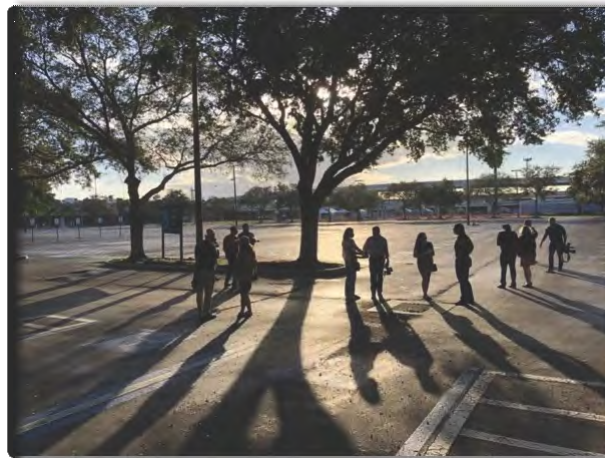


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# **St. Petersburg African American Burial Ground & Gas Plant Neighborhood Timeline 1888-2025**

St. Petersburg's Oaklawn Cemetery complex, near the Gas Plant neighborhood, consisted of three cemeteries:  
Oaklawn, Moffett, and Evergreen cemeteries

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Compiled by David Shedden  
for the USF African American Burial Ground & Remembering Project  
Updated April 14, 2025

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/)

# 1888

On June 8, 1888, the first Orange Belt railroad train arrived in what would become St. Petersburg, Florida.

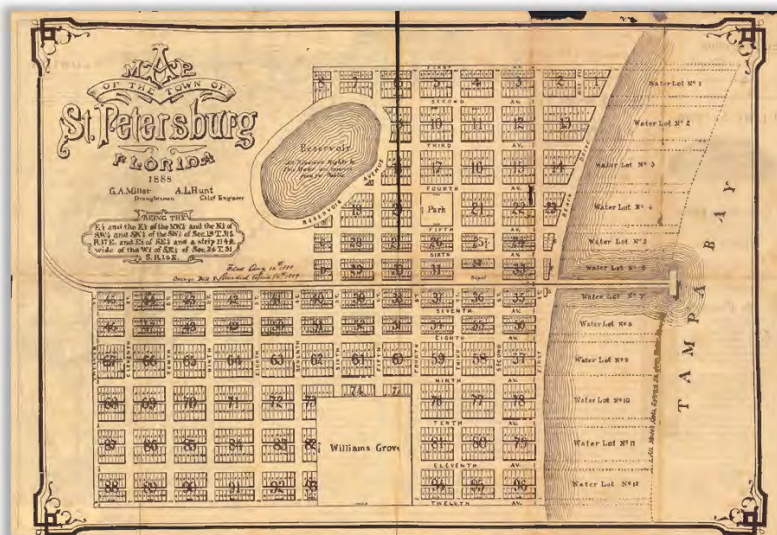
Book Excerpt:

**“....More than a hundred black laborers worked on the final stages of the Orange Belt’s construction, and after the railroad was completed in 1889, a dozen or so stayed on. Joined by their families, these early black pioneers created a small subcommunity along Fourth Avenue South known as Pepper Town.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950*.

By Raymond Arsenault, 1988, p. 124.)

<https://dloc.com/AA00061982/00001/pdf>



**St. Petersburg map with the Orange Belt Railroad, 1888**  
(Courtesy State Archives of Florida)

Pioneer St. Petersburg’s first formal cemetery was **Glen Oak Cemetery** (aka **St. Jude’s Church Cemetery**) which was established after the church’s founding in 1874. **John Donaldson**, St. Petersburg’s first Black settler in 1868, who died in 1901, may have been buried in this predominantly white cemetery. His wife, **Anna Germain Donaldson**, who died around 1891, may have also been buried at Glen Oak Cemetery. (Location: 2012 Auburn Street between 18th and 22nd Avenues South.)

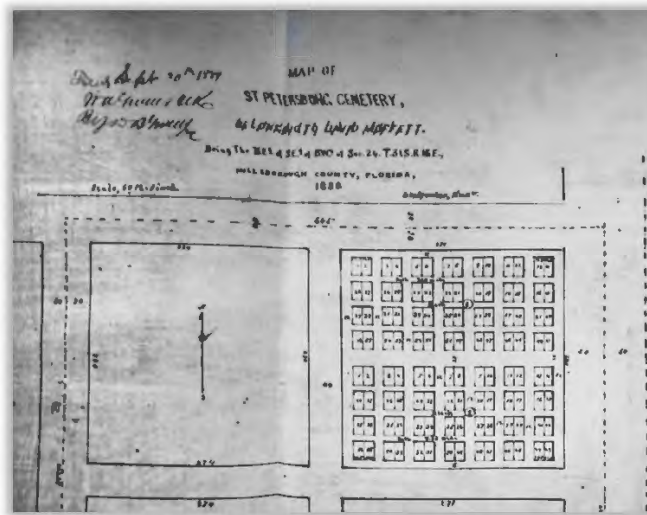
Various local churches started small cemeteries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as the **St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church** (aka **Oakdale**) Cemetery.

**Moffett Cemetery (aka Moffett's Cemetery or St. Petersburg Cemetery), with graves for white and Black burials, was founded in 1888.**

This community cemetery, which was officially surveyed and platted in 1889, included graves for Civil War and other veterans. It was named for **David Moffett**, the owner of the land and the first mayor of St. Petersburg.

(Location: 16<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. Size: 2 acres.)

**1889**



***Plat of Moffett (aka Moffett's or St. Petersburg) Cemetery, 1889***  
(Courtesy St. Petersburg Museum of History)

Book Excerpt:

**“Many drivers traveling across Interstate 175, one of two short spurs running from I-275 into downtown St. Petersburg, Florida, have no idea, as they slow down along the ramp, that they are cruising over the former site of three burial grounds -- Moffett, Evergreen, and Oaklawn Cemeteries.** For them, this mile-long stretch of highway serves as a primary exit for Tropicana Field, the Bayfront/All Children's Hospital complex, the Salvador Dalí Museum, and the University of South Florida's St. Petersburg campus.

Discussed collectively here as the Oaklawn Cemetery Complex, these three sites were built during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then condemned and abandoned during the 1920s. All three cemeteries were founded during the period in U.S. history when racial segregation was legal. For African Americans and their families, this meant that cemeteries were typically segregated or partitioned along racial lines, with certain cemeteries or areas within cemeteries designated for whites only. ‘White only’ spaces, from cemeteries to parks to schools, excluded Black people from

access or use. Segregation limited burial options for Black people, often dictating location, legal/legislative protections, and resources available for perpetual care and upkeep. Moffett, Evergreen, and Oaklawn Cemeteries tell the history of segregation, even in death, in St. Petersburg. Today these three burial grounds are unmarked, erased from the physical landscape, or paved over in the name of urban development.” (Source: “Cemeteries and Community: Foregrounding Black Women’s Labor and Leadership in Sacred Site Remembrance Practices.” By Kaniqua L. Robinson and Antoinette T. Jackson. In the book, *Grave History: Death, Race, and Gender in Southern Cemeteries*, 2023, pgs. 235-236.)

## 1890

### 1890 Census

St. Petersburg:	273
Tampa:	5,532
Hillsborough County:	14,941
Florida:	391,422

**Early St. Petersburg African American neighborhoods included Pepper Town, Methodist Town, and Cooper’s Quarters, which was later called the Gas Plant neighborhood.** Additional smaller communities within or near the Gas Plant neighborhood included: **Little Egypt, Lincoln Court, Forty Quarters,** and the **Hollow.**

Article Excerpt:

**“The area known as the Gas Plant neighborhood was the second African-American neighborhood formed in St. Petersburg between 1890-1900. Originally known as ‘Cooper’s Quarters,’ the area was owned by Leon Cooper, a white business merchant.**

It ran along Ninth Street South and south of First Avenue South. Like the earlier neighborhood of **Pepper Town**, formed between 1888-1889 along Ninth Street between Third and Fourth Avenues South, Cooper’s Quarters was also settled by the influx of African Americans coming to the area to complete the **Orange Belt Railway.** Along with **Methodist Town** and an area referred to as **Goose Pond**, these two neighborhoods were the only places Black people could call home in the city.”

(Source: “I AM: The story of the Gas Plant Neighborhood.”

By Gwendolyn Reese, *The Weekly Challenger*, May 13, 2021.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/i-am-the-story-of-the-gas-plant-neighborhood/>

Book Excerpt:

**“The Gas Plant area, west of Ninth Street between First and Fifth Avenues South, was so named because of the two imposing natural gas storage cylinders that towered over the neighborhood.** Among its first residents were African American

railroad workers who took residence along First Avenue South, originally called Railroad Avenue. Gradually, the neighborhood spread south, even spilling over Fifth Avenue South into the **Campbell Park** area. Like **Methodist Town**, the **Gas Plant** boasted its own business section. The self-contained neighborhood also boasted the **Harlem Theater**, numerous churches and two schools – **Davis Academy** [opened in 1910] and the privately operated **McCray School**.”

(Source: *St. Petersburg's Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, pgs. 30-31.)

## 1894

**Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church**, founded in 1894 and located in the Methodist Town neighborhood at 912 Third Avenue North / Williams Court, was one of the churches that may have held burial services at the Moffett, Oaklawn, and Evergreen cemeteries.

Article Excerpt:

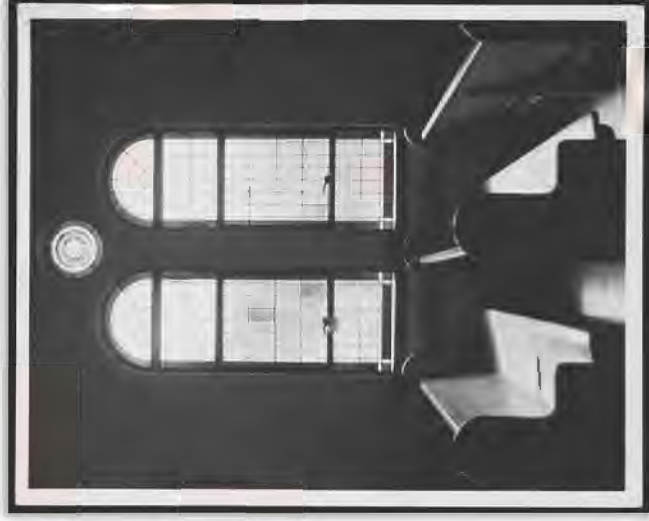
“In 1894, **the original building [for Bethel AME]** was a wooden structure located on the same property. By 1905, that congregation outgrew the original building and the masonry church building known as the ‘stone church’ was constructed in two phases. In 1922, construction began on the present brick edifice architecturally based on the Gothic Revival style. It is modeled after Mother Bethel, the denominational connection landmark church in Philadelphia.

The new church was literally built over the existing masonry, and according to historical records, only one Sunday service was suspended due to construction.”

(Source: “Historic Bethel AME celebrates 125 years of service.”

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, October 4, 2019.)

<https://bit.ly/4awMN8Y>



**Interior of church with stained glass windows and pews, circa 1970s**  
(*Courtesy Special Collections, USF Nelson Poynter Memorial Library*)

Following are some of the African American churches that may have held burial services at the Moffett, Oaklawn, and Evergreen cemeteries before the city officially closed the Oaklawn Cemetery complex in 1926.

**Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church**  
(Established in 1894)

**First Baptist Institutional Church**

(The church's original name may have been

**Mount Teman or Temor Baptist Church**)

(Established in 1897)

**Bethel Metropolitan Baptist Church**

(Established in 1903)

**McCabe Memorial Methodist Church**

(Renamed McCabe United Methodist Church)

(Established in 1905)

**Mount Olive Primitive Baptist Church**

(Renamed New Mount Olive Primitive Baptist Church)

(Established in 1907)



### **Church of God**

(Renamed Tenth Street Church of God)  
(Established in circa 1910)

### **14th Street Church of God in Christ**

(Renamed Prayer Tower Church of God in Christ)  
(Established in 1918)

### **Second Bethel Baptist Church**

(Renamed Bethel Community Baptist Church)  
(Established in 1923)

Although **St. Augustine's Episcopal Church** and **Traveler's Rest Missionary Baptist Church** were located near the cemeteries, they were established after 1926.  
(Source: *Polk's St. Petersburg City Directories.*)

## **1895**

Book Excerpt:

**"Bussey [Henry P. Bussey] was St. Petersburg's first funeral director.** He had opened a funeral home in 1895 in a small building on the south side of Central between Third and Fourth. His horse-drawn hearse was an ornate affair..."

(Source: *The Story of St. Petersburg.* By Karl H. Grismer, 1948, p. 106.)

## **1897**

**In 1897, Greenwood Cemetery, with graves only for white burials, was started by Henry P. Bussey near what would become the Roser Park neighborhood.**

(Location: 9th Street and 11th Avenue South.)

## **1899**

### **Map of St. Petersburg, 1899.**

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company.

University of Florida Digital Collections.

(In 1899, what would become Pinellas County, was part of West Hillsborough County.)

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00004/images>

and

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00004>

## 1900

### 1900 Census

St. Petersburg:	1,575
Tampa:	15,839
Hillsborough County:	36,013
Florida:	528,542

## (Circa) 1900

**Evergreen Cemetery was informally established as a segregated African American cemetery as early as 1900.** Before it was officially surveyed and platted in 1908 the land may have been part of the segregated west section of Moffett Cemetery. (The two-acre Moffett Cemetery, at 16th Street and 5th Avenue South, was formally established when a plat for the cemetery was filed in 1889.)

## 1902

Obituary Excerpt:

**“Sallie Ross, colored, died at her home in this city Tuesday and was buried in the Moffett cemetery** by Undertaker R. L. Medlin, of Tampa.”

(Source: “Died.” *St. Petersburg Times*, February 22, 1902, p. 5.)

Article Excerpt:

**“The old Moffett cemetery southwest of town has been considerably improved in appearance.** A new wire fence has been built, a new double-team gate built, and a flight of steps now leads over the fence. The improvement in appearance is very considerable.”

(Source: “Improving Cemetery.” *St. Petersburg Times*, October 18, 1902, p. 5.)

## 1903





***Bethel Metropolitan Baptist Church***

*(Courtesy Special Collections, USF Nelson Poynter Memorial Library)*

**Founded in 1903, Bethel Metropolitan Baptist Church was one of the Gas Plant neighborhood churches that may have held burial services at the Moffett, Oaklawn, and Evergreen cemeteries.**

The above photograph shows the church building that was constructed in the early 1950s at 301 10th Street South (1010 Third Avenue South). During the middle 1980s the church moved to 3455 26th Ave. S. when the Gas Plant neighborhood was razed to build a baseball stadium.

Website Excerpt:

“Bethel Baptist Church was organized in the home of Alfred and Katie Wright in the spring of 1903 in St. Petersburg, Florida. The first public worship service was held on September 27, 1903 in a building on Second Avenue South near Ninth Street in St. Petersburg.

....During Rev. Holly’s pastoral leadership (1907-1917), Bethel moved to 1010 Third Avenue South. Many of the foundational ministries were organized at this site, including Deacons, Mother’s Board / Deaconess, Trustee, Sunday School, Music, Missionary Society, Ushers, Baptist Young People’s Union, Youth. As Bethel grew, ministries were added to serve the specific needs of the congregation and the community. During Rev. Pelham’s pastorate (1921-1932), Bethel’s name was changed to Bethel Metropolitan Baptist Church. Over the years and through several pastorates, major physical improvements were made to the church facility and grounds. In 1985, during Rev. Dr. Lyons’ pastorate (1972-1999), the church moved to its present location, 3455 Twenty-Sixth Avenue South.”

(Source: “Bethel Metropolitan Baptist Church History.”  
Church website, 2024.)

<https://bit.ly/3Kbj2M>

**1904**

### **Map of St. Petersburg, 1904.**

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company.

University of Florida Digital Collections.

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00003/images>

and

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00003>

## **(Circa) 1905**

**When Oaklawn Cemetery was established around 1905, its lots were primarily for white graves, however it also included a segregated section for Black burials. A plat for the cemetery was filed in 1907.**

(Location: 16<sup>th</sup> Street and from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues South. Size: 10 acres.)

**Over the years the three cemeteries near the Gas Plant neighborhood were owned by various people and organizations. The owners included the Independent Order of Odd Fellows fraternal order, the Carpenters and Joiners Union of America, S.D. Harris (Samuel David Harris), Endicott Funeral Home, Palms Memorial Funeral Home, Reginald H. Sumner, Maynard Duryea, and others.**

See Also:

**"St. Pete's Historic Cemeteries and a Time for Reconciliation."**

By Will Michaels, *Northeast Journal*, November 21, 2023.

<https://bit.ly/4a0tPZn>

## **1908**

### **Map of St. Petersburg, 1908.**

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company.

University of Florida Digital Collections.

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00001/images>

and

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00001>

Obituary Excerpt:

**"D.E. McDonald, (colored) died Thursday night and was interred in Moffett's cemetery yesterday afternoon by Undertaker S.D. Harris. The funeral services were conducted at the A.M.E. church by the colored Odd Fellows of which order the deceased was a member. He leaves a wife and several children."**

(Source: "Died.")

*St. Petersburg Times*, December 19, 1908, p. 5.)

Book Excerpt:

**"Mrs. Lula Grant, a longtime resident of St. Petersburg who came here in 1908....**When Mrs. Grant came to St. Petersburg, Tangerine Avenue was called Green Ridge Avenue. Twenty-second Street was a farming area. There were **no black undertakers**. The bodies of blacks were embalmed at the **S.D. Harris Funeral Home** -- a white funeral home at 7th Street and Central Avenue. After embalming the bodies, they were turned over to blacks to be buried in the...west of 16th Street S. between 5th and Dunmore Avenues."

(Source: *On The Bethel Trail*.

By Enoch Douglas Davis, 1979, pgs. 24-25.)

## 1909

Book Excerpt:

**"Laurene Barson moved to St. Petersburg in 1909, when job prospects were good for a young black woman seeking a position as a restaurant cook.** In 1916 she rented a small, tin-roofed house 'built out of all good heart wood. You can't get that kind of lumber no more.' In 1923 Laurene's landlord brought in a mule team and hauled her house from its original location to the segregated Gas Plant neighborhood. Laurene went with it. She stayed to raise a family, plant shrubs and bushes, and develop an extended support network in her neighborhood.

**In 1980, ninety-four-year-old Laurene still chopped wood for the stove where she did all her cooking and groceries she carried home from the store on foot."**

(Source: *City of Green Benches: Growing Old in a New Downtown*.

By Maria D. Vesperi, 1985, pgs. 102-103.)

## 1910

### 1910 Census

St. Petersburg:	4,127
Tampa:	37,782
Hillsborough County:	78,374
Florida:	752,619

Book Excerpt:

**"In 1910, blacks accounted for 26.6 percent [approximately 1,097 population] of St. Petersburg's 4,127 inhabitants."**

(Source: *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950*.

By Raymond Arsenault, 1988, p. 124.)

Obituary Excerpt:

**"Vina Johnson, colored, died Thursday morning. S.D. Harris had charge of the remains which were interred in Evergreen cemetery."**

(Source: "Colored Woman Dies.")

*St. Petersburg Times*, January 21, 1910, p. 5.)

Article Excerpt:

**"The undertaking parlors of H.P. Bussey has been purchased by S.D. Harris and will be moved to Mr. Harris' present place of business.** [The Harris funeral home was established in 1908.] Mr. Bussey's reason for selling is his extreme ill health and desire to drop all business cares. Mr. Bussey was the first to enter this line of business in St. Petersburg and is well known as a first class undertaker. Mr. Harris will carry a complete line of first-class undertaking supplies and is fast establishing an enviable reputation for efficiency in this line of work."

(Source: "Purchases Undertaking Parlors.")

*St. Petersburg Times*, February 25, 1910, p. 5.)

Article Excerpt:

**"G.A.R. [Grand Army of the Republic, Union Army veterans] services will be held Monday at Oaklawn cemetery.** An address will be made by Rev. J.O. Thompson, D.D., Dept. Commander. The Post has provided free transportation G.A.R., Relief Corps, Confederate Veterans and ladies. Car will leave the post office at 3 p.m. Everybody is cordially invited to attend, special invitation to the Confederate Veterans."

(Source: "Decoration Day Services.")

*St. Petersburg Times*, May 27, 1910, p. 4.)

Obituary Excerpt:

**"Mr. Oliver Rowe, aged 71, a Confederate veteran, died suddenly of heart failure last Saturday morning at his home....Interment was made at Oaklawn cemetery."**

(Source: "Death of Oliver Rowe. Takes Place Saturday Morning Just Before Noon.")

*St. Petersburg Times*, December 27, 1910, p. 6.)

## 1911

Article Excerpt:

**"While last night's session of the city council was a short one it was an important session. An ordinance was introduced for the granting of a franchise for a gas plant here,** and after some discussion it was laid over for investigation until the next regular meeting.

**....A request of the local order of Woodmen for a paved street to Oaklawn cemetery was referred to the street committee."**

(Source: "Gas Ordinance Is Introduced At Last Night's Council Meeting."  
*St. Petersburg Times*, February 10, 1911, p. 1.)

Article Excerpt:

**"A suitably located, well managed, cared-for and beautiful cemetery is an essential to every town....Oaklawn Cemetery is too small, but there is as yet ample room for extension. Plenty of land adjoining can be secured now, but soon it too will be gone."**

(Source: "Our Cemeteries."

*St. Petersburg Times*, November 3, 1911, p. 4.)

## 1912

Obituary Excerpt:

**"Eugene Wilson, a negro who recently came to the Sunshine City from the North, and who succumbed to tuberculosis of long standing, was buried by the city at Evergreen cemetery yesterday. The negro was 40 years old."**

(Source: "Negro Succumbs."

*St. Petersburg Times*, November 22, 1912, p. 1.)

## 1913

**Map of St. Petersburg, 1913.**

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company.

University of Florida Digital Collections.

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00005/images>

and

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00005>

Obituary Excerpt:

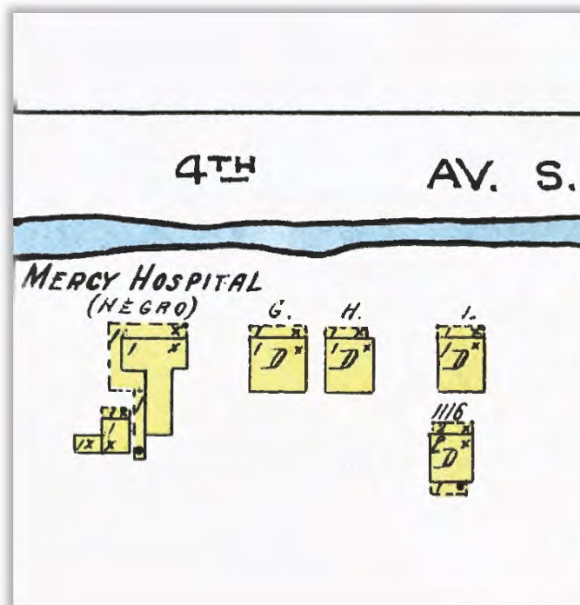
**"Mrs. Nellie Johnson, age 20, colored, died at her home on Third Avenue and Eleventh Street South yesterday morning after a long illness of consumption. She is survived by a husband. She will be buried in the local colored cemetery."**

(Source: "Colored Woman Dies."

*St. Petersburg Times*, March 16, 1913, p. 7.)



**The original 1913 Mercy Hospital  
was only a few blocks from the Oaklawn Cemetery complex.  
Oaklawn Cemetery complex (on left)  
and Mercy Hospital (on lower right)  
(1918 Sanborn map)  
(Courtesy University of Florida Digital Collections)**



**Mercy Hospital and other buildings on Booker Creek  
(1918 Sanborn map)  
(Courtesy University of Florida Digital Collections)**

Article Excerpt:

**“Mercy Hospital, as we know it, opened in 1923. However, this was not the**

**original Mercy Hospital. Ten years earlier in 1913, Mercy Hospital was about to come into being when the Samaritan Hospital was moved from Seventh Street and Sixth Avenue South to 1150 Fourth Ave. S to become the first health care facility for African-American residents."**

(Source: "Mercy Hospital and its pioneering physicians."

By Gwendolyn Reese, *The Weekly Challenger*, November 2, 2018.

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/mercy-hospital-and-its-pioneering-physicians/>

and

"Mercy Hospital and its pioneering physicians, part 2."

By Gwendolyn Reese, *The Weekly Challenger*, December 13, 2018.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/mercy-hospital-and-its-pioneering-physicians-part-2/>

Article Excerpt:

**"Some citizens who have relatives and friends buried in Oaklawn have been much worried for fear that the property might be sold** and it becomes necessary for the bodies of their friends and relatives buried there to be removed to make way for homesites....The **Odd Fellows [owners of the cemetery]** desire to sell their property and have more money with which to build the new home. **S.D. Harris**, the undertaker, is one of the parties with whom the lodge is now negotiating for the sale of the property."

(Source: "Sale of Cemetery Cause of Worry: Fear that Bodies Must be Removed."

*St. Petersburg Times*, May 24, 1913, p. 4.)

Article Excerpt:

**"Members of the Odd Fellows lodge will meet at the Odd Fellows cemetery [Oaklawn], Fourth Avenue South and Sixteenth Street, at 1 p.m., Thursday, June 26, to clean up the lots.** The lodge last night voted to take this action. All members are urged to help next Thursday afternoon."

(Source: "Lodge Will Work."

*St. Petersburg Times*, June 21, 1913, p. 5.)

Article Excerpt:

**"A score of members of the Odd Fellows lodge went to the I.O.O.F. cemetery [Oaklawn], Fourth Avenue South and Sixteenth Street yesterday afternoon and put in several hours of good work cleaning up the driveways and lots.** Fertilizer was scattered and much good was accomplished."

(Source: "Odd Fellow Work."

*St. Petersburg Times*, June 27, 1913, p. 6.)

Obituary Excerpt:

**"....The funeral of Walter James, age 40 years, was held yesterday afternoon. He was buried at Evergreen cemetery.** The funeral services were in charge of the Rev. Mr. Haynes. The deceased leaves a brother, wife and one child."



(Source: "Two Negroes Die."  
*St. Petersburg Times*, August 29, 1913, p. 6.)

## 1914



***St. Petersburg's gas plant, circa 1914***

*(Courtesy Special Collections, USF Nelson Poynter Memorial Library)*

In the spring of 1914, the city of St. Petersburg planned to build a gas plant near Bayboro Harbor, however after hearing objections by Bayboro area landowners, the city decided instead to build the plant near Third Avenue South on land owned by African American community leader Elder Jordan. The gas plant was built not far from the **Oaklawn Cemetery** complex and **Booker Creek**. The area, which had been known as **Cooper's Quarters**, eventually became known as the **Gas Plant neighborhood**.

