



Abandoned African-American Cemeteries Task Force Second Meeting

September 2, 2021

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE



I. Call to Order/Roll Call

CS/CS/HB 37: Task Force on Abandoned African-American Cemeteries

	MEMBER	REPRESENTING ENTITY	AREA
1.	Dr. Timothy Parsons, Chair <i>Director, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State</i>	Secretary of State, Laurel Lee's designee	Statewide
2.	Dr. Kathryn O'Donnell Miyar <i>Bureau Chief, Bureau of Archaeological Research, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State</i>	Bureau of Archaeological Research, Division of Historical Resources	Statewide
3.	Ms. Yvette Lewis <i>President, NAACP Hillsborough County Branch</i>	Florida State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)	Hillsborough County
4.	Dr. Antoinette Jackson <i>Professor and Chair, Department of Anthropology, USF</i>	Florida Council of Churches	Tampa
5.	Ms. Althemese Barnes <i>Executive Director, FAAHPN</i>	Florida African American Heritage Preservation Network (FAAHPN)	North Florida Region
6.	Mr. Jeffery T. Moates <i>West Central Region Director, FPAN</i>	Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN)	West Central Region
7.	Mr. Keenan L. Knopke <i>President & CEO Curlew Hills Memory Gardens, Inc.</i>	Cemetery Industry	Temple Terrace
8.	Senator Janet Cruz	Florida Senate	Part of Hillsborough County
9.	Representative Fentrice Driskell	Florida House of Representatives	Part of Hillsborough County
10.	Mr. Jaha Cummings <i>Council Member, City of Punta Gorda</i>	Local government	Punta Gorda



Adoption of Agenda

ITEM		PRESENTER
1.	Call to Order and Roll Call	Dr. Timothy Parsons
2.	Opening Remarks	Dr. Timothy Parsons
3.	Summary of Methods for Collecting Public Input	
4.	Overview of Chapter 98-268, Laws of Florida ; and Related Summary of Findings and Recommendations from the Final Report of the 1998 Task Force on Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries	Dr. Timothy Parsons
5.	Overview of the Role of the Division of Historical Resources under Florida Law Regarding Cemeteries	Dr. Kathryn O'Donnell Miyar
6.	Summary of Initiatives in Other States	
7.	Presentations, Thoughts, and Input from Task Force Members	
8.	Update on Public Input, <i>If Received</i>	Dr. Timothy Parsons
9.	Public Comment	
10.	<i>Motion to Adjourn</i>	



Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting



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II. Opening Remarks



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III. Collecting Public Input



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africanamericancemeteries@dos.myflorida.com





FLORIDA PUBLIC
ARCHAEOLOGY
NETWORK

www.FPAN.us/HCI

HELP US WITH FLORIDA'S
HISTORIC CEMETERY INVENTORY

Cemetery Name (if known): _____
 Closest Address: _____
 City/Town and County: _____
 GPS Coordinates (optional): _____

HISTORY
 Approximate year established (if known): _____ Earliest/Latest headstone dates? _____

DESCRIPTION
 Circle all that apply: Abandoned Overgrown Well-Maintained Broken Headstones Threatened
 Describe visible damage: _____
 Approximate size of cemetery/number of headstones: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION (optional)
 Name/Organization: _____
 E-mail: _____ Phone Number: _____

Under Florida law, e-mail addresses are public record. If you do not want your e-mail address released in response to a public records request, contact this office by phone or in writing, Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historical Resources, R.A. Gray Building, 4th Floor, 500 S. Bronough St., Tallahassee, FL 32399 (850) 245-6440

HELP US WITH FLORIDA'S
HISTORIC CEMETERY INVENTORY

Place
First Class
Stamp Here

Help Florida's Division of Historical Resources protect and preserve our state's historic cemeteries!

Fill out the front of this postcard, mail it in (don't forget a stamp), and ensure that your local community, church, or family cemetery is recorded with the State of Florida. For more information on how to fill out the form, visit:
FPAN.us/HCI

Some historic cemeteries are on private property, and permission of the property owner must always be obtained in advance of accessing the land.


www.fheritage.com


FLORIDA PUBLIC
ARCHAEOLOGY NETWORK

Florida Division of Historical Resources
Attn: Historic Cemetery Inventory
R.A. Gray Building, 4th Floor
500 S. Bronough Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250



IV. Overview of Ch. 98-268, Laws of Florida



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Cemetery Preservation and Consumer Protection Act

- Created 11-member task force on Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries
- Examine status of abandoned and neglected cemeteries in the state, report findings, and recommend solutions to problems.
- Submitted Final Report on January 15, 1999





Summary of Findings of the 1998 Task Force on Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries

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1. Data from appx. 3,580 cemeteries suggest that 40%-50% were abandoned or neglected.
2. The Task Force was unable to quantify the extent to which private, unlicensed cemeteries were not able to maintain their properties.
3. Did not quantify the extent that neglected cemeteries create problems for citizens and local government, but opined that such cemeteries are a burden on local government resources.



4. Some older neglected cemeteries may represent a loss of historic or archaeological value, but the extent of such loss was not quantified.
5. Legislation is needed to establish guidelines, definitions, methods of establishing care for neglected and abandoned cemeteries, agencies responsible for providing such care, the funding mechanism for such projects, as well as a permanent structure to continue the location, identification, protection, preservation, and care of such cemeteries.
6. A grants-in-aid type program using matching funds would help ameliorate the problems created by abandoned and neglected cemeteries.



7. The Task Force examined the question of funds needed to address the problems and recommended the following funding sources:
 - a. A one-time appropriation by the legislature
 - b. A fee on death certificates
 - c. Enabling legislation to permit Cities and counties to include in their budgets funds for this purpose
 - d. The establishment of a non-profit corporation withing the Department of Banking and Finance to obtain donations from individuals, businesses, industries, organizations, local, state, and federal grants, foundations, etc. The fund would function as an endowment.



8. Determined that it is imperative to stop the proliferation of neglected and abandoned cemeteries.

9. The Legislature had already established in Ch. 872 protection for all human burial sites and all human remains regardless of whether the site is abandoned.





Summary of Recommendations of the 1998 Task Force on Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries

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1. The work of the Task Force should be allowed to continue in either of the following ways:
 - a. The Task Force should continue in its present form for a finite time in order to more thoroughly examine the extent of the problems, or
 - b. The non-profit corporation outlined in the proposed legislation should continue these functions on a permanent basis.

