

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Oak Grove Cemetery

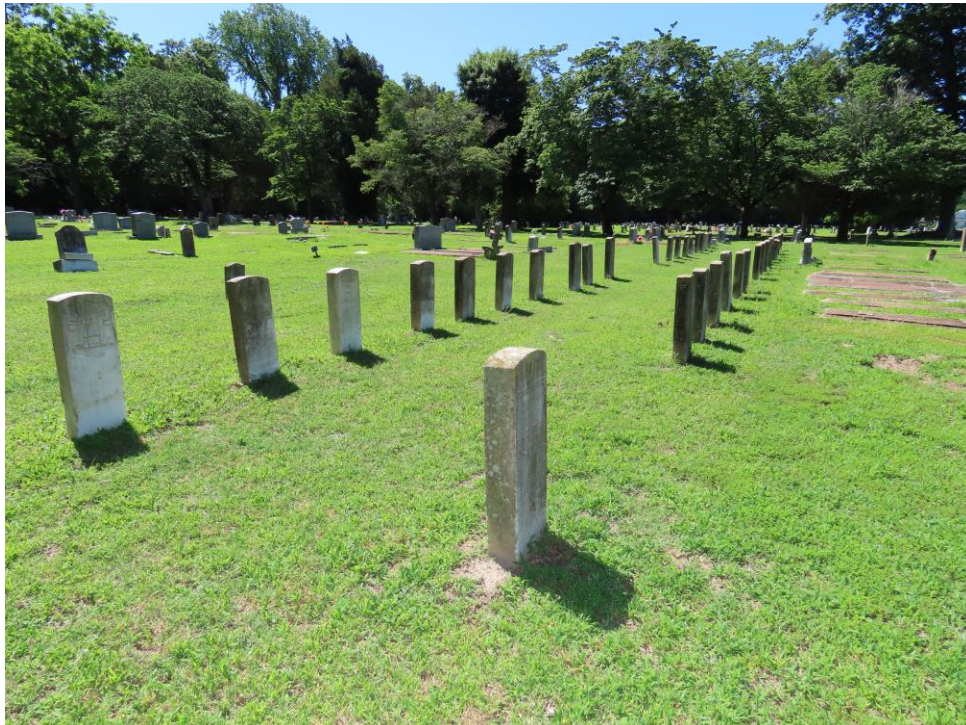
Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, PK1161, Listed 08/11/2025

Nomination by Althea Wunderler-Selby, Anna Maas, Jennifer Brosz; Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.

Photographs by Anna Maas, May 2024



Family plot in the Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.



USCT markers in the Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Oak Grove CemeteryOther names/site number: Elizabeth City Colored or Negro Cemetery; Peartree Road Colored or Negro Cemetery; Old Oak Grove Cemetery; Oake Hill Grove Cemetery

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A**2. Location**Street & number: 1400 Peartree RoadCity or town: Elizabeth City State: NC County: PasquotankNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___meets___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B ___ C ___ D6/25/25
Signature of certifying official/Title: State Historic Preservation Officer DateNorth Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___meets___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title:

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

- Private: ☐
Public – Local ☒
Public – State ☐
Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

- Building(s) ☐
District ☐
Site ☒
Structure ☐
Object ☐

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

FUNERARY: Cemetery

Current Functions

FUNERARY: Cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification

N/A

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property: Marble, Granite, Concrete, Brick, Iron, Metal, Wood, Plastic

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Oak Grove Cemetery is at 1400 Peartree Road in southern Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, North Carolina (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**), approximately one-half mile south of the largest historically Black neighborhood in the city, the Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District (NR 1994, Ref. #94000164).¹ The oldest extant Black cemetery in the city, the Black community formally established it on 2.53 acres in 1886, expanded it twice in 1921, and again in 1955 to approximately 8 acres, which it remains today within a 14-acre parcel. It is located at the south end of multiple white community cemeteries all laid out away from the city, likely reflecting Elizabeth City's local knowledge of the Rural Cemetery Movement (**Figure 3** and **Figure 4**). Currently, the 8-acre, roughly rectangular, vernacular landscape is bound to the west by Peartree Road and 1967 public housing, to the north and east by a wooded area containing Charles Creek, and to the south by a recent chain-link metal fence and grass field.² Burial and marker data is derived from three sources: a professional 2022 ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey of marked and unmarked burials, marker inscription inventory by the WPA in 1939, and marker inscription inventory by volunteers on findagrave.com. Elizabeth City Parks and Recreation commissioned the GPR survey, because African American skeletal remains resurfaced in the cemetery from 2015 to 2021. The GPR survey indicated that the cemetery contained 5,418 probable burials, including 2,315 unmarked and 3,103 marked; surveyors also recorded 3,899 markers classified as ledgers, headstones, tombstones, footstones, double headstones, family markers, and miscellaneous types (**Figure 5**, **Figure 6**, and **Figure 7**). The findagrave.com inventory records inscriptions for 2,793

¹ Tom Butchko, "Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County," North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (1994), National Register of Historic Places Designation, 8:2.

² Jon Hawley, *Study List Application, Old Oak Grove Cemetery* (2023), 8:6.1951

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individuals interred every decade since 1884, and 52 percent of those date to the period of significance (1884-1975).³ Markers vary from homemade to commercial, and materials include concrete, marble, granite, brick, iron, metal, wood, and plastic (**Photographs 1-30**). The cemetery retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. It has remained in continuous use for 135 years, retained its size since at least 1958, and its association with Elizabeth City's Black community is evident.⁴

Narrative Description

Setting, Geography and Topography

Oak Grove Cemetery is one of many public cemeteries on Peartree Road in the southern half of Elizabeth City. Though Peartree Road served as an important transportation route, wetlands around Charles Creek to the east made it unsuitable for farming or residential development. However, by 1900, at least five cemeteries lined the east side of the road on a narrow strip of high ground. From north to south, they included the Negro Quaker Cemetery, the white Old Hollywood Cemetery, Old Peartree Burying Ground once owned by white Quakers, two Black cemetery plots owned by the white Nash family, and the adjacent historically Black and Black-owned Oak Grove Cemetery.⁵ By the mid-twentieth century, New Hollywood Cemetery and Highland Park Cemetery opened to the northwest of Oak Grove Cemetery on the west side of Peartree Road, and New Oak Grove Cemetery opened farther south on the west side of Peartree Road. Today, the Quaker plots are no longer evident.