Article Excerpt:

**"The municipal gas plant instead of being built on the city's lots in Bayboro, will be erected between South Third and Fourth avenues, just west of Twelfth street, and adjoining the garbage disposal plant, according to C.D. Hammond, commissioner of public works. Mr. Hammond decided to change the location of the plant after hearing the objections of a number of the property owners in the vicinity of the proposed site at Bayboro....Mr. Hammond continued that the gas plant bonds provided for the purchase of a site as well as the erection of a plant, and that a suitable location was found available near the incinerator plant, and purchased for a reasonable figure from its owner, Elder Jordan."**

(Source: "Gas Plant Will Be Built Close To Incinerator."  
*St. Petersburg Times*, June 12, 1914, p. 1.)

Obituary Excerpt:

**“Jim James, colored, for many years porter on passenger trains 39 and 40 into St. Petersburg, died yesterday at 963 South Third Avenue, after an illness of several months....The funeral will be held at 2:30 o’clock this afternoon from the stone church [Bethel AME], and the interment will be at Evergreen Cemetery.”**

(Source: “Negro Veteran of Railroad is Dead.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, October 21, 1914, p. 6.)

Obituary Excerpt:

**“John Wesley Shorter, colored, age 85, a veteran of the Civil War, died yesterday morning at the residence, 117 Eleventh Street, South, and will be buried this afternoon at Evergreen Cemetery. The funeral will be held from the ‘stone church’ [Bethel AME] at 2 o’clock.** Shorter was well known and considered a good citizen. He followed the federal army through the war and after the surrender of General Lee, came to Florida to live. He had been a resident of St. Petersburg for 18 years.”

(Source: “Well Known Negro Dies.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, November 10, 1914, p. 4.)

See Also:

*Additional updated information about “John W. Shorter”*

3d Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops, Company K

<https://www.pa-roots.com/pacw/usct/3rdusct/3dusctcok.html>

and

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd\\_United\\_States\\_Colored\\_Infantry\\_Regiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd_United_States_Colored_Infantry_Regiment)

Article Excerpt:

**“In 1914, John Evans was attacked [November 12, 1914] by an angry mob and killed before a jury or judge weighed in.”**

(Source: “History of a St. Petersburg lynching was hidden. Not anymore.”

By Leonora LaPéter Anton, *Tampa Bay Times*, **Feb. 23, 2021.**)

<https://bit.ly/45CmrzX>

See Also:

Video: “John Evans Lynching Marker Ceremony Recap, St. Pete, FL.”

City of St. Petersburg, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XGWbIDxfqg>

and

*Days of Fear: A Lynching in St. Petersburg.*

By Jon Wilson and Jane A. McNeil, 2023.

and

“Pinellas Remembers” website

<https://pinellasremembers.org/>

# 1917



## ***Newspaper article headline***

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Daily Times, May 31, 1917, pgs. 1, 5)*

Article Excerpt:

**"....A large delegation of veterans and ladies went to the cemetery in the morning with an unusually large and beautiful collection of flowers and decorated all graves of the blue and the gray alike and also both monuments. About 60 graves were decorated in Greenwood cemetery, six in the old Odd Fellows [Oaklawn Cemetery], three in St. Bartholomew's, and three in Sunnyside cemeteries."**

(Source: "Memorial Day Observed Here With Ceremony."

*St. Petersburg Times*, May 31, 1917, pgs. 1, 5.)

# 1918

**Map of St. Petersburg, 1918.**

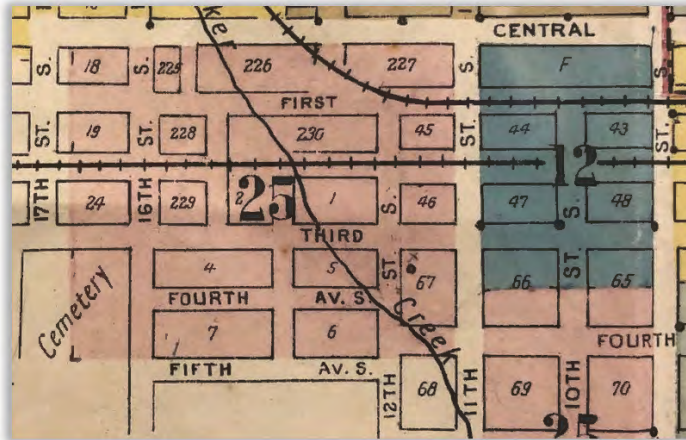
Sanborn Fire Insurance Company.

University of Florida Digital Collections.

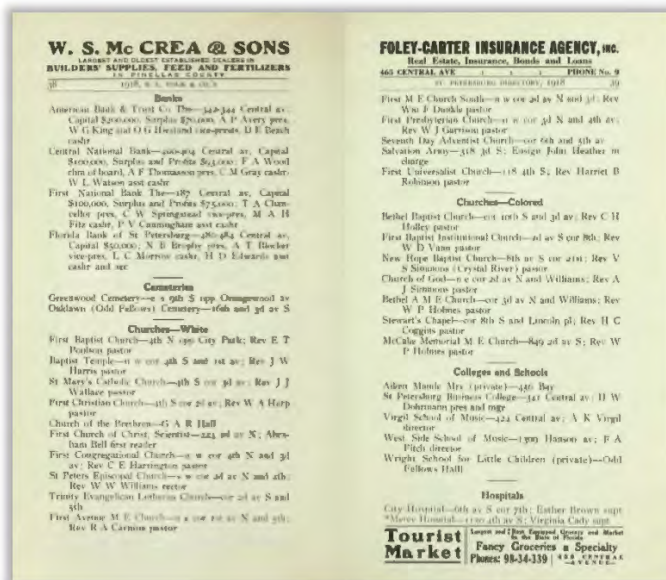
<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00002/images>

and

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00002>



**Gas Plant neighborhood**  
(1918 Sanborn map)  
(Courtesy St. Petersburg Museum of History)



**The Oaklawn Cemetery is listed in the 1918 St. Petersburg city directory.**

Article Excerpt:

**“A special service for the 20 or 25 colored soldiers returned from the army will be held in the First Baptist Institutional church at the corner of Second avenue and Eighth street south at 7:45 tonight.** Rev. W.D. Vann will deliver a special sermon and there will be a good musical program. At the close baptism will be performed for persons joining the church. Popular religious songs will be sung by the choir. J.A. Whitehurst, church clerk, announces that the church will be well heated and that the services are free.”

(Source: “Church Holds Service For Colored Soldiers.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, December 29, 1918, p. 6.)



***The plaque for St. Petersburg's 1920s World War I monument listed Carey Herriott and Charles Hargray, Jr. separately as "Colored" soldiers.***  
(Courtesy Florida Memory)

Article Excerpt:

"According to the monument, 16 soldiers died in the line of duty during the war. The names of the two officers, a first and second lieutenant, are listed at the top, followed by the names of 12 of the enlisted men in alphabetical order, Lewis N. Brantley through Paul Other Webb. **The last two names, Carey Herriott and Charles Hargray Jr., should be between Edward Theodore Hall and James Clyde McCraven.**

**I realized why the names of these two dead soldiers are at the bottom: The word "Colored" is in parenthesis next to each. "White" is not beside the other men's names. Even in death, legalized racism (Jim Crow) was destiny for the two blacks."**

(Source: "Prejudices set in stone are relevant today,"

By Bill Maxwell, *St. Petersburg Times*, November 19, 2003.)

<https://bit.ly/3WV3Ca>





***A century after World War I, the St. Petersburg monument plaque was updated and no longer used the term “Colored” soldiers.  
(Courtesy David Shedden)***

## 1919

Article Excerpt [1989 article]:

**“Flagmon Welch [He was the father of former city council member, David T. Welch, and the grandfather of Mayor Ken Welch.]...came here as a teen-ager in 1919 from his native Gainesville, where his family farmed. In 1925, he opened Welch’s Woodyard, selling firewood and dirt and doing landscaping. Until a spur of the interstate came through in the 1970s, the yard was at 16th Street and Fifth Avenue S. Forced to move by the highway construction, he resumed operating on Carolina Court behind his residence and continued the business until his death.**

....In an interview with a reporter in 1972, Mr. Welch spoke proudly of his four children....Mr. Welch was ‘quite a character -- with a lot of wisdom,’ his son David said Monday.

‘He certainly gave us encouragement. I remember he was always saying, ‘I want to make this a better world for my kids, and grandkids and my great-grandkids.’ He didn’t want them to go through the same things he had gone through.”

(Source: “Flagmon Welch, 87, owner of firewood yard.”

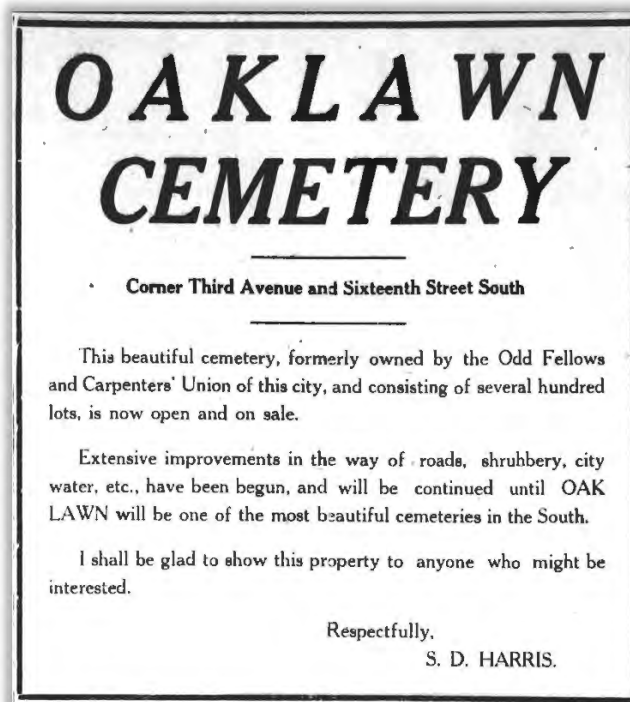
By Craig Basse, *St. Petersburg Times*, *City Times* section, June 27, 1989, p. 7.)

See Also:

“Flagmon Welch: St. Pete’s Black pioneer.”

By Jon Wilson, *The Weekly Challenger*, August 16, 2012.  
<https://theweeklychallenger.com/flagmon-welch-st-petes-black-pioneer/>

1920



***Oaklawn Cemetery newspaper advertisement***  
*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, August 4, 1920, p. 4)*

Advertisement Excerpt:

**“This beautiful cemetery, formerly owned by the Odd Fellows and Carpenters’ Union of this city, and consisting of several hundred lots, is now open and on sale.** Extensive improvements in the way of roads, shrubbery, city water, etc., have been begun, and will be continued until **Oaklawn** will be one of the most beautiful cemeteries in the South. I shall be glad to show this property to anyone who might be interested. Respectfully, **S.D. Harris.**”

(Source: Advertisement for Oaklawn Cemetery.  
*St. Petersburg Times*, August 4, 1920, p. 4.)

**1920 Census**

St. Petersburg:	14,237
Pinellas County:	28,265
Tampa:	51,608
Hillsborough County:	88,257



Florida:

968,470

Book Excerpt:

**“During the 1920s, the local black community tripled in size, from 2,444 [in 1920] to 7,416 [in 1930]....At the end of the decade, the black proportion of the city’s population continued to hover around 18 percent.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950*.

By Raymond Arsenault, 1988, p. 206.)

## 1921

**Royal Palm Cemetery was established by Reginald H. Sumner for white burials only.** Sumner was the founder of **Sumner Marble and Granite Inc.** which supplied materials for the cemeteries.

(Location: 101 55th Street South. Size: Approximately 60 acres.)

Article Excerpt:

**“J.M. Endicott and Miss Sarah E. Cowen will become owners Saturday morning of the S.D. Harris undertaking establishment....**

S.D. Harris is one of the oldest merchants in St. Petersburg. He went into business here about 1908 at the corner of Seventh and Central. Two years later he bought out the undertaking establishment of **H.P. Bussey** who had been an undertaker here for many years. At the same time he acquired the **Greenwood cemetery** from Bussey at Ninth Street South and later bought the Odd Fellows cemetery [**Oaklawn**] at Sixteenth Street and Third Avenue South. In 1911 he bought the negro cemetery at Sixteenth Street [**Evergreen Cemetery**]....

In addition to his business the new firm of Endicott and Cowen will take over his cemetery holdings.”

(Source: “Harris Sells Funeral Home.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, April 21, 1921, p. 15.)



**Newspaper front page**

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, October 26, 1921, p. 1)*

Article Excerpt:

**"After having been completely isolated from the outside world for two days, St. Petersburg is slowly recovering from the effects of the worst tropical storm known in its history.**

....The storm struck this city at 2 o'clock Tuesday morning and gathered momentum as the hours passed until 10 o'clock in the morning when it had reached the proportions of a genuine hurricane....Along the waterfront the water extended up into the city for more than a block.

....Despite the intensity of the storm, which hurled roofs into the streets, sent signs down, crashed trees to the street, and sent sheets of tin bowling down the streets, there were few casualties.

**....The city, although without electric lights and power, has not suffered from a lack of gas and water....No particular damage was done to the gas plant. Both plants have sufficient fuel and supplies on hand to keep running for several weeks.**

**....A negro church on Ninth street, which was nearing completion at a cost of \$50,000, collapsed and is a total loss....Discussion everywhere was of the future."**

(Source: "St. Petersburg...Tropical Storm All But Razes City; Docks and Boats Swept Away; Two Die in Hurricane; Physical Loss Runs into the Millions."

*The Tampa Daily Times*, October 28, 1921, p. 7.)

[*The Tampa Daily Times* newspaper was published from 1893-1982.]

Report Excerpt:

**".... in 1921 the Dream Theater for Blacks [on 9<sup>th</sup> Street South near the Gas Plant area] was bombed with dynamite after White resistance to the theater's location on the periphery of a White neighborhood....This and other violence and intimidation gave public notice to Blacks that there would be consequences if they attempted to live and do business outside the boundaries set for them by the**

### **White power structure.”**

(Source: “Examination of Historical and Modern-Day Impact of Structural Racism on the Lives of Black People in the City of St. Petersburg, Florida.”

The city of St. Petersburg commissioned this structural racism study, December 2021, p. 90.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fac\\_publications/4117](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fac_publications/4117)

See Also:

“Negro Theater Wrecked By Dynamite Charges Early This Morning.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, November 26, 1921, p. 1.

## **1922**

Article Excerpt:

**“Representatives from the G.A.R. and all other veteran organizations will meet at 9 o’clock Monday morning to flag the graves at Greenwood, Oaklawn, Episcopal and Royal Palm cemeteries...Oaklawn: G.W. Anderson, C.S. Bartlett, I.J. Beers, E.O. Carpenter, J.T. Healey, D. Mulholland, S. Murphy, J. Powell...Colored Cemetery**

**[Evergreen / Moffett]: J.W. Shorter.**

(Source: “Memorial Day Services to be Held at First Avenue M.E.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, May 27, 1922, p. 3.)

## **1923**

### **Map of St. Petersburg, 1923.**

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company.

University of Florida Digital Collections.

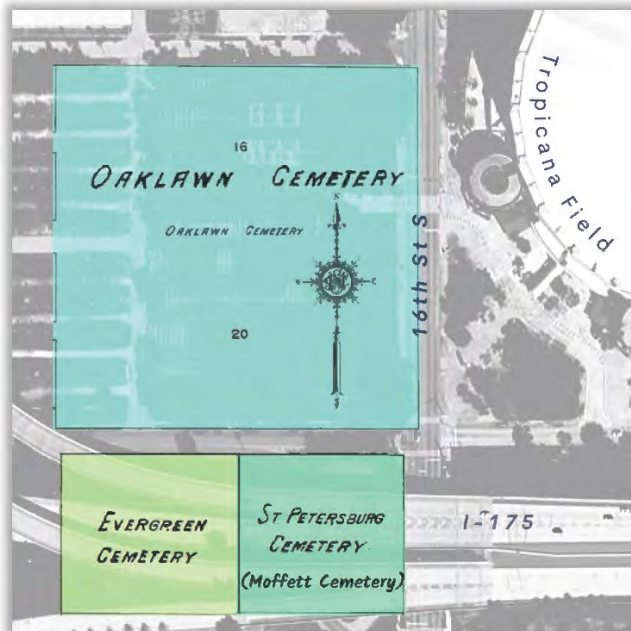
<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00006/images>

and

<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00074228/00006>



**Oaklawn, Evergreen and Moffett (aka St. Petersburg) cemeteries**  
 (1923 Sanborn map)  
 (Courtesy University of Florida Digital Collections)



***Oaklawn, Evergreen and Moffett (aka St. Petersburg) cemeteries***  
*are shown in this overlay image with Tropicana Field and the interstate.*  
*(Courtesy USF African American Burial Ground & Remembering Project handout)*



***Booker Creek and the Gas Plant neighborhood***  
*(1923 Sanborn map)*  
*(Courtesy University of Florida Digital Collections)*

## 1924

Article Excerpt [1980 article]:

**“Her hair is graying now and her social clock ticks just above a whisper. But for more than 50 years Fannye Ayer Ponder held court in a stately two-story house on Fifth Avenue S when it was the place to live. [The house was located in the Sugar Hill area of the Gas Plant neighborhood.]**

A civic leader, socialite and club woman par excellence, Mrs. Ponder, one of four children of an Ocala Baptist minister, was the apple of her late husband’s eye. He saw to it that she lived like a queen.

**Shortly after the couple came to St. Petersburg in 1924, Dr. James Maxie Ponder built the magnificent, seven-bedroom house for his wife.** Ponder, who was hired by the segregated city to work in the black community, helped lead the drive to build all-black Mercy Hospital (now closed).

**The Ponder home, which was leveled for Interstate 275 construction in 1975,** was accented with roughed ceilings, hardwood floors, carved mantelpieces and thick wooden doors with sparkling glass knobs.”

(Source: “Fannye Ayer Ponder.”)

By Theresa White, *St. Petersburg Times*,  
Special Report: "To Be Black And To Live In St. Petersburg,"  
Originally part of a series of stories, October – December 1980, p. 40.)  
<https://bit.ly/3S0UJdk>

## 1925

Article Excerpt:

**"A.S. Bradley, city attorney, was instructed at the session [city commission meeting at city hall] to draw up an ordinance prohibiting further burials at Oaklawn, Evergreen and Moffett cemeteries.** It was pointed out by Commissioner Charles Snyder that interment at these three cemeteries is limited, and that sanitary safety demands cessation of burials in them.  
**Commissioner Snyder further indicated that by closing these burial places, proposed opening up of Fourth and Sixth avenues could be made possible,** in this way greatly clearing up thoroughfares on the south side."  
(Source: "Fifth Avenue to be Opened."  
*St. Petersburg Times*, December 29, 1925, pgs. 1, 2.)

## (Circa) 1920s

Article Excerpt:

**"The first Negro mortician in St. Petersburg was J.G. Royal [G.G. Royal], who was associated with S.D. Harris Undertakers."** [This was probably during the 1920s.]  
(Source: "Few Left Today Among Pioneers Of Community."  
By E.H. McLin, *St. Petersburg Times*, News of Negroes of St. Petersburg and Pinellas section, August 26, 1951, p. 40.)

## 1926

**Lincoln Cemetery was established in 1926 by Reginald H. Sumner for African American burials.**

(Location: 600 58<sup>th</sup> Street South. South of Royal Palm Cemetery. Size: 9 acres.)

**Ownership of Lincoln Cemetery has changed a number of times over the years.** In addition to the Sumner family and their Sumner Marble and Granite company, the McRae Funeral Home also owned the cemetery from 1957-1974 before Sumner Marble and Granite (aka Lincoln Cemetery Inc.) took over again until about 2017. Since then the Lincoln Cemetery Memorial Park Corp., the Lincoln Cemetery Society, Cross & Anvil, Greater Mount Zion AME Church and others have helped take care of the

cemetery.

See Also:

“Secondary Educator Approaches to Cemetery-Based Education in Florida.” By Hillary M. Van Dyke. PhD dissertation, Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Learning, College of Education, University of South Florida, March 2024.

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/10255/>

**For a brief period Reginald H. Sumner’s family also owned some of the cemeteries near the Gas Plant neighborhood in addition to Royal Palm and Lincoln cemeteries.**

Audio --

Description:

**In a 2023 oral history interview Dr. Basha P. Jordan talked about St. Petersburg’s Lincoln Cemetery.** His grandfather, **Elder Jordan, Sr.**, who died in 1936, is buried there.

(Source: Audio Interview / Transcript.

**Dr. Basha P. Jordan oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, November 6, 2023.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/14/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/14/)

See Also:

*The Legacy of Elder Jordan, Sr.: From Slavery to Philanthropy.*

By Dr. Basha P. Jordan, Jr., 2025.

**In February 1926 an ordinance was passed by the city of St. Petersburg closing the Oaklawn, Moffett, and Evergreen cemeteries.**



ORDINANCE NO. 425-A  
 AN ORDINANCE DECLARING IT  
 ADVISABLE FOR THE PROTEC-  
 TION OF PUBLIC HEALTH THAT  
 EVERGREEN, OAKLAWN AND  
 MOFFETT CEMETERIES BE  
 CONDEMNED AND CLOSED, AND  
 CONDEMNING AND CLOSING  
 THE SAID CEMETERIES AND  
 PROVIDING WHEN SAID ORDI-  
 NANCE SHALL TAKE EFFECT  
 AND OTHER MATTERS IN RE-  
 GARD THERETO.  
 Be it Ordained by the Board of  
 Commissioners of the City of St.  
 Petersburg:  
 Sec. 1. That it is deemed advisable  
 to protect the public health that  
 Evergreen cemetery, Oaklawn ceme-  
 tery and Moffett cemetery within the  
 City limits of the City of St. Peters-  
 burg be condemned and closed.  
 Sec. 2. That the said Evergreen  
 cemetery, Oaklawn cemetery and  
 Moffett cemetery be and the same  
 are hereby condemned and closed.  
 Sec. 3. That this ordinance shall  
 be of full force and effect on and  
 after its passage, approval and pub-  
 lication according to law.  
 Sec. 4. All ordinances and parts of  
 ordinances in conflict herewith are  
 hereby repealed.  
 Passed on first reading at regular  
 adjourned meeting this 15th day of  
 January, 1926.  
 Passed on second and third read-  
 ings this 1st day of February, 1926.  
 C. M. BLANC,  
 Mayor-Commissioner.  
 Chairman Board of Commissioners.  
 ATTEST: S. S. MARTIN,  
 Director of Finance.

### City of St. Petersburg Ordinance No. 425-A

(Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, section 5, February 3, 1926, p. 11)

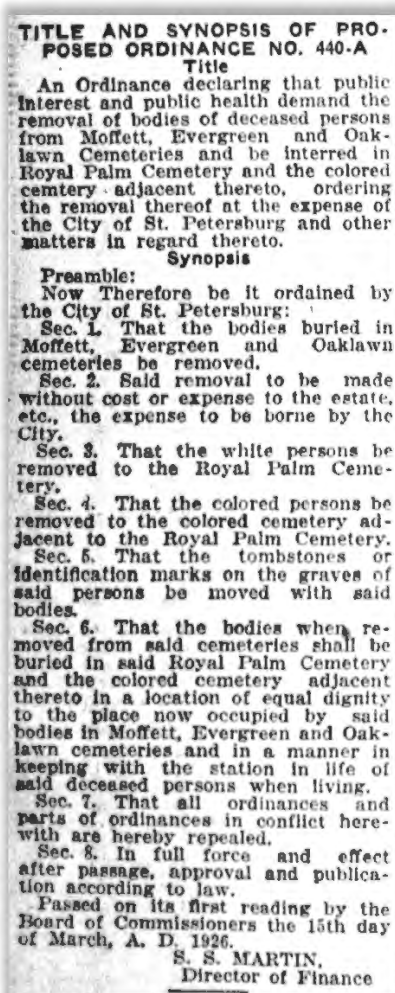
Ordinance Excerpt:

**"An ordinance declaring it advisable for the protection of public health that Evergreen, Oaklawn and Moffett Cemeteries be condemned and closed, and condemning and closing the said cemeteries and providing when said ordinance shall take effect and other matters in regard thereto."**

(Source: "Ordinance No. 425-A.")

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 5, February 3, 1926, p. 11.)

**On Monday, March 15, 1926, an ordinance was passed by the city of St. Petersburg declaring that the graves at the Oaklawn, Moffett, and Evergreen cemeteries should be moved to the Royal Palm Cemetery and the new African American [Lincoln] cemetery.**



**City of St. Petersburg Ordinance No. 440-A**  
 (Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, section 4, March 17, 1926, p. 8)

Ordinance Excerpt:

**“An ordinance declaring that public interest and public health demand the removal of bodies of deceased persons from Moffett, Evergreen and Oaklawn Cemeteries and be interred in Royal Palm Cemetery and the colored cemetery adjacent thereto, ordering the removal thereof at the expense of the City of St. Petersburg and other matters in regard thereto.”**

(Source: “Title and Synopsis of Proposed Ordinance No. 440-A Title.”  
*St. Petersburg Times*, section 4, March 17, 1926, p. 8.)

**During 1926 a 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South road extension was built through Moffett Cemetery and a small part of Evergreen Cemetery.**

Article Excerpt:

**“Possibility that Fifth Avenue South may shortly become a through bay to bay thoroughfare received further development at Monday night [March 15<sup>th</sup>] city commission meeting at the city hall when City Attorney A.S. Bradley presented a contract between the city and R.H. Sumner, by which a right of way through the Moffett and Evergreen cemeteries is to be secured....Mr. Sumner is owner of the property upon which the burial grounds are located.”**

(Source: “Avenue Opening Plan Develops. Contract Drawn to Give City Right of Way Through Cemetery Property.” *St. Petersburg Times*, section 1, March 16, 1926, p. 2.)



***Map of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South road extension  
through Moffett Cemetery and a small part of Evergreen Cemetery, 1926***  
(Courtesy St. Petersburg Museum of History)

Report Excerpt:

**“From August 1926 through October 1927, Arch Royal Funeral Home and Wilhelm Funeral Home removed 86 unknown individuals from Moffett Cemetery to Lincoln Cemetery.”**

(Source: Pinellas Genealogy Society report on Lincoln Cemetery, 2006.)

**Between 1926 and the late 1950s about 125 graves were exhumed from Moffett Cemetery and about 225 graves were exhumed from Evergreen Cemetery.**

The number of graves exhumed from **Oaklawn Cemetery** is not available.

(Source: These approximate numbers are based on Pinellas Genealogy Society reports and *St. Petersburg Times* articles.)