2. Establish that local governments are the best way to handle the problem created by abandoned and neglected cemeteries within their jurisdictions, combined with a statewide approach through the designated agency and non-profit corporation.



3. Establish that owners of unlicensed cemeteries must care for those cemeteries in a proper manner as to avoid neglect.
4. Proscribe abandonment and neglect of cemeteries.
5. Establish that a copy of all burial transit permits will be filed with the Clerk of Court in the County of Burial.
6. Establish that officially designated persons other than the next of kin shall be given an easement right of entry to enter and inspect private cemeteries.



7. Establish that unlicensed cemeteries be required to post a sign at the cemetery providing notice of the existence of a cemetery at the posted location.

8. Establish that no new cemeteries shall be allowed to be created except under the provisions of Part I of Chapter 497, thereby ensuring that a care and maintenance fund is established for each new cemetery.



V. Overview of the Role of the Division of Historical Resources under Florida Law Regarding Cemeteries



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Cemeteries, burials, and human remains have a special place in all human cultures from earliest times to the present.

Special care for ancestors and for the dead is one of the defining traits of being human.



Under Florida Statute 872, all human remains are afforded equal protection under the law, regardless of land ownership.

“It is the intent of the Legislature that all human burials and human skeletal remains be accorded equal treatment and respect based upon common human dignity without reference to ethnic origin, cultural background, or religious affiliation. This section applies to all human burials, human skeletal remains, and associated burial artifacts not otherwise protected under chapter 497 or other state law and found upon or within any public or private land in the state, including submerged lands.”



Cemeteries are in all types of ownership:

- public ownership by municipalities, counties, states and the federal government
- private ownership by organizations that manage cemeteries, such as corporations and churches
- private ownership of abandoned and neglected cemeteries that are no longer active
- Each type of ownership involves different levels of protection and management, ranging from active use as a legal cemetery, to cases where a landowner does not even know that a cemetery is on their land. **The most important point to remember is that all human remains are protected under state law, no matter who owns the land.**



Most active cemeteries fall under the regulations of Chapter 497, *Florida Statutes*, and are under the management of cemetery corporations, or religious and not-for-profit organizations. Active cemeteries of this type are regulated by the Florida Division of Banking and Finance.

- Sometimes cemeteries become abandoned when the original organization is no longer viable.
- Commercial cemeteries can go out of business with no provision for future care.
- Church cemeteries may be left behind.
- Land in private ownership may contain cemeteries that are unknown, lost, abandoned, or neglected.
- In some cases, headstones may have been removed illegally or prior to enactment of legal provisions, but human graves still exist below the ground.



Chapter 497 Regulates *licensed or commercial* funeral and cemetery services (cemeteries, columbaria, cremation, cemeteries companies, dealers, and monument builders, and funeral directors and establishments).

Chapter 872 protects all human burials from disturbance and regulates relocation of any cemetery (marked or previously marked) burials *exempt under Chapter 497*.

Most unrecorded African American cemeteries will fall under provisions from chapter 872.02 rather than 497. This is because cemeteries exempt under Ch. 497, F.S. excludes most smaller historic and religious cemeteries.

Ch. 497 Exemptions:

- Religious cemeteries of less than 5 acres
- County and municipal cemeteries
- Community and nonprofit cemeteries
- Cemeteries owned/operated by religious institution prior to June 23, 1976
- Cemeteries owned and operated since July 15, 1915 by a fraternal organization
- A columbarium owned by and contiguous with an existing religious institution facility
- Family cemeteries of less than 2 acres
- A mausoleum less than 2 acres owned and contiguous to an existing religious institution facility
- A columbarium 5 acres or less on the campus of a state university.





Under both 872 and 497 **the same principles apply regarding ownership:**

- all human remains receive equal protection under Florida law, regardless of land ownership
- land owners are prohibited from disturbing human remains and graves on their land
- relatives and descendants have certain rights of access to cemeteries on private land
- relatives and descendants may request the private landowner to provide reasonable maintenance
- relatives and descendants have a right to maintain a cemetery if the landowner fails or refuses to do so
- if there is a dispute about access or maintenance local law enforcement will be involved



A brief history of Chapter 872:

Chapter 872 provides burial protection, detailing criminal liability for willfully and knowingly disturbing burials. That law has been modified throughout the years to provide regulations for various types of interments.

Section 872.02 existed prior to 872.05.

Under 872.02 historic cemeteries have regulation and protocol regarding protection, disturbance, and relocation of cemetery burials. Granting the authority to relocate burials to a “Legally Authorized Person”, as defined under 497.005(43), which primarily includes familial descendants, and gives final authority in case disputes to the local county commission or city council.

In 1986-1987, The Florida Legislature amended Chapter 872 to include language that address protection and respectful treatment of American Indian burial sites, as well as all other burials not in marked (or previously marked) cemeteries that are greater than 75 years deceased.

Section 872.05 was added to ensure that proper steps were taken when unmarked human remains were encountered. Under 872.05 duties are provided to the State Archaeologist regarding the determination, often in conjunction with District Medical Examiners, whether a burial falls under the category as an “unmarked burial” and, if the remains constitute an “unmarked burial”, grants authority to the State Archaeologist to assume state jurisdiction of such burial to initiate efforts for the proper protection of the interment/burial.



Legally Authorized Person in priority listed under 497.005(43):

- *The decedent, when authorizations and directions are provided by the decedent*
- *The person designated by the decedent as authorized to direct disposition*
- *The surviving spouse*
- *A son or daughter 18 years of age or older*
- *A grandchild 18 years of age or older*
- *A grandparent*
- *Any person in the next degree of kinship*
- *If no family member exists than individuals such as a decedent's guardian, personal representative, attorney, as well as a public health officer, medical examiner, county commission, a friend of the decedent or any other person willing to assume the responsibility as the legally authorized person.*

One shortcoming is descendent communities, that are not direct lineal descendants, don't fall under the definition as a legally authorized person. However, communities can have a significant influence in the public forum if a public hearing is held before the county commission of the county where the cemetery is located, or the city council, if the cemetery is located in a municipality. These communities can appeal to their local public figures in the County Commission or City Council, since they have the final authority to grant a request for a relocation of a cemetery or grave.



The are differential legal authorizations and protocol for cemetery interments (872.02) versus unmarked burials (872.05).