Oak Grove Cemetery was close to its present-day size by 1921, with the addition that year of the Nash burial plots to the north and east and a section of land owned by Walson Funeral Home to the south of the original cemetery boundaries. Based on a 1938 aerial photograph, at that time the cemetery was mostly cleared, with some scattered trees, and had nearly reached its current footprint. Agricultural fields surrounded the grounds other than the wooded riparian buffer, which remains along Charles Creek on its eastern boundary. A single early twentieth-century residence stood immediately south. East of Oak Grove Cemetery and the creek, residential development occurred to the northeast along Witherspoon Street and the east side of Herrington Road farther south. The historically Black Shepard Street-South Road Street neighborhood was well established approximately one-half mile north of Oak Grove Cemetery and the State Colored Normal School, present-day Elizabeth City State University (ECSU), was approximately one-half mile east of Oak Grove Cemetery.⁶

By the early 1950s, limited institutional and residential development encroached on Oak Grove Cemetery's setting. In 1951, the county built the Pasquotank Negro Consolidated School immediately southwest on the west side of Peartree Road. Residential development extended south on the west side of Herrington Road, along the intersecting present-day Massachusetts Avenue, and the north side of

³ Find A Grave, Oak Grove Cemetery, Cemetery 48249, 2024.

⁴ Sarah Lowry and John Kimes, *Ground Penetrating Radar Survey of the Old Oak Grove Cemetery (31PK122)*, New South Associates (2022) Draft Report.

⁵ John W. Clauser Jr. and Jerry L. Cross, *Investigation of the Old Pear Tree Burying Ground, Pasquotank County, North Carolina*, Office of State Archaeology, State Historic Preservation Office, Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources (1992), 6-8.

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Photograph Collection, Elizabeth City, 1938, Aerial Image.

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present-day Rhode Island Avenue.⁷ By the late 1950s, more residences were constructed as far south as present-day New Jersey Avenue, immediately east of Charles Creek and Oak Grove Cemetery, and Halstead Boulevard (State Highway 344) was constructed to the south, making Peartree Road more accessible.⁸ The most significant change in the setting of Oak Grove Cemetery occurred in the 1960s when Elizabeth City constructed the DeBry Court Public Housing Project across Peartree Road north of the then-segregated Pasquotank Negro Consolidated School.⁹

By 1982, Oak Grove Cemetery's setting nearly matched that of its modern-day setting. Additional residential growth occurred to the east buffered by the woods and Charles Creek, from the south side of New Jersey Avenue to Maryland Avenue. Also buffered by the woods, ECSU began constructing Roebuck Stadium on the west side of Herrington Road in 1982.¹⁰ Open land remains south of the cemetery, but its setting has been primarily residential since the 1960s. In 2014, the early twentieth-century residence directly south of the cemetery was demolished, and a chain link metal fence was subsequently installed between the cemetery and the vacant lot.¹¹

Cemetery Circulation

Punctuated by small trees and low shrubs in the north half, the cemetery's grass lawn gently slopes downward to the south. The four gravel drives from Peartree Road and the single north-south gravel drive near the eastern edge of the cemetery look like a comb. Two brick gateposts with concrete caps flank the primary entrance—at the second drive to the south—and a small, embedded marble sign on the south post reads "1886 / OAK GROVE CEMETERY / 1951" (**Photograph 1**). By 1938, the cemetery's first two drives to the north were extant.¹² In 1952, the north-south drive connected the east-west drives at their western terminuses to create a U-shaped drive. By 1952, a third drive to the south (**Photograph 25**) existed, and by 1958, the north-south drive connected to the southernmost drive to create a second U-shaped drive. Between 1975 and 1982, both loop drives were connected by a single north-south drive.¹³

Burial Layout

The GPR survey of Oak Grove Cemetery completed in 2022 identified 5,418 probable burials, including 2,315 unmarked and 3,103 marked. Burials, marked and unmarked, are generally organized in linear north-south rows and face both east and west, despite the Christian custom of facing bodies east to meet Christ's coming again. The easternmost linear row edges into surrounding woods and wetlands. Some individual burials have more than one marker, while some markers have inscriptions for multiple individuals (**Photograph 26**).¹⁴ Wrought-iron fencing or stone or concrete borders also demarcate family groups (**Photograph 8**).

⁷ Reggie Ponder, "First Consolidated School for Blacks Marks Its 70 Year," *The Daily Advance*, February 5, 2021; Clauser Jr. and Cross, *Investigation of the Old Pear Tree Burying Ground*, 7; Nationwide Environmental Title Research, Elizabeth City, 1952, Aerial Image.

⁸ Nationwide Environmental Title Research, Elizabeth City, 1958, Aerial Image.

⁹ *News and Observer*, "Buys Tract," May 6, 1964, 19.

¹⁰ Nationwide Environmental Title Research, Elizabeth City, 1982, Aerial Image; Glen Bowman, "1980s: Langhorne, Cofield starred; Roebuck Stadium Opens," *The Daily Advance*, August 7, 2021.

¹¹ Google Earth Pro, Elizabeth City, NC, March, 2013, Aerial Image; Google Earth Pro, Elizabeth City, NC, April, 2016, Aerial Image.

¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Aerial Image, 1938.

¹³ Nationwide Environmental Title Research, Elizabeth City, 1975, Aerial Image; Nationwide Environmental Title Research, Aerial Image, 1982.

¹⁴ Lowry and Kimes, *Ground Penetrating Radar Survey of the Old Oak Grove Cemetery (31PK122)*, i, 29.

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Unmarked Burials

GPR indicates that 2,315 unmarked burials are dispersed throughout the cemetery, evident in soil depressions and other anomalies. Concentrations of unmarked burials are in the northeast portion of the cemetery (in the former Nash burial plots), otherwise dominated by veterans' markers, and in the southeast portion of the cemetery. Available records of government-issued headstones for deceased Civil War United States Colored Troops (USCT) veterans indicate approximately 47 men are interred in Elizabeth City; however, only around 30 markers are extant, indicating the presence of at least 17 unmarked veteran burials. At least 47 unmarked burials lie beneath the cemetery drives, demonstrating that the drives post-date the initial development of the cemetery and some post-date the expansion of the cemetery in 1921. There is also evidence of burials in the wetlands adjacent to Charles Creek.¹⁵

Marked Burials

GPR indicates that 3,103 marked burials are dispersed throughout the cemetery. The survey also recorded 3,899 markers, including ones that marked multiple burials, and multiple markers that marked one burial. Marker types recorded include 1,840 ledgers; 1,367 headstones; 380 tombstones; 139 footstones; 94 double headstones; 18 family markers; and 61 miscellaneous types. The website findagrave.com documents inscriptions for 2,793 individuals, 1,452 of which date to the period of significance and 1,341 post-date 1975. These inscriptions range in date from 1884 to 2022 and exhibit an array of sizes, styles, and ornamentation, which illustrate socioeconomic status, cultural practices, and evolving funerary trends. Tombstones include flat and beveled vaults set at grade covering a whole burial (**Figure 6**). Headstone and miscellaneous subtypes include obelisks (**Photograph 9**), crosses, hearts, angels, and figurines (**Photograph 10**). Marker materials in the cemetery are granite, marble, concrete, brick, metal, wood,¹⁶ rocks, and plastic.