Article Excerpt:

**“Opening of Fifth Avenue South as a bay-to-bay thoroughfare was assured Friday**

**afternoon** at a conference between J.O. Spenser, city engineer; Scott Serviss, chairman of public works, and R.H. Sumner, owner of Evergreen cemetery, through which a new avenue will extend. **Sumner agreed to quitclaim property for the extension of Fifth Avenue through the cemetery.**

....Completion of Fifth Avenue South will open up a new thoroughfare across the peninsula, relieving Central Avenue of the present traffic congestion and offering motorists a new route to the Gulf beaches."

(Source: "New Bay-to-Bay Street Assured for South Side."

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 1, August 7, 1926, pgs. 1, 2.)

Article Excerpt:

**"Removal of more than 50 bodies from the Negro cemetery at Sixteenth Street and Fifth Avenue South during the past month will make it possible to open Fifth Avenue as soon as the paving is completed, it was learned Tuesday. The bodies were transferred to another cemetery at the expense of the city, which not only paid for the removal, but purchased the new lots."**

(Source: "Fifty Bodies Removed From Negro Cemetery."

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, August 18, 1926, p. 7.)

## 1927



***Harlem Theatre newspaper advertisement, 1940***

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, News of Negroes of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County section, December 22, 1940, p. 8-B)*

**The Gas Plant neighborhood's Harlem (movie) Theatre, at 1017 Third Ave. South, opened in 1927 and closed in 1964.**

## 1928

Article Excerpt:

**"I was born at home, as a lot of black folks were in 1928, in a St. Petersburg community known as the Gas Plant. Tropicana Field, home of the Devil Rays, is there today. You know, we lived pretty close to where home plate is now. I love baseball. Always have.**

....I'm a Yankee fan because of my daddy, Alfred Williams Sr. He moved to St. Pete in 1924 and went to work at a barber shop shining shoes. His boss told him Alfred was too dignified a name for a Negro, so when daddy opened his own business a few years later he called it Bill's Shoe Service.

He shined shoes and repaired shoes for more than 40 years in the Magnolia Arcade, just off Central Avenue. In the old days, when I was a boy, the New York Yankee ball players stayed at the Princess Martha Hotel across the street during spring training.

....My brother and I were pretty good ballplayers. Clifford was a shortstop and I was a center fielder. **We played professional baseball in the Florida Negro League for the St. Petersburg Pelicans when we were teens. We played our games at Campbell Park, less than a mile away from old Al Lang Field, where the white pro team, the St. Petersburg Saints, played their games.**

If you were on the Saints, you could dream about playing in the major leagues one day. But if you were a Pelican, you couldn't, not back then. In fact, during spring training, if you were black, you couldn't even attend a major league spring-training game in St. Petersburg. Not allowed."

(Source: "Close to Home." By Al Williams as told to Jeff Klinkenberg, *St. Petersburg Times*, October 6, 2006.)

<https://bit.ly/41k0jfi>

## 1930

### 1930 Census

St. Petersburg:	40,425
Pinellas County:	62,149
Tampa:	101,161
Hillsborough County:	153,519
Florida:	1,468,211

Book Excerpt:

**"St. Petersburg's population is 40,425, including 7,416 African Americans -- or about 18 percent -- according to the federal census."**

(Source: *St. Petersburg's Historic African American Neighborhoods*.  
By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, p. 108.)

## 1933

Article Excerpt:

**“Clearing of the old cemetery at Fifth Avenue South and Sixteenth Street through efforts of Dixie chapter, United Daughters of Confederacy, is revealing interesting history.** It was generally believed that this was a Negro cemetery, but since then has been found to have been a white cemetery with the west section allotted to Negroes. One grave was found marked with a government grave marker, **Joseph Brownlow** having been buried here. He was a member of Company A. Florida cavalry, and his grave will be decorated with an American flag on Memorial Day.”

[Some newspaper articles spell the name “Joseph Brownlow” as “Joseph Brownlowe.”]

(Source: “Clearing of Old Cemetery Recalls Historical Facts.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, May 23, 1933, p. 12.)

## 1936

Article Excerpt:

**“In a lengthy session devoted mostly to routine business, the city council yesterday....filed for future reference the offer of the Endicott Funeral home to sell the city the property between Third and Fifth avenue and Sixteenth and Eighteenth streets, known as the Oaklawn cemetery, for \$8,000.”**

(Source: “Council Okehs 36-Year Lease on Armory Site.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 1, November 11, 1936, p. 7.)

## 1937

**Map of St. Petersburg, 1937.**

<https://bit.ly/3xIkson>

“Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America.”

American Panorama: An Atlas of United States History.

<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining>

Article Excerpt:

**“Jock Edwards was born January 19, 1937 at 1514 Fourth Avenue South, right where Tropicana Field [Gas Plant neighborhood] now sits. The family lived there until he was in junior high school, then moved to a bigger house right next door at 1516. There he lived until he graduated from Gibbs High School. Booker Creek, where he and his friends learned to swim, ran through the area.”**

(Source: “Community Spotlight: James Ulysses Edwards, Jr. ‘Jock’:

Educator, Machine Repairman, Husband/Parent, Grandparent.”

By Emma Cavin, *The Weekly Challenger*, December 15, 2011, p. 4.)

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/challenger/206/>



***The Gas Plant neighborhood's Dye & Ritchison grocery store  
at 9th Street and 3rd Avenue South, circa 1940s***  
(Courtesy Special Collections, USF Nelson Poynter Memorial Library)

## 1940

### 1940 Census

St. Petersburg:	60,812
Pinellas County:	91,852
Tampa:	108,391
Hillsborough County:	180,148
Florida:	1,897,414

### Book Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg’s population is 60,812, including 11,982 African Americans -- or about 20 percent -- according to the federal census.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, p. 109.)





**Gas Plant neighborhood and Oaklawn Cemetery complex map, circa 1940**  
(Courtesy Special Collections, USF Nelson Poynter Memorial Library)

**1941**



**Newspaper front page**  
(Courtesy The Weekly Challenger, September 8, 2005,  
and Special Collections, USF Nelson Poynter Memorial Library)

Article Excerpt:

**“Where is Pearl Harbor?’ That is what everyone said when news of the stunning attack came. December 7, 1941 was the beginning of the end of innocence and carefree life as children of my generation knew it to be....and one by one, our teachers, friends and relatives went to war.** My sister, Theo, joined the WACS...We learned to identify all airplanes in the sky and sang songs relative to changes in our lives that the war had brought. We wrote and received letters, prayed for the war to end, and whooped with joy louder than music from the jukebox, at a teenage dance in Campbell Park the evening word came that the war was over.”

(Source: “World War II....Sixty Years Later.”

By Rosalie Peck, *The Weekly Challenger*, September 8, 2005, pgs. 1, 7.)

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/challenger/947/>

Article Excerpt:

**“While white [World War Two] soldiers frequented the Pier, the Coliseum, and other popular downtown bars and restaurants on their free time, black soldiers were restricted to special functions within the boundaries of the African-American community.** Various women’s clubs sponsored patriotic teas at their clubhouses, as well as formal ‘invitation only’ programs at the Manhattan Casino on 22nd Avenue South, where soldiers danced to the music of local bandleaders Jessie Henderson and Fess Clark. **They enjoyed movies at the [Gas Plant neighborhood’s] Harlem Theatre and played softball against local teams like Elmer Edward’s Pepsi Cola Kids at Campbell Park.”**

(Source: “A Community within a Community:

African-American Women in St. Petersburg during World War II.”

By Ellen Babb, *Tampa Bay History*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 1995.)

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol17/iss1/5>

## 1943



***Gas Plant neighborhood and Oaklawn Cemetery complex aerial image, 1943***  
(Courtesy University of Florida Digital Collections)

## 1944

Article Excerpt:

**“Editor, The Times:**

**In Sunday’s paper, July 2, you had a feature story on Greenwood cemetery, telling of its rundown condition.**

**If you would send your reporter out Sixteenth street south, she will find two places that make Greenwood look like a paradise in comparison. I am speaking of Oaklawn and the old negro cemetery.”**

(Source: “Times Forum: A Bit of History on Greenwood Cemetery.”

Letter to the editor from Hiram Rogers.

*St. Petersburg Times*, July 6, 1944. p. 6.)

## (Circa) 1940s

Book Excerpt:

**“Just as the labor of women was critical to the functioning of the Black church, the women auxiliaries, or sister organizations, of benevolent societies were instrumental in homegoing services.**

....These organizations also offered assistance with funerals to ensure that homegoing services and cemetery plots were respectful.

The **African American Burial Ground and Remembering Project** team identified several benevolent societies that were active in St. Petersburg, including the **Knights of Pythias** and the **Independent Order of the Oddfellows**. Since the original Knights of Pythias, founded in 1864 by white men, refused to accept Black members, African Americans created their own fraternal order of the same name. In St. Petersburg, the group was referred to as the St. Petersburg Colored Chapter of the KOP. The women’s auxiliary is called the Order of Calenthe, and only women who are married to a Knights of Pythias member can join. **In the ‘Card of Thanks’ section of the *St. Petersburg Times*, where the family and friends of the deceased acknowledged the people who showed kindness and offered help during the time of bereavement, the Order of Calanthe was often credited for its role in homegoing services.”**

(Source: “Cemeteries and Community: Foregrounding Black Women’s Labor and Leadership in Sacred Site Remembrance Practices.”

By Kaniqua L. Robinson and Antoinette T. Jackson. In the book, *Grave History: Death, Race, and Gender in Southern Cemeteries*, 2023, pgs. 243-244.)

## 1946

**In July 1946 a second large cylinder gas storage tank (or gas holder) began operation in the Gas Plant neighborhood. The new tank was constructed on the site of the former city stockade at 14th Street South near the Seaboard railway tracks.** The first large storage tank, located on the other side of Booker Creek, was built in 1914.

(Source: "New Gas Holder Ready For Use." *St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, July 26, 1946, p. 13.)

## 1947

**In 1947 the Gas Plant neighborhood's James Weldon Johnson Library opened in the Masonic lodge at 1035 Third Ave. South.** The first librarian was **Leslie Burke**, who served from 1947-1950, and then **Helen Allen Edwards** became the librarian from 1950 until the library moved from that location in 1979.

(Source: "The first librarians at the James Weldon Johnson Branch Library."

By Gwendolyn Reese, *The Weekly Challenger*, June 7, 2018.)

<https://bit.ly/45jsr0l>

**[A city branch library for the African American community was founded during the late 1920s in Campbell Park. The library continued to serve the area until the early 1940s.]**

Article Excerpt:

**"During pre-civil rights days for black people of the South, the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Chicago Defender* [black newspapers] were our libraries. They were all we had. But, as predicted by our long-suffering ancestors, a change did come. Eventually black citizens of St. Petersburg were blessed with the James Weldon Johnson Library near the Harlem Theater on Tenth Street and Third Avenue South [in the Gas Plant neighborhood], with Ms. Helen Edwards as librarian."**

(Source: "Black History Comes to St. Petersburg."

By Rosalie Peck, *The Weekly Challenger*, November 24, 2005, p. 3.)

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/challenger/958/>

## 1948

**The Royal Theatre, at 1011 22nd Street South in the Deuces neighborhood, opened in 1948 and closed in 1966.**

(Source: "Vintage St. Pete: The Royal Theatre."

By Bill DeYoung, *St. Pete Catalyst*, July 27, 2021.)

<https://stpetecatalyst.com/vintage-st-pete-the-royal-theatre/>

**To learn more about the history of the Deuces neighborhood,**

**including the Royal Theatre, view the following  
African American Heritage Association**

<https://www.facebook.com/AAHASPFLL/>

**and African American Heritage Trail videos.**

<https://bit.ly/3zGVYT2>

Video: Stop 1: "In the Beginning"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfHn1HlnRj8>

Video: Stop 2: "At the Crossroads"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kOq3WEa5UY>

Video: Stop 3: "In the Name of Progress"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDHqtEJFeR8>

Video: Stop 4: "The Manhattan Casino"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-O7KKhS4\\_DM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-O7KKhS4_DM)

Video: Stop 5: "Building 22nd Street"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wfOk5NM39I>

Video: Stop 6: "The Royal Theater"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsgF78hs-rl>

Video: Stop 7: "Faces and Stories"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhbKEGxos9c>

Video: Stop 8: "A Community of Caring"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zngpKRotok8>

Video: Stop 9: "Blazing the Way"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ypq1Va0aBgQ>

Video: Stop 10: "Crossing the Line"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ypRh507xq8>

Video: Stop 11: "Jordan Park Housing Complex"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsUKpsmOp2c>

Video: Stop 12: "Pioneer Schools"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjgeQZvqpYA>

Video: Stop 13: "Civic Associations"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6ir6l\\_LKDc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6ir6l_LKDc)

Video: Stop 14: "Women United"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thMF8JbS3pM>

Video: Stop 15: "Avenue of Faith"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmHLV3Zqt9w>

Video: Stop 16: "Happy Workers Daycare and Trinity Presbyterian Church"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKhD-3QqCo>

Video: Stop 17: "Empowered Negro Women"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMoXQ7ay3O0>

Video: Stop 18: "Early Housing"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VwmHZn2Tjo>

Video: Stop 19: "Campbell Park and Immaculate Conception"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2t6qJlqpWE>

Video: Stop 20: "The End of an Era"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_8BdvpLdtM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_8BdvpLdtM)

# 1949



## Oaklawn Cemetery complex

(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, section 2, February 20, 1949, p. 22)

In 1949, local military veterans, wanting to protect the graves of former Civil War and other veterans, stopped apartment construction bulldozers from road grading parts of the Oaklawn Cemetery complex including the Moffett and Evergreen cemeteries.

Article Excerpt:

**"Protests against the use of three long-forgotten cemeteries in St. Petersburg as dumping grounds for junk and trash are being voiced by members of L.M. Tate Post 39, Veterans of Foreign Wars.**

Post Commander Vernon L. Strickland and a special committee are investigating conditions they label 'a disgrace to veterans buried in these cemeteries and a smear on our civic pride.'

The cemeteries in question are overgrown with weeds and the tombstones are crumbling amid heaps of rusty cans, broken bottles and other refuse.

Once known as **Oaklawn, Moffett and Evergreen cemeteries**, these sites contain remains of many St. Petersburg pioneers.

A crumbling archway can be spotted west of the Fifth Avenue curve beyond Sixteenth Street South."

(Source: "VFW Protests Junk, Trash Covering Graves of Veterans in Southside Plot." By Paul Mitchell, *St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, February 20, 1949, p. 22.)





### **Oaklawn Cemetery complex**

*The Royal Court apartments were built on the former Oaklawn Cemetery.  
(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, section 4, August 14, 1949, p. 50)*

**In 1949, the Royal Court apartment complex, consisting of 168 units, was built on the Oaklawn Cemetery. An unknown number of graves were moved from the Oaklawn Cemetery to various other cemeteries during this period.**

(In 1966 the Royal Court apartments became the Laurel Park housing project.)

Audio --

Description:

**In a 2023 oral history interview Diana Schwarz talked about her great uncle, Gus Blair, who helped build the Royal Court, later called Laurel Park, apartment complex.**

(Source: Audio Interview / Transcript.

**Diana Schwarz oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, October 23, 2023.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/13/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/13/)

Article Excerpt:

**“Within four months St. Petersburg Negro families will be moving in Royal Court Apartments now starting up on Sixteenth Street South between Third and Fifth Avenues.** The scope of the project which will create 16 buildings with 168 apartments....Site clearance [at the **former site of Oaklawn Cemetery**] began in July, and first occupancy is anticipated in February.

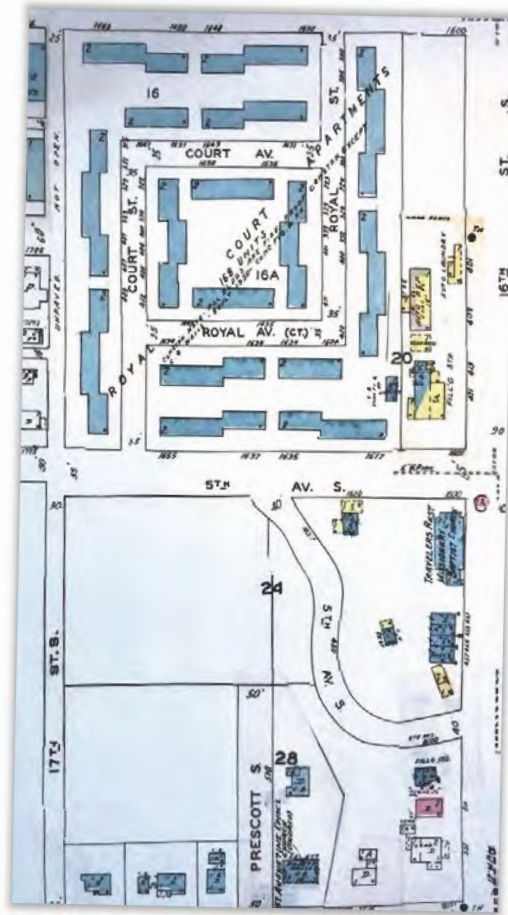
....The units, renting for \$50 and \$52.50 per month, are planned for persons ineligible to live in public housing authority housing, and will provide in many instances for families



in the **Jordan Park** development whose incomes have risen above the housing authority limit.”

(Source: “Walls for 168 Units Rise.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 4, October 16, 1949. p. 43.)



**The Royal Court apartments**  
(Updated circa 1952 Sanborn map)  
(Courtesy St. Petersburg Museum of History)



### **Oaklawn Cemetery complex**

*Photo caption:*

*"A general view of the cemetery adjacent to two abandoned cemeteries shows the desolation of crumbling and fallen tombstones hidden under debris and high underbrush. Arrows indicate large piles of scrap lumber, broken bottles cluttering the area. The Legion and VFW propose the bodies be removed to permanent burial places and all desecration ended."*

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, section 2, November 9, 1949, p. 17)*

Article Excerpt:

**"Anger ran high yesterday during 'All Veterans Week' as a committee from American Legion Post 14 began investigating reports of bulldozers covering graves in an abandoned cemetery.**

'It's the worst case of desecration I've heard of,' Clair Davis, local attorney and committee head, said in a meeting at 4 p.m.

Davis secured a promise from Sheriff Todd Tucker to stop all operations in the southwest corner of **Moffett Cemetery** that dates back to 1888 and is bisected by the curve in Fifth Avenue South west of Sixteenth Street.

The seven-man Legion committee phoned Sheriff Tucker at 5 p.m. about gravestones being uprooted and sites obliterated by bulldozers and asked for immediate action."

(Source: "Veterans Groups Fight Moffett Cemetery Grave Desecration."

By Paul Mitchell, *St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, November 9, 1949, p. 17.)

## **1950**

### **1950 Census**

St. Petersburg:	96,738
Pinellas County:	159,249
Tampa:	124,681
Hillsborough County:	249,894

Florida: 2,771,305

Book Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg’s population is 96,738, including 13,977 African Americans -- or about 14 percent -- according to the federal census.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

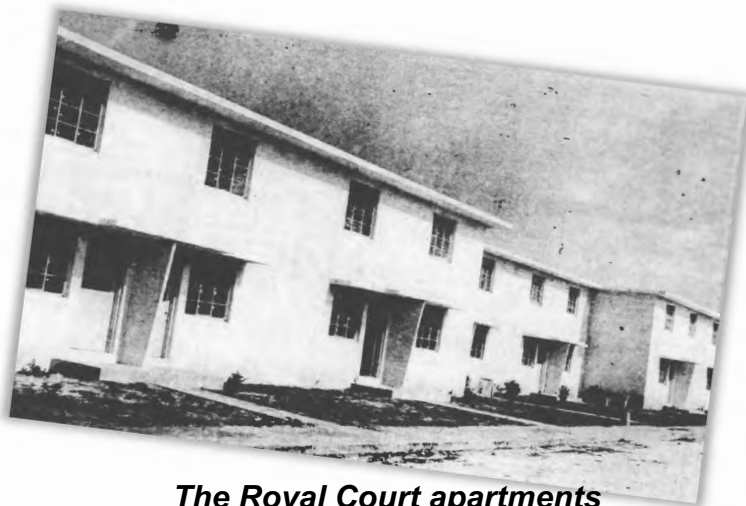
By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, p. 109.)

Book Excerpt:

**“The 1950 federal census....The black proportion of the city’s population had fallen to 14.4 percent, the lowest figure since the early 1890s.** In absolute terms, the number of blacks in the city was still increasing -- from 11,982 in 1940 to 13,977 in 1950 -- but such gains were dwarfed by the accelerating pace of white in-migration.”

(Source: *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950*.

By Raymond Arsenault, 1988, p. 312.)



***The Royal Court apartments***

(Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, section 4, August 20, 1950, p. 39)

Article Excerpt:

**“....16 buildings containing 168 living units which make up Royal Court Apartments [at the former site of Oaklawn Cemetery]....The first quarter of the development off Sixteenth Street South between Third and Fifth Avenues will be ready for occupancy in a few days....**One of their objectives was to provide a destination for Negro tenants whose income exceeds the maximum set at **Jordan Park**, the **St. Petersburg Housing Authority** development. Many of the first families to enter Royal Court will be ‘graduates’ of Jordan Park. Rentals have been set at \$13 a week or \$54 a month including equipment and appliances.....Royal Court units all have two bedrooms, bath, kitchen, living room and dining space....Screen landscaping and other plantings are yet to be added. The steel casement windows will be equipped with

venetian blinds. The oil tanks seen here serve fuel oil heaters, installed in each unit....Construction is masonry and reinforced concrete, with steel casements. Steel clothes drying poles are also being set. Children will have three equipped playgrounds in addition to their own yards to play in."

(Source: "Negro Housing Project Nears Completion."

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 4, August 20, 1950, p. 39.)



***The Royal Court apartments***

*Photo caption:*

*"Anderson Sams shows his wife how Royal Court -- a backyard view is shown here -- differs from Jordan Park, where they lived before....Sams and his wife are both employed at the Chatterbox Club."*

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, section 4, October 1, 1950, p. 53)*

Audio --

Description:

**In a 2022 oral history interview Thomas "Jet" Jackson remembered living in the Royal Court, later called Laurel Park, apartment complex.** He described the area near the former cemeteries during the 1950s and early 1960s.

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Thomas "Jet" Jackson oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, February 2, 2022.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/8](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/8)

See Also:

"Thomas 'Jet' Jackson honored with building dedication."

By Holly Kestenis, *The Weekly Challenger*, December 4, 2014.

<https://bit.ly/46yTfuR>

and

“Oral histories of erased Black cemeteries: Jet Jackson.”

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, December 16, 2022.

<https://bit.ly/3RFb47o>

## 1951



***Moffett Cemetery sign***

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, section 2, April 16, 1951, p. 9)*

Article Excerpt:

**“Eighteen months after bulldozing operations ceased in abandoned Moffett Cemetery near Fifth Avenue and 16th Street South, and a 20-man crew of American Legion Post 14 cleaned up the graves, the area has lapsed into a dump.**

The fallen sign that was erected with high hopes in November 1949, lies near a cast away liquor bottle. Rotting oranges strewn elsewhere over the forgotten cemetery present a far different picture than envisioned by Legionnaires who invaded the area with shovels and brawn and removed tons of rubbish.

Parts of Moffett and Evergreen Cemeteries have been cut up and sold. Parts are hidden by brush. Some graves are now under a new housing project.

A project to rebury the four veterans’ bodies elsewhere was set aside for fear it would discriminate against non-vets buried nearby.”

(Source: “Rubbish Again Marks Veterans’ Graves.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, April 16, 1951, p. 9.)

Article Excerpt:

**“....United Churches were advised that the problem of abandoned Moffett Cemetery involves so many legal angles they better leave it alone.”**

(Source: “Good Morning!”

By Paul Davis, *St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, June 30, 1951, p. 17.)

# 1952

## **Map of St. Petersburg, 1952.**

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company.

Library of Congress, 1952 update of 1923 map.

[https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn01343\\_009/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn01343_009/)

**In 1952 a new school for African American students was started not far from the former Oaklawn Cemetery complex. Sixteenth Street School, serving students from kindergarten through ninth grade, was located at 701 Sixteenth Street South.** The school was later called **Sixteenth Street Junior High**, and when it was rebuilt in 1998, it was renamed **John Hopkins Middle School** in honor of one of its first principals.

Program Brochure:

**Various Gas Plant neighborhood businesses placed advertisements in the 1952 Melrose Clubhouse related program cited below.** One of the founders of the organization that hosted the program was **Fannye Ayer Ponder**, who lived in the **Sugar Hill area** of the Gas Plant neighborhood.

(Source: "Melrose Park Clubhouse Souvenir Program Of the City **Federation of Colored Womens Clubs.**"

March 30, 1952. Digital Commons, University of North Florida.)

<https://bit.ly/3tczg6H>

See Also:

"Fannye Ayer Ponder: Her story lives on."

By Raven Joy Shonel, *The Weekly Challenger*, June 14, 2018.

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/fannye-ayer-ponder-her-story-lives-on/>



**Jackie Robinson**  
(Courtesy Library of Congress)

Book Excerpt:

**“Unlike those Black pioneers before him, Jackie Robinson never went unnoticed, certainly not on April 2, 1952, the day of his Al Lang [baseball spring training field] debut.** A Dodger-Yankees matchup was always a big draw anywhere, but with Jackie, the crowds were record-breaking.

....Stories began appearing in local newspapers touting number 42’s arrival two days before. Extra temporary bleacher seats were built at Al Lang Field, a practice that would continue for all of Robinson’s games there. Fans spent the night outside the park’s box office in order to get tickets. The Jordan Park Community Club bought a block of three hundred tickets. **Most Black-owned businesses closed at noon the day of the game in anticipation of the 2:00 p.m. start....”**

(Source: *100 Years of Baseball on St. Petersburg’s Waterfront.*

By Rick Vaughn, 2022, p. 96.)

**On numerous occasions during the 1950s and 1960s, Jackie Robinson met with St. Petersburg civil rights leaders Bette and Dr. Ralph Wimbish. The Wimbish family played an important role in St. Petersburg’s civil rights history, and it all began in the late 1920s, when a young Ralph Wimbish moved to Third Avenue South in the Gas Plant neighborhood.**

Book Excerpt:

“Growing up on Third Avenue South, there was plenty for young Ralph and his family to do despite racial restrictions on their movement. They could see a movie at the Harlem Theater, eat ‘the best chicken in town’ at the Citizen’s Lunch Counter, or get a haircut at a number of barbershops. There was a variety of beauty salons, grocery stores, dry cleaners, and an insurance company owned, operated, and patronized by African Americans. And there was no shortage of places of worship. Inez [Ralph Wimbish’s mother] took her family to First Institutional Baptist Church.”