The legal separation of unmarked human remains and known cemeteries is beneficial and appropriate because while the state has jurisdiction in unmarked, isolated cases, legal authority of known cemeteries falls to familial descendants, landowners, local law enforcement, and/or the county or city as appropriate.

Separate protective laws for cemeteries and unmarked burials are comparable to many other states' statutes.

Unmarked Human Burial applies to:

“any human skeletal remains or associated burial artifacts or any location, including any burial mound or earthen or shell monument, where human skeletal remains or associated burial artifacts are discovered or believed to exist on the basis of archaeological or historical evidence, **excluding any burial marked or previously marked by a tomb, monument, gravestone, or other structure or thing placed or designed as a memorial of the dead.**” Section 872.05 does NOT apply to any cemetery or burial marked OR marked at any time in the past.



The Division of Historical Resources' role in cemetery protection

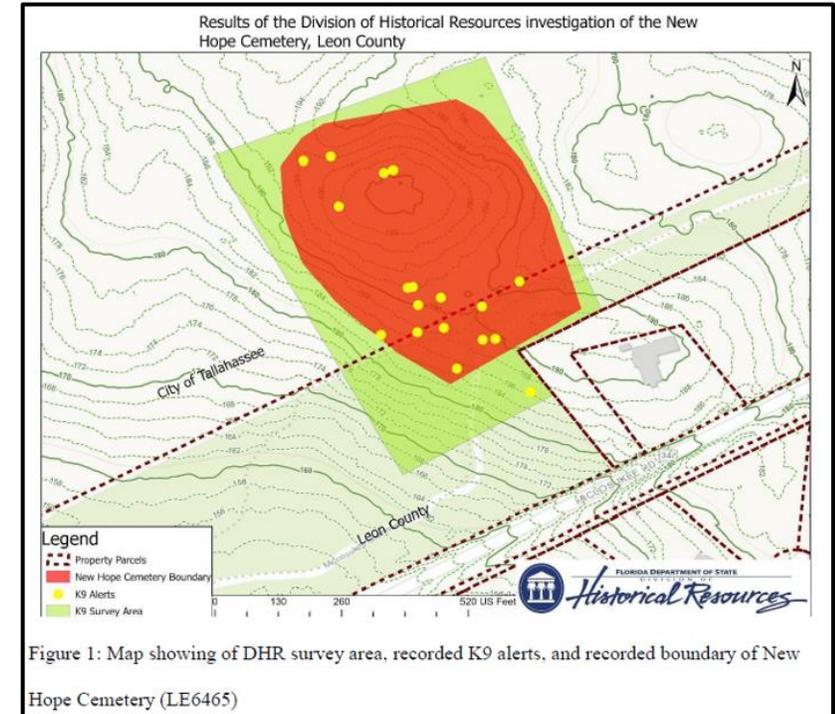
In Florida, the office of the State Archaeologist is within the Division of Historical Resources under the Bureau of Archaeological Research. Because the State Archaeologist has certain narrow responsibilities under Section 872.05, Florida Statutes, concerning unmarked human remains, the office receives many calls about problems concerning cemeteries and graves.

The duties of the State Archaeologist assigned in Section 872.05, *Florida Statutes*, are about unmarked human remains only. Though the Division typically has no jurisdiction or legal responsibility, the State Archaeologist often provides guidance, as solicited, for such cases, to any cemetery stake holder regarding their situation.

- State Archaeologist responded to and provided guidance for over 75 cemetery case inquiries/situation in the last few years.

There are circumstances, however, when the State **does** have legal authority:

- When a cemetery is located on State owned/managed lands
- When proposed development, where a cemetery is located, triggers a state permit application; the Compliance and Review program, located within the Division of Historical Resources under the Bureau of Historic Preservation, can then be provided with an opportunity to comment on the project



Map: Bureau of Archaeological Research led investigation of African American Cemetery on State Lands in Tallahassee, FL





The primary historic preservation law for Florida is the Historical Resources Act (1986), Chapter 267, F.S. Section 267.061 of the act defines the states' policy towards its historical resources and offers some protection for historic cemeteries and graveyards by providing that:

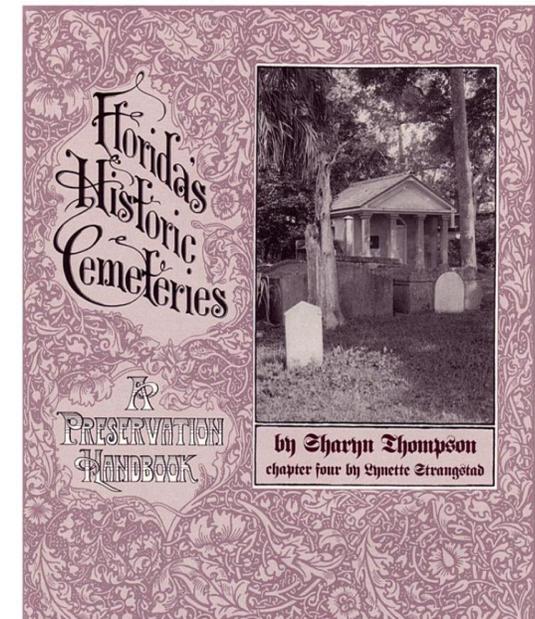
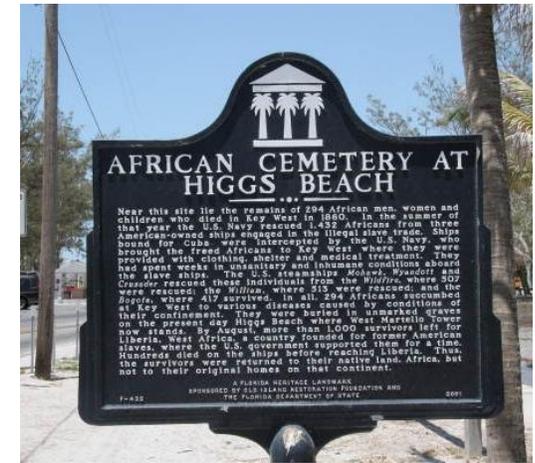
Each state agency of the executive branch having direct or indirect jurisdiction over a proposed state or state-assisted undertaking shall, in accordance with state policy and prior to the approval of expenditure of any state funds on the undertaking, consider the effect of the undertaking on any historic property that is included in, or eligible of inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places. Each such agency shall afford the division a reasonable opportunity to comment with regard to such an undertaking.