Commercial Markers

Commercial markers are found throughout the cemetery and predominantly date from the mid-twentieth century to the twenty-first century. However, some earlier burials are marked with commercial markers, indicating that they replaced earlier markers (**Photograph 2** and **Photograph 6**) or that the burial did not originally have a permanent marker. Most commercial markers are granite but exhibit a variety of types, shapes, sizes, and iconography. The grave of Gilbert Dixon (1882-1965) has a granite headstone with rusticated sides and a polished face, an ogee-shaped top, and a capitalized precision-engraved inscription (**Photograph 17**). Emma Wilson Frost (1891-1974) has two markers: a vernacular marker and a commercial marker. The vernacular marker, likely the original marker, is an arched concrete vault set at grade with a stamped inscription. The commercial marker is a small, flat tablet with rusticated sides and a polished top.¹⁷ This marker was likely placed at a later date as adequate funds became available.

Vernacular Markers

¹⁵ Lowry and Kimes, *Ground Penetrating Radar Survey of the Old Oak Grove Cemetery (31PK122)*, 31.

¹⁶ A single wood marker is in Oak Grove Cemetery and appears to date to the mid-twentieth century or later. No other wood markers are extant in the cemetery.

¹⁷ Find A Grave, Emma Wilson Frost, Memorial 112781742, 1974.

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In addition to those noted above, a wide variety of vernacular or folk markers are found in Oak Grove Cemetery (**Photograph 19** and **Photograph 23**). The grave of Stephen Hollowell (1897-1918), a lumber mill worker who died as the result of an accident, is marked with a concrete headstone inscribed by hand.¹⁸ The interment of Charlier Carter (1912-1928) is marked with a complex vernacular concrete headstone, which has a steep triangular top, inward sloping sides, and a recessed “C” above its inscription (**Photograph 14**).¹⁹ The marker of Henretta Armstrong (1872-1934) is the same shape but features a different handwritten font and no recessed letter at the top of the marker; it also is flat on the ground but appears to have originally stood upright on a base.²⁰ Another uniquely shaped marker, the concrete headstone for Miles Cartwright (d. 1937), is rectangular-shaped but has a prominent oval top with shoulders.²¹

Later examples of vernacular markers, post-dating the 1940s, are also found in Oak Grove Cemetery. Many of these later examples are flat markers set flush with the ground or attached to vaults set at grade or ledgers (**Photograph 12**). The graves of Leora McMurren (1893-1974) and George R. Price (1891-1974) are marked with nearly identical vernacular markers. Both are concrete, set flat atop vault lids, and have stamped uppercase lettering.²² Numerous uses of this marker design are found in the cemetery, indicating it was likely produced by a local craftsman. Another common vernacular marker design found in Oak Grove Cemetery is an inset rectangle on top of a flat concrete vault, with stamped lettering used to inscribe the deceased’s name, date of birth, and date of death. Examples of this marker include Joseph C. Collins (1871-1968), Jerry Murden (1897-1969), and Lille L. Cherry (1889-1974).²³

Veteran Markers

Families have installed government-issued veteran headstones and tablets throughout the cemetery, including the Civil War type and the General type as defined by the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA).²⁴ Issued to Civil War and Spanish-American War veterans, Civil War type headstones are upright polished marble or granite slabs with curved tops, 10 inches wide and 12 inches in height extending above the ground. Name of the soldier, rank, and sometimes state is carved in a sunken shield icon. Approximately 30 Civil War type headstones mark the graves of USCT veterans (**Photograph 13**). Most are grouped together in the northern portion of the cemetery, but some are dispersed among family plots.²⁵ Examples include Isaac Ehringhaus (Sergeant in the 35th Regiment USCT), Ambros(e) Knox (Private in the 35th USCT, d. 1900), Miles Holloway (Sergeant in the 36th USCT, d. 1903), Eli Spencer (Private in the 35th USCT, d. 1904), and Jesse Agason (14th US Colored Heavy Artillery, d. 1912).²⁶ Ehringhaus’s 1884 marker predates the cemetery by two years, likely due to the GAR Fletcher Post reintering fellow Union veterans at the cemetery in 1889.

¹⁸ North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Stephen Hollowell, North Carolina, U.S., Death Certificates, 1909-1976, Ancestry.com, May 18, 1918, North Carolina State Archives; Find A Grave, Stephen Hollowell, Memorial 111691664, 2024. The spelling “Hollowell” and “Hollowell” are both used to refer to this individual. The spelling “Hollowell,” used on the individual’s headstone, has been deferred to in-text.

¹⁹ Find A Grave, Charlie Carter, Memorial 115847686, 2024.

²⁰ Find A Grave, Henretta Armstrong, Memorial 230040501, 2024.

²¹ Find A Grave, Miles Cartwright, Memorial 113969561, 2024.

²² Find A Grave, Leora McMurren, Memorial 111909462, 2024; Find A Grave, George R Price, Memorial 112328175, 2024.

²³ Find A Grave, Lillie Lee Cherry, Memorial 114659270, 2024; Find A Grave, Jerry Murden, Memorial 112327950, 2024; Find A Grave, Joseph Cephus Collins Jr., Memorial 114712683, 2024.

²⁴ National Cemetery Administration, History of Government-Furnished Headstones and Markers, 2024.

²⁵ Hawley, *Study List Application, Old Oak Grove Cemetery*, 5.

²⁶ Find A Grave, Oak Grove Cemetery; Christopher Meekins, Grand Army of the Republic Burial Records, Personal Collection of Christopher Meekins, 2024, Excel Spreadsheet.

