadsworth in the 1940s. Wadsworth said that the last burial at this cemetery was in the early-1950s, and afterwards, he closed the cemetery stating it was "full."

In 1960, Wadsworth sold land that included the Bunnell Black Cemetery to Dewey D. Moody<sup>5</sup> and Tom Holden<sup>6</sup> who subdivided it for development. A housing community known as Colony Park now occupies that land.

In November 1978, during the Colony Park Community's development, Carl Laundrie, a *Flagler Tribune*<sup>7</sup> staff writer, investigated the cemetery's decimation. This investigation discovered a gravesite covered by a thick growth of palmettos, several broken up pieces of concrete with illegible writing on one side and an intact tombstone that was moved and leaned up against a tree in a vacant lot (*figures 4 & 5*). All clear and physical proof that graves of the Bunnell Black Cemetery had been decimated in the guise of progress.

Wadsworth said that he made a verbal agreement with the sale of the property that was supposed to protect the Bunnell Black Cemetery. Obviously, this verbal agreement was not honored as the housing and street development for the Colony Park Community was built right over top of the old cemetery.

Today, the Colony Park Community has no visible indicators that a cemetery once occupied the area (*fig. 6*).

## **Mysteries Surround the Bunnell Black Cemetery**

The mysteries about this cemetery are not if, when or where it existed, as it is well documented and still remembered by many local residents, it is what happened to the bodily remains, tombstones and coffins of all the people that were buried there during and after the development of the Colony Park community.

Local stories are still being told about what ever became of the bodily remains of all the people who were known to have been buried in the cemetery. One story states that a black man was hired to operate a bulldozer to prepare the area for the new housing development. After getting on the job, he was instructed to bulldoze all of the cemetery's bodily remains into one big hole and cover it up in what can be defined as the creation of a mass grave (*fig. 7*). This particular story continues with its mysterious elements as it states

that the man who operated the bulldozer went out to a saloon that night and died. A second story states that surrounding sand and dirt mounds were excavated and used to level the property, which included the cemetery. Some roads and houses were then built over the top of the existing graves. A third story states that the bodily remains were relocated to the black Masonic Cemetery on Old Kings Road. However, this story can be debunked, as there are no records in any church documents, local publications, or most importantly local memories, of any these people's remains being relocated.

As ghostly as it sounds, overwhelming evidence points to the actuality that the bodily remains of the 50 to 100 people that were buried in the Bunnell Black Cemetery are still underground on the property now known as the Colony Park community.

### **The Lost St. Joe Colored Cemetery**

During 1940-1941, the Works Progress Administration's Veterans' Registration Graves Project conducted a survey in Flagler County and documented a 'colored' cemetery that was named Saint Joe Cemetery. It was located at Section 18, Township 11, S., Range 31, E (*fig. 8*) in the town of St. Joe<sup>8</sup> (present-day Palm Coast). The directions to this cemetery were listed as "from Wadsworth's Turpentine Still go east on Canal Road, 3/10 mile to cemetery which lies on the left (north) of road." The total number of graves in this cemetery was not documented by this project. One veteran was listed as being buried here: Brown, Frank, (15 Aug) 1893-1939, Pvt., 15<sup>th</sup> Eng. Corps.

### **Frank Brown, World War I Veteran**

Some historical and genealogical information was located regarding Frank Brown (World War I veteran). His Registration Card (*fig. 9*) was located and reveals the following: Name: Frank Brown; Residence: Espanola, FL; Race: African (Black); Marital Status: Single; Birth Date: August 15, 1893; Birth Place: Adabelle, Georgia; Occupation: Common Laborer; Where Employed: Near Bunnell, FL; Marital Status: Single; Race: African; Exemption from the Draft?: No; Tall, Medium or Short?: Medium; Slender, Medium or Stout?: Medium; Color of Eyes: Brown; Color of Hair: Black; Bald?: No; Disabled?: No; and he was a natural born citizen of the United States.

There is also some additional information about him in the 1920 and 1930 census records.

In 1920, he was living in Espanola, Flagler County, Florida, was age 28, single, a boarder in a home of Will and Camalias Moseby, a laborer in the Turpentine Still and he could read and write.