(Source: *Baseball Under Siege: The Yankees, the Cardinals, and a Doctor’s Battle to Integrate Spring Training.* By Adam Henig, p. 14.)

See Also:

“A warrior, a father, a fighter:

Ralph Wimbish waged -- and won -- many battles at lunch counters, theaters and hotels. His son remembers them, and their cost.”

By Ralph Wimbish, Jr., *St. Petersburg Times*, November 25, 2007.)

<https://bit.ly/41UjBZc>

## 1953

**Under the leadership of Reverend Ben Wyland and the McRae Funeral Home, there was a plan to move the remaining Evergreen and Moffett Cemetery graves to create space for a planned African American youth center and pool. However,**



**the center was never built and the Jennie Hall pool ended up in the Wildwood Heights neighborhood.**

See Also:

“Jennie Hall Pool -- A Tangible, Living Piece of St. Petersburg History!”

Preserve the ‘Burg, January 11, 2021.

<https://bit.ly/3L9XOIR>

and

Video: “Sense of Place:

One Woman’s Effort to Address One of Life’s Inequities -- Jennie Hall.”

Preserve the ‘Burg, September 24, 2021.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_Dt5Bxhxcl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_Dt5Bxhxcl)

Article Excerpt:

**“The old Moffett Cemetery, a weed-grown, trash-littered five-acre plot at 16th Street and Fifth Avenue South, may become the site of a modern Negro civic center.**

Future Floridians, who brought the Bartlett Park Youth Center to reality, are in the discussion stage of the project which would **transform the old burial grounds** into a center for several recreational activities for residents of that section of the city.

The Floridians have announced a plan for transforming the cemetery into a playground built around a swimming pool. **Rev. Ben F. Wyland**, project chairman, points out that with a Negro public school, ball park and churches already near this intersection, the location is ideal.

The project offers an opportunity to clean up Moffett Cemetery, long since abandoned and now weed-grown and littered with refuse, and to transfer bodies in the cemetery to a place where they can be given perpetual care.”

(Source: “Negro Civic Center May Replace Old Cemetery.”

By George Bartlett, *St. Petersburg Times*, March 29, 1953, p. 1B.)

Article Excerpt:

**“Council voted to buy three acres of land adjacent to the two-acre Moffett Cemetery at 16th Street and Fifth Avenue from Maynard Duryea for \$8,000.**

**An additional \$2,500 was appropriated to pay for removing about 100 bodies from Moffett to Lincoln cemeteries.** When this is done a quit claim deed for the two-acre cemetery will be given to the City without extra cost.”

(Source: **“Negro Youth Center, Pool Planned on South Side.”**

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 1, June 3, 1953, p. 16.)



Mrs. Elnora Johnson, left, 1509 Dixie Avenue South, signs a quit claim deed turning her family burial plot in Old Moffett Cemetery over to the City. She also gave permission to move the body of a relative from the now abandoned cemetery to Lincoln Cemetery. Monroe McRae of McRae and McRae Funeral Home watches the procedure. His firm will handle the disinterment project to make way for the construction of a new youth center.  
(Times Photo by Jack Ramsdell)

**Mrs. Elnora Johnson and Mr. Monroe McRae**

*Photo caption:*

*"Mrs. Elnora Johnson, left, 1509 Dixie Avenue South, signs a quit claim deed turning her family burial plot in Old Moffett Cemetery over to the City. She also gave permission to move the body of a relative from the now abandoned cemetery to Lincoln Cemetery. Monroe McRae of McRae and McRae Funeral Home watches the procedure."  
(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, Local and National Negro News section, June 7, 1953, p. 2D)*

Article Excerpt:

**"An urgent plea to persons having relatives buried in Old Moffett Cemetery was made late yesterday afternoon. Immediate removal of all persons interred there is necessary to begin construction of a new youth center in the area."**

(Source: "Removal Of Bodies From Moffett Cemetery Urged.")

By Cal Adams, *St. Petersburg Times*, Local and National Negro News section, June 7, 1953, p. 2D.)

Article Excerpt:

**"....suggestion to City Council that the City purchase Moffett Cemetery, as the location of the proposed Youth Center, was not a logical choice when we consider all the factors necessary in locating a function of this type."**

(Source: "Moffett Cemetery Out As Negro Youth Center.")

By Ross Windom, *St. Petersburg City Manager*, *St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, July 18, 1953, p. 13.)

**Another local African American cemetery established in the 1920s that was used by St. Petersburg and other Pinellas County residents was Oakhurst Cemetery,** located on 131st Street North where Garden Sanctuary Funeral Home & Cemetery in **Seminole** is located today. There were attempts to clear the area in the early 1950s.

Article Excerpt:

**“Leveling of graves and gravestones at Oakhurst Cemetery has drawn sharp criticism and threats of legal action from local Negro citizens.** The Negro cemetery, oldest in Pinellas County, is being cleared for future use by both races.”

(Source: “Leveling of Graves, Markers at Negro Cemetery Draws Fire.”

By Cal Adams, *St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, November 5, 1953, p. 23.)

## 1955

**One of the most important civil rights events in St. Petersburg history began on November 30, 1955 when six African-Americans filed suit for access to the city’s segregated Spa Beach and pool. For many years the Gas Plant neighborhood’s Booker Creek served as an informal place for children to learn how to swim.**

Article Excerpt:

**“Six African-Americans filed suit in 1955 to open the swimming spots.**

**The names of Fred W. Alsup, Ralph Wimbish, Willet Williams, Naomi Williams, Chester James Jr. and Harold Davis still echo as local freedom fighters.**

The Supreme Court ruled in their favor in 1957, but the battle wasn’t over. During 1958, city officials closed the beach and pool several times rather than let blacks use them.

The issue was fading by 1959, partly because the white tourist industry downtown felt closing the facilities would hurt their pocketbooks more than integration would.

So the water stayed open and African-Americans swam in it, though never in great numbers.”

(Source: “The soul of St. Petersburg.”

By Jon Wilson, *St. Petersburg Times*, January 2, 2000.)

<https://bit.ly/3UckMNQ>

## (Circa) 1950s

Audio --

Excerpt:

**In a 2021 oral history interview Gwendolyn Reese remembered living near the former Moffett and Evergreen cemeteries during the 1950s. Her home was in the Sugar Hill area of the Gas Plant neighborhood.**

**“....Cemeteries tell the story of a people.** They tell the story of a particular family, but because of that family’s connections and links within the community, it tells the story of a community. Cemeteries tell the stories of a people....

....I’m not sure how they [**Oaklawn, Moffett, Evergreen cemeteries**] should be remembered, but I know they should -- they must, not should -- they must be remembered. And the story about them that needs to be told is the story of what happened to them as well. I think it’s real important for people to be aware how locally, across the state, and across the nation, how cemeteries of people of color, specifically African American people, were paved over, built over. And that is so indicative of the respect and the value weighing that people have of black lives. And so when we talk about -- number one, if we still have the cemetery, we should do everything we can to preserve it, to maintain it, and tell the story of that cemetery. But if the cemetery is no longer there, I just so strongly feel that the story of that cemetery needs to continue....”

(Source: Audio Interview / Transcript.

**Gwendolyn Reese oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong and Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, May 3, 2021.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/3/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/3/)

See Also:

“Oral histories of erased Black cemeteries: Gwendolyn Reese.”

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, February 2, 2023.

<http://bit.ly/3YdFc9k>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**In a 2021 oral history interview Corey Givens Jr. remembered his family’s connection to the Oaklawn Cemetery complex and the Gas Plant neighborhood.**

“I didn’t live there, but my grandmother -- she grew up in the Gas Plant district. She was right off of 9th Street and 5th Avenue, so she was close to where Webb’s Plaza was.

There was a school there back in the day called **Davis Elementary**, and that was the school where she attended, her mom was a teacher there, and they lived, worked, studied, and played in the same neighborhood. And it was said that you could be born and buried in the same place without ever having to leave, and that’s exactly what happened to a lot of those early settlers.”

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Corey Givens Jr. oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, March 22, 2021.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/1/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/1/)

See Also:

“Oral histories of erased Black cemeteries: Corey Givens, Jr.”

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, February 24, 2023.

Book Excerpt:

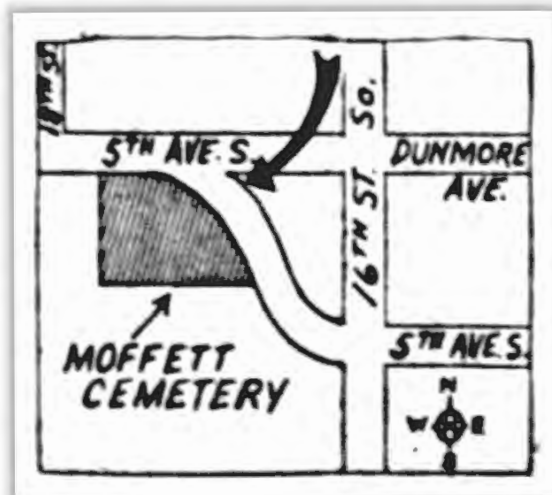
**“In the face of racial segregation and death, Black funeral homes provided proper and respectful burials for African Americans and thus contributed to the long tradition of homegoings. Among the Black funeral homes and undertakers that have operated in St. Petersburg are Creal-Williams Funeral Home [founded circa 1926], Arch of Royal Funeral Home, Clarke Mortuary, Sanchez-Arch Royal Funeral Home, Sanchez Rehoboth Mortuary and Cremations Services, and McRae Funeral Home, which was responsible for the removal of bodies from Moffett to Lincoln Cemetery in the 1950s.”**

(Source: “Cemeteries and Community: Foregrounding Black Women’s Labor and Leadership in Sacred Site Remembrance Practices.”

By Kaniqua L. Robinson and Antoinette T. Jackson. In the book, *Grave History: Death, Race, and Gender in Southern Cemeteries*, 2023, p. 243.)

## 1957

**A 1890 Moffett Cemetery grave marker for “Mrs. Ball,” which should have been moved when the cemetery closed, was found in July 1957 during the expansion of a used car lot at 1640 Fifth Avenue South.**



**Map of the streets near Moffett Cemetery**

Photo caption:

*“Arrow indicates where 67-year-old wooden grave marker was located.”  
(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, section 2, July 23, 1957, p. 17)*

Article Excerpt:

**“A cypress slab, marking the grave of a woman [Mrs. Ball] who died in 1890, was uncovered by workmen yesterday as they cleared brush and other debris from a lot near 16th Street and Fifth Avenue South, opposite Moffett Cemetery.”**

(Source: “Grave Marker Is Found on Used Car Lot Site.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, section 2, July 23, 1957, p. 17.)

## 1958

In 1958, graves were moved by the staff of the McRae Funeral Home, when a 138-unit apartment complex, sometimes called the “Pink Apartments,” was built by Grady Swope on the former Evergreen and Moffett cemeteries. Graves were moved to a special section of Lincoln Cemetery known as “Removals from Evergreen.”



***This service at Moffett Cemetery honored the remains of two Civil War soldiers that were being moved to Lincoln Cemetery.***  
(Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, July 1, 1958, p. 3B)

Approximately 30 years after the last church funeral service took place at the still-operating Oaklawn Cemetery complex, local African American ministers from Trinity Presbyterian and Bethel AME participated in a formal service to honor the remains of two Civil War era soldiers that were being moved to Lincoln Cemetery.

Article Excerpt:

“...Services will be held at the edge of **Moffett Cemetery** [on June 30, 1958] at 4 p.m. **Rev. Wyland** [executive secretary of the Florida Council for Racial Cooperation] will be in charge. The **Rev. O.M. McAdams**, pastor of **Trinity Presbyterian Church**, will give the invocation. The **Rev. H. MacDonald Nelson** of **Bethel AME Church** will read the

Scriptures. Prayer will be by the **Rev. Charles Bruce**, president of the **Interdenominational Ministers Alliance.**"

(Source: "Old Cemetery To Give Way To 140-Unit Negro Apartment Structure."

By Paul Davis, *St. Petersburg Times*, June 29, 1958, p. 1B.)

Article Excerpt:

**"Among those at the ceremony in the overgrown old burying place was Eugene Sharter, a 53-year-old Negro who is the great grandson of one of the Confederate veterans whose bones were dug up and taken to the Negro Lincoln Cemetery. The soldier was John W. Sharter, who served in Company K of the Third Confederate Infantry, and died in 1923 from a wound he received in the war."**

(Source: "Bones of Two Negro Confederate Soldiers Moved to New Cemetery."

By Don Branning, *St. Petersburg Times*, July 1, 1958, p. 3B.)

See Also:

***Updated and correct information about the African American Civil War veteran mentioned in the 1958 Times story is posted below.***

The Civil War veteran's name was **John W. Shorter**, rather than **John W. Sharter**, and he fought for the Union side rather than the Confederacy. According his obituary and the 1914 city directory, John Wesley Shorter lived at **117 Eleventh Street South**, which was not far from **Evergreen Cemetery** where he would be buried. His wife's name was **Hattie**, who began receiving his Civil War pension about a month after his death.

***Obituary Excerpt from 1914:***

**"John Wesley Shorter, colored, age 85, a veteran of the Civil War, died yesterday morning at the residence, 117 Eleventh Street, South, and will be buried this afternoon at Evergreen Cemetery. The funeral will be held from the 'stone church' [Bethel AME] at 2 o'clock. Shorter was well known and considered a good citizen. He followed the federal army through the war and after the surrender of General Lee, came to Florida to live. He had been a resident of St. Petersburg for 18 years."**

(Source: "Well Known Negro Dies."

*St. Petersburg Times*, November 10, 1914, p. 4.)

See Also:

***Additional updated information about "John W. Shorter"***

3d Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops, Company K

<https://www.pa-roots.com/pacw/usct/3rdusct/3dusctcok.html>

and

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd\\_United\\_States\\_Colored\\_Infantry\\_Regiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd_United_States_Colored_Infantry_Regiment)

Article Excerpt:

**"McRae Funeral Home is doing the work of removing remains for the Palms Memorial Inc., which owns the three-acre triangular site near the intersection of 16th Street and Fifth Avenue South.**

**The Palms Memorial is under contract to sell the plot of land to Grady Swope who is to build the apartment building on the site.**

**Monroe McRae of the funeral home, said his workmen have already moved**



**approximately 150 bodies from the ancient burial ground, to the Negro Lincoln Cemetery which is adjacent to the Royal Palm Cemetery in the West Central Avenue area."**

(Source: "More Bodies Found at Site of Apartment."  
*St. Petersburg Times*, August 22, 1958, p. 9B.)

Article Excerpt:

**"According to Alford, Moffett Cemetery was razed and moved to Lincoln Cemetery in 1926 and 1927. Evergreen Cemetery remained in the same area until 1958. At that time, the article and picture of the cemetery indicated it was in horrible condition with broken headstones, trash and other disarray...The bodies were removed and placed in an area in Lincoln Cemetery known as 'Removals from Evergreen.'** In talking with Mr. McRae, who removed these bodies, it appears that no records were kept for identifying any of the burials. They were simply placed in metal boxes, then in wooden boxes and placed two to a gravesite. At some later date, the stones, monuments, etc. were brought to Lincoln Cemetery, then placed in a line because no one could determine where they went."

(Source: "Finding Relatives' Graves Is Proving A Difficult Task."

By Pat Fenner, *St. Petersburg Times*, *City Times* and *Independent* section, November 1, 1987, p. 2.)

Audio --

Description:

**In a 2021 oral history interview Mordecai Walker recalled that in 1958 he moved to the Sugar Hill area of St. Petersburg's Gas Plant neighborhood at 1224 5th Avenue South. His home was not far from the Oaklawn Cemetery complex.**

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Mordecai Walker and Andrew Walker oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong and Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, May 2, 2021.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/7/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/7/)

See Also:

Mordecai Walker and Andrew Walker oral history interview.

StoryCorps, American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, January 29, 2022.

<https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/mordecai-walker-and-andrew-walker-2/>

and

Video: "The life and times of Mr. Mordecai Walker."

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, November 30, 2022.

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/the-life-and-times-of-mordecai-mr-walker/>



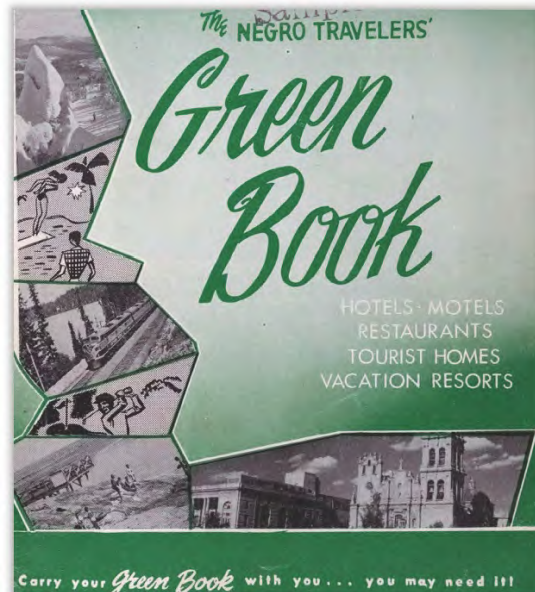
***The Webb's City Furniture Building***  
(Postcard Photo by Earl Foster)

**On June 27, 1958, Webb City's seven-story furniture building opened on the corner of 10th Street and Second Avenue South near the Gas Plant neighborhood.** The history of Webb's City, "the World's Most Unusual Drug Store," began in the middle 1920s when James Earl "Doc" Webb became a partner in a small St. Petersburg drug store that would eventually grow to ten city blocks. Many of Webb's early downtown buildings were built where the African American Pepper Town neighborhood once stood. **Gas Plant neighborhood residents regularly shopped at Webb's even though it remained a racially segregated business until the 1960s when sit-ins and other protests helped end the store's racial discrimination policies.** After Webb's City closed in 1979, the furniture building was purchased by the U-Haul moving and storage company.

(Source: "Stack 'Em High and Sell 'Em Cheap: James 'Doc' Webb and Webb's City, St. Petersburg, Florida." By Pamela D. Robbins. PhD dissertation, Department of History, Florida State University, 2003.)

<https://repository.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A176309>

**1959**



***The Negro Travelers' Green Book, 1959***  
 (Courtesy New York Public Library)

The 1959 edition of *The Negro Travelers' Green Book* lists the following Gas Plant neighborhood and Methodist Town addresses.

**Robert James Hotel, 1205 2nd Avenue.**

**Citizens' Restaurant, 948 2nd Avenue South.**

**Harrison's Restaurant, 445 14th Street South.**

(Source: *The Negro Travelers' Green Book: 1959*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division.

New York Public Library Digital Collections, p. 14.)

<https://bit.ly/4haSUUp>

and

<https://bit.ly/42eSOH1>

**There were Gas Plant neighborhood listings in other editions of the *Green Book*, such as J. A. Bailey's "Tourist Home" at 942 3rd Avenue South in 1938.**

<https://bit.ly/42ccGuC>

See Also:

"Green Book Research Guide."

New York Public Library.

<https://libguides.nypl.org/greenbook/welcome>

## 1960

### 1960 Census

St. Petersburg:

181,298

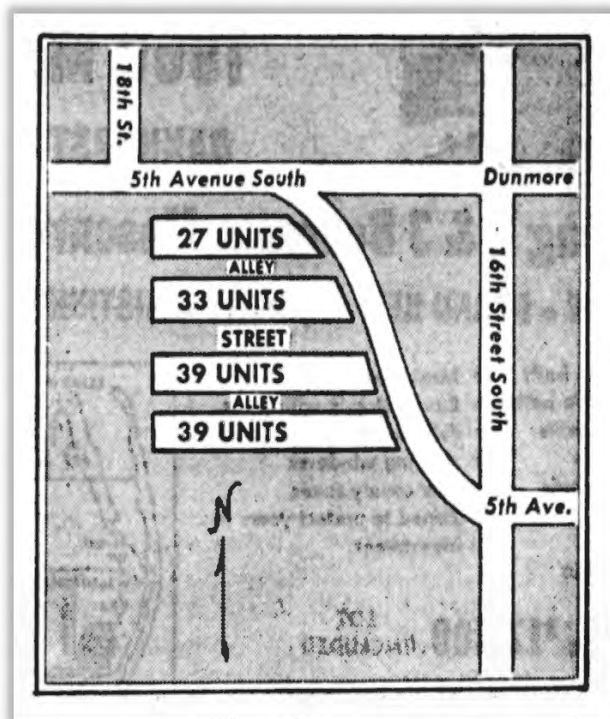
Pinellas County:	374,665
Tampa:	274,970
Hillsborough County:	397,788
Florida:	4,951,560

Book Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg’s population is 181,298, including 24,080 African Americans -- or about 13 percent -- according to the federal census.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, p. 110.)



***Apartments at the former location of Moffett and Evergreen cemeteries***

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, January 31, 1960, p. 13F)*

Article Excerpt:

**“Within the next two weeks, 39 of the proposed 138 apartment units at 1600 5th Ave. S., will be ready for Negro occupancy. Grady Swope, owner-contractor, said final touches are being placed on the first units.**

The apartments, located in the former **Moffett Cemetery**, are three-storied, concrete masonry and are fire resistant and sound proof.”

(Source: “39 Rental Units Set to Open.”

*St. Petersburg Times*, January 31, 1960, p. 13F.)

## 1964



***The Harlem Theatre***

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, March 31, 1964, p. 2B)*

**The Gas Plant neighborhood's Harlem Theatre at 1017 Third Ave. South, which opened in 1927, was torn down at the beginning of 1964.**

Article Excerpt:

**"The Harlem Theatre, four blocks away, was where my 13-year-old brother and his cronies spent countless hours watching 'shoot-'em-ups' during summer vacation and weekends. We dubbed the theatre 'The Ranch' because of the almost daily offerings of Western movies. Admission was 11 cents for children...."**

(Source: "Klan Rally Provokes Memories of First Encounter."

By Mamie Brown, *St. Petersburg Times*, *City Times* section, August 30, 1990, p. 2.)

## 1965



**Helen Allen Edwards, librarian at the James Weldon Johnson Library**  
(Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, April 11, 1965, p. 10B)

Article Excerpt:

**"....In the years before 1947, many persons in the Negro community had difficulty obtaining books in the main library.** Other persons resented the seating arrangements made for the Negro readers.

Out of this group a committee was formed to negotiate for a branch library [in the **Gas Plant neighborhood**]. Several members were from larger cities where easy access to libraries was always possible.

The **James Weldon Johnson Branch Library** was opened April 1, 1947. It is housed in facilities owned by a Negro Masonic group.

....There was only one time when **Helen Edwards** considered resigning. Large numbers of teenagers who crowded a theatre next door [the Harlem theatre] often overran into the library. They were noisy and unruly. Books were purposely damaged and it was impossible for Mrs. Edwards to continue her work. Only after the theatre closed was she able to continue devoting her time to young persons interested in improving their reading ability.

....The library has been a place to read and study for the young, and for the old. It has even been a home for those children who slept in its quietness until closing time."

(Source: "Librarian Is Quiet, Unassuming."

By Peggy M. Peterman, *St. Petersburg Times*, April 11, 1965, p. 10B.)

See Also:

"The first librarians at the James Weldon Johnson Branch Library."

By Gwendolyn Reese, *The Weekly Challenger*, June 7, 2018.)

<https://bit.ly/45jsr0l>

**(Circa) 1960s**

Audio --

Excerpt:

**In a 2021 oral history interview Irving Sanchez III talked about his family's funeral home business.** He was born in 1959 and remembers going to school in the **Gas Plant area** during the 1960s.

"I had an aunt that lived in the Gas Plant area, on 3rd Avenue South. She was the matriarch who acquired the funeral home. And my dad was a descendant who took the funeral home over after she bought it.

She was married to a gentleman named R.C. Calhoun, who was a builder. And he built a ton of houses right there in the Gas Plant area, and churches -- namely, **First Baptist Institutional Church on 3rd Avenue and 16th Street**. He was actually the builder of that church."

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Irving Sanchez III oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, May 7, 2021).

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/4/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/4/)

See Also:

"Oral histories of erased Black cemeteries: Irving Sanchez III."

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, January 5, 2023.

<https://bit.ly/3tagtZM>

and

"New funeral director continues father's legacy."

*The Weekly Challenger*, May 30, 2019.

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/new-funeral-director-continues-fathers-legacy/>

## 1966

Article Excerpt:

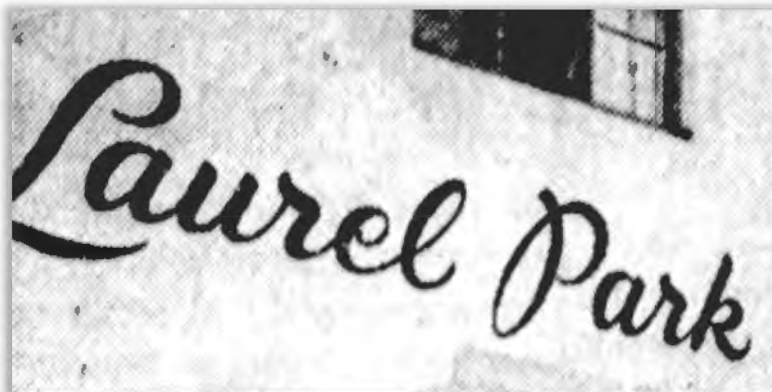
**"The 168-unit Royal Court Apartments [at the former site of the Oaklawn Cemetery] are only a signature away from becoming low-income, public housing, the St. Petersburg Public Housing Authority (SPHA) disclosed yesterday....**It will be the first public housing venture in St. Petersburg since 1940-41, when the 446-apartment Jordan Park was developed.

....The purchase agreement for Royal Court is between the SPHA and the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) in Washington. The FHA took over Royal Court about three years ago when its mortgage was foreclosed. Since then, it has completely rehabilitated the apartments. It spent about \$200,000 on refurbishing." [After taking over control of the site, the St. Petersburg Housing Authority reopened the units as the **Laurel Park** housing project.]

(Source: "Apartments to be Public Housing."

*St. Petersburg Times*, July 1, 1966, p. 3B.)





**Laurel Park apartments**

*(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, August 25, 1966, p. 3B)*

Article Excerpt:

**“The Royal Court Apartments [at the former site of the Oaklawn Cemetery] now has new management, the St. Petersburg Housing Authority, and a new name, ‘Laurel Park.’** Some changes in appearance also are planned.

The Authority became owners of Royal Court July 26 and immediately began the job of turning the 167 apartments into low-income, public housing.

To give substance to the new name, the authority has bought nearly \$3,000 worth of large palm trees to be planted throughout the apartment complex.

Gerald Metko, the authority’s executive director, said he hoped the palms would break up the ‘institutional’ look of the two-story, look-alike apartment buildings.