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The VA created a General type headstone after World War I and retained the shape and material of the Civil War type but allowed for a religious emblem—a small Christian cross or a Star of David—and a longer inscription. Most VA-issued grave markers in the cemetery mark the burials of veterans of the World Wars, Korean War, and Vietnam War. In 1940, the VA created more options for families of veterans, briefly permitting granite headstones and offering flat markers in granite, marble, and bronze.²⁷ Most Oak Grove General type markers are marble arched headstones with a small cross inscribed. There are few instances of the granite, marble, or bronze General type flat markers. Examples include the grave of Robert E. Williams, a sergeant in the U.S. Army during World War II, deceased in 1963. Williams's headstone is a flat granite marker inscribed with his name, home state, rank, conflict, and birth and death dates. Instead of being set in the ground as intended, the marker was set upright on a vernacular concrete base.²⁸ The marker for James C. Clary, deceased in 1945, also a sergeant in the U.S. Army during World War II, is a flat bronze plaque with a small cross.²⁹

Symbolism and Iconography

Oak Grove Cemetery markers that date to the period of significance (1884-1975) exhibit a wide variety of funerary iconography. Most popular in the Victorian period (1837-1901), which romanticized nature, flora and fauna motifs symbolize different attributes and have continued to be favored through present day. Other iconography depicts the human condition, religious devotion, and fraternal and sororal associations.

Flora engravings include ivy, vines, roses, grapes, and various other flowers. For example, roses appear on women's markers and may represent martyrdom or purity. Ivy represents immortality, fidelity, and undying affection, and its three-pointed leaves symbolize the Holy Trinity.³⁰ The headstones of Edmond Cartwright (1866-1918) and Olive L. Bell (1881-1918) each feature two vines, which symbolize the connection between God and man. The headstones are identical in their concrete material, shape, iconography, and font, indicating that the same craftsman made them.³¹

Fauna engravings include lambs and doves. Lambs generally appear on children's markers as they symbolize innocence, and doves, the most frequently used animal iconography, represent purity and peace.³² One distinctive concrete vernacular marker includes a handwritten inscription for Eddie H. White (1896-1918) and a lamb in relief, set within a slightly asymmetrical recessed arch.³³ Marking the interment of Fannie Miller (1876-1907) is a white marble headstone with arched shoulders, chamfered edges, and a delicate dove in relief set in a recessed circle.

Other iconography on grave markers in the cemetery includes hands, crosses, American flags, anchors, hearts, open books, interlinked rings, urns, a mansion, and a golfer on a golf course. Three variations of hand iconography are on markers: shaking hands, hands pointing up, and praying hands. Shaking hands

²⁷ National Cemetery Administration, *History of Government-Furnished Headstones and Markers*.

²⁸ Find A Grave, Robert E Williams, Memorial 112328640, 2024.

²⁹ Find A Grave, James C Clary, Memorial 114025393, 2024.

³⁰ Douglas Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography* (Gibbs Smith via Internet Archive, 2004), 54, 57.

³¹ Find A Grave, Olive L Bell, Memorial 111682565, 2024; Find A Grave, Edmond Cartwright, Memorial 111691731, 2024.

³² Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, 74, 79.

³³ Find A Grave, Eddie H White, Memorial 111691638, 2024; North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics Eddie White, North Carolina Death Certificates, 1909–1976, Ancestry.com, March 28, 1918, North Carolina State Archives.

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represent either matrimony, a heavenly welcome, or an earthly farewell; hands pointing up represent ascension to heaven; and praying hands symbolize devotion.³⁴ Crosses are both singular and combined with other symbols like crowns or flowers. The headstone for Reverend Arthur George Bowden (1861-1914) combines an anchor and ivy and matches the material, shape, and font of Edmond Cartwright's (1866-1918) and Olive L. Bell's (1881-1918) headstones. A unique marker within the cemetery marks the grave of Reverend Norman G. Edney (1885-1931) and Millie B. Edney (1888-1932). The marble obelisk features an ornately carved mansion; this biblical iconography is derived from John 14:2, "In my father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."³⁵

In addition to engraved iconography and inscriptions, some markers in the cemetery are shaped as crosses or hearts, and others have attached urns on both singular headstones and double headstones that share a singular base. The grave of Mattie G. Spence (d. 1936) is marked with a large vernacular concrete cross with curved shoulders in front of a flat vault set at grade. The marble headstone of Davis Doxey (1917-1935) is one of the oldest heart-shaped markers with a carved heart set above two carved flowers. The marble headstone for Maggie Dudley (1875-1951) features an urn carved with grapes, symbolizing the blood of Christ, and a band with a Greek key pattern.

Grave marker iconography in Oak Grove Cemetery also reflects three different fraternal and sororal associations in the Black community: the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (GUOOF), Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge (MWPHGL), and the Independent Order of Good Samaritan and Daughters of Samaria (IOGSDS). A chain with three links containing the letters FLT (Friendship, Love, Truth) indicates GUOOF membership.³⁶ The headstone of William K. Pool, a mixed-race lumber worker (1864-1923), features this iconography.³⁷ A square and compass engraving indicates Prince Hall membership.³⁸ The headstone of Wilson Bell, a mill worker (1851-1924), features this iconography.³⁹ A triangle containing the letters LPT (Love, Purity, and Truth) signifies IOGSDS membership.⁴⁰ IOGSDS's co-educational membership is reflected in Oak Grove Cemetery where "LPT" appears on two stones belonging to a husband and wife, Joseph Cephus Collins (1846-1907) and Mary Collins (1840s-1906). The couple lived on Speed Street in the Shepard Street-South Road Street neighborhood, and Joseph worked as a day laborer.⁴¹

Makers Mark

Becoming widespread in the 1960s, Black families often requested that funeral homes place concrete burial vaults at grade, so they could also serve as markers.⁴² Walson Funeral Home, which owned part of

³⁴ Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, 108.

³⁵ Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, 120.

³⁶ Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, 191, 197.

³⁷ Find A Grave, William K Pool, Memorial 111965164, 2024; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Elizabeth City Ward 4, Pasquotank, North Carolina, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1920, Manuscript; Anonymous, Records of Golden Star Lodge No. 4 of Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria (Philadelphia, Pa.), 2024.

³⁸ Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, 191, 197.

³⁹ Find A Grave, Wilson Bell, Memorial 111903243, 2024; U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Elizabeth Ward 6, Pasquotank, North Carolina*, The United States at the Thirteenth Census: 1910 (Government Printing Office, 1910), 12A.

⁴⁰ Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria, Independent Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria, ppmsca 45401, Popular and Applied Graphic Art Print Filing Series, Library of Congress, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, 1872, Pamphlet.

⁴¹ Find A Grave, Mary Collins, Memorial 114710843, 2024; Find A Grave, Joseph Cephus Collins, Memorial 114711395, 2024.

⁴² Heather Fearnbach, "John N. Smith Cemetery, Southport, Brunswick County," North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (2021), National Register of Historic Places Designation, 7:6.

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the cemetery, placed its name on many of these vaults, some of which have been painted silver and decorated (**Photograph 3**). Others bare the mark of the John T. Davis Funeral Home. A headstone for multiple members of the Martin Family is inscribed with "J.T. Davis" and a dove (**Photograph 7**).