In 1930, he was living in Bell, Gilchrist County, Florida, married to Ellen Brown (age 17) and was a laborer in the turpentine wood industry.

The census records record his social security number was 266050956, and his mother was Julia Sapp (born around 1870) and his father was Jim Brown.

According to the 1940-1941 Works Progress Administration's Veterans' Registration Graves Project he died in 1939 and was buried in the St. Joe (colored) cemetery in the Flagler County town of St. Joe (present-day Palm Coast).

Records indicate he was a turpentine worker and was employed at different stills (Bunnell, Flagler County (*fig. 10*) and Bell, Gilchrist County). The fact that he was buried in the St. Joe (colored) cemetery, which was near the Holden-Wadsworth St. Joseph's Still seems logical as it is possible that he might have been employed there during his life.

### **Is the St. Joe Colored Cemetery Lost to Time?**

Currently, it is not known what happened to this cemetery since Palm Coast was developed. It is surely possible that the graves of the St. Joe Cemetery are still intact underground. If the area that was Canal Road in the 1940s can be identified against a current map, it might be possible to locate the original area of the St. Joe (colored) cemetery.

### **Continuing Thoughts about our Cemeteries**

It is certainly safe to assume that most of the humans that have ever lived on this planet, and since died, do not have their remains in recognizable or known graves today.

The unfortunate story of the decimated Bunnell Black Cemetery and the lost St. Joe Cemetery are just two of thousands of similar incidents that continue to occur to this day. Whether considering Flagler County, or any other community, questions and concerns arise regarding the stability and longevity of any cemetery or gravesite. Ponder this: If the land hosting a cemetery or gravesite becomes desirable, or necessary, for commercial, military, governmental or residential purposes what do you think the likelihood would be that the current owners or governments will redevelop the property regardless of who or how many people are interred there?

The loss of cemeteries results in the diminishing of community and social culture and distorts local, state and national history.

## Figures

### Decimated and Lost Cemeteries (Flagler County Black History)

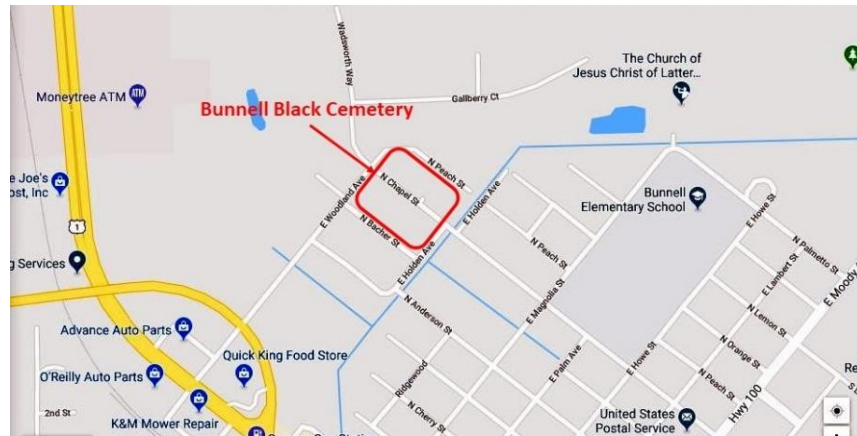


***Fig. 1.*** Masonic Cemetery for blacks in Palm Coast, FL – Central Section Looking West through the iron fence. Photograph by Author (September 2019).





**Fig. 2.** A surviving Flagler County family cemetery (located on the property of present-day Flagler County Executive Airport). Tombstones of Robert and Julia White (originals are on the right and left, and a newer memorial tombstone is in the center). Photograph by Author (March 2019).



**Fig. 3.** A 2019 street map that includes the Colony Park community in Bunnell. The area where the Bunnell Black Cemetery was (is) located is highlighted. Source: Google Maps – March 2019.





**Fig. 4.** Colony Park Development, Bunnell, FL – Displaced tombstone of Warren Benford (1881-1931) that was moved away from its original gravesite and leaned up against a tree on an empty building lot because it was in the way of new housing and street development. Photograph by Carl Landrie – November 1978. Source: Flagler County Historical Society.