Metko said the first of the palms will be planted soon along the Fifth Avenue South side of the complex. The other boundaries are Third Avenue South and the alleys west of 17th Street.”

(Source: “Laurel Park Public Housing Changes Set.”  
*St. Petersburg Times*, August 25, 1966, p. 3B.)

Audio --

Excerpt:

**In a 2022 oral history interview Wanda Stuart remembered living near, but not in, the Laurel Park apartment complex during the 1960s and early 1970s.** There was a wall separating the Laurel Park apartments from her house.

“We were in the vicinity of Laurel Park and the gas plant. You could smell the horrible odor coming from the gas plant. I don’t know why I remember the smell, but I can remember the smell. I can remember the [Laurel Park] wall. I can remember friends jumping the wall. You know, it’s like okay can I really remember the **cemetery**? I know it was there, but it was just like, ‘Okay, this is a cemetery. You just walk past it.’ ....So, in keeping with the fact that there was a cemetery, I just sort of, I guess, ignored it hoping that I would never get in trouble with the cemetery, so to speak. But you don’t think about that as you’re growing up you just know that this occurred, and you were not really a part of it. But it was a part of our community.”

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Wanda Stuart oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, March 3rd or 7th, 2022.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/9/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/9/)

See Also:

“Oral histories of erased Black cemeteries: Wanda Stuart.”

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, January 10, 2023.

<http://bit.ly/3Z1cQQ>

## 1967

**The Gas Plant neighborhood’s Davis Elementary at Third Ave. S. and Tenth Street, which originally opened as Davis Academy in 1910, closed in 1967.** Davis Academy was the first school for African American children in St. Petersburg.



***Weekly Challenger newspaper box***  
(Courtesy David Shedden)

**The St. Petersburg African American newspaper, *The Weekly Challenger*, was founded by Cleveland Johnson in 1967.** The newspaper offered home delivery and

*Weekly Challenger* newspaper boxes throughout the **Gas Plant neighborhood**.  
<https://theweeklychallenger.com/>

## 1968

**On August 30, 1968, St. Petersburg's four-month sanitation workers strike, which began on May 6, 1968, came to an end.**

Article Excerpt:

**"Joseph E. Savage, a humble man who picked up other people's garbage for a living, changed the way a city saw itself.**

**As new ways of thinking emerged during the politically tumultuous 1960s, Savage led St. Petersburg's sanitation workers on a strike for better pay and working conditions.** No such thing ever had happened in the Sunshine City.

The four-month walkout in 1968 improved the workers' lives only marginally, at least in the short run. Marching for what would amount to a few cents more in pay, Savage received death threats. His car was burned in front of his house near Campbell Park, and someone tapped his telephone.

....In 1969, C. Bette Wimbish was elected as the first black City Council member.

Lawyer James B. Sanderlin marched with the strikers; in 1972 he was elected the county's first black judge.

The strike, said Ali, helped 'shake up the wells' to make positive things happen."

(Source: "Tribute to a courageous man."

By Jon Wilson, *St. Petersburg Times*, April 19, 2006.)

<https://bit.ly/3TZESW>

## 1969

**During 1969 McCabe United Methodist Church, a Gas Plant neighborhood church that traces its history back to the early 20th century, begins looking for a new home away from the Gas Plant area. After a long transition period, their new church is dedicated in 1972.**

Old Address:

Second Avenue South (Early 20th century building)

Fourth Avenue South and Ninth Street (1919 building)

New Address:

2701 28th Street South (1972 building)

and

2800 26th Avenue South (1992 building)

(Source: McCabe United Methodist Church website.)

<https://bit.ly/4IraMNI>

## 1970

### 1970 Census

St. Petersburg:	216,159
Pinellas County:	522,329
Tampa:	277,714
Hillsborough County:	490,265
Florida:	6,789,443

Book Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg’s population is 216,232, including 31,911 African Americans -- or about 15 percent -- according to the federal census.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, p. 112.)

## 1973

Dissertation Excerpt:

**“As early as June, 1973, Milo Smith and Associates, commissioned by the city council, prepared a redevelopment plan for the ‘Intown’ section of the city. This study recommended that the Gas Plant be a priority area for development after Jamestown/Methodist Town.”**

(Source: “An Ethnohistorical Analysis of the Political Economy of Ethnicity Among African Americans in St. Petersburg, Florida.” By Evelyn Newman Phillips.

PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of South Florida, 1994, p. 136.)

**Before the city focused on changes to the Gas Plant neighborhood in the 1970s and 1980s, changes first came to the African American Methodist Town neighborhood, which was north of the Gas Plant area. The following 1990 *St. Petersburg Times* article describes the Methodist Town neighborhood. Some of their early residents may have been buried in the Oaklawn Cemetery complex.**

Article Excerpt:

“...But to the thousands of people who lived in the area called ‘Methodist Town,’ it was a loving neighborhood where families grew up together, looked out for each other and worshiped side by side.

‘We didn’t see ourselves as underprivileged or downtrodden, really,’ said Algerine Falana Dawkins, a retired schoolteacher who has fond memories of her childhood years there.

....Methodist Town built up around Bethel AME Church, which was established in 1894

at 912 Third Ave. N. The neighborhood eventually would be bounded roughly by First Avenue S and Fifth Avenue N and Ninth and 16th streets.

In 1911, **Chester James** came to Methodist Town, where he would marry, raise four children, volunteer at his church, crusade for better housing, push fellow black citizens to vote and operate a shoe repair shop while his wife ran a private elementary school. ....'People loved and cared for each other over here.' said Mrs. Griffin, who was born there in 1929. 'Black people served their own people. They had grocery stores, dry cleaners, restaurants. They had their own lounges and they had their barber shop, wood yard, furniture transfer'....It was like a city within the city, said Mrs. Griffin. ....After decades of empty promises from city leaders, the houses of Methodist Town were replaced in the 1970s by two-story and high-rise apartments. The re-created neighborhood was named for Chester James, who was about 90 when his dream came true.

....Many Methodist Town residents, then numbering about 2,300, received money for their old homes and moved to other areas of the city, Mrs. Holmes said.

....'It's lost that sense of community,' she [Mrs. Griffin] said."

(Source: "Neighbors Reunite to Remember:  
Methodist Town Still Exists In Their Thoughts."

By Patty Curtin, *St. Petersburg Times*, *City Times* section, June 10, 1990, pgs. 1, 3.)

See Also:

"Methodist Town Project."

Nicole Slaughter Graham, Project Coordinator.

Department of Journalism, Neighborhood News Bureau, USF St. Petersburg campus, circa 2019.

<https://www.methodisttownstpete.com/>

## 1974

Dixie Avenue's past  
falls house by house  
to oncoming highway

By PEGGY PETERMAN  
St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

**Newspaper article headline**

(Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, November 17, 1974, p. 1F)

**In 1974, St. Petersburg Times reporter Peggy Peterman interviewed Gas Plant neighborhood residents whose homes were torn down to build the Interstate 275 highway.** Following are a few excerpts from her newspaper story:

Article Excerpt:

“....It’s difficult to envision the bustle that went on here years ago before the bulldozers like menacing dinosaurs crushed, flattened and leveled all semblances of homes and life.

It’s all a desert now. No more children race between houses, down streets, darting in and out playing their daytime games. No more neighbors make their way across the street to sit on wooden porches and gossip about the cares of the day. No more parties will be given where jokes and laughter can be heard throughout the close-knit black neighborhood.

To speak of the **Dixie Avenue, Dunmore, Fifth Avenue South** community you have to go back in time before anyone ever envisioned an I-275 that would bring the crush of rushing humanity from one part of the city to another or from one city to another. You would have to talk to the oldtimers who built their homes there hoping this would be it for the rest of their lives. Who know that the bulldozers don’t just tear down homes, they disrupt lives, they dismantle lifestyles as they make their ‘progressive’ rounds.

**Elder Jordan Jr.** 86, is perhaps legendary in St. Petersburg’s black community. The handsome white-haired man, who’s nearly blind, can whet your appetite for hours telling you about the early history of St. Petersburg. He’s unhappy about having to leave the home where he and his first wife, **Eva**, now deceased, spent so many ‘wonderful’ days....and now that’s all been torn down....

....**Flagmon Welch** was a familiar sight on the corner, with that ready smile and quick laugh. [He was the father of former city council member, **David T. Welch**, and the grandfather of **Mayor Ken Welch**.] He and his friends could be seen daily, lounging on the wooden porch, talking, laughing, greeting neighbors as they went by. One day passersby realized Welch’s home was the last house standing in that block. He was all alone, just a 69-year-old black man and a lonely wooden building. He held out as long as he could in negotiations with the Department of Transportation. ‘I raised all my children there’....When he first started selling wood 39 years ago, you could buy a cord of wood for \$2.50. When Welch left, he was selling a cord for \$30. ‘When they tore that old building down, it was just like somebody died in the family’....

....One cannot travel down **Fifth Avenue South** between **16th Streets and 12th Streets** without wondering about the homes. Rising stately on your left is a ‘majestic’ two-story home that brings tears to the eyes of many who know it will be leveled....There are six bedrooms on the top floor of this home belonging to Mrs. **Fannye A. Ponder**....with all its memories which go back to her life with her two children and **Dr. Ponder**, the first black physician for the city of St. Petersburg, will soon be gone....She places both hands at her chest and a pained expression crosses her face. ‘But it hurts sometimes. How can I leave this mantel,’ she says crossing to the

cream-bricked mantel and spreading her small arms. 'All my children's pictures always sit here.' She smiles a painful smile and walks quickly to a side table. 'Here are my wedding shoes in bronze. There are so many memories here.'"

(Source: "Dixie Avenue's past falls house by house to oncoming highway."

By Peggy Peterman, *St. Petersburg Times*, November 17, 1974, pgs. 1F, 6F, 7F.)

## (Circa) 1970s

Audio --

Excerpt:

**In a 2021 oral history interview Ennis Davis remembered visiting the Gas Plant neighborhood and the 16th Street area near the former Moffett and Evergreen cemeteries. (This may have been in the late 1970s after the interstate was built.)**

"There was this seldom used **railroad line** that ran through there, so that was always fascinating to me because I wanted to see if it was ever used. So when we'd go through, I'd look around to see if there were boxed cars and things like that on it. I remember....I guess if you're on **16th Street South** and you go **under I-175** and I remember the middle school on one corner, **John Hopkins [16th Street Middle / Junior High School]**, **Campbell Park** was a big park that was on the other corner...."

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Ennis Davis oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries,

August 27, 2021, *Tampa focus* / October 8, 2021, *St. Petersburg focus*.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/6/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/6/)

See Also:

"Oral histories of erased Black cemeteries: Ennis Davis."

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, May 13, 2023.

<https://bit.ly/3EifSaM>

## 1976

**In 1976 human remains were found at the former Evergreen Cemetery site when apartments, which were built in the late 1950s, were razed to build Interstate 175 (I-175), which connects Interstate 275 (I-275) with downtown St. Petersburg.**

Article Excerpt:

**"St. Petersburg homicide detectives were to renew search efforts today after city fire fighters discovered what are believed to be human bones in an alley behind a vacant apartment building on the city's near southside Tuesday.**



....The apartment building, which was built in the late 1950s over the site of the **Evergreen Cemetery**, has been vacated in recent weeks pending its destruction as **I-275** construction moves south."

(Source: "Human Bones Found at Scene of Mattress Fire."

By Patrick Tyler, *St. Petersburg Times*, February 11, 1976, p. 1B.)

Article Excerpt:

**"Human bones found near a vacant apartment building at 1650 Fifth Ave. S may end up as permanent residents of the Pinellas County Morgue.**

....'The chances are more than 90 per cent that they are from that cemetery,' Dr. Wood said. She referred to police confirmation that the builder of what were known as the '**Pink Apartments**' erected their building in the late 1950s on the site of the **Evergreen Cemetery**...."

(Source: "Medical Examiner Pretty Sure Bones Came from Old Cemetery."

By Patrick Tyler, *St. Petersburg Times*, February 18, 1976, p. 9B.)

Article Excerpt:

**"For the second time this year the grinding, earth-shuffling advance of Interstate 275 has yielded human bones.**

....Thursday, it was a construction work's turn. Anthony Garvilla was preparing ground at the same location when he unearthed a skull.

....**Luther Swope**, whose brother Grady developed what came to be known as the '**Pink Apartments**' at the site in the late 1950s, said after the earlier find that construction workers more than a decade ago conducted a mass excavation of the graves. He said workers often were not able to find the full contents of any given grave."

(Source: "Under the Spreading Freeway Lies..."

By Patrick Tyler, *St. Petersburg Times*, July 16, 1976, p. 1B.)

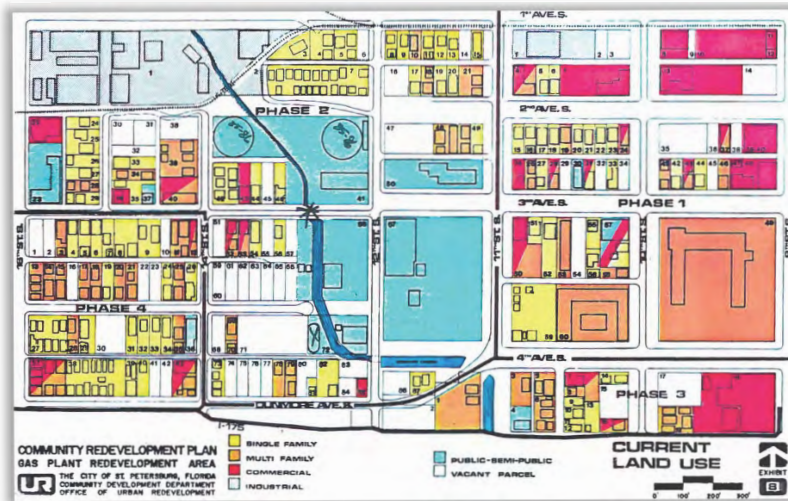
## 1978

Dissertation Excerpt:

**"On September 7, 1978, the city council declared itself the St. Petersburg Community Redevelopment Agency by Resolution 78-738 and proposed to rid the downtown of blighted conditions in the Gas Plant. Essentially, the city proposed to upgrade the living conditions of the residents, relocate and rehabilitate sound structures and to build an industrial park to create jobs. The original plan left the Gas Plant intact as a whole community."**

(Source: "An Ethnohistorical Analysis of the Political Economy of Ethnicity Among African Americans in St. Petersburg, Florida." By Evelyn Newman Phillips.

PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of South Florida, 1994, p. 136.)



***This late 1970s map of the Gas Plant neighborhood is included in the 1978-1979 city redevelopment plan.***  
*(Courtesy City of St. Petersburg)*

City Report:

**“Gas Plant Redevelopment Plan.”**

The City of St. Petersburg, Department of Community Development,  
 Office of Urban Redevelopment, 1978-1979.

<https://bit.ly/3V92tvo>

## 1979

Article Excerpt:

**“The Gas Plant redevelopment plan, a city proposal for upgrading what officials call ‘one of the worst areas in St. Petersburg,’ may prove to be one of the hottest issues to come before City Council this year.**

**The plan would bring in industry and new housing -- and displace more than 800 poor, black residents.** The plan has already been taken to task by the NAACP and several churches and residents of the area, which is bounded by Ninth and 16th streets, First Avenue S and the south distributor of Interstate 275.”

(Source: “Black groups criticize plans for Gas Plant area.”

By Theresa White, *St. Petersburg Times*, April 19, 1979, p. 6B.)

***A newspaper clipping of this article can be found at the end of the following 2023 Times article:***

“St. Petersburg bulldozed a Black community on Trop site. What’s next?

The Gas Plant community was home to residents, businesses and churches.”

By Lauren Peace, *Tampa Bay Times*, January 15, 2023, pgs. 1A, 4A-5A.

<https://bit.ly/3lnGQjf>

## 1980



***Aerial image of the Gas Plant neighborhood, 1980***  
(Courtesy Historical Aerial Photography Index, Pinellas County website)

### 1980 Census

St. Petersburg:	238,647
Pinellas County:	728,531
Tampa:	271,523
Hillsborough County:	646,960
Florida:	9,746,324

### Book Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg’s population is 238,647, including 40,903 African Americans -- or about 17 percent -- according to the federal census.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, p. 112.)

### Article Excerpt:

**“Fifth Avenue South, where they (Eloise Perkins and Willie Mae McMurray) lived originally, was the first residential area for blacks in the city, with homes that met special income and building-code specifications.** The sisters could watch **J.M. Ponder**, the first black doctor hired by the city of St. Petersburg, heading toward his office in the black community, as well as two of the earlier black dentists. Black educators lived across the street, and one of the first black funeral homes in the city completed the majestic sweep of stately homes.

**Miss Perkins admits crying unashamedly several years ago when the two-story brick Ponder home on Fifth Avenue South became a mound of dirt for I-275 and again recently when another landmark, Bethel Community Baptist Church, at the top of Fifth Avenue, was leveled to make room for a playground.**

The Perkins home around the corner, built after their father retired in 1945, now stands as a lonely monument to that period in history. These sisters carry the early history of black St. Petersburg in their hearts....”

(Source: “Perkins Sisters Perpetuate Pioneering Spirit.”

By Peggy Peterman, *St. Petersburg Times*, June 23, 1980, p. 1D.)

*Times* Special Report Excerpt:

**“What is it like to be black and live in St. Petersburg in 1980?** The *St. Petersburg Times* wanted to find out. In a poll last spring (April 16 - June 1, 1980), followed by six months of reporting, the newspaper staff talked to St. Petersburg blacks about integration and discrimination, education and busing, crime and the police department, poverty and employment, the church and black society. These are the findings of that project.”

(Source: “To Be Black And To Live In St. Petersburg.”

*Times* special report (Series of 40 newspaper articles).

By Marcia Slacum, John Harwood, Frank DeLoache and Theresa White.

*St. Petersburg Times*, October 12 - December 7, 1980, p. 1.)

<https://bit.ly/3S0UJdk>

## 1982

Book Excerpt:

“On October 18, 1982, Tampa Sports Authority chairman Ed Giunta turned up the heat. He announced the TSA’s intention to build a ballpark adjacent to Tampa Stadium. ‘We have accomplished today in 20 minutes what Pinellas County has not been able to do in several years,’ Giunta said. **Within days, St. Petersburg answered Tampa’s pressure to act by making the Pinellas Sports Authority an offer it couldn’t refuse: A \$1 per year lease of the 66-acre downtown Gas Plant redevelopment area for 40 years. The city would also pay the \$7-million cost to develop the land and present it construction-ready to the PSA. The PSA had no choice but to accept the generous St. Petersburg offer. It was either that or vote itself out of existence. It unanimously selected the Gas Plant site in downtown St. Petersburg on November 1, 1982.** ‘We thought we needed a partner and the city was willing,’ Bill Bunker says. ‘The support was in St. Petersburg -- nowhere else.’”

[In 1982 Corinne Freeman served as St. Petersburg’s mayor and Alan Harvey was the city manager. In the years to come, assistant city manager Rick Dodge would coordinate St. Petersburg’s official efforts to acquire a baseball team and build a stadium.]

(Source: *Stadium for Rent*, by Bob Andelman, 2nd edition, 2015, p. 85.)

See Also:

Video: “Rise of the Rays. A Devil of a Story.”

WEDU documentary, 2023.

<https://www.pbs.org/video/rise-of-the-rays-a-devil-of-a-story-ld02xk/>

and

List of Mayors of St. Petersburg, Florida, 1892-Present

(Source: Wikipedia.)

[The city's first mayor, David Moffett, owned the land that became Moffett Cemetery.]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayors\\_of\\_St.\\_Petersburg,\\_Florida](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayors_of_St._Petersburg,_Florida)

## 1983

**During 1983 three of the Gas Plant area's largest churches accepted the city's offer to move to new locations.**

### **Bethel Metropolitan Baptist Church**

Old Address:

1010 Third Avenue South

New Address:

3455 26th Avenue South

### **First Baptist Institutional Church**

Old Address:

280 16th Street South

New Address:

3144 Third Avenue South

### **Prayer Tower Church of God in Christ**

Old Address:

1400 Fourth Avenue South

New Address:

1137 37th Street South

## 1984



**Aerial image of the Gas Plant neighborhood, 1984**  
(Courtesy Historical Aerial Photography Index, Pinellas County website)

In 1984 the two large cylinder gas storage tanks (or gas holders) that had stood in the center of the Gas Plant neighborhood were dismantled. The first storage tank was constructed in 1914 and the second began operation in 1946.

**1986**



**Newspaper front page**  
(Courtesy St. Petersburg Times, July 25, 1986, p. 1A)

Article Excerpt:

**"It was billed as a once-in-a-lifetime chance.**

**Thursday, St. Petersburg's City Council took it.**

**The council voted 6-3 to build a domed stadium downtown that is promoted as the cornerstone of a new beginning for the city.**

The vote ended 10 years of studies, lawsuits and heated debate about the project."

(Source: "Council votes to build stadium.")

By Tim Nickens, *St. Petersburg Times*, July 25, 1986, pgs. 1A, 12A.)

**Construction of the future Tropicana Field baseball site began in 1986. The original name of the stadium was the Florida Suncoast Dome and it opened**

without a team in 1990. The name of the stadium changed to the Thunderdome from 1993-1996 when the Lightning hockey team played there. The Tampa Bay Devil Rays baseball franchise was awarded to the area in 1995 and their inaugural season at Tropicana Field started in 1998.

Book Excerpt:

**“Along with the construction of Interstate 275 and the displacement it caused, probably no other project caused the degree of resentment that the Gas Plant bulldozing did.** Part of it was because residents there had believed renewal of another kind was coming, a baseball stadium. The decision was not universally popular because baseball had not been part of the original plan. **The original plan to rehabilitate the Gas Plant neighborhood called for new housing, an industrial park and hundreds of new jobs.**

When the idea of baseball came up, city council member David Welch warned officials: ‘When you went into this area and moved out all the people, you said you were going to rehabilitate and create light industry and create jobs. You have a moral obligation to those individuals who were moved out for what you have told them.’”

(Source: *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, pgs. 85-87.)

Book Excerpt:

“The 20th century history of the African American community, particularly in the southern states, is a difficult one and can be characterized as one of resilience, perseverance, and triumph against the odds. Rosalie Peck, co-author of *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods* and life-long resident of St. Petersburg, offers that: **‘One word defined St. Petersburg’s historic African American neighborhoods: connectivity’** (Peck & Wilson, 2008).

Currently, only one portion of the historic neighborhoods remains, around 9th Ave. S., the avenue of Faith, and 22nd St. S., the street of Music. **The three original settlements, Peppertown, Methodist Town and the Gas Plant no longer exist....”**

(Source: *Where Have All The Mangoes Gone?:*

*Reactivating the Tropicana Field Site -- On the Threshold of St Petersburg’s History, Culture and Memory.*

By Sarah Jane Vatelot, St. Petersburg Press, 2020, p. 8.)

See Also:

“Community Voices: Where have all the mangoes gone?”

By Sarah Jane Vatelot, *St. Pete Catalyst*, August 8, 2019.

<https://stpetecatalyst.com/community-voices-where-have-all-the-mangoes-gone/>

**On November 22, 1986, thousands of people attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the Florida Suncoast Dome.**



Article Excerpt:

**“The groundbreaking for the domed stadium in downtown St. Petersburg was official -- and apparently a record-setter....Shoveling dirt was just a small portion of Saturday’s celebration. There were high school bands, young athletes and fancy cars in a parade. Short speeches and sky divers. Hot dogs and Chuck Berry.**

**....Mabelle Murray remembered the neighborhood that used to be where the stadium will be built**, once known for the gas plant that was there. The city bought the property -- once home to several hundred black families, three churches and dozens of businesses -- in the late 1970s, leveled the buildings and later leased it to the Pinellas Sports Authority for the stadium.”

(Source: “Stadium breaks ground -- and records.”

By Tim Nickens, *St. Petersburg Times*, November 23, 1986, pgs. 1B, 16B.)

See Also:

Video: “Groundbreaking of Florida Suncoast Dome in St. Petersburg.”

WTVT, November 22, 1986.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VjnMMazezI>

and

Video: “St. Pete and baseball: A relationship that spans over a century.”

By Diedra Rodriguez, WTVT, September 13, 2022.

<https://www.fox13news.com/news/st-pete-and-baseball-history>

## 1987



**Bunny and Abe Katz**

(Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, March 14, 1987)

Photo Caption Excerpt:

**“Bunny and Abe Katz bid farewell to 30 years of memories Friday morning, as the former home of Katz Grocery is demolished to make way for the parking lot of St. Petersburg’s domed stadium.** The building at 1056 Third Ave. S. was the last structure standing on the stadium site and was the subject of a lengthy city condemnation suit.”

(Source: “Last building at stadium site goes down.”

*St. Petersburg Times, City Times and Independent* section, March 14, 1987, p. 2.)

[Six years later, in 1993, Louise Macon’s home at 1726 Fourth Ave. S. was the last house torn down for additional stadium parking.]

See Also:

“He fought city to keep his shop:

A grocer’s loyalty to his neighborhood stood in the way of the Trop.”

By Andrew Meacham, *St. Petersburg Times*, August 15, 2009.

<https://bit.ly/41yhols>

Article Excerpt:

**“Listening to Mamie Doyle Brown talk about the history of St. Petersburg’s black community is fun.**

**She’s colorful and witty, and has done her homework on how black folks lived, worked, and built this city and county decades ago.**

....‘If you can remember swinging across **Booker Creek** on a rope made of vines, without your mother’s consent, if you remember playing in a den on the bank of Booker Creek. The den was a big hole in the ground dug by the boys to get away from the nosey girls. It was partitioned off with rooms, a stove and books.’

**....Another was walking through the black cemeteries in the vicinity of 16th Street and Fifth Avenue S. The cemeteries were destroyed to make room for other establishments.**

**‘We lost a lot of history when they dug up the tombstones,’ Brown says sadly.**

**‘We used to play running through the cemetery, and listening to the men singing who sat on the tombstones and drank liquor.’**

....‘This community was built by grass-roots people, domestics, laborers who forged homes out of the wilderness. Just plain old working people. They were invisible people then, and still are. They reared their children, bought homes, and decided to stick around.’”

(Source: “Do You Remember Lead Pies.”

By Peggy Peterman, *St. Petersburg Times*, November 16, 1987, p. 1D.)

See Also:

“Fighting for Others: Peggy M. Peterman’s 31 Years at the *St. Petersburg Times*.”

By Jennifer Inge Bortolus. M.A. Thesis, University of South Florida, 2000.