Statement of Integrity

Oak Grove Cemetery possesses a level of integrity sufficient for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It retains its integrity of location, because it has remained within the same footprint since the mid-twentieth century and includes the original portion of the cemetery established in 1886. Construction of the DeBry Court Public Housing complex altered its eastern viewshed from a quiet country road to a residential area ca. 1965, but it retains sufficient integrity of setting, because the housing served the Black community during the period of significance (1884-1975). In addition, the cemetery retains its north and east boundaries, which are buffered by woods, and multiple historic-age cemeteries continue to operate to its north.

Oak Grove Cemetery retains integrity of materials and workmanship. It contains 5,418 probable burials and 3,899 intact markers according to the GPR survey. The total number of historic and non-historic burials is unknown, but of the 2,793 death dates recorded on findagrave.com, 1,452 (52 percent) date to the period of significance.⁴³ In addition to 139 footstones not having dates on them, the difference in the number of markers from the GPR survey and findagrave.com records may be related to loss of legibility.⁴⁴ Non-historic interments, through at least 2022, align with its historic use and burial patterns and reflect the continued association of Oak Grove Cemetery with Elizabeth City's Black community. Furthermore, modern grave markers do not detract from the historic markers. Common condition issues include leaning (**Photograph 16**), sinking (**Photograph 20**), fallen, or broken markers and biological staining or growth. Some markers are impacted by tree growth (**Photograph 15**), and some near the cemetery's northern and eastern boundary are threatened by undergrowth and wetland erosion. Though ephemeral wood and fieldstone markers were likely lost over time, it has not been negatively impacted by past flooding events.⁴⁵ Most of the markers are in overall good condition, and the cemetery is maintained.

Oak Grove Cemetery's integrity of design is diminished due to alterations to its circulation pattern. The cemetery's present-day circulation pattern was not established until sometime between 1975 and 1982, when its two separate U-shaped drives were connected with a single north-south drive. Despite this minor alteration to its circulation pattern, the cemetery retains its landscaping and the pattern of north-south rows. It has maintained its overall grassy lawn punctuated by occasional trees and plantings.

The cemetery has integrity of feeling and association, as it retains sufficient historic-age physical features and an association with Elizabeth City's Black community. To have integrity of feeling, a property must retain physical features that express its historic character and aid in awareness of its importance and history. Burial markers, organization, and the landscape contribute to its sense of feeling. As the oldest extant Black cemetery in Elizabeth City, its separation by woods from multiple

⁴³ Find A Grave, Oak Grove Cemetery.

⁴⁴ Lowry and Kimes, *Ground Penetrating Radar Survey of the Old Oak Grove Cemetery (31PK122)*, 26; Beach Rivers Funeral Service, Virginia (Perry) Jones, 2022.

⁴⁵ Federal Emergency Management Agency, "FEMA's National Flood Hazard Layer (NFHL) Viewer," 2024.

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historic white cemeteries to the north and placement near other Black institutes contributes to both its feeling and association. The presence of at least 2,315 unmarked burials reflects the effect of the Jim Crow era on community resources and inequity. Deeds, newspapers, death certificates, and other primary sources support this association, and its continued use demonstrates the cemetery's enduring importance to the community.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☒ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Social History

Period of Significance

1884-1975

Significant Dates

1884, 1921, 1964

Significant Person

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N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

In 1886, Black community leaders established Oak Grove Cemetery, the oldest extant and longest-operating Black cemetery in Elizabeth City. The cemetery provided the only formal Black burial ground in the city until the mid-twentieth century and remained in use through the twenty-first century. The cemetery is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History, due to its ability to demonstrate the social history of oppression, segregation, and Black resiliency in the American South. It meets Criteria Consideration D, because the burial ground derives its significance from its historic association with Elizabeth City's segregation-era Black community, including its churches, fraternal organizations, funeral homes, and burial practices. The period of significance begins in 1884, the earliest marked death date, and ends in 1975, the National Register standard 50-year cut-off date. While active until 2022, the period after 1975 is not of exceptional significance under Criteria Consideration G. Its location and setting, on lowland adjacent to the creek, illustrates discriminatory white real estate practices during the period of significance due to its location on less desirable land that is lower and farther south than the city's white cemeteries; however, it also demonstrates resiliency in an understanding of the rural cemetery movement and scientific advancements regarding land use and public health, as it is separated from residential areas and water supply. The pragmatic arrangement of the historic-period drives and variety of markers also illustrates resiliency despite the effect of discrimination on accumulated wealth in the Black community, as the landscape and scale of monuments are less elaborate than those in the contemporary white cemeteries nearby. Individual markers, or lack thereof, represent the full socioeconomic spectrum of Black society in Elizabeth City, evident in high-style commercial monuments and headstones, vernacular homemade markers, and unmarked graves, which may have been delineated by wood or fieldstone in the past. Altogether, the cemetery's physical characteristics reflect local Black religious practices born of the abolitionist-driven Great Awakening, which spawned more inclusive Christian denominations popular in the Black community; and they reflect local Black communal practices born of enslavement and empowerment in the Civil War, the effects of which contributed to the foundation of ecumenical and non-denominational fraternal and sororal groups, churches, and natural gathering places in segregated life and death.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History of Elizabeth City

A summary of the development of the Black community from the settlement through the period of significance in Elizabeth City is provided to illustrate the lives and context of the those who built and are

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buried in the cemetery. Incorporated as the town of Redding in 1793, Elizabeth City, North Carolina originated as a port town on the narrows of the Pasquotank River, which drains into the Albemarle Sound between the mainland and the Outer Banks. From 1764 to 1790, three resources propelled its growth into a leading trade center in North Carolina: an inspection station, a ferry at the narrows, and the Dismal Swamp Canal to international trade centers in Norfolk, Virginia. Renamed in 1801, Elizabeth City developed slowly but steadily until the 1830s when the canal was improved.⁴⁶ Between 1830 and 1860, the population increased from around 400 to nearly 1,800, which was 35 percent enslaved and 12 percent free Black individuals.⁴⁷ Leading up to the Civil War (1861-1865), free and enslaved people worked as servants in domestic complexes as well as in building and maritime trades.⁴⁸

During the Civil War, the U.S. military occupied Elizabeth City for nearly three years, allowing numerous local Black men to join the United States Colored Troops (USCT).⁴⁹ The 1st USCT was stationed in a camp on Elizabeth City's waterfront beginning in the summer of 1863 and actively recruited Black men fleeing slavery in the area. In the fall of that year, nearly 2,000 more Black soldiers arrived in Elizabeth City. This expanded presence aimed to end guerilla Confederate activity in the area, free enslaved individuals, and recruit more Black soldiers. Over the course of their presence in Elizabeth City, the USCT freed about 2,500 formerly enslaved individuals. After the war, as veterans, some of these USCT soldiers became pivotal in establishing Oak Grove Cemetery in 1886 and introducing Memorial Day to the Black community.⁵⁰

Following the Civil War, like many Southern communities, Elizabeth City's white community entered a period of economic depression, while newly freed Black Americans gained their footing in local politics, education, commerce, and religion with the assistance of the U.S. Freeman's Bureau, operating 1865-1872.⁵¹ With passage of a new Reconstruction-era North Carolina constitution, Black men gained the right to vote and elected 30 Black state legislators between 1870 and 1876.⁵² In Elizabeth City, Oak Grove Cemetery co-founder Hugh Cale, among others, was elected to local and state offices and helped open the community's first Black primary schools in 1870 and 1882. At that time, the arrival of the Elizabeth City and Norfolk Railroad dramatically and quickly improved the local economy for all.