The Historic Preservation Compliance Review Section of BHP is the agency primarily responsible for reviewing development projects which alter the environment (Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 267.061, F.S.) and assisting local governments in comprehensive planning for historic resources.



The Division of Historical Resources manages a wide range of preservation programs that are useful during an organized effort to preserve a historic cemetery:

- The Florida Master Site File (FMSF)
- Historic landmark designation and National Register of Historic Places nomination
- Grant assistance
- A historic cemetery preservation handbook was created to assist individuals and organization concerns with the preservation of historic cemeteries in Florida: “Florida’s Historic Cemeteries, A Preservation Handbook”, was published in 1989 by the Historic Tallahassee Preservation Board. Funding was provided by the historic preservation grant-in-aid assistance from the division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State.



Chapter 704.08 Cemeteries; right of ingress and egress for visiting or maintenance

- *The relatives and descendants of any person buried in a cemetery shall have an easement for ingress and egress for the purpose of visiting the cemetery at reasonable times and in a reasonable manner.*
- *The owner of the land may designate the easement.*
- *If the cemetery is abandoned or otherwise not being maintained, such relatives and descendants may request the owner to provide for reasonable maintenance of the cemetery, and, if the owner refuses or fails to maintain the cemetery, the relatives and descendants shall have the right to maintain the cemetery.*

497 and 872 also allows counties and municipalities with jurisdiction over an abandoned cemetery to provide maintenance and security to the cemetery.



VI. Summary of Initiatives in Other States



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Overview of Initiatives in Other States with Cemetery programs.

Some States, such as Georgia, do not have a cemetery program.

In Georgia, Locations of cemeteries are provided to local libraries and/or historical societies and local governmental zoning or development offices, not the State; city and county governments are responsible for enforcing state laws and local regulations regarding historic cemeteries. The primary role of the State Historic Preservation Office is to offer information and make suggestions about whom one might contact to see that cemeteries in their area are protected.

Some only have a historic cemetery grant program (Washington State)

15 states *with* cemetery programs were assessed:

Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia

These State programs vary in regards to legal jurisdiction and scope. The agencies that administer these programs also varies from state to state.

Different program agency administration:

- State Historic Preservation Office/Office of the State Archaeologist/Historical Commission (AL, AR, MA, MN, NC, CT, VA, WV, NE, TX, TN)
- Department of Archives (MS)
- Office of State Comptroller (IL)
- Office of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (MI)
- State Administrative/Advisory Board (UT)



- Cemetery program consists solely of cemetery database management (AR, UT)
- No jurisdiction but substantial state cemetery program run by state to compile, assess, and disseminate cemetery information (NC, TX)
- Jurisdiction through permitting programs for substantial cemetery maintenance and relocation (AL, VI, WV)
- Jurisdiction through dispute investigation (MI)
- Two state programs have complete oversight legally regarding cemetery location, designation, protection, and relocation for cemeteries over a certain age (typically 50 or more years since cemetery ceased to be active). (MN, NE)



Minnesota Cemetery Program

- An agency or landowner can request a cemetery authentication from the State Archaeologist. The State Archaeologist will prioritize authentication requests based on immanent threat, planning needs, current staff schedules, and the likelihood that a burial exists in a given location.
- The State Archaeologist has the right to enter all non-federal property for the purposes of authentication. If a burial ground is likely to exist in a particular area, a field visit by state staff may be scheduled. Due to limited staff, schedules may prohibit site visit if there is not an immanent threat and it is located some distance from the office; it may take several weeks to actually make a field visit or the State Archaeologist may never visit the location if it is not threatened.
- If the State cannot respond to a cemetery inquiry due to funding and scheduling restrictions, the landowner or developer has the option of hiring a qualified archaeological contractor to assist with the authentication.
- The archaeological contractor must obtain a Burial Site Assessment License from the office of the State Archaeologist before beginning fieldwork. If the detailed field examination fails to find any evidence for burials, the State Archaeologist may terminate the authentication procedure at any time and make a negative declaration.



The North Carolina Cemetery Survey

Program for recording vital statistics from the state's cemeteries. It operates at the county level and is coordinated through the State Archives at the state level.

The program's objectives are:

- Identifying, mapping, and describing existing cemeteries in North Carolina regardless of size, type, or physical characteristics. Since vital statistics were not kept officially until 1913, the emphasis of the survey is on those graveyards with burials before that date.
- Permanently preserving historical, genealogical, sociological, demographic, and cultural data contained in abandoned or otherwise not-cared for cemeteries, including epitaphs and photographs whenever possible.
- Providing more recent and comprehensive survey data than that available in earlier cemetery surveys, such as the one conducted by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s and 1940s.



Texas Cemetery Preservation Program

- The Cemetery Preservation Program of the Texas Historical Commission supports countywide and local cemetery preservation efforts in each of the 254 counties across the state.
- Cemetery Preservation Program staff provides consultation, educational materials, and training to concerned citizens and public officials. In addition, the program offers the Historic Texas Cemetery (HTC) designation and maintains a statewide inventory of cemeteries to record and protect historic burial grounds.



The Alabama Historical Commission Cemetery Program

- Provides assistance in identifying, documenting, registering, and protecting Alabama's historic cemeteries. Through the cemetery program, the Alabama Historical Commission makes information on Alabama's cemetery laws available; informs the public about general cemetery preservation guidelines; issues permits for substantial work - including, but not limited to the relocation of human remains in cemeteries at least 75 years old.
- The Alabama Historical Commission manages a permit program in which they may issue permits regarding cemetery preservation, investigation, restoration, or relocation of human burials.
- The AHC only issues permits for cemeteries that are at least 75 years old or older. A permit is issued in the form of a letter signed by the Executive Director of the Alabama Historical Commission. **Permittee is responsible to obtain permission from the property owner, prior to permit application, to access the cemetery.**



States with greatest jurisdiction (including permitting programs)



States with least jurisdiction (substantial state funded cemetery programs)

- State agencies with greater authorization and jurisdiction over historic cemeteries provide less legal authorization to lineal descendants.
- Serve as central location and repository to record and synthesize cemetery information; take lead on cemetery issues including significant maintenance and relocation.
- Tend to be less populated / less development, or, like Minnesota, state jurisdiction can create a bottleneck-like restriction to investigate and record these cemeteries.

- Greater legal authorization to lineal descendants, municipalities, landowners and local law enforcement.
- Serve as central location and repository to synthesize and disseminate cemetery information to public and local municipalities; provide guidance including information regarding legal statutes covering cemetery protection, and acts as an advocate for cemetery preservation.
- Work with outside agencies to record and protect burial grounds.