<https://bit.ly/4c7JPKC>

**In 1987, Ninth Street, which borders the east side of the Gas Plant neighborhood, was renamed in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

## 1988



**Booker Creek**  
(Courtesy David Shedden)

Article Excerpt:

**“As a boy, Watson Haynes often played in the shallow creek that curled between his home and the city gas plant.**

**On summer days, he waded and swam in Booker Creek. He and his friends caught tadpoles there and carried them home in old paint cans dumped by the creek.** While swimming, he sometimes swallowed creek water and cut his leg on the creek’s rocks.

Haynes is 35 now. He owns a business in downtown St. Petersburg and looks forward to the day when a 43,000-seat stadium will open on the gas plant site.

He also looks back to the days he played in the creek crossing that site, a creek whose mud is now known to hold cancer-causing compounds. And he wonders if people who grew up near the gas plant are carrying traces of its poisons.

**....The municipal gas plant opened in 1914, when St. Petersburg was a town of about 10,000 people. It became a major industry in the city’s black neighborhood, producing gas from coal and steam and creating tar as a byproduct. The plant closed in 1962, leaving spilled tars and buried pipelines behind.**

....Thirty years ago, in a segregated city, Booker Creek was a place where black children swam, he said. ‘Those of us who were kids, we could swim there every day....’”

(Source: “Toxins in Creek Worry Residents.”

By David Olinger, *St. Petersburg Times*, February 1, 1988.)

## 1990

### 1990 Census

St. Petersburg:	238,629
Pinellas County:	851,659
Tampa:	280,015
Hillsborough County:	834,054
Florida:	12,937,926

Book Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg’s population is 238,629, including 46,726 African Americans -- or about 20 percent -- according to the federal census.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, p. 113.)

**On March 3, 1990, the Florida Suncoast Dome officially opened to the public.**

Article Excerpt:

**“More than 4,000 amateur performers and country star Kenny Rogers officially hung out the ‘Open for Business’ sign on the Florida Suncoast Dome on Saturday night. And the crowd of 25,339 loved it....opening night went smoothly at the \$110-million stadium that has been 13 years in the making.”**

(Source: “Doozy of a Debut.”

By Kenneth S. Allen, *St. Petersburg Times*, March 4, 1990, pgs. 1B, 8B.)

See Also:

Video: “Florida Suncoast Dome Grand Opening.”

WTSP, March 3, 1990.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pY9louJRHBM>

and

Video: “Florida Suncoast Dome opens -- finally -- in 1990.”

WTVT, March 3, 1990.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lbktXr8OIk>

**During 1990, the Laurel Park housing project, which was built on the former Oaklawn Cemetery site, was razed to create Tropicana Field parking lots. In 1988 the city had taken over ownership of the complex from the St. Petersburg Housing Authority.**

Article Excerpt:

**“The dead have never rested undisturbed around Laurel Park.**

**It seems that in recent decades, whenever someone has probed the earth near the public housing project, a coffin or bones from old cemeteries have turned up - bones that were supposed to have been removed.”**

“....**Interstate 175** stands where **Moffet’s [Moffett]** was dedicated in 1888 as a burial ground for Civil War veterans. In 1958, about 225 graves were removed from Evergreen, which was next to Moffet’s [Moffett] and used in the early 1900s, to make way for an apartment complex that has since been torn down, according to *St. Petersburg Times* articles of that day....The history of **Oaklawn**, now the site of Laurel Park, is more of a mystery. There is scant mention of the cemetery in city history books, records and newspaper stories.”

(Source: “Dome Parking Project May Unearth Remains.”

By Alicia Caldwell, *St. Petersburg Times*, July 22, 1990, pgs. 1B, 6B.)

<https://bit.ly/3lzQaIW>



### **1990 newspaper article; 1949 cemetery photograph**

(Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, *Largo/Seminole Times* section, July 26, 1990, p. 3)

Article Excerpt:

**“The possibility that century-old graves may lie beneath Laurel Park has put a crimp in the city’s plan to tear down the public housing project and put in a parking lot.....Old maps and city directories show that the land beneath Laurel Park was Oaklawn Cemetery around the turn of the century. Although the graves were supposed to have been removed before the land was built upon in 1949, some people are not sure that was done.”**

(Source: “Graves Might Stall Demolition.”

By Alicia Caldwell, *St. Petersburg Times*, *Largo/Seminole Times* section, July 26, 1990, p. 3.)

## **1993**





**Louise Macon and her great grandson**  
(Courtesy *St. Petersburg Times*, March 30, 1993)

Article Excerpt:

**“Tears filled Louise Macon’s eyes Monday as she watched the claw on the backhoe rip through the walls of her former home.**

**After living there 37 years, she was left with only memories. City officials eventually will pave over the azaleas, the pine and citrus trees in the yard to complete a parking lot for the Florida Suncoast Dome.**

‘I had everything I dreamed of,’ said Mrs. Macon, 79. ‘This takes everything out of you. You think you’re set for life...This is where I was going to call home.’

Mrs. Macon owned the last house [1726 Fourth Ave. S.] in the neighborhood that city officials wanted torn down to make room for more than 4,000 new parking spaces just west of the Dome.”

(Source: “House Falls to Make Way for Dome.”

By Mark Journey, *St. Petersburg Times*, *City Times* section, March 30, 1993, pgs. 1, 3.)

<https://bit.ly/3h3tA9h>

**1994**



***Aerial image of the former Gas Plant neighborhood, 1994***  
*(Courtesy Historical Aerial Photography Index, Pinellas County website)*

## 1998

Article Excerpt:

**“In just two more days, thousands of people will come from all over for a revitalized city’s Opening Day.**

**As they buy their cold drinks, peanuts and Cracker Jack, many will not know -- or perhaps even care -- what the real dirt under Tropicana Field supported before the dream of Major League Baseball was there.**

**It was a neighborhood of large houses, small businesses, apartments, tenement shacks, nightclubs and churches.**

**Its name was the Gas Plant, for the two giant fuel tanks that towered over the center of the neighborhood.** When the bulldozers came in the early 1980s, clearing the way for what was then just a big gamble, the city erased one of its oldest African-American neighborhoods.

**What it couldn’t erase were the memories.** Even today, the name Gas Plant brings a sigh of nostalgia to those who remember it. Middle-aged adults remember their childhoods. Old folks recall the families they raised. Preachers, the ones they baptized, married and buried.”

(Source: “Around the dome, echoes of the past.”

By James Harper, *St. Petersburg Times*, March 29, 1998, p. 1B.)

<https://bit.ly/3ybW6fd>

**On March 31, 1998, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays played their first game at Tropicana Field.**

See Also:

**Video: “Tampa Bay Devil Rays debut.”**



By Jennifer Jones, WTVT, March 31, 1998.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgiuq6JprZg>  
and  
**Video: “Tampa Bay Devil Rays’ first game.”**  
By John Wilson, WTVT, March 31, 1998.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObNimjpzdMc>

## 2000

### 2000 Census

St. Petersburg:	248,232
Pinellas County:	921,482
Tampa:	303,447
Hillsborough County:	998,948
Florida:	15,982,378

Book Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg’s population is 248,232 including 55,502 African Americans -- or about 22 percent -- according to the federal census.”**

(Source: *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

By Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson, 2008, p. 113.)

## 2002

**In 2002 the *St. Petersburg Times* published a special online and print report about the historic 22nd Street business district of St. Petersburg called “The Deuces.”**

The newspaper project laid the foundation for two remarkable books by Rosalie Peck and Jon Wilson on the history of St. Petersburg’s African American neighborhoods, including the Gas Plant neighborhood. The books are titled *St. Petersburg’s Historic 22nd Street South* and *St. Petersburg’s Historic African American Neighborhoods*.

(Source: Times special report: “The Deuces.”

By Jon Wilson. Photography by Jamie Francis. *St. Petersburg Times*, July 28, 2002.)

<https://bit.ly/3QefwZf>

and

<https://bit.ly/3xPuuOT>

## 2005

Article Excerpt:

**“We danced, drank and mingled at the Cozy Corner Tavern and partied at Prince Hall Masonic Building. We protected our community. Today, this area marks the East entrance to Tropicana Field. Only persons who gather in the area know that this was once a thriving community.”**

(Source: “Gas Plant Historic Markers.”

By Norman E. Jones, *The Weekly Challenger*, October 13, 2005, p. 3.)

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/challenger/952/>

## 2006

Article Excerpt:

**“The remains of Sharter [John W. Shorter] and Brownlow were removed in 1958 from the early-day Moffett Cemetery, now long gone from its Fifth Avenue S site, just west of where Tropicana Field now stands. They were reinterred in Lincoln. The two were among about 150 reinterments from Moffett to Lincoln in 1958, according to the society’s brief history of the cemetery. Many remains were unidentified. Another 86 ‘unknown individuals’ were moved from Moffett to Lincoln between 1926 and 1927, according to the history.”**

(Source: “Unraveling the mysteries at a place of final rest.”

By Jon Wilson, *St. Petersburg Times*, April 14, 2006.)

<https://bit.ly/3xCtwFM>

## 2007

Article Excerpt:

**“Mollette ‘Michelle’ Davis remembers getting her hair curled as a child at Redvict’s Beauty Parlor on Fourth Avenue S. Down the street, she would hold funerals for grasshoppers. When she was 13, she found the Lord at First Baptist Institutional Church.**

Those memories were long ago paved over for the **Tropicana Field** parking lot.

Davis, 55, was among scores of residents moved out of their homes in the **Gas Plant** area, an aging, predominantly black neighborhood near downtown St. Petersburg, to make way for Tropicana Field. City officials said the stadium would revitalize the area, attracting businesses and jobs.

It never quite happened.

**Today, as the Tampa Bay Rays unveil their plans to leave the dome and build a new waterfront stadium, some are demanding that the black community get a piece of the pie this time.**

**‘The hollow promises were never made true,’ said Darryl Rouson, a lawyer in St. Petersburg. ‘We want to be significantly included and remembered this time.’”**

(Source: “Trop deal didn’t pay off for all:

Group seeks benefits never realized for a razed neighborhood.”

By Nicole Hutcheson, *St. Petersburg Times*, November 28, 2007, pgs. 1A, 20A.)

<http://bit.ly/3IYX17Y>

Article Excerpt:

**“Nearly 800 people lived, worked, played and prayed in the 66-acre, predominantly African-American Gas Plant district, named for the two fuel towers that stood where the stadium is now.** Businesses like the **Harlem Theater** and **Citizen’s Lunch Counter** thrived. The area was home to St. Pete’s **first African-American elementary school** and one of the community’s **first libraries**. Three **churches** attracted parishioners from across South St. Pete. Shacks filled with renters lined some of the brick streets; well-kept bungalows lined blocks like those off of **Fifth Avenue South**, including the home of St. Pete’s first African-American physician, **Dr. James Ponder**. Many residents owned their homes and had lived there for more than a decade.”

(Source: “Build a Stadium, Raze a Neighborhood: Memories of Gas Plant haunt the Rays’ latest plans.”

By Alex Pickett, *Creative Loafing*, November 28, 2007.)

<https://www.ctampa.com/news/build-a-stadium-raze-a-neighborhood-12270838>

## 2010

### 2010 Census

St. Petersburg:	244,769
Pinellas County:	916,542
Tampa:	335,709
Hillsborough County:	1,229,226
Florida:	18,801,310

## 2013

Article Excerpt:

**“Lincoln Cemetery, resting place for thousands of African Americans since 1926, holds a story in every grave. Walk through its nine acres, shaded by oak, pine and palm, and look at the markers.**

Some are impressive, such as the ones for the pioneer **Jordan family, Elder Sr.**, his wife **Mary Frances** and the **couple’s sons**. Their story of early entrepreneurship is familiar and their name still resonates through community landmarks such as **Jordan Park** and **Jordan Elementary**.

Civil rights figures such as **Ralph Wimbish** and **Robert Swain** are there. So is **Fanny Ayer Ponder** and other revered Gibbs High School educators. Activist **Chester James**, for whom Jamestown is named, and his wife **Rachel**, who founded the city’s first African-American private school, lie not far away.

....Soon after Lincoln opened, the remains of about 86 individuals were disinterred from Moffett and reinterred at the new cemetery. In 1958, there were about 150 more re-interments from Moffett to Lincoln, according to a 600-page book compiled

by a Pinellas Genealogy Society research team.”

(Source: “St. Pete’s Hidden History: Lincoln Cemetery.”

By Jon Wilson, *The Weekly Challenger*, September 12, 2013, p. 9.)

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1245&context=challenger>

## 2017

Article Excerpt:

**“Irving Sanchez remembers the Gas Plant.**

His after-school route took him through the heart of the razed St. Petersburg neighborhood. **Immaculate Conception, off 16th St. S.**, let out at 2:30. His aunt picked him up after school, drove east down 3rd Ave. S., and kept him at her house on the corner of 9th until Sanchez’s parents got off work.

In the 1980s the city leveled the buildings and homes in Gas Plant to make room for a domed stadium. Sanchez, now 58, remembers the **candy store** across from his aunt’s house (by today’s ‘Urban Style Flats’). He attended **McCabe Methodist Church**, one block south. Now it is a parking garage.”

(Source: “Gas Plant -- imagining a lost neighborhood.”

By Thomas Hallock, *Creative Loafing*, October 19, 2017.)

<https://bit.ly/3yRjM96>

## 2019

Video --

Excerpt:

**“It has always been the case of the city fathers to relocate the African American community to expand the business district,’ said the Rev. Wayne Thompson of First Baptist Institutional Church in St. Pete.** ‘I was a young pastor, probably 25 years old, 26 years old, when the city came to talk to the black ministers about signing on for the help of relocating that area, that they were going to bring jobs, they were going to bring businesses to the area.’

Thompson is referring to the historically black **Gas Plant neighborhood** of St. Pete that was razed in the 1980s to make room for the **Trop**. He says neighbors were originally told that the land they sold would bring in new business and would help the black community, but that never happened.

‘They used that land for the Trop instead of businesses,’ he said.

(Source: “Black community fears more broken promises if Trop site is redeveloped.”

By Emerald Morrow, WTSP, July 18, 2019.)

<https://bit.ly/3sxm1nI>

## 2020



***Aerial image of the former Gas Plant neighborhood, 2020***  
*(Courtesy Historical Aerial Photography Index, Pinellas County website)*



***Booker Creek***  
*(Courtesy David Shedden)*

Book Excerpt:

**Remembering the Gas Plant neighborhood by Kenneth Welch:**

**“I’m third generation St. Pete. My grandmother moved from Live Oak and my granddad was from South Georgia....My grandfather had a firewood and topsoil business that was right where Tropicana Field now is, on Sixteenth Street and about Fourth and Fifth Avenue -- where the ticket counter now is. It was called Welch’s Wood Lot. All the boys in the family grew up working there. Our church, Prayer Tower, was at Fourteenth and Fourth. My Uncle Clarence, who was also a science teacher in Pinellas County Schools, was the pastor. There were churches and businesses all in this area.**

....There was such a rich community there before the Dome. Folks didn't want to lose that. When the Gas Plant community was uprooted, it was with the promise of development and jobs -- which has really not occurred."

(Source: "Afterword: A Conversation with Kenneth Welch."

Interviewed by Thomas Hallock. *Voices of Booker Creek*, 2020, pgs. 142-143.)

[On January 6, 2022, Kenneth Welch became St. Petersburg's first African American mayor.]

Article Excerpt:

**"Thirty years ago, residents stepped forward when the city prepared to pave parking lots 1 and 2 for Tropicana Field.**

**They thought caskets were under those 12 acres on the corner of 16th Street South and spreading from Third Avenue South to Fifth Avenue South.**

It was once the home to **Oaklawn Cemetery**, the city was told, and bodies were likely left behind when it was moved in the mid-20th century.

Oaklawn was adjacent to **two other cemeteries**. In 1976, human remains were unearthed from one of those properties during construction, years after the burial grounds were supposed to have been moved, bolstering the belief that bodies were also under the parking lot land.

But the land was paved without further investigation."

(Source: "Are there graves under Tropicana Field parking lots? Archaeologists want to find out."

By Paul Guzzo, *Tampa Bay Times*, July 2, 2020.)

<https://bit.ly/387t7yt>

Video --

Description:

**This Tropicana Field area redevelopment RFP video looks at the history of the Gas Plant neighborhood.**

City of St. Petersburg, October 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK2o7uqMuWM>





***Members of the USF  
African American Burial Ground & Remembering Project  
on a tour of the former Oaklawn Cemetery complex, November 5, 2020  
(Courtesy David Shedden)***

**On November 5, 2020, members of the USF African American Burial Ground & Remembering Project toured the site of the former Oaklawn Cemetery complex** which is now under parts of Tropicana Field's parking lot and Interstate 175 at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue South and 16<sup>th</sup> Street.

See Also:

The Black Cemetery Network

<https://blackcemeterynetwork.org/>

The Black Cemetery Network:

African American Burial Ground and Remembering Project

<https://blackcemeterynetwork.org/usfresearch>

Article Excerpt:

**"In Tampa Bay and across the nation, many African-American burial grounds and cemeteries have been lost to history, neglected, abandoned, even paved over and developed on.** A research project funded by a University of South Florida anti-racism initiative seeks to recover and reimagine the forgotten history of these sacred places. Consisting of faculty, staff, graduate students, and community partners from fields such as anthropology, business, English and the arts, the **African American Burial Grounds & Remembering Project** will identify and preserve these cemeteries in Tampa Bay."

(Source: "Research project to recover, engage public on lost history of Black burial grounds in Tampa Bay."

*The Weekly Challenger*, December 23, 2020.)

<https://bit.ly/3O5ThR3>



## 2021

Video --

Excerpt:

**“Archaeologists from Cardno have started a ground-penetrating radar search for graves from a lost African American cemetery that documents show could be underneath a parking lot in Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, a city official said Thursday.”**

(Source: “Search underway at Tropicana Field for graves from lost Black cemetery.”  
By Emerald Morrow, WTSP, March 25, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3KO68Wp>

Article Excerpt:

**“A crew hired by the city of St. Petersburg has begun scanning land near Tropicana Field in search of lost grave sites, a potential sticking point that could affect redevelopment of the 86-acre site.**

Archaeologists with the Riverview company Cardno this week started using ground penetrating radar to probe land in parking lots 1 and 2 west of Tropicana Field, near a COVID-19 testing site, to look for skeletal remains on the former site of **Oaklawn Cemetery.**”

(Source: “Search begins for grave sites at Tropicana Field parking lots in St. Petersburg.”

By Jay Cridlin and Josh Solomon, *Tampa Bay Times*, March 26, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3waZGDQ>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg city officials are weighing a shortlist of four proposals for the redevelopment on Tropicana Field. And as the process picks up steam, two prominent members of the city’s African American community discuss their hopes for and fears about the project.**

Tropicana Field has been home to the Tampa Bay Rays since 1998.

But the baseball stadium and surrounding parking lots was once a neighborhood.

On this week’s episode, we focus on the legacy of the Gas Plant neighborhood, and the promises made to its residents.”

(Source: “St. Petersburg Community Leaders Share Optimism And Concern For Tropicana Field Site’s Future.”

By Bradley George. Produced by Dinorah Prevost.

Florida Matters, WUSF Public Media, March 30, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3soDwN9>

Article Excerpt:

**“This article was written to remind us of what we lost when the City decided to build a [Tropicana Field] stadium, and the lessons learned from repeated failures to meet equity goals for past developments there.”**

(Source: “Timeline: 40 Years of Broken Promises to the Black Community Over the Trop; What We Lost & What to Watch for as Developers Present This Week.”

By Toni Gallardo, *The Power Broker*, April 5, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3PkTH7X>

Article Excerpt:

**“St. Petersburg griot Gwendolyn Reese grew up at 1305 Fifth Ave. S, in a cherished part of town known as Sugar Hill. In the 1970s, Interstate 175 bowled through her block, and following a nationwide pattern, leveled a Black community. Reese has given her adult life to preserving the landmarks and memories that survive in south St. Pete.**

‘The church where I was baptized and married is no longer there,’ Reese explained at a recent forum, speaking in her carefully measured alto. ‘I can tell my children my story, but I cannot take them and actually show them the buildings.’

Stories of the adjacent Gas Plant neighborhood follow the same refrain. Black space got replaced by white ‘urban renewal.’ Promising light industry, the city razed the 86-acre site around what is now Tropicana Field, where Booker Creek still flows. The story has been told many times: how the city bulldozed over 285 buildings, 500 households, and at least nine churches.”

(Source: “Old wounds and big promises weigh on proposals for redevelopment of St. Pete’s Tropicana Field.”

By Thomas Hallock, *Creative Loafing*, April 14, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3MB0fhe>



***Tropicana Field***  
(Courtesy City of St. Petersburg)

Video --

Excerpt:

**“Are there still graves buried on the Tropicana Field property? That’s what USF researchers are waiting to find out. If there are remains at the site, researchers said they plan to honor and identify the people buried there and their descendants.”**

(Source: “Are there graves still buried on the Tropicana Field property?”

By Sandra Weathers, Bay News 9, April 20, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3Rghuch>

Video --

Description:

**Gwendolyn Reese interviewed Dr. Antoinette Jackson and Dr. Julie Armstrong about the USF African American Burial Ground and the Remembrance Project.**

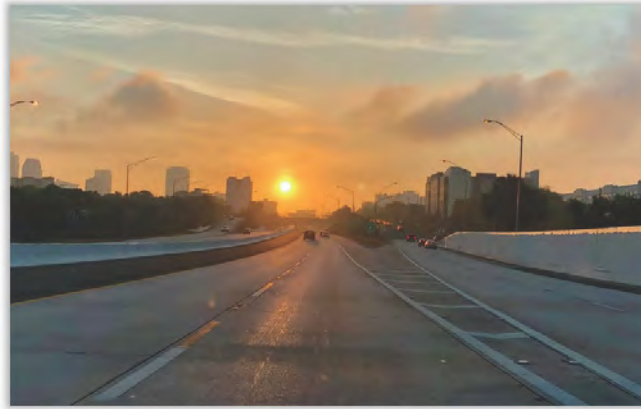
(Source: “The African American Burial Ground and Remembering Project.” Community Conversations program. The African American Heritage Association.

Recorded video session with Tombolo Books, May 19, 2021.)

<https://www.facebook.com/TomboloBooks/videos/847947952477017>



***I-175 near Tropicana Field***  
*(Courtesy David Shedden)*



***I-175 near Tropicana Field***  
*(Courtesy David Shedden)*

Video --

Excerpt:

**“A spokesperson with the Florida Department of Transportation, District 7, said on Wednesday it is working with Pinellas County on a possible conduit project within the boundaries of two historic cemeteries under I-175 in St. Petersburg. Documents show the city condemned Evergreen and Moffett cemeteries in 1926, and crews constructing the interstate later found human remains in 1976.”**

(Source: “FDOT investigating erased veteran and Black cemeteries under I-175 ahead of possible project.”

By Emerald Morrow, WTSP, May 26, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/2SRh1Bs>

Article Excerpt:

**“Across the nation and throughout Tampa Bay, African-American cemeteries have been lost to history, neglected, abandoned, even paved over and developed on. Even in St. Pete, where Tropicana Field has stood on long-forgotten burial grounds for years, a group of University of South Florida researchers aims to unearth their history.**

This month’s Community Conversations with the African American Heritage Association (AAHA), in partnership with Tombolo Books, centered around the **African American Burial Grounds and the Remembrance Project**. Featured guests joining **Gwendolyn Reese**, president of the AAHA, in the virtual discussion included USF Professors Dr. Antoinette Jackson and Dr. Julie Armstrong.”

(Source: “St. Pete’s Black burial grounds erased from history.”

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, May 27, 2021.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/st-petes-black-burial-grounds-erased-from-history/>

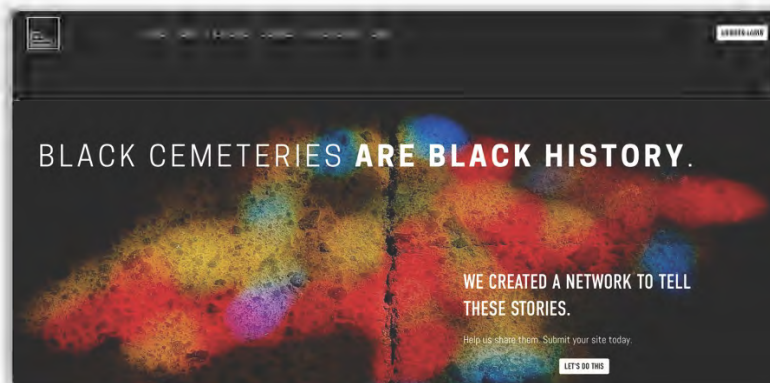
Article Excerpt:

**“In Tampa Bay and across the nation, a number of African American burial**

**grounds and cemeteries have been lost to history, neglected, abandoned, even paved over and developed.** A research project funded by a USF anti-racism initiative is seeking to recover and reimagine the forgotten history of these sacred places. Consisting of faculty, staff, graduate students and community partners from fields such as anthropology, business, English and the arts, the **African American Burial Grounds & Remembering Project** seeks to identify and preserve these cemeteries in Tampa Bay.”

(Source: “Anti-Racism Initiative Seeks to Recover History of Black Burial Grounds.” *USF Magazine*, Summer 2021, pgs. 14-15.)

[https://issuu.com/usfucm/docs/usf\\_magazine\\_summer\\_2021](https://issuu.com/usfucm/docs/usf_magazine_summer_2021)



***The Black Cemetery Network website***

Article Excerpt:

“Graves from five erased Black or mostly Black cemeteries have been discovered throughout Tampa Bay in recent years, but the issue is not unique to this area. Such burial grounds have been found throughout the nation.

So, a team of **University of South Florida professors and doctoral students created the Black Cemetery Network** website at [blackcemeterynetwork.org](http://blackcemeterynetwork.org) to serve as a hub for the movement to bring dignity to those cemeteries.”

(Source: “USF launches website to serve as a national hub for erased Black cemeteries.”

By Paul Guzzo, *Tampa Bay Times*, June 16, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/45WL4st>

See Also:

**The Black Cemetery Network**

<https://blackcemeterynetwork.org/>

The Black Cemetery Network:

**African American Burial Ground and Remembering Project**

<https://blackcemeterynetwork.org/usfresearch>

In July 2021, the Cardno company's Oaklawn Cemetery ground penetrating radar survey of Tropicana Field parking lots 1 and 2 was released by the city of St. Petersburg. The report said that three graves may have been found under the Tropicana Field parking lots.

Video --

Excerpt:

**"A new report reveals archaeologists have discovered what appear to be three graves from the old Oaklawn Cemetery in parking lot 1 at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg.**

Research into the possibility of graves at the site began amid city talks of redeveloping the 86-acres around Tropicana Field."

(Source: "Ground-penetrating radar reveals 3 possible graves under Tropicana Field parking lot."