As a result of the railroad, commerce and industry facilitated significant population growth from 2,315 to nearly 7,000 residents between 1880 and 1900.⁵³ However, threatened by Black political progress, the U.S. states and localities adopted new racist and regressive laws collectively known as Jim Crow. As a result, one Black neighborhood emerged in segregation-era Elizabeth City, the National Register-listed Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District.⁵⁴ Its residents endured despite oppression and

⁴⁶ Tom Butchko, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Elizabeth City, North Carolina, 1793-1943, Pasquotank County," North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (1992), National Register of Historic Places Multiple-Property Documentation.

⁴⁷ Catherine W. Bishir and Michael T. Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina, Vol. 1* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 98-99.

⁴⁸ Bishir and Southern, *Architecture of Eastern North Carolina, Vol. 1*, 98-99. Butchko, "Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District", 8:3; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Population of Civil Divisions Less than Counties, State of North Carolina, U.S. Census Bureau, 1870.

⁴⁹ Butchko, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Elizabeth City", E:13.

⁵⁰ Anonymous, A Town Divided, 2024.

⁵¹ Butchko, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Elizabeth City", E:1-E:19.

⁵² Anonymous, "Reconstruction in North Carolina," NCPedia.org, 2022.

⁵³ Butchko, "Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District", E:14, E:19. U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Census Bulletin: Population of North Carolina by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, U.S. Census Bureau, 1901.

⁵⁴ Butchko, "Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District", 8:2, 8:4; Butchko, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Elizabeth City", E:25-E:26.

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established churches, fraternal and sororal organizations, businesses, entertainment venues, and Oak Grove Cemetery, the city's first formal Black burial ground to the south of the neighborhood on Peartree Road. Where the Black community interred its deceased prior to this is unknown, because the churches did not have adjacent burial grounds.

Black community fraternal and sororal associations included the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (GUOOF), Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge (MWPHGL), and the Independent Order of Good Samaritan and Daughters of Samaria (IOGSDS). UCST veterans established GAR Fletcher Post 20 in 1885 and supported the foundation of the cemetery. The GUOOF Republic Star Lodge No. 138 and the IOGSDS Lily of the Valley Lodge No. 7 had halls in the nearby Shepard Street-South Road Street neighborhood.⁵⁵ GAR, GUOOF, and Prince Hall Freemasonry, all Black counterparts to white organizations, provided mutual aid to members, such as assistance paying for medical care, burials, or widowhood.⁵⁶ IOGSDS also provided mutual aid to members and promoted the temperance movement against alcohol consumption.⁵⁷ Iconography from these groups appears on markers throughout the cemetery.

After Hugh Cale helped establish Oak Grove Cemetery in 1886, he focused on lobbying for a Black college, many of which opened in the South after the war. The 1892 opening of the State Colored Normal School for teachers marked one of the most significant developments in Elizabeth City's Black community.⁵⁸ Now known as Elizabeth City State University (ECSU), the school moved from the Shepard Street-South Road Street neighborhood to a new campus southeast of Oak Grove Cemetery to accommodate growing enrollment in 1912.⁵⁹

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Black community continued to grow in the south end of Elizabeth City near the cemetery and present-day ECSU, due to racist real estate practices that sustained segregation. After U.S. involvement in World War I (1917-1918), ECSU's enrollment surpassed 1,000 and represented 20 counties in North Carolina. Around the same time, Shepard Street-South Road Street residents formed a Parent-Teacher Association, a Civil League, the Merchants Civic and Literary Society, and the Volunteer Scouts.⁶⁰ Despite the Great Depression of the 1930s, the neighborhood included several physicians' offices, two funeral parlors, numerous barber and beauty shops, cafes, pool rooms, grocery stores, and launderers.⁶¹ Even amidst World War II (1941-1945), at least 75 Black-owned businesses operated in Elizabeth City, including dance halls, ice cream shops, restaurants, dentists, hairdressers, a bank, and funeral homes.⁶²

Stacy J. Walson and John T. Davis owned the two funeral homes serving the Black community in the early-to-mid-twentieth century and organized many interments in Oak Grove Cemetery.⁶³ Despite the

⁵⁵ Butchko, "Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District", 8:6.

⁵⁶ Michael Barga, *Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America*, 2016.

⁵⁷ *Richmond Planet*, "The Independent Order of Good Samaritans," 1893, 4.

⁵⁸ Butchko, "Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District", 8:4.

⁵⁹ Tom Butchko, "Elizabeth City State Teachers College Historic District, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County," North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (1994), National Register of Historic Places Designation, 8:2-8:3.

⁶⁰ *The Independent*, "The Progress Made by the Negroes in Elizabeth City in 25 Years in Spite of Wage Handicaps," June 9, 1933, 8.

⁶¹ *The Independent*, "The Progress Made by the Negroes in Elizabeth City in 25 Years in Spite of Wage Handicaps".

⁶² Amy Beth Wright, *Mapping Spaces of Freedom: An Interview with Elizabeth City Scholar and Public Historian Dr. Melissa Stuckey*, 2024.

⁶³ Anonymous, "'Beyond the Green Book': Rediscovering Historic Black Life in Elizabeth City," WTKR News 3 (2022); *The Independent*, "The Progress Made by the Negroes in Elizabeth City in 25 Years in Spite of Wage Handicaps".