VII. Task Force Member Presentations



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Rep. Fentrice Driskell

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE





Mr. Jeff Moates

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE





Task Force on Abandoned African American Cemeteries

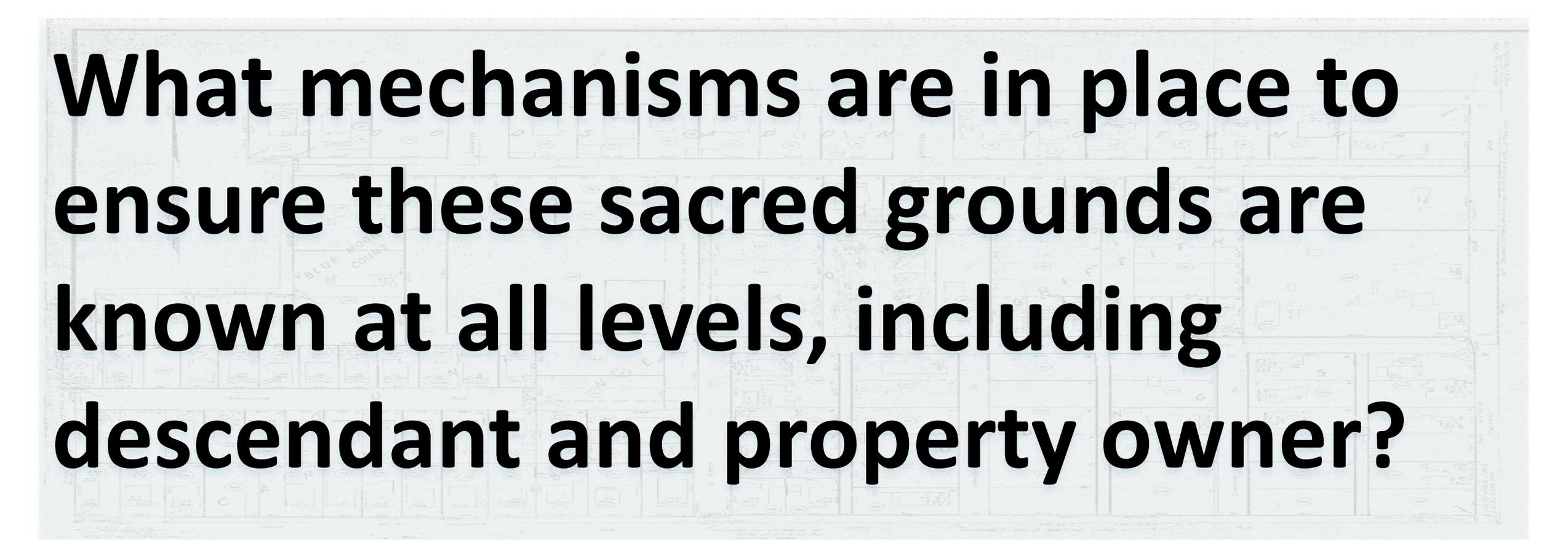
– Second Meeting, Sept 2, 2021, Tampa, FL

Jeffrey Moates, Regional Director
Florida Public Archaeology Network, University of South Florida

A gap in protections for historic cemeteries exists between state and local levels.

Considering:

- State law protects human remains regardless of location, whether on public or private property.**
- A number of historic cemeteries are “missing” from modern maps and official systems of knowledge today.**
- Efforts are underway to collect and record information on these historic cemeteries.**



What mechanisms are in place to ensure these sacred grounds are known at all levels, including descendant and property owner?

Case studies and previously reported examples:

- **College Hill Cemetery & Zion Cemetery, Tampa, FL**
- **Branhilda Richardson-Knowles Memorial Park and Historic Cemetery, Deerfield Beach, FL**
- **Works Progress Administration – Veteran’s Grave Registration of 1940**



Branhilda Richardson-Knowles Memorial Park and Historic Cemetery, Deerfield Beach, FL

- **Works Progress Administration (WPA) – Veteran’s Grave Registration of 1940 - 1941**

Available online:

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00047703/00007/2j>

**FLORIDA
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**SPECIAL ARCHIVES PUBLICATION
NUMBER**

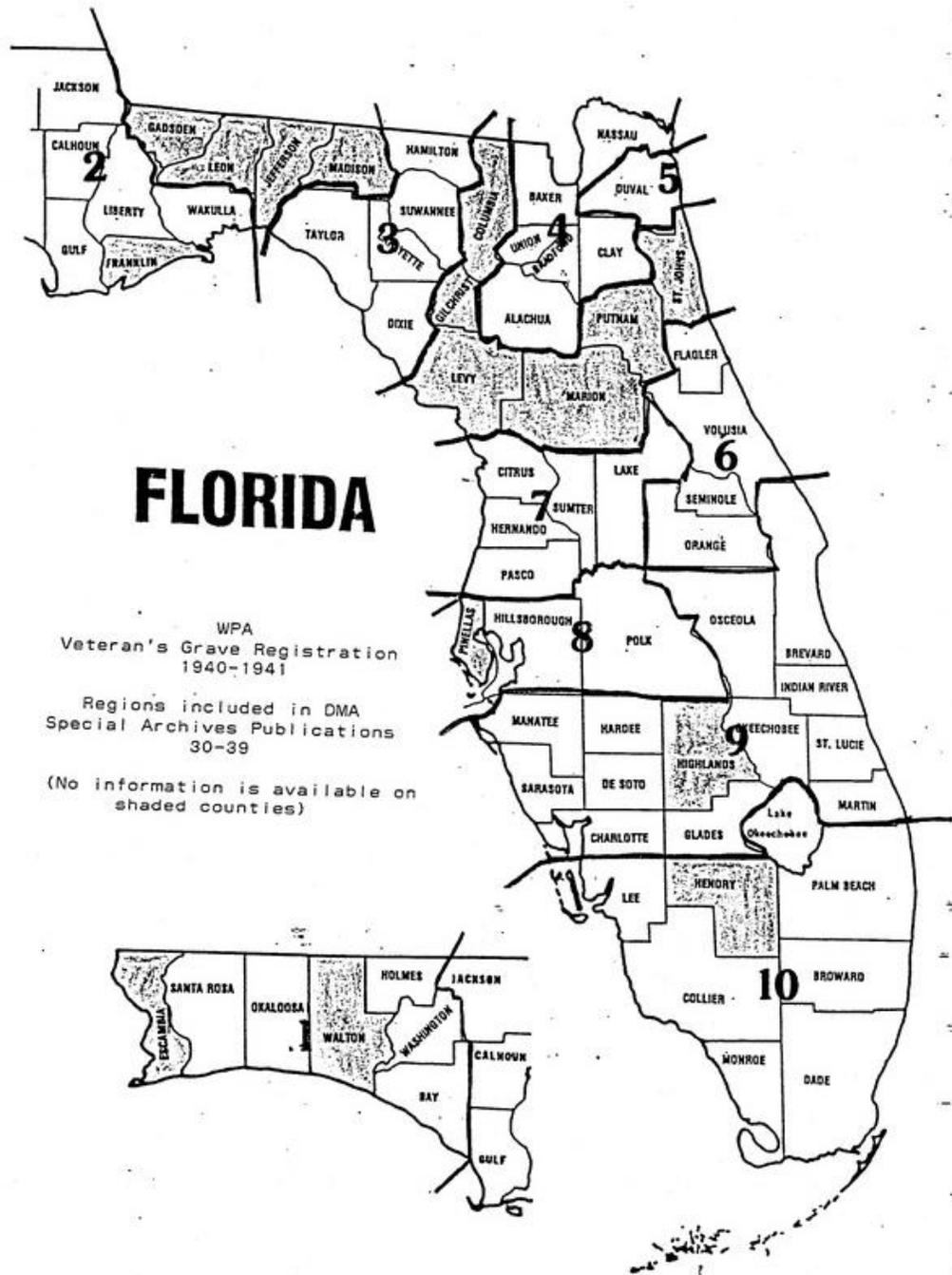
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**WPA
VETERAN'S GRAVE REGISTRATION
1940-1941
REPRINT**