By Emerald Morrow, WTSP, August 7, 2021.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVInvH-HeSI>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**"The city of St. Petersburg has hired an engineering firm to scan the 7.4 acre site with ground-penetrating radar.**

**There is evidence of three possible graves underneath a parking lot at Tropicana Field and eight 'areas of interest,' according to a report from the city of St. Petersburg."**

(Source: "Possible Graves Found Under Tropicana Field Parking Lot, Report Finds."

By Bradley George, WUSF, August 9, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3EvxEra>

See Also:

"Oaklawn Cemetery Ground Penetrating Radar Survey at Tropicana Field Parking Lots 1 and 2 St Petersburg, Florida."

Cardno Company, July 19, 2021. (Posted online with WUSF story.)

<https://bit.ly/3UG4z5K>

Article Excerpt:

**"When driving by Tropicana Field, Corey Givens Jr. wonders if his great-grandfather, Will Williams, is buried under the nearby interstate overpass.**

**That's where Moffett Cemetery was located.** Bodies were moved in the 1950s, but Givens was told his ancestor was in an unmarked grave that would have been hard to find. And he said there is no record of a new burial site.

'We never learned if his body was reinterred,' Givens said.

He might finally know if bodies were forgotten.

Moffett was part of a burial campus with three cemeteries.

Last week, archaeologists announced that ground-penetrating radar discovered there



are at least three graves under Tropicana Field's parking lots 1 and 2, at the southern boundary next to 5th Ave. S. and Interstate 275."

(Source: "Graves were found under Tropicana Field parking lots. Now what?"

By Paul Guzzo, *Tampa Bay Times*, August 10, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/4625Nup>

See Also:

"In search of lost cemeteries."

A collection of *Tampa Bay Times* stories, beginning in 2019, about African American burial grounds.

<https://www.tampabay.com/topics/zion/>

Video --

Excerpt:

**"The city of St. Petersburg will explore the next steps after archaeologists recently found a lost cemetery with three possible graves at Tropicana Field, the latest in an effort to uncover erased African American cemeteries in Tampa Bay."**

(Source: "Radar identifies three possible graves under Tropicana Field parking lots."

By Briona Arradondo, WTVT, August 11, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3r6FILP>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**"Five University of South Florida professors launched the Black Cemetery Network last June.**

**....Launched in June, its purpose is to document and highlight the stories of the nation's unearthed cemeteries and the people buried in them.**

Host Bradley George talks with Antoinette Jackson, chair of USF's Anthropology Department and one of the founders of the Network, and Walter Jennings, a Tampa-based poet who is also part of the project."

(Source: "Tampa Bay-Based Project Continues The Work Of Highlighting Unearthed Cemeteries."

By Bradley George. Produced by Dinorah Prevost.

Florida Matters, WUSF Public Media, September 14, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3RaaJci>

Article Excerpt:

**"In 2020, with funding from a university antiracism initiative, she started the African American Burial Grounds and Remembering Project. The project has brought a team of anthropologists, historians, activists, artists, poets, and storytellers to burial sites in both Tampa and St. Petersburg."**

(Source: "When Black History Is Unearthed, Who Gets to Speak for the Dead?"

Efforts to rescue African American burial grounds and remains have exposed deep conflicts over inheritance and representation."



By Jill Lepore, *The New Yorker*, September 27, 2021.)  
<https://bit.ly/484xdS9>

Video --

Excerpt:

**“Today, St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman announced his selection of Midtown Development to serve as the developer of the Tropicana Field Site.** This selection is the next step in a more than five-year process of extensive community engagement, visioning, and master planning.

Said Mayor Kriseman, ‘I am excited to take this next critical step in the redevelopment of the Tropicana Field site. We have worked hard to ensure that this has been an inclusive, community-driven process, and I am confident that Alex Vadia and Midtown Development, working in partnership with the City of St. Petersburg and stakeholders, will ensure the public is front and center as redevelopment moves forward. It is critically important that we begin to honor the promises made a generation ago. My thanks to Midtown Development and everyone who has offered their voice in this process as we continue to pursue our brightest future in the Sunshine City.’”

(Source: “Mayor Kriseman’s Announcement about the Selection of Midtown Development Group.”

City of St. Petersburg, December 2, 2021.)

[https://www.stpete.org/news\\_detail\\_T30\\_R232.php](https://www.stpete.org/news_detail_T30_R232.php)

See Also:

Video: Story about Midtown Announcement.

Bay News 9, December 2, 2021.

<https://bit.ly/3l52CN4>



### **Newspaper advertisement**

*(Courtesy African American Heritage Association / The Weekly Challenger)*

Article Excerpt:

**“Next month, a reunion will be held for former residents and their descendants of the Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods.** Both neighborhoods were razed to make way for what some called progress, and others called a broken promise. The Dec. 12 celebration of the past is for former residents and their direct descendants.”

(Source: “Gas Plant/Laurel Park Reunion: Making it happen.”

By Jeffery L. Peaten III, *The Weekly Challenger*, November 19, 2021.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/gas-plant-laurel-park-reunion-making-it-happen/>

Video --

Excerpt:

**“People who once called the Gas Plant neighborhood or Laurel Park neighborhood home are meeting this Sunday for a reunion.**

....‘So what they did is they went for referendum and they initially proposed, in case you don’t know, was a light industrial complex that would provide employment and build better housing people for the people living in the Gas Plant area,’ said **Gwendolyn Reese**, the African American Heritage Association of St. Petersburg president. ‘I don’t think it took more than two years before they said, no, we’re building a baseball field. But they didn’t go to referendum to change it and decide to build a baseball field, a baseball field that did nothing for the people who had been displaced from there.’

....‘I want people to walk away knowing the story and hearing the stories of people who lived there so we can feel uplifted about the Gas Plant area and not embarrassed by the

way it's often described,' she said."

(Source: "Reunion for former residents of Black neighborhoods that were demolished to build Tropicana Field."

By Sandra Weathers, Bay News 9, December 10, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/37Cxd1k>

Video --

Description:

**Live coverage of the Gas Plant/Laurel Park Neighborhood Reunion.**

December 12, 2021.

**(Part 1)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CAIsCDSOvs>

(The video begins at 1:06:00)

and

**(Part 2)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Yairq94lsk>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**"When the Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods were demolished in the 1980s, it erased part of the city's Black history. The reunion allowed families to lift up names of people, businesses and churches who made up the neighborhoods, and to reminisce about the rich history of the city's Black communities.**

Now the 86 acres around and including Tropicana Field will be redeveloped."

(Source: "Two Black neighborhoods were demolished for Tropicana Field. Ex-residents gathered and remembered."

By Daylina Miller, WUSF, December 12, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/37Fla2g>

Video --

Excerpt:

"They were vibrant neighborhoods rich with culture in St. Petersburg.

They no longer exist after officials destroyed them to make room for new development, including Tropicana Field in the 1980s. The developments came with empty promises from officials about jobs and help.

**Residents from the Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods reunited to honor the neighborhoods' history Sunday."**

(Source: "Gas Plant, Laurel Park neighborhoods reunite to honor past."

By Miguel Octavio, WTSP, December 12, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3PbRHig>

Video --

Description:

**"Memories from the Gas Plant & Laurel Park Neighborhoods."**

Hundreds of Black families, businesses, churches, and community spaces were displaced or destroyed by the construction of Tropicana Field. Former residents of the Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods and their descendants share memories of a safe, supportive, and thriving community and the lasting impact of its demolition.

(Source: Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg, December 2021.)

<https://history.healthystpete.foundation/memories/>



***Downtown St. Petersburg and the Historic Gas Plant District***  
*(Courtesy Google Earth)*

Report Excerpt:

**Remembering the Gas Plant neighborhood by Rev. Watson Haynes:**

"I lived at 1543 3rd Avenue South, right behind **First Baptist Institutional Church** which was on the corner of 3rd Avenue and 16th Street South. There were seven of us and my mother worked six days a week making \$7 a day. When we had to move for 'economic development purposes' a deacon from our church came to my mother and said I want you to have my house and helped her to buy his home and we moved to 2004 25th Street South. The **Gas Plant neighborhood** was a family. We had doctors, dentists, and teachers in the neighborhood. One of the most influential people in my life was **Rev. Enoch Davis**. He would walk down 3rd Avenue to **Webb's City** and one day he asked my mother if I could walk with him. My mother said yes and even though I really didn't want to walk with this 'ole' man it became a weekly ritual. Eventually, I looked forward to our ritual. He instilled stuff in me; not just our history but that he was concerned about me. He was giving back."

(Source: "Examination of Historical and Modern-Day Impact of Structural Racism on the Lives of Black People in the City of St. Petersburg, Florida."

The city of St. Petersburg commissioned this structural racism study, December 2021, pgs. 106-107.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fac\\_publications/4117](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fac_publications/4117)

Report Excerpt:

**Remembering the Gas Plant neighborhood by Jean Miller Anderson Davies:**

"I lived at 1429 Dixie Avenue South, which was between 14th and 16th Streets. When I think back, what impressed me most, although at the time I thought that we were just being isolated, is that we really had a well-developed community with almost everything in it that I access now within the greater St. Pete. **We had grocery stores. We had a cemetery. We had a funeral home, we had our churches, there were shoeshine parlors, everything that you thought you needed was in the parameter of the Gas Plant area.** And when I say the Gas Plant area, my mind goes from 7th Avenue to 1st Avenue South and from 16th Street to 9th Street or 8th Street because it was in those parameters where our community, our people and our churches and all that we had that we were accessing as the neighborhood was within those parameters. And we had the Harlem theater. So, you went to the movies, you know, on Sunday or Saturday. **The library, that was a godsend when they opened that branch of that library there. And all Black books. Oh my God. It was just wonderful. And we learned how to use a library, how to catalog books. It was just a magical place. You could leave Davis Elementary, go to the library. I used it as my way of discovering the whole world.** Oh, because I would read autobiographies and stories about somebody else's life. And it was a magical place for me, and I would stay there till five o'clock in the afternoon reading, imagining myself in another place other than my own neighborhood." (Source: "Examination of Historical and Modern-Day Impact of Structural Racism on the Lives of Black People in the City of St. Petersburg, Florida.")

The city of St. Petersburg commissioned this structural racism study, December 2021, pgs. 107-108.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fac\\_publications/4117](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/fac_publications/4117)

**In 2021 the African American Heritage Association**

<https://www.facebook.com/AAHASPFLL/>

**and the city of St. Petersburg produced the following history video interviews with former Deputy Mayor Dr. Kanika Tomalin and Gwendolyn Reese.**

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - Standing on the Shoulders."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkc4HMB7rEq>

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - The Future."

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49uL0Ku\\_vAs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49uL0Ku_vAs)

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - African American Heritage Trail."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWX8fhrkXuA&t=33s>

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - Gibbs High School."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZNZ1rDqFxc>

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - Elder Jordan Sr."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAjf6aXT3E0>

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - Segregation."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=PqhcBOgXBz0>

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - Manhattan Casino."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWXclb9N4O8>

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - The Deuces: 22nd Street South."

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=fe0\\_SEUv1fE&feature](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=fe0_SEUv1fE&feature)

Video: "St. Pete Black History Stories - Education."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3YGo8JmCGk>

See Also:

"African American Heritage Trail."

<https://bit.ly/3RLFx29>

and

<https://bit.ly/3zGVYT2>

## 2022

Article Excerpt:

"For decades, the Tampa Bay area's Black community claimed their historic cemeteries were erased by developments.

There was one on MacDill Air Force Base, they said, another under Tampa's Robles Park Village and several others.

But their allegations were ignored.

Then, in 2019, the *Tampa Bay Times* began investigating.

It turned out that they were right.

Erased and forgotten Black cemeteries have since been discovered on both sides of the bridge and there are likely more.

**On Thursday, state legislation titled *Abandoned and Historic Cemeteries* was filed by Sen. Janet Cruz and Rep. Fentrice Driskell, both Tampa Democrats.**

....This bill was based on the recommendations of the Task Force on Abandoned African American Cemeteries, which was put together by the state in response to the Times' investigations."

(Source: "Tampa lawmakers introduce bill to protect and find erased Black cemeteries."

By Paul Guzzo, *Tampa Bay Times*, January 6, 2022.)

<https://bit.ly/3r6k1eV>

See Also:

Abandoned African-American Cemeteries Task Force.

(Final Report, December 17, 2021.)

<https://bit.ly/3sl7LSh>

This ten-member Florida Department of State task force was established in 2021.

<https://bit.ly/45Vw2Tq>

Article Excerpt:

**"During any given day, about 40,000 vehicles travel across Interstate 175 into downtown St. Petersburg. How many of those drivers know they are cruising over the former site of three burial grounds -- Moffett, Evergreen and Oaklawn? These cemeteries, like others in our community, were founded during a period in U.S. history**



when racial segregation was legal, cemeteries were typically segregated or partitioned along racial lines, and “white-only” spaces from cemeteries to parks to schools meant Black people were excluded from access or use.”

(Source: “It’s a matter of dignity and justice to acknowledge African American cemetery erasure.”

By Shannon Peck-Bartle and Antoinette Jackson, *Tampa Bay Times*, February 2, 2022.)

<https://bit.ly/460K6Lc>

Article Excerpt:

“In Tampa Bay and across the nation, a number of African American burial grounds and cemeteries have been lost to history: erased, neglected, even paved over and developed on.

Historically segregated, some of these burial grounds were cemented over throughout the 20th century in the name of urban development. Others fell into disrepair because they weren’t given the same dedicated resources as other burial grounds or were forgotten as cities grew around them and local communities were displaced.

**The African American Burial Grounds & Remembering Project seeks to recover and reimagine the forgotten history of these sacred places in Tampa Bay.**

Consisting of USF faculty, staff, graduate students and community partners from fields such as anthropology, business, English and the arts, the team is working to identify and preserve historical Black cemeteries.”

(Source: “Preserving Black Cemeteries:

Recovering Lost History By Preserving the Memory and Physical Spaces of Historical Black Cemeteries.”

By Matthew Cimitile, *USF St. Petersburg campus Innovations Magazine*, Volume 3, 2022.)

<https://bit.ly/3MuLc8P>

Article Excerpt:

“From Tampa to Clearwater to St. Petersburg, hundreds of unmarked graves are turning up at the former locations of historic African American cemeteries. After decades of neglect, abandonment and new construction, a project funded by the University of South Florida anti-racism initiative hopes to recover and remember the history of those hallowed grounds through research and art.

**The African American Burial Grounds & Remembering Project is working with the community to identify and preserve those forgotten cemeteries throughout Tampa Bay.”**

(Source: “Research project recovers, remembers lost history of Black cemeteries.”

By Mark Parker, *St. Pete Catalyst*, February 2, 2022.)

<https://bit.ly/39Kb561>



Video --

Excerpt:

“Several erased African American cemeteries were uncovered in Tampa Bay in the last few years, and the work to do right by those buried hasn’t stopped.

**....Understanding what happened and why takes detailed work, and that’s the challenge for researchers working on the African American Burial Grounds and Remembering Project at the University of South Florida.”**

(Source: “For descendants of those buried at erased Black cemeteries, work never stops to honor ancestry.”

By Briona Arradondo, WTVT, February 9, 2022.)

<https://bit.ly/3Pwwx0z>



***AABG&R Project presentation  
at Tampa Bay History Center, February 16, 2022  
(Courtesy Tampa Bay History Center)***

Video --

Excerpt:

**“Find out how people across the country and the Tampa Bay area can counter Black cemetery erasures. Dr. Antoinette Jackson, USF professor, chair of USF’s Department of Anthropology and founder of the Black Cemetery Network, leads this important Florida Conversations from the History Center’s TECO Hall.”**

(Source: “African American Burial Grounds and Remembering Project.”

Tampa Bay History Center, February 2022.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoW1deFtxjA>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**“....Meanwhile, The Black Cemetery Network, started a year ago by another USF anthropologist, Antoinette Jackson, is tracking Black cemeteries that have been neglected, partially relocated, found beneath developed property, or lost entirely.**

On Sunday, Jackson talked about the archive -- and research on several specific lost cemeteries -- with group of artists, activists and community members at the Sulphur Springs Museum and Heritage Center.”

(Source: “As Hillsborough County explores forgotten cemeteries, a national archive tracks lost Black graves.”

By Daylina Miller, WUSF Public Media, February 21, 2022.)

<http://bit.ly/3Jf0wa6>

Article Excerpt:

**“Flagmon Welch was David Welch’s dad, and he owned and operated a woodyard in the Gas Plant neighborhood.** It was a family business where young Ken worked summers and after school.

Unfortunately, the area became a casualty of eminent domain, a system implemented by the government that gives it the authority to claim privately owned land supposedly for the ‘good’ of the community at large.”

(Source: “Alletha Welch: A mother’s words of wisdom and love.”

By Joyce Nanette Johnson, *The Weekly Challenger*, May 6, 2022.)

<http://bit.ly/3Zmw6IV>



***Historic Gas Plant Site Request for Proposal, 2022***  
(Courtesy City of St. Petersburg)

Media Release Excerpt:

**“St. Pete Mayor Kenneth T. Welch announced Wednesday, June 29 that the city is canceling the RFP issued in July, 2020 and launching a new RFP process.**

The decision comes after careful consideration and extensive communication with City staff regarding city needs, current economic trends and changing workforce needs.”

(Source: “St. Pete Mayor Kenneth T. Welch announces Historic Gas Plant District RFP for Tropicana Field site redevelopment.”

City of St. Petersburg, June 29, 2022.)

[https://www.stpete.org/news\\_detail\\_T30\\_R380.php](https://www.stpete.org/news_detail_T30_R380.php)

See Also:

Video of the announcement from the City of St. Petersburg.

<https://www.facebook.com/StPeteFL/videos/400897998673017>

Video of the announcement from WTSP.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N VWjnkWuGNM&t=18s>

Article Excerpt:

“After careful consideration and extensive communication with city staff regarding the city’s needs, current economic trends, and changing workforce needs, Mayor Ken Welch announced on June 29 that the city is canceling the Request for Proposal issued two years ago and launching a new RFP process.

**‘I think it is providential that 40 years after a community was uprooted in the successful pursuit of baseball,’ Welch said at a press conference, ‘we now have the opportunity to bring the promises of jobs and equitable development to fruition on what I believe, and many people believe, to be sacred land.’”**

(Source: “Mayor Welch announced the city is starting over with plans to redevelop Trop site.”

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, June 29, 2022.)

<https://bit.ly/3AhjTLj>

Article Excerpt:

**“The story of the Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods is both unique to Pinellas County as well as a history that has been repeated across this country, across generations of Black and Brown communities.** If we are to move forward with race equity, we must know, understand, honor, and be changed by our collective past.

Taking trips to the library, bicycling through the neighborhood, and marveling at the imposing cylinders at the gas plant are childhood memories for Andrew Walker.”

(Source: **“My Gas Plant Memories: Gas Plant memories provided by Andrew Walker.”**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, July 21, 2022.)

<http://bit.ly/3IQ5A3q>

Article Excerpt:

“Hundreds of Black families, businesses, churches, and community spaces were displaced or destroyed by the construction of Tropicana Field. Former residents of the Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods and their descendants share memories of a safe, supportive, and thriving community and the lasting impact of its demolition...**Born and raised in the neighborhood, Lovett relocated with his family when he was 14, explaining that ‘we had to move, of course,’ and that his was ‘one the last families here.’** He recalled some lean years that followed but also the strong sense of a

community bond.”

(Source: **“My Gas Plant Memories: Memories Provided by Carlos Lovett.”**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, August 4, 2022.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-carlos-lovett/>

Article Excerpt:

**“Sheron Potts, who grew up at 432 11th St. S, is part of a family that helped make a difference in young people’s lives in the Gas Plant district.**

Prominent in the community, her parents started the Potts Recreation Center, which became a gathering place for kids and featured after-school programs.

‘They did a lot of things to help the community and help women get on their feet,’ Potts said. ‘They helped with programs, after-school programs for the kids in the neighborhood.’”

(Source: **“My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by Sheron Potts.”**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, August 21, 2022.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-sheron-potts/>



***Downtown St. Petersburg and the Historic Gas Plant District***  
(Courtesy City of St. Petersburg)

Article Excerpt:

**“Shirley Smith-Hayes, who grew up in the Gas Plant and Laurel Park districts, has bittersweet memories of her time there. She remembers the happiness**

**experienced in her close-knit community and the sadness she felt when she had to relocate.**

She came to St. Pete in 1953 and lived in Royal Court at 325 and 326 Royal St. S, then as an adult moved to 1641 Court Ave. S in Laurel Park, where her daughter Stephanie Perry was born.

'I can remember when they wanted to tear down the Gas Plant area,' she said. 'When they wanted to tear down the neighborhood, they were giving people money, and some of them were using the money to buy houses.'

(Source: **"My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by Shirley Smith-Hayes."**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, September 7, 2022.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-shirley-smith-hayes/>

Video --

Excerpt:

**"In the heart of downtown St. Petersburg, two gas cylinders once stood, casting twin shadows over a bustling neighborhood.**

There were hundreds of African Americans who called Gas Plant their home -- before Tropicana Field took its place. The tightly knit community was around for nearly a century."

(Source: "Gas Plant District in St. Pete: One of the oldest Black neighborhoods razed for baseball."

By Diedra Rodriguez, WTVT, September 13, 2022.)

<https://www.fox13news.com/news/gas-plant-district-history-st-pete>

Article Excerpt:

**"Russell Cato, who calls himself a Gas Plant native, lived on Fourth Avenue and 10th Street South, attended Davis Elementary School and later Gibbs High School, and recalled when African-American families had to relocate out of the district.**

Lamenting the interstate construction that 'had come through the area, kind of knocking us out,' Cato admitted he was saddened by the destruction of the area's unique community."

(Source: **"My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by Russell Cato."**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, September 20, 2022.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-russell-cato/>

Article Excerpt:

**"Joe Sherot is genuinely a product of the Gas Plant area, as he was born on Dixie Avenue and raised on Dunmore Avenue.** During his middle school years, he moved with his mother to Laurel Park until he departed for the service in 1966 at age 19. He remembers it being a close-knit community."

(Source: **"My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by Joe Sherot."**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, October 13, 2022.)



<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-joe-sherot/>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**In a 2022 oral history interview St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch remembered his family's connection to the Gas Plant neighborhood and the area near the former Oaklawn Cemetery complex.**

"The main issue here was that the history was not told, that folks did not know that these folks were laid to rest there."

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Ken Welch oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong and Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.  
Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, October 25, 2022.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/10/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/10/)

See Also:

"Oral histories of erased Black cemeteries: Mayor Ken Welch."

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, June 11, 2023.

<https://bit.ly/45vzFX>

Article Excerpt:

"I was born by a midwife on the north side of St. Petersburg,' he said. 'The toilets were on the outside, running water was -- we didn't have sinks, you had to do everything on the porch. The bathroom's on the porch. And then when we moved to **Royal Court**, man, I thought that was what I'm living in now -- a townhouse!'

....Mays, 80, is a product of Sarasota and Pinellas Counties school systems and is a professor of mathematics at St. Petersburg College. His journey should inspire younger generations to aim high and strive to overcome any obstacles.

'I think it's so important to know that young people understand that you can come from wherever; you can be whatever,' he said."

(Source: "**My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by Ruben Mays.**"

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, October 27, 2022.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-ruben-mays/>



**Screenshot from “Art Over Erasure” video, November 3, 2022**  
 (Courtesy USF African American Burial Ground & Remembering Project)

Article Excerpt:

**“St. Pete’s ‘Art Over Erasure’ hopes to acknowledge lost burial grounds and recover Black history.** It happens Thursday, Nov. 3 at the Center for Health Equity.”

By Arielle Stevenson, *Creative Loafing*, Nov. 1, 2022.

<http://bit.ly/3kRSs64>

See Also:

Video of “Art Over Erasure” event, St. Petersburg’s Center for Health Equity, USF African American Burial Ground & Remembering Project, November 3, 2022.

<https://vimeo.com/804997581>

Article Excerpt:

**“‘Here in the Gas Plant area when I was young, I always visited my grandmother,’ Wallace remembered.** ‘Me and my cousins, we would always come here, and we were able to go across the street to the church... it was a really wonderful place. The community and the whole neighborhood [had] been here since before the 1920s.’ Wallace, who is from Ft. Lauderdale, has fond memories of the district from her youth, which include visiting the library, riding bikes and learning valuable lessons from her grandmother.

‘There was everything here,’ she said. **‘There was a library that my grandmother used to work at, and I used to go to the library all the time and read books, and I really loved it! The other side of her house was a movie theater, but by the time I was old enough to go to a movie theater, they had closed it.** My grandma, she used to teach me how to dance and cook. She ran a boarding house right along with her salon. This was a wonderful area!’”

(Source: **“My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by Jennifer Wallace.”**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, November 25, 2022.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-jennifer-wallace/>



Article Excerpt:

“...The unknown bothered Jackson. She couldn’t understand why this critical piece of history was a question mark. Whether or not African Americans were buried under Tropicana Field -- and who they were -- should be known. She wanted to understand why family members did not know the whereabouts of their ancestors, those who were at one time buried in the **Oaklawn, Evergreen and Moffett cemeteries**.

And so, **Jackson, along with a team of researchers, community members, artists and volunteers, started looking for answers. Last Thursday, Nov. 3, the group presented their findings to a crowd of people for the “Art over Erasure” event at the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg’s Center for Health Equity.**”

(Source: “Event highlights St. Pete Black cemeteries were erased, not ‘lost.’”

By Nicole Slaughter Graham, *The Weekly Challenger*, November 30, 2022.)

<https://bit.ly/459zQiT>

Article Excerpt:

**“Taffy Macon, the granddaughter of Louise Macon, recalls her grandmother’s love for the Gas Plant district -- and her determination to stay until the very end.**

Louise Macon was a lifelong resident of the area and lived at 1726 Fourth Ave. S, where she raised all of her nine children. Taffy is the daughter of Louise’s oldest son Samuel Macon.

**‘She had to relocate with the building of the Dome, which is now known as the Tropicana Field,’** Macon said. She was very sentimental about it. Her residence and home were very sentimental to her, her children, her grandchildren, great-grandchildren and all of her descendants.’

Louise became known as the ‘ThunderDome holdout,’ Taffy explained.”

(Source: **“My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by Taffy Macon.”**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, November 30, 2022.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-taffy-macon/>

Article Excerpt:

**“As a little boy, Imam Askia Muhammad Aquil remembers riding with his mother in the family car to take lunch to his father at his job at the Gas Plant site. The natural gas plant, owned by the city, gave the family of six a secure financial foundation and served as a launching pad to entrepreneurship.**

Aquil’s story is just one of many associated with the Gas Plant neighborhoods -- there were several -- that formed a diverse socioeconomic community.”

(Source: “Making Tropicana Field right.”