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Great Migration of Black Southerners to more work in the North, the remaining community and trend of families returning South for burials necessitated establishing a second cemetery during World War II. In 1943, New Oak Grove Cemetery (present-day Dove's Landing Cemetery) opened south of Oak Grove Cemetery on the west side of Peartree Road. In 1951, John T. Davis bought most of New Oak Grove Cemetery.⁶⁴

The Jim Crow era did not blatantly end until the Fair Housing Act in 1968. For over a hundred years, white oppression thwarted Black advancement in politics, education, and housing and employment opportunities, but its impact on Black churches, funeral homes, and cemeteries was more complex. In sacred spaces, discriminatory laws primarily had a negative effect on how and where the Black community built them rather than the community's psyche. Restricted from accessing more lucrative jobs than their white counterparts resulted in Black individuals accumulating less generational wealth, which in turn affected budgeting for charitable giving, which then affected the scale and materials selected in the design of landscapes, sanctuaries, and grave markers. Yet, Black Americans found strength and power in Black sacred spaces regardless of comparisons to white neighboring counterparts that might be larger or more ornate. Even before Jim Crow, most Black faith communities preferred to separate from white faith communities in life and death for familial and spiritual reasons and a sense of security after being barred from having churches without white supervision before the Civil War. After Jim Crow, they catapulted the Civil Rights Movement from their church pews and honored their dead with distinctive markers and annual memorial celebrations.

The Founding and Growth of Oak Grove Cemetery, 1886-2022

Five known cemeteries in Elizabeth City predate Oak Grove Cemetery, all of which were exclusively white burial grounds: the Baptist Cemetery (ca. 1810); Peartree Burying Ground (ca. 1828); the Episcopal Cemetery (ca. 1830); the Quaker Cemetery (ca. 1839); and Hollywood Cemetery (1872).⁶⁵ Following the Civil War, Black families in more rural areas commonly laid relatives to rest in church burial grounds and family cemeteries, while those in cities buried them in segregated city cemeteries or Black community burial grounds; however, there is no documentation of that or any other substantial burial ground in Elizabeth City.⁶⁶ Black residents of Elizabeth City established Mt. Lebanon A.M.E. Zion Church (ca. 1850) and Olive Branch Missionary Baptist (1865) before Oak Grove, though no associated cemeteries are recorded with those churches.⁶⁷

In 1939 and 1940, U.S. Works Progress Administration (WPA) surveyors recorded four Black cemeteries in Pasquotank County during a federally funded survey of historic resources in North Carolina. Within Elizabeth City limits, Oak Grove Cemetery contained over 225 marked burials, and the

⁶⁴ Pasquotank County Clerk, Deed Record 150:441, Elizabeth City, April 19, 1951; Anonymous, "'Beyond the Green Book': Rediscovering Historic Black Life in Elizabeth City"; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States, Sheet No. 1, Population, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, Enumeration District 0076, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1900, Manuscript; Interstate Directory Company, Directory of Elizabeth City, Elizabeth City State University Archives, 1902; Find A Grave, Stacy J Walson, Memorial 112119237, 2024; *The Independent*, "Walson Burial Assoc. Inc.," October 19, 1928, 6, Advertisement; *The Independent*, "Walson Mutual Burial Association Inc.," May 24, 1935, 5, Advertisement.

⁶⁵ Butchko, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Elizabeth City", F:27-F:28; Tom Butchko, "Episcopal Cemetery, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County," North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (1994), National Register of Historic Places Designation, 7:1, 8:7.

⁶⁶ Fearnbach, "John N. Smith Cemetery, Southport, Brunswick County", 8:20.

⁶⁷ Butchko, "Shepard Street-South Road Street Historic District", 8:4.

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Negro Quaker Cemetery contained five unmarked burials on the west side of Peartree Road between Tatem Lane and Boston Avenue. In the county outside of the city limits, Union Chapel Cemetery, an historically Black cemetery five miles southeast of town, contained one marked burial, and the Negro Davis Cemetery contained “no marked graves before 1914.”⁶⁸ Little is known about the Negro Quaker Cemetery, but it likely predates Oak Grove Cemetery, as the WPA surveyor dated the most recent burial ca. 1905 and recorded the conditions of the grounds as poor.⁶⁹ Today, houses and a retention pond are in its approximate location.

WPA documentation indicates that such limited contemporary burial grounds motivated Black leaders to establish Oak Grove Cemetery, and a review of the Black community’s activism and political involvement indicates that the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Fletcher Post 20 was most likely its biggest booster. Elizabeth City USCT veterans established the GAR Fletcher Post 20 in 1885, one year before the cemetery’s founding. In 1866, with the motto Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty, a white Union veteran in Ohio started GAR as a fraternal group that held reunion campfires, assisted local veteran widows, and erected local monuments and memorials. It quickly became a national political force that founded Memorial Day in 1868 and successfully lobbied for federal veteran pensions in 1890 when over 400,000 white and Black veterans were active in posts across the country.⁷⁰ During this period, the federal government also established national veterans’ hospitals and cemeteries at critical population points. Another likely motivator for the Fletcher Post’s support of a new cemetery in Elizabeth City, the only national veterans’ cemeteries in North Carolina opened hundreds of miles away in Raleigh, Salisbury, New Bern, and Wilmington between 1866 and 1868. Such distances prompted remote veteran communities to establish their own burial grounds within local and family cemeteries, so that they did not have to travel such great distances to celebrate Memorial Day.⁷¹

With adequate support, a group of men, who included politicians, educators, businessmen, USCT veterans, and future ECSU founders, purchased land on the east side of Peartree Road from C.W. and Florence L. Grandy on May 15, 1886, to create a “colored cemetery for the sole use of the colored people for Pasquotank County.”⁷² Buyers of record included Robert Bowe, William C. Butler, Hugh Cale, Joshua A. Fleming, Lancaster Brothers, Charles McDonald, and Alexander A. Small. As a well informed and political community, national and regional burial trends would have influenced site selection away from their rapidly expanding segregated neighborhood. In the mid-nineteenth century, tenants of the Scientific Enlightenment and Second Great Awakening, which were often at odds, found commonality in the American Rural Cemetery Movement. In the early nineteenth century, scientific study and industrialization advanced the public’s understanding of sanitation and the need for zoning land uses to keep air and water clean. Meanwhile, the Great Awakening inspired abolitionist ministers to break away from the Episcopal Church, which was associated with the colonial white establishment and science, and found the Methodist and Baptist denominations, which embraced Black and poor

⁶⁸ Works Progress Administration, Pasquotank County Cemetery Survey Records, 176.1 (MARS ID, Series), North Carolina Family Records Collection, North Carolina Digital Collections, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, 1940; *The Independent*, “Fire Demon Has Not Visited Us For Two Months,” November 2, 1936, 6; Find A Grave, Union Chapel Cemetery, Cemetery 2468299, 2024.

⁶⁹ Works Progress Administration, Pasquotank County Cemetery Survey Records, 1940.

⁷⁰ Alexandra Boelhauer, Object 25: Grand Army of the Republic Parade, 2022.