**Fig. 5.** Colony Park Development, Bunnell, FL – Another view of the displaced tombstone of Warren Benford. The home in this photograph, and other homes in this vicinity, could possibly be standing right over top of a lost grave or graves. Photograph by Carl Landrie - November 1978. Source: Flagler County Historical Society.



**Fig. 6.** Intersection of E. Holden Ave. & N. Bacher St. - facing north. Several lifetime Flagler County residents remember that this area had several gravesites, including a few standing tombstones, while it was part of the original Bunnell Black Cemetery. The Graves Registration Project that was conducted by the Federal Works Agency in 1940-1941 also identified this area as the Bunnell (Colored) Cemetery. Photograph by Author (July 2019).





**Fig. 7.** View of the intersection of E. Holden Ave. and N. Chapel St., Colony Park, Bunnell. Local stories and rumors say a mass grave was created in this area from the remains of the Bunnell Black Cemetery that were bulldozed and relocated here to make way for the Colony Park development. Photograph by Author (March 2019).



**Fig. 8.** Section 18, Township 11, S., Range 31, E in Flagler County now includes major development including Interstate 95, which runs right through the center of the area. Source: Flagler County Property Appraiser's Office.

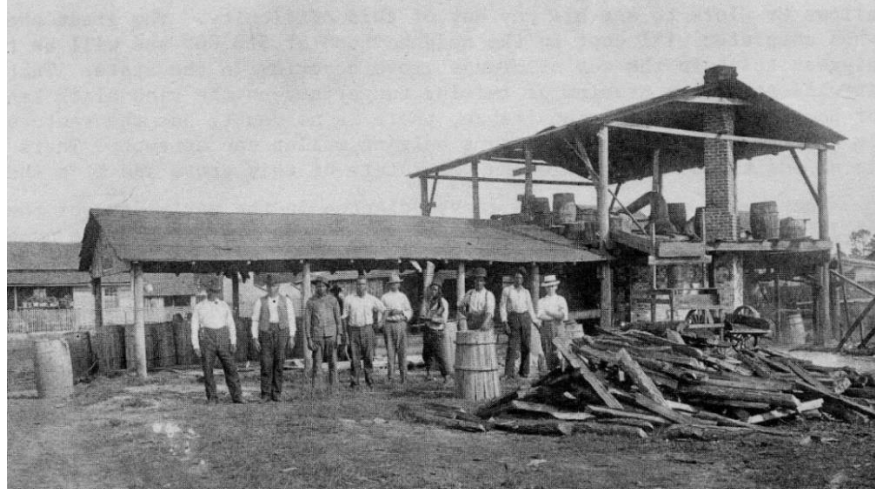
Form 1 REGISTRATION CARD No. 114	
1 Name in full	Frank Brown
2 Home address	Esplanade
3 Date of birth	August 15 1893
4 Are you (1) married have child (2) a married woman, (3) at home, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)?	Married
5 Where born	Adelphi Ga
6 If not a citizen of what country are you a citizen or subject?	
7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office?	Common labor
8 By whom employed?	St. Johns Graph Co
9 Where employed?	Highway Bureau
10 Registered as single (check) (1) married (check) (2) Race (specify which) (3) Affected	Single
11 What military service have you had? Rank (1) Branch (2) Dates (3) Station or State (4)	
12 Do you claim exemption from military service? (1) Yes (2) No	No

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.  
 Frank Brown 190  
 (Signature or mark)

9-2-29-A REGISTRAR'S REPORT	
1 Full name of registrant (specify which)?	Frank Brown
2 Date of report	June 2 1917
3 Date of birth	August 15 1893
4 Place of birth	Adelphi Ga
5 Place of residence	Esplanade
6 Place of employment	St. Johns Graph Co
7 Signature of Registrar	C. J. Brown
8 Precinct	7
9 City or County	St. Johns
10 State	Fla
11 Date of registration	6-2-17

**Fig. 9.** World War I Registration Card No. 114 for Frank Brown (born August 15, 1893). Precinct 7, St. Johns County, dated June 2, 1917.