HILLSBOROUGH, POLK

STATE ARSENAL

ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

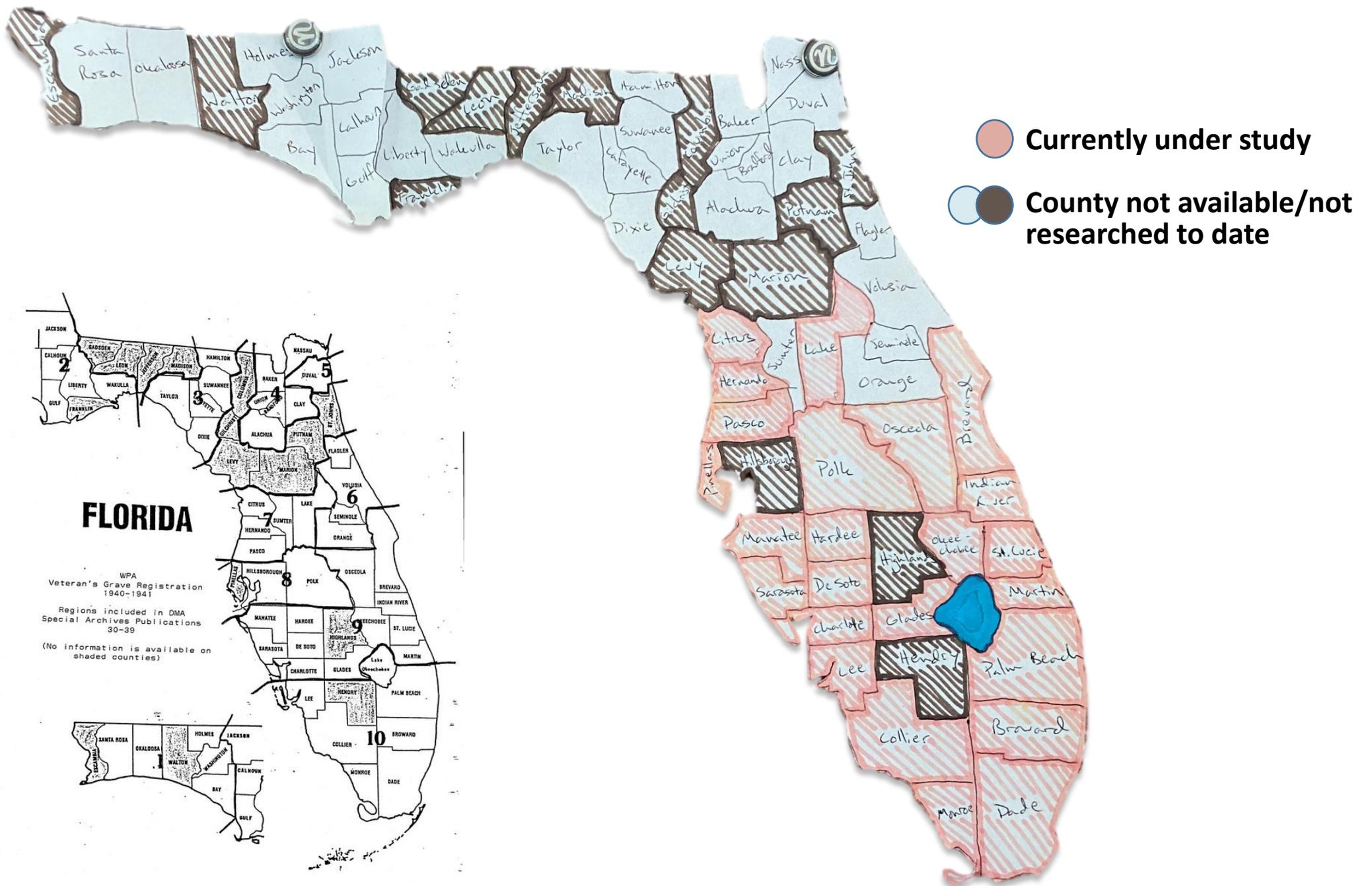


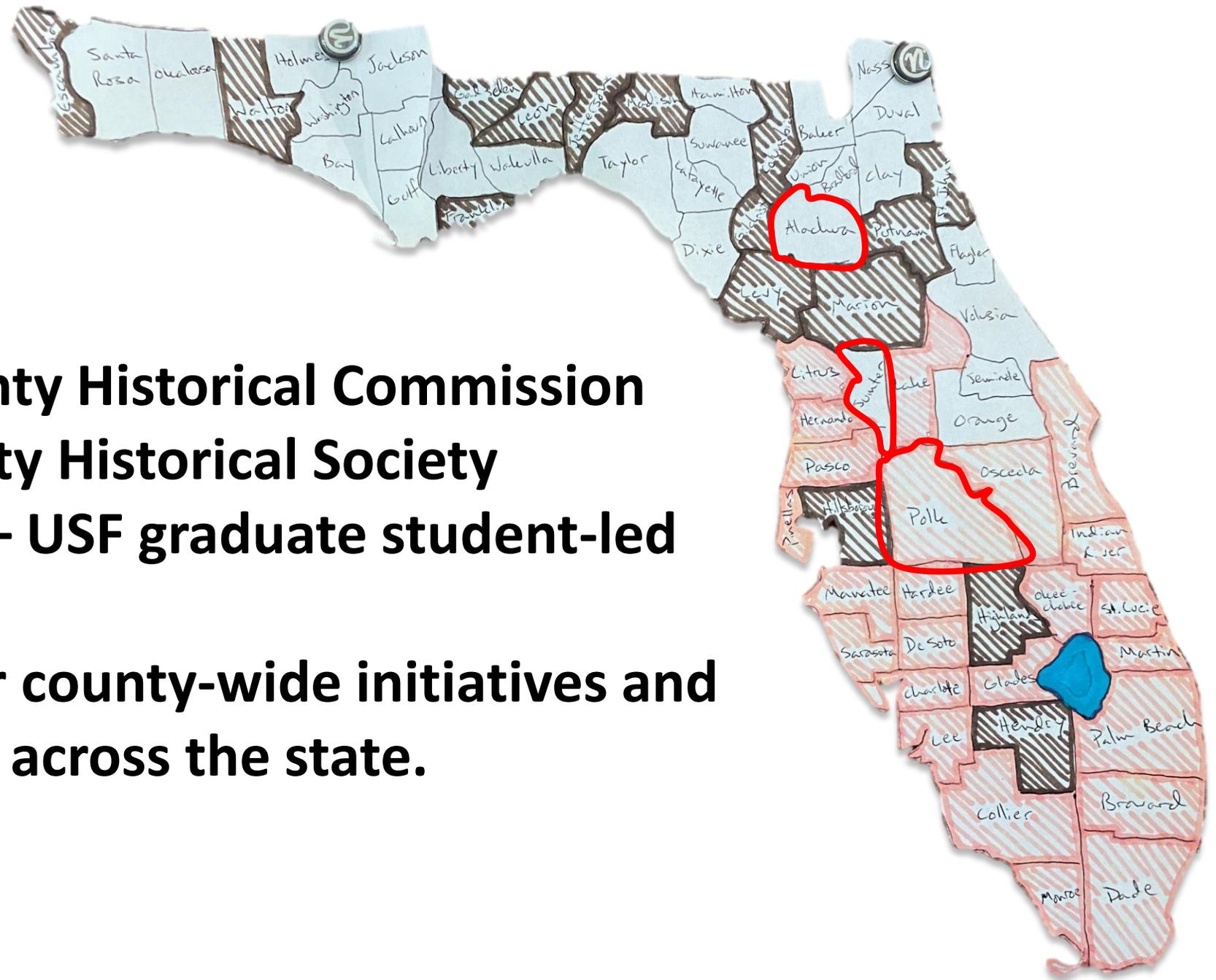
- Works Progress Administration (WPA) – Veteran’s Grave Registration of 1940 - 1941

Available online:

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00047703/00007/2j>

- Cemetery location information is available for 52 of 67 Florida counties.

