

OLD CITY CEMETERY

Background

In 1852, Captain Charles and Frances Willey donated a four-acre square of property measuring 420 feet on each side to the City of Jacksonville for use as a community cemetery.

In 1869, the cemetery was expanded to the North by an additional two acres, creating sections 5 and 6. This part of Old City Cemetery, known as the Duval Colored Cemetery or the "Freedmen's Cemetery", came to be the burial ground of choice for many of Jacksonville's prominent African-American families. Dispersed throughout this part of the cemetery are the graves of fifty African American veterans, commonly referred to as Buffalo Soldiers, including several that fought as part of the Union army.

In 1902, through Ordinance No. G. 65, the City Council and Mayor dedicated the southwest corner of section 6 (~ 1,584 square feet) as a burial ground to be used exclusively for the burial of soldiers and sailors formally of the Confederate Army and Navy. However, it should be noted that other Confederate Soldiers and Sailors, as well as those that served in later wars and conflicts, are buried throughout the cemetery.

Starting in 1902, the Martha Reid Chapter of the Daughter of the Confederacy joined with the United Confederate Veterans (R.E. Lee Camp No. 58) and the Sons of the Confederate Veterans (Stonewall Jackson Camp No. 83) to host Confederate Memorial Services at the Old City Cemetery. Because of growing attendance, in 1926, the event sponsors had a masonry grandstand constructed in time for the Confederate Memorial Service on April 27, 1926. The grandstand has been continuously used since constructed and was restored in 2008 by the Sons of the Confederacy, Kirby-Smith Camp #1209.

From 1900 to 1942, the Old City Cemetery was maintained by James B. Chalmers, a Scotchman who migrated to America in 1873. His son, Percy Parnell Chalmers, continued as caretaker for the cemetery until 1971. Both lived in a private residence located on the cemetery grounds that has since been demolished.

In 2010, by Ordinance 2010 - 770, the City designated the Old City Cemetery as a local landmark site pursuant to Chapter 307 of the Ordinance Code.

Confederate Burial Ground Dedication

In April of 1902, the City Council and Mayor, through Ordinance No. G. 65, dedicated a portion of what is now known as the "Old City Cemetery" for the burial of Confederate Soldiers and Sailors. Lots 71, 72, 73, and 76 in the southwest corner of section 6 (the "Lots") were "set apart and dedicated" as a burial ground to be used exclusively for soldiers and sailors of the Confederate Army and Navy. Additionally, the Ordinance provided for regulating the granting of permits by the City Board of Health for the burials.

The Ordinance appointed three “custodians”, Maria C. Murphy, Mrs., Mary E. Bessent, and Miss Lou Briggs, representatives of the Daughters of the Confederacy, and gave them “charge and control” of the Lots, providing, in relevant part:

“ . . . no burials shall be permitted in said lots under the general control that the Board of Public Works has of said cemetery except upon their consent or the consent of two of them. Should they or any two of them wish to use said lots for the purposes for which the same are set apart, they shall send to the City Board of Health a request for a permit . . . ”

From the language of the Ordinance, it appears that the City ceded charge and control to the designated custodians for the limited purpose of consenting to burials consistent with the ordinance and obtaining the required permits. The language acknowledges the City still maintained control of the entire cemetery, which would arguably include, operations and maintenance. Moreover, the Ordinance does not convey title; therefore, the dedicated confederal burial ground remains City property.

Landmark Designation

In 2010, by Ordinance 2010-770, the City designated the Old City Cemetery as a local landmark site finding it met 4 of the 7 criteria in Chapter 307 of the Ordinance Code and noting the period of significance as 1852 through 1961.

As a designated landmark site, any activity affecting the Old City Cemetery, requires a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. Before issuing the Certificate of Appropriateness, the Commission will review the proposed activity for consistency with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. However, routine repairs and maintenance, alterations, and new construction not seen from the public right-of-way and other projects consistent with the Secretary's Standards can be pre-approved by the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department, Historic Preservation Section. Any burial or disinterment at the Old City Cemetery will require an approved Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for purposes of documentation.