By Waveney Ann Moore, *St. Pete Catalyst*, December 9, 2022.)

<https://stpetecatalyst.com/waveney-ann-moore-making-tropicana-field-right/>

Article Excerpt:

**“Yashima Fuller, Brenda Hanes and Shirley Dee fondly recalled the loving, communal spirit of living in Laurel Park.**

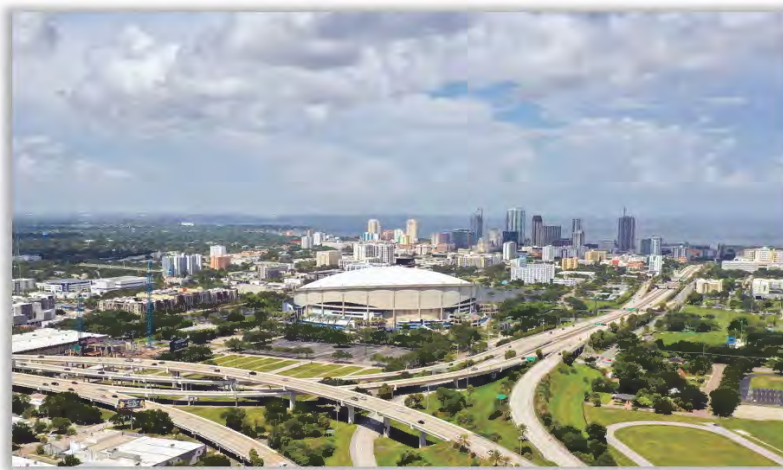
‘Everyone there was like family,’ Hanes said. ‘You know, kids stay out late at night on the streets, everybody watching each other’s kids. And we have some good memories from then.’ ‘We try to still be family,’ Dee added. Hanes said she was sorry to see the area torn down -- even though it wasn’t in ‘the best of shape’ -- to make way for the new development.”

(Source: **“My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by Yashima Fuller, Brenda Hanes and Shirley Dee.”**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, December 16, 2022.)

<http://bit.ly/3kRUjHZ>

## 2023



***Downtown St. Petersburg and the Historic Gas Plant District***  
(Courtesy City of St. Petersburg)

Article Excerpt:

**“His grandfather, Napoleon Bonaparte Jackson, started the Jackson Ice Company on 11th Street between Central Avenue and what became First Avenue North. As a youngster, long before he was of legal age to drive, he helped deliver ice that the dealers would take around to the Gas Plant area,** he explained, adding that he delivered ice to businesses and families at other locations such as Methodist Town and Cooper’s Town.

Stovall said he got to know the African-American families in those neighborhoods.

‘I got to know their children, their wives, their husbands. I got to know their stories because we delivered ice to their ice boxes and kitchens,’ said Stovall, noting that there were no refrigerators back in those days.

....This was uncommon among his white peers, Stovall pointed out, because of segregation.”

(Source: **“My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by George Stovall.”**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, January 5, 2023.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-george-stovall/>

Article Excerpt:

**“William Walker’s great-grandfather, Charlie Williams, was a pioneer in St. Pete’s Black community as he was the founder of St. Pete’s first Black-owned drugstore. His father, William McNorton, grew up in the Gas Plant district, and Walker likens the removal of that area’s residents to the government’s upheaval of the Native people from their lands.**

Walker, who was in his teens when the city ‘tore everything down,’ explained that the area was ‘taken by eminent domain.’ He noted that white settlers -- and ultimately the federal government -- legally ousted the indigenous populations from their own land. ‘I think it’s the same thing with the Gas Plant,’ he said. ‘So, they used the law to take the land of the people that were there. They did give him compensation for it, but it was only a tenth of the value of what it was really worth -- especially now, and how much is worth now.’”

(Source: **“My Gas Plant Memories: Memories provided by William Walker.”**

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, January 10, 2023.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/memories-provided-by-william-walker/>

Article Excerpt:

**“The Tropicana Field site may appear as little more than a downtown ballpark, with big stretches of blacktop parking and a slanted dome.**

**But for many residents, including St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch, the land still holds the ghostly pulse of a former African American community, where homes and churches, bars and theaters, and the first library that Black residents were allowed to visit, used to stand. A majority of the land was owned by African American families.”**

(Source: “St. Petersburg bulldozed a Black community on Trop site. What’s next?

The Gas Plant community was home to residents, businesses and churches.”

By Lauren Peace, *Tampa Bay Times*, January 15, 2023, pgs. 1A, 4A-5A.)

<http://bit.ly/3kfnpjQ>

Article Excerpt:

**“Mayor Ken Welch made the biggest decision of his political career on Monday, selecting the team led by the Tampa Bay Rays to redevelop Tropicana Field.**

With the selection, Welch sought to remake history, trying to keep the Rays in St. Petersburg after the team’s threats to leave, to repay the mostly Black community that was plowed over for a stadium, and to court baseball by building a new district that creates jobs and offers affordable homes.”

(Source: “St. Petersburg mayor picks Tampa Bay Rays, Hines to redevelop Tropicana Field.”

By Colleen Wright, *Tampa Bay Times*, January 30, 2023.)

<http://bit.ly/3ZofTTu>



***This drawing of a proposed future Historic Gas Plant District is included in a Hines-Rays redevelopment report.***

*(Courtesy City of St. Petersburg)*

Article Excerpt:

“At the 2023 State of the City address this morning, Mayor Ken Welch recounted some of his administration’s key accomplishments from 2022, expressed his appreciation for his city team and partnership with the community, shared his priorities for 2023 and announced Hines & Tampa Bay Rays as his selection for the master developer of the Historic Gas Plant Redevelopment Project.”

(Source: **“Hines & Tampa Bay Rays named as master developer of the Historic Gas Plant District Redevelopment.”**

*The Weekly Challenger*, January 30, 2023.)

<http://bit.ly/3IT4eot>

Article Excerpt:

**“As a teen, Ken Welch worked at his grandfather’s woodyard -- until the family land became part of Interstate 175. As the city’s mayor, he is working to repair the neighborhood his relatives and other Black residents lost to highway and stadium development.”**

“For close to a century, the Gas Plant neighborhood (so-called due to twin gas cylinders towering over it) represented achievement and possibilities. The majority Black community in St. Petersburg, Florida, contained hundreds of single-family homes and locally owned businesses. Churches, shops, entertainment venues and the offices of Black professionals dotted the tightly knit area where sugarcane and mango, guava and avocado trees grew in the yards of residents.”

(Source: “Before the Highway: St. Petersburg, Florida.”

By Jimmie Briggs, AARP Livable Communities, 2023.)

<http://bit.ly/3YaBayx>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**In a 2023 oral history interview Joseph C. Myrick remembered his family's connections to the cities of St. Petersburg, Clearwater, and Tampa.**

"...where Tropicana Field is, that area, there was all Black neighborhoods and Black businesses. And, and I was too young to understand what was happening and, and how that, how that property was eventually taken over by the city, maybe by eminent domain. I'm not sure. But they wanted the baseball, a professional baseball program there, so that's what happened. Campbell Park which is right there behind the Tropicana Field, that's where I grew up playing football, baseball."

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Joseph C. Myrick oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, February 27, 2023.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/11/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/11/)

See Also:

"Oral histories of erased Black cemeteries: Joseph C. Myrick."

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, June 26, 2023.

<https://bit.ly/3OOdeQQ>

Article Excerpt:

**"Shirley Jennings lost touch with childhood friends and neighbors when the city demolished the historically Black Gas Plant community, clearing the way for what would later become Tropicana Field in the 1980s.**

Gone were the ice cream shop where her friends gathered, her family's church and the building where her father owned Jennings Fish Market. It was a story that played out across the country in the second half of the last century as Black communities were torn apart to make way for interstates and sports arenas, all in the name of progress.

The Jennings family would later settle in Campbell Park, a predominantly Black neighborhood south of Interstate 175 across from Tropicana Field."

(Source: "Tropicana Field took over a Black St. Pete community. Could it affect another? The Campbell Park neighborhood, south of Tropicana Field, braces for the redevelopment's effects."

By Colleen Wright, *Tampa Bay Times*, March 4, 2023.)

<http://bit.ly/3mqdt8i>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**In a 2023 oral history interview, St. Petersburg's Jennifer Gamble talked about the Oaklawn Cemetery complex and her family's connection to the funeral home business, as well as the role of cemeteries and funerals in society.**

"It's just as human people and spiritual people, we have to be cognizant of how we do



things in -- to preserve our own memories, memories of our ancestors and teach our children that, you know, it's important because this is a human form."

(Source: Audio / Transcript --

**Jennifer Gamble oral history interview.**

**African American Burial Grounds Oral History Project.**

Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong.

Digital Commons, University of South Florida Libraries, March 21, 2023.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/12/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/12/)

Article Excerpt:

**"The Tampa Bay Rays are expected to announce plans Tuesday for a long-awaited deal to redevelop 86-acres of downtown real estate where the current baseball stadium sits.**

The project, estimated to cost at least \$1.2 billion, promises to bring a state-of-the-art stadium experience to a fanbase that responded this year to support a team with the best home record in Major League Baseball.

But this deal is about more than baseball. Rather, it presents an opportunity to make good on broken promises that displaced a vibrant, predominantly Black community now-decades ago.

Years before Tropicana Field was built, ushering in a tradition of baseball in Tampa Bay, the site of the dome and its surrounding parking lots was home to hundreds of Black residents."

(Source: "The Gas Plant District and the Tampa Bay Rays: Here's what to know."

By Lauren Peace, *Tampa Bay Times*, September 18, 2023.)

<https://bit.ly/3rsSgNO>

Article Excerpt:

**"The Tampa Bay Rays announced Tuesday that a historic agreement has been reached with the City of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County to move forward with a new state-of-the-art ballpark and a transformational development by the Hines Historic Gas Plant Partnership on the 86-acre site where the team's current stadium sits.**

....'My story is a story of thousands who lived and worked and worshiped in this place, in this neighborhood,' said Mayor Ken Welch. 'That community was promised a stake in the economic benefits that would come from the redevelopment of this land. And the agreement that we have forged with the Hines-Rays group will finally honor that promise.'

Welch speaks of the city's promise to create 'light industry' and affordable housing more than 40 years ago where the historically Black Gas Plant neighborhood sits, which turned into a baseball stadium for a team that did not yet exist."

(Source: "Rays announce historic development and partnership."

By Raven Joy Shonel, *The Weekly Challenger*, September 19, 2023.)

<https://bit.ly/455tLUO>



***Screenshot from live video coverage of the press conference announcing the agreement to redevelop the Historic Gas Plant District***  
*(Courtesy City of St. Petersburg, September 19, 2023)*

Video --

Description:

**This video includes live coverage of the press conference announcing the City of St. Petersburg and Hines-Rays group agreement to redevelop the Historic Gas Plant District.**

City of St. Petersburg, September 19, 2023.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUWgGPqRnXw>

See Also:

Video: "Rays announce plans for new \$1.3 billion stadium in St. Petersburg:

'Our Rays are here to stay'."

WTVT, September 19, 2023.

<https://bit.ly/3LGvaua>

Video --

Excerpt:

**"Despite crews finding bones during construction in the 1970s, The Florida Department of Transportation said on Wednesday it has no plans to do searches for possible graves across from Tropicana Field under Interstate 175 in St. Petersburg, where historical records show segregation-era cemeteries once existed.**

This comes one day after the Tampa Bay Rays formally committed to building a new stadium next to its current location. The Rays, alongside the Hines group, also have plans to redevelop the surrounding 86 acres into a mixed-use residential and commercial space.

The massive, multi-billion-dollar redevelopment project has raised questions about whether proper searches and memorialization for **Evergreen** and **Moffett cemeteries** will ever happen."



(Source: “What’s under I-175 in St. Pete? Despite finding bones decades ago, FDOT does not plan to search.”

By Emerald Morrow, WTSP, September 21, 2023.)

<https://bit.ly/46cKwye>



***A 2023 photo (left) and a drawing of a proposed future  
Historic Gas Plant District (right)***  
(Courtesy City of St. Petersburg)

Article Excerpt:

**“The African American Heritage Association’s (AAHA) November Community Conversations spotlighted former residents of the Gas Plant District.** Held at Tombolo Books, the public discussion allowed residents to share stories and talk about the neighborhood that meant so much to them.”

(Source: “Growing Up in the Gas Plant.”

By Frank Drouzas, *The Weekly Challenger*, December 1, 2023.)

<https://theweeklychallenger.com/growing-up-in-the-gas-plant/>

## 2024

Article Excerpt:

**“The City of Tampa Black History Committee recognized and honored the ongoing research of the African American Burial Ground Project (AABGP).**

....Director of the USF Living Heritage Institute in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and principal investigator of the AABGP, Dr. Antoinette Jackson, accepted the award on behalf of the team during the City of Tampa’s 36th Annual Black History Celebration on Feb.16 at the Tampa Convention Center.

‘This [recognition] means that the **African American Burial Ground Project** is truly having an impact and our work is of importance to communities we serve as a university,’ Jackson, who is also chair of the Department of Anthropology, said. ‘It is

extremely rewarding to be recognized directly and in a public way by the community you serve and by people and communities most impacted by the research and outreach our team is doing.'

Jackson explained that the AABGP engages research, teaching and education while also supporting families and communities as they work to preserve historic Black cemeteries to 'memorialize sacred sites that have been lost, ignored and desecrated.'" (Source: "The City of Tampa honors research efforts of the African American Burial Ground Project."

By Anna Mayor, USF College of Arts and Sciences, February 22, 2024.)

<https://bit.ly/3uQG3nQ>

Project Description:

**"Cemeteries are like open-air museums that contain the histories of many. Even in situations where the cemetery no longer exists, studying it can still illuminate the histories of an area. These lesson plans were designed by Dr. Hillary Van Dyke and reviewed by Michelle Anderson.** They are .doc format so that you can make any edits to the worksheets you need to make. The hope is to add to the amazing work of the African American Burial Grounds and Remembering Project and to encourage Tampa Bay teachers to bring these histories into their classrooms."

(Source: "Explore the AABG Cemetery Education Lesson Plan Collections."

USF Digital Commons, 2024.)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/aabg\\_cemetery\\_lessons/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/aabg_cemetery_lessons/)

See Also:

"Secondary Educator Approaches to Cemetery-Based Education in Florida." By Hillary M. Van Dyke. PhD dissertation, Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Learning, College of Education, University of South Florida, March 2024.

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/10255/>

Video --

Excerpt:

**"'That's exactly what I call it, sacred ground,' said African American Heritage Association President Gwendolyn Reese as she walked through the neighborhood she lived in as a child, known as St. Petersburg's Gas Plant District."**

(Source: "As stadium vote nears, descendants share how to preserve Gas Plant Legacy."

By Fadia Patterson, Bay News 9, March 4, 2024.)

<https://bit.ly/49GKUY2>

Audio --

Excerpt:

**"Students from John Hopkins Middle School in St. Petersburg recently produced a podcast that looked at the historic Gas Plant neighborhood, a historically Black**

**community razed in the 1980s. The students focused on the childhoods of the residents.”**

(Source: “Student podcast shares childhood memories from St. Petersburg’s Gas Plant neighborhood.”

By Journeys in Journalism Student Journalists, WUSF, April 24, 2024.)

<https://bit.ly/3WtM8lq>

See Also:

Video: “Addressing a Broken Promise: A Documentary About the Redevelopment of St. Petersburg’s Gas Plant District.”

By Journeys in Journalism Student Journalists, SNN's Spartan Podcasts, April 24, 2024.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wWPXJE\\_wYk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wWPXJE_wYk)

Video --

Excerpt:

“In the last five years, the state of Florida has seen a rise in reports of erased African American cemeteries. Many attribute the conversation surrounding some of the lost cemeteries to discoveries made in the Tampa Bay area.

One of the main questions that comes up: How did this happen in the first place?”

Photo/Screenshot caption related to video:

**“Anthropologist Dr. Antoinette Jackson stands in the parking lot of Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg, where she says was once a site for a historical African American cemetery.”**

(Source: “Efforts in restoring forgotten African American cemeteries in Tampa Bay.”

By Spectrum News, July 10, 2024.)

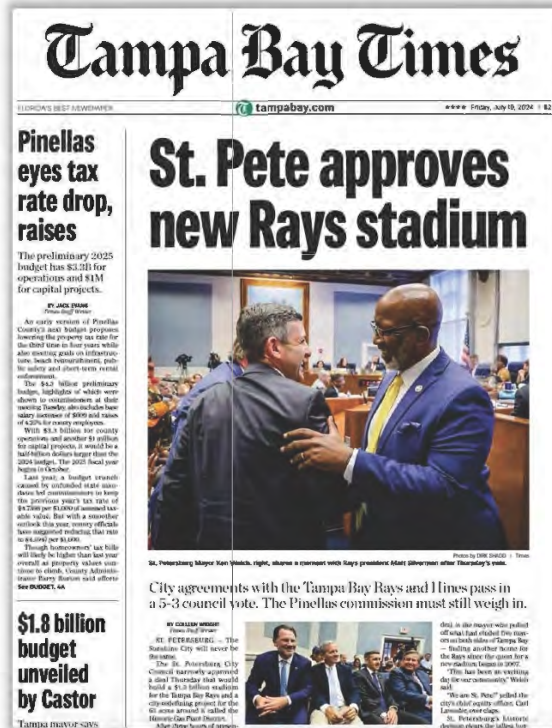
<https://vimeo.com/981388409/c781ec1aba>

See Also:

“Grave Betrayal: the history that lies beneath us.”

By Spectrum News, July 10, 2024.

<https://bit.ly/3W5gSHJ>



**Newspaper front page**  
 (Courtesy Tampa Bay Times, July 19, 2024, p. 1A)

Article Excerpt:

“[Mayor] Welch’s public pitch invoked legacy. His father, David Welch, was a City Council member who voted to redevelop the predominantly Black Gas Plant neighborhood for new housing, jobs and light industry. The site, once razed, was later used to lure Major League Baseball, crowning the city’s decadeslong relationship with spring training. But those promises never came to fruition.”

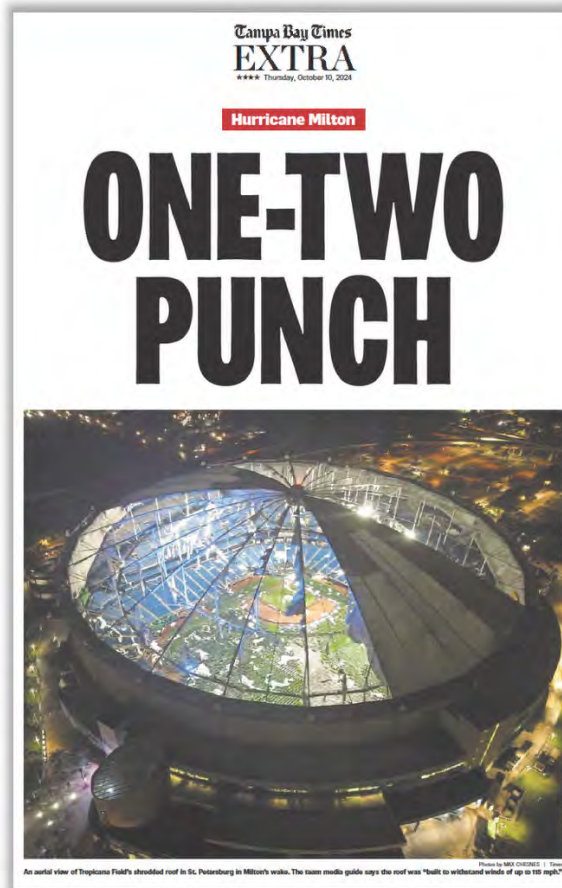
(Source: **‘We are St. Pete!’: Rays stadium, redevelopment approved by city council. The city’s agreements with the Tampa Bay Rays and development partner Hines approved in 5-3 vote.**)

By Colleen Wright, *Tampa Bay Times*, July 18, 2024.)

<https://bit.ly/4f43Se2>



***Gwendolyn Reese, Wanda Stuart, and Dr. Basha P. Jordan addressed St. Petersburg's city council before the council voted to approve the redevelopment of the Historic Gas Plant District.***  
*(Screenshot from live video coverage. Courtesy City of St. Petersburg, July 18, 2024)*



***Newspaper front page after***



### ***Hurricane Milton***

*(Courtesy Tampa Bay Times, October 10, 2024, p. 1A)*

Article Excerpt:

“In storm-weary Tampa Bay, where hundreds of thousands of residents were under a mandatory evacuation, it was the wind and the rain. The north side of Milton dumped incredible amounts of fresh water -- around 17 inches in parts of Pinellas and Hillsborough counties in just six hours -- that led the National Weather to declare a rare flash flood emergency. **In Pinellas, the extreme wind uprooted large trees, ripped off a section of the roof at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg and toppled a massive construction crane into a downtown building nearby.**”

(Source: “Wednesday, Oct. 9 updates: **Hurricane Milton makes landfall in Florida:** Tampa Bay residents are beginning to see impacts from Hurricane Milton.”

By Christopher Spata, Tony Marrero, Gabrielle Calise and Hannah Critchfield, *Tampa Bay Times*, October 9, 2024.)

<https://bit.ly/3DBDZVh>



***This Campbell Park tree lives near  
the former Oaklawn Cemetery complex.***  
*(Courtesy David Shedden)*

Article Excerpt:

“**At one of their first meetings, the African American Burial Grounds and Remembering Project team walked along Tropicana Field’s parking lot one and underneath Interstate 175.**



Barely able to hear themselves speak, a group of academics and students stood underneath Interstate 175's overpass across from Tropicana Field's parking lot one. As cars zipped above them, they were grappling with the reality of what they were standing on.

Beneath their feet were two cemeteries, **Moffett and Evergreen. Across from them, underneath parking lot one, was another: Oaklawn.** The cemeteries were established between 1888 and 1907 and serviced the surrounding African American community until 1926 when they closed.”

(Source: “Filling the gaps in history: The African American Burial Grounds and Remembering Project brings awareness to forgotten cemeteries in Tampa Bay.”

By Alisha Durosier, USF St. Petersburg Crow’s Nest student newspaper,

November 25, 2024.)

<https://bit.ly/49gV1mJ>

2025



### Newspaper front page

(Courtesy Tampa Bay Times, March 14, 2025, p. 1A)

Article Excerpt:

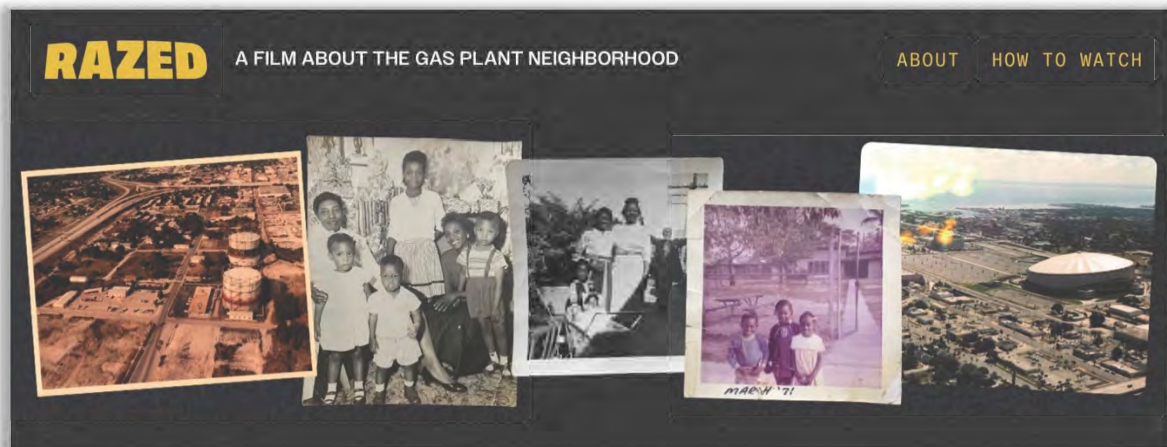
**“The Tampa Bay Rays on Thursday announced the team will not move forward with a \$1.3 billion stadium and redevelopment project aimed at keeping the ball**

club in St. Petersburg and healing wounds in the city's Black community with plans to create work and housing opportunities.”

(Source: “Tampa Bay Rays announce they won’t move forward with stadium deal.”

By Colleen Wright, *Tampa Bay Times*, March 13, 2025.)

<https://bit.ly/3XUtoLP>



*Screenshot from the website for  
Razed, a film about the Gas Plant Neighborhood  
(Courtesy Roundhouse Creative)*

Film Trailer --

Description:

**“*Razed* is a film about the Gas Plant Neighborhood in St. Petersburg, Florida – a Black neighborhood that was destroyed to make way for a baseball stadium. The film was produced by Roundhouse Creative, in partnership with Ms. Gwendolyn Reese of the St. Petersburg African American Heritage Association, and many of the displaced former residents of the Gas Plant Neighborhood.”**

(Source: Gas Plant film website, March 2025.)

<https://gasplantfilm.com/>

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## APPENDIX

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***African American Burial Ground Oral History Project  
Interviews about St. Petersburg and Tampa burial grounds***  
(Image is courtesy USF Libraries Digital Commons)

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/)

Dominique Cobb oral history interview. (Tampa burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/5/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/5/)

Ennis Davis oral history interview. (Tampa and St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/6/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/6/)

Jennifer Gamble oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/12/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/12/)

Corey Givens Jr. oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/1/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/1/)

Thomas “Jet” Jackson oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/8/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/8/)

Dr. Basha P. Jordan oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/14/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/14/)

Yvette Lewis oral history interview. (Tampa burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Cheryl Rodriguez.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/2/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/2/)

Joseph C. Myrick oral history interview. (Clearwater, St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/11/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/11/)

Gwendolyn Reese oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong and Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/3/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/3/)

Irving Sanchez III oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/4/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/4/)

Diana Schwarz oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/13/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/13/)

Wanda Stuart oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/9/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/9/)

Mordecai Walker, Andrew Walker oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong and Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/7/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/7/)

Ken Welch oral history interview. (St. Petersburg burial grounds)  
(Ken Welch began serving as the 54th mayor of St. Petersburg on January 6, 2022.)  
Interviewed by Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong and Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson.

[https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african\\_american\\_burial\\_grounds\\_ohp/10/](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/african_american_burial_grounds_ohp/10/)

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### **African American Burial Ground and Remembering Project.**

#### **ArcGIS StoryMaps interactive exhibit.**

Prepared by Kaleigh Hoyt, University of South Florida, 2022.

<https://bit.ly/3RdF0UI>

and

#### **Artist's Gallery.**

ArcGIS StoryMaps interactive exhibit, 2022.

<https://bit.ly/3Ase8cG>

### **The Black Cemetery Network.**

<https://blackcemeterynetwork.org/>