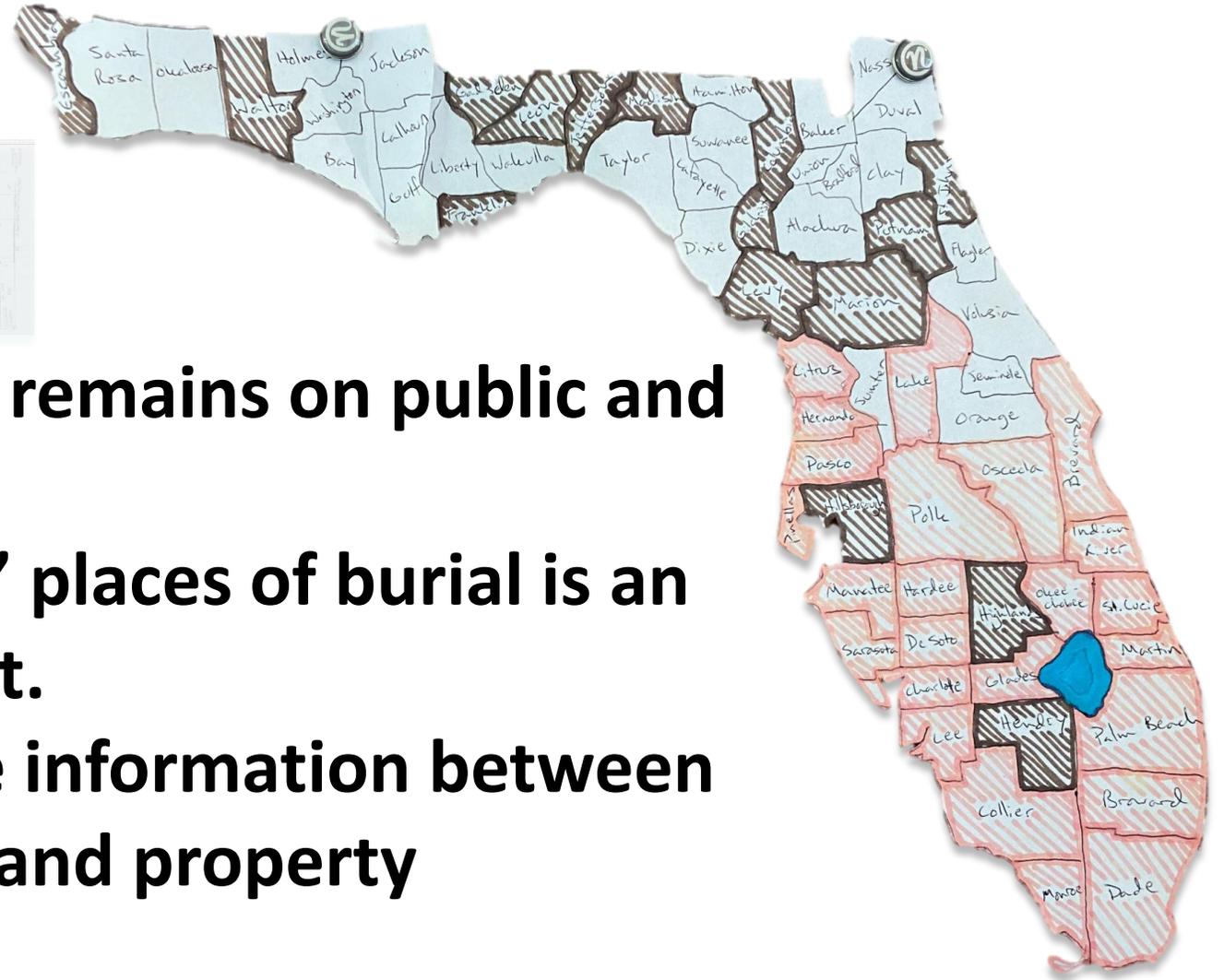




- **Alachua County Historical Commission**
- **Sumter County Historical Society**
- **Polk County – USF graduate student-led project**
- **Various other county-wide initiatives and undertakings across the state.**

Key takeaways:

- State law protects human remains on public and private property.
- Identification of “missing” places of burial is an ongoing cooperative effort.
- A mechanism to share the information between state, local governments, and property appraisers is lacking.
- Impacts descendants’ and relatives’ right to access and provide upkeep (FS 704.08).





Ms. Althemese Barnes

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Florida Historic African American Cemeteries Research Brief

Tampa, Florida

Research Conducted by Task Force Member Althemese Barnes since the
First Meeting in Tallahassee, Florida on July 20, 2021

Points of Discovery Since First Meeting:

- Persons in communities are very willing to share information and stories about cemeteries that are abandoned, neglected, have been desecrated, dismissed or became lost in time.
- The word “Abandoned” does not accurately describe the reason why many African American burial grounds became unkempt or not maintained. Rather: “Neglect”, “Lost from History as generations passed on”, “Desecration” and being dismissed or on the peripheral “at best” in decisions made by those in power in communities led to the problem that the Task Force and residents are challenged with today.

- The State of Florida is commended for this initiative and has an opportunity to lead and set a model nation-wide for identifying, recording, preserving and bringing respect to the numerous heretofore neglected, disrespected, forgotten in time and now referred to as Abandoned African American cemeteries.
- Research into the origin of a cemetery can be a key factor in seeking a resolution for perpetual maintenance, restoration and/or preservation. Examples follow: Greenwood, Hickory Hill, Munree and New Hope in Tallahassee; Moncrief Road Cemeteries in Jacksonville, Florida.

OUT OF STATE-LOUISIANA

ABANDONED, NEGLECTED, LOST TO HISTORY AND DESCECRATED AFRICAN AMERICAN BURIAL GROUNDS – A NATIONAL PROBLEM

Sharing: Sharyn Thompson, Founder and Director of The Center for Historic Cemeteries Preservation, is an historian and cultural geographer-Balsam North Carolina, formerly Florida.

A friend who teaches at LSU called to tell me research has shown that the University's health center (built in the 1930s) was built over a slave cemetery -- which people apparently knew about and went ahead with anyway.

If you Google Slave Cemetery on LSU Campus, three or four articles pop up --from the Baton Rouge Advocate. The article entitled "Oh Boy" discusses the actions that could occur -- tearing down the building, putting up interpretive markers, etc. The others give factual information, with even a photo of a contemporary newspaper article, about the site.

This is a very recent discovery (or re-discovery) that I will use for discussion at the Upcoming December 2021 History Conference.

Definitions

- Abandonment: leave completely; forsake; give up; freedom from
- Neglect: disregard; fail to do; withhold; not given proper care