**Fig. 10.** A Turpentine Still in Bunnell, Flagler County. All the workers were black except for the still's owner, I. I. Moody, who is standing on the right wearing a white hat - circa 1910. This picture is an excellent example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Florida turpentine still. It is not known if Frank Brown ever worked at this particular still. Source: Flagler County Historical Society.

## Notes

### Decimated and Lost Cemeteries (Flagler County Black History)

<sup>1</sup> **Lewis Edward Wadsworth, Jr.** (November 21, 1915 – October 14, 1985) began working in the lumber business at age 14. After the death of his father, he managed the commissary at the St. Joseph Turpentine Still, which had a workforce of 35 families. He also managed 6,000 acres of pine trees, which produced turpentine, and 24,000 acres of timberlands his family owned. In 1957, the Wadsworth Lumber Company was founded which became one of Florida's largest suppliers of lumber, cross ties (for railroading) and wood chips. He served several terms on the Flagler County Board of County Commissioners, was president of the Flagler County Chamber of Commerce, was president of the Flagler County Farm Bureau and was named an Honorary Director for the Florida Chamber of Commerce in 1997. Due to his influence in Flagler County business, which at one time accounted for the largest payroll in the county, he was locally referred to as the "Baron of Bunnell."

<sup>2</sup> Not considering Native American tribal wars since the European Invasion began in 1513 several wars and battles have been fought within the borders of Florida. These wars include Spanish and French battles, the Patriot War [U.S. Invasion of Spanish East Florida] (1812-1814), the First Seminole War (1817-1818), the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), the Third Seminole War (1855-1858) and the American Civil War (1861-1865).

<sup>3</sup> The **Naval Outlying Field Bunnell** military facility was built during World War II. It served as an auxiliary airfield with minimal facilities for flight training operations in the low-traffic Flagler County area. After World War II, it became surplus government military property and the federal government donated it to Flagler County. The area is now home to the Flagler Executive Airport.

<sup>4</sup> **Isaac I. Moody** (October 27, 1874 – December 17, 1918) moved to St. Johns County, Florida in the early 1890s and first worked in the turpentine business as a woods rider near present-day Bunnell. He ventured into various businesses including turpentine, shingle milling, real estate and banking. After getting into politics he quickly gained influence and local and statewide respect and was instrumental in the establishment of Flagler County, Florida in 1917. Today, he is remembered as the "Father of Flagler County."

<sup>5</sup> **Dewey D. Moody** (June 4, 1899 – September 20, 1964) was the manager of a turpentine still, a surveyor and Flagler County Tax Assessor for 32 years.

<sup>6</sup> **Tom E. Holden** (January 27, 1893 – July 6, 1974) was a pharmacist that moved to Bunnell in 1916 and purchased the Smith Drug Store. He renamed the Bunnell store Holden's Pharmacy and opened a second pharmacy in Flagler Beach. He was also a Bunnell City Councilman, the Mayor of Bunnell, and a Flagler County School Trustee.

<sup>7</sup> The **Flagler Tribune** was originally named the *St. Johns Tribune*, which was a weekly newspaper that was established in 1913. In 1917, when Flagler County was incorporated the newspaper changed its name to the **Flagler Tribune**. In 1981, the **Flagler Tribune** newspaper was purchased by the News-Journal Corporation. The News-Journal then merged it with the *Palm Coast News* and renamed the newspaper to the *Flagler/Palm Coast News-Tribune*, which is now a weekly publication that is published on Wednesdays.

<sup>8</sup> **The town of St. Joe** was established around a turpentine still called St. Joseph's. It was owned by Thomas Holden and Lewis Wadsworth in the 1930s. No remnants of this town or turpentine still industry are known to exist above ground, because the area of Section 18, Township 11, S., Range 31, E of Flagler County has been heavily developed. Interstate 95 runs right through the middle of this area, and many commercial and residential buildings, parking lots and streets of Palm Coast, Florida have been constructed within its boundaries.

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### About the Author

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***Perseverance: Episodes of Black History from the Rural South***

by Randy Jaye