- Loss of History: “generational” separation from; a record of events-burials nonexistent and unrecorded
- Desecration: Insult something holy; damage something revered; vandalism; defilement
- Definitions are important in the process of addressing and developing strategies to resolve unattended, unkempt, desecrated African American Cemeteries. As well, the origin of burial grounds can impact the solution. Intentional focus, community and institutional, is necessary to effectively discuss, identify, research and develop enforceable guidelines to restore and preserve these important burial grounds.

Research – Identification – Advocacy – Documentation – Restoration – Preservation Examples

Clearwater, Florida (Pinellas County) - **Whispering Souls African American Cemetery**

Tallahassee, Florida (Leon County) - **Bethel Church Cemetery**

New Smyrna Beach (Volusia County) - **Oaklynn and Larkins Cemeteries**

Sanford Florida (Seminole County) - **Page Jackson Cemetery**

Delray Beach Florida (Palm Beach County) - **Pine Crest Cemetery changed to Delray Beach Memorial Gardens**

Nassau/Duval County - **Franklin Town Cemetery**

Tallahassee, Florida – **Centenary, Hickory Hill, Welaunee and Greenwood Cemeteries**

Several other Phone calls and emails received and are in process of being responded to.

Shared African American Cemetery Profiles – Situations and Issues



Page Jackson Cemetery



Page Jackson Cemetery



Trees leaning from strong storm wind direction. Many trees have fallen on graves.
White post markers to identify grave burial sites.



Trees leaning and falling.

Munree Cemetery



Hickory Hill Cemetery: Community and Development Collaboration



Community and Local Government Collaboration
In progress of restoration and preservation: Historic Marker acquired 2019.



Centenary Cemetery: Surveyed but no restoration or preservation; discovered by archeological survey



Greenwood Cemetery Cleanup

Eleven acre cemetery was created as a result of a City discrimination - 1936.
In 1987- Community Advocacy resulted in one time Clean up by the community followed by
Acquisition and Perpetual care assumed by the City of Tallahassee



Greenwood Cemetery

Success story of community and municipal restoration, preservation and perpetual care

Closure

Because many natural and man-made factors are adversely affecting Florida's African American cemeteries and burial grounds, and have for some time, the sites, known and unknown, to the extent possible, are in need of research, surveying, restoration, documentation and preservation for the valuable information that they provide to the state's historical record and in reverence and respect for a group of people who have accomplished, contributed and helped to build the state of Florida.

Logo: Riley House, FAAHPN, Culture Builds Florida



Mr. Jaha Cummings

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VII. Task Force Member Discussion



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VIII. Update on Public Input

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IX. Public Comment

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X. Adjourn

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Abandoned African-American Cemeteries Task Force Second Meeting

September 2, 2021

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