⁷¹ National Cemetery Administration, Historic Headstones and Markers (prior to World War I), 2023.

⁷² Pasquotank County Clerk, Deed Record 007:633, Elizabeth City, May 15, 1886.

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communities and eventually inspired other evangelical and non-denominational movements.⁷³ Semi-rural cemeteries, like Oak Grove and the white Hollywood Cemetery segregated by woods to its north, provided an ideal conditions for burial grounds in the segregated Victorian era: non-denominational, spiritual natural setting, and sanitary in its separation from neighborhoods and water supplies.

From 1886 until the 1910s, the community referred to the new burial ground as the Elizabeth City Colored or Negro Cemetery as well as the Peartree Road Colored or Negro Cemetery. Only two extant markers in the cemetery date to the decade it was established, indicating the earliest burials may not have been marked, or ephemeral markers were lost. The first extant grave marker to postdate the cemetery's foundation is the 1899 grave of Sophia Turner, a mixed-race woman who worked as a housekeeper and lived on Ehringhaus Street in the Black neighborhood.⁷⁴ That same year, Fletcher Post disinterred their fallen comrades and reburied them at the cemetery.⁷⁵ This may account for 17 unmarked veteran burials and the earliest veteran marker predating the cemetery's foundation: that of Isaac Ehringhaus, a sergeant in the 35th Regiment USCT, who died in 1884. Throughout its existence, Fletcher Post members led celebratory Decoration Days every Memorial Day placing flowers on the markers, as well as Emancipation Proclamation anniversaries celebrating their accomplishments in the Civil War and hard-won freedom. These men's grit and resilience in fighting a war, founding a fraternal group, promoting the cemetery, and creating days filled with Black pride at the cemetery, despite ongoing oppression, lends great significance to its group and the site.⁷⁶

In addition to notable UCST burials, Oak Grove Cemetery contains the graves of Hugh Cale and other founders. The most well-known founder, Cale played a pivotal role in the establishment of ECSU. He settled in Elizabeth City and opened a successful mercantile business before involving himself in local politics.⁷⁷ Thereafter, he served as Elizabeth City's treasurer for six years, sat on the Board of Town Commissioners, and was Pasquotank County's Republican representative in the State House of Representatives from 1876 to 1880 and 1885 to 1891.⁷⁸ His political involvement made him a pillar of Elizabeth City's African American community.⁷⁹ Despite his esteem in political life, Cale had a troubled personal life and passed away in poverty in 1910.⁸⁰ In 1963, during their annual pilgrimage to Cale's grave, ECSU staff and students placed a monument and ledger at his grave (**Photograph 6**).⁸¹

William C. Butler, the second cemetery founder, was born in 1835 or 1836 in North Carolina and was employed as a Methodist minister from at least 1880 until his death in 1918. Shortly after the Civil War,

⁷³ Sarah Caroline Thuesen, *Greater Than Equal: African American Struggles for Schools and Citizenship in North Carolina, 1919–1965* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Inhabitants in Elizabeth City, in the County of Pasquotank, State of North Carolina*, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1880, Manuscript.

⁷⁵ *North Carolinian*, "Local Mention," May 22, 1889, Personal Collection of Christopher Meekins. Anonymous, *Grand Army of the Republic and Kindred Societies: A Guide to Resources in the General Collections of the Library of Congress*, 2024.

⁷⁶ *North Carolinian*, "Fletcher Post, No. 20," June 4, 1890, Personal Collection of Christopher Meekins; *North Carolinian*, "Local Mention," January 1, 1890, Personal Collection of Christopher Meekins.

⁷⁷ Marjorie Ann Berry, *Legendary Locals of Elizabeth City North Carolina* (Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 50; *Tar Heal Weekly*, "Hugh Cale is Dead," July 30, 1910, Pasquotank County Library: Hugh Cale Vertical File.

⁷⁸ Berry, *Legendary Locals of Elizabeth City North Carolina*, 50; *Tar Heal Weekly*, "The Voice of Cale," October 24, 1902, Pasquotank County Library: Hugh Cale Vertical File; *The Independent*, "When a Negro Held 2 Public Offices Here," December 2, 1936, 1.

⁷⁹ *Tar Heal Weekly*, "Hugh Cale is Dead".

⁸⁰ *Tar Heal Weekly*, "Hugh Cale is Dead".

⁸¹ *Daily Advance*, "Dedication Rites Set for Sunday at Cale's Grave," February 22, 1963, Elizabeth City State University: Hugh Cale Collection.

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he also served as the superintendent of Elizabeth City's "colored church school."⁸² Butler was acquainted with Hugh Cale through shared involvement in local religious groups.⁸³ Lancaster Brothers, born around 1850 in North Carolina, was a Civil War veteran, politician, and acquaintance of Hugh Cale.⁸⁴ Joshua A. Fleming was a supporter of the proposed State Colored Normal School at Elizabeth City.⁸⁵ He died in 1909 and was interred at Oak Grove Cemetery.⁸⁶ Robert Bowe, born in 1828, served during the entirety of the Civil War and was referred to as a landmark of the Black community.⁸⁷ He was also involved with the State Colored Normal School.⁸⁸ In 1891, he was one of four committee members who honored Hugh Cale for his role in securing Elizabeth City as the home of the school.⁸⁹ Charles McDonald, born sometime in the 1840s and deceased before 1938, was also part of this committee and crossed paths with Hugh Cale through his local political involvement.⁹⁰ The last founder of Oak Grove Cemetery, Alexander A. Small, was born in 1857 and passed away in 1919.⁹¹ He was married to Sarah E. Brothers in 1882; she may have been a relative of Lancaster Brothers, but no relation could be confirmed.⁹²

When founded, the footprint of Oak Grove Cemetery was 2.53 acres, roughly rectangular, and located on the east side of Peartree Road towards the north end of the present-day cemetery (**Photograph 2, Photograph 3 and 6-15**).⁹³ In 1921, Stacy J. Walson, a local Black undertaker, expanded Oak Grove Cemetery to the north, northeast, and south. On June 27, 1921, Walson, whose funeral home name appears on grave markers throughout the cemetery, purchased a tract of land south and southeast of the original cemetery from the Turner and Reddick families (**Photographs 21-25 and Figures 3-5**).⁹⁴ That same year, he entered into a lease agreement with an adjacent property owner, Thomas P. Nash, to add two small plots with 63 burial plots north and northeast of the Negro Cemetery (**Photograph 2, Photograph 3 and 16-20**). A farmer and feed store owner, Nash served as the Mayor of Elizabeth City in 1914 and a member of the state general assembly for 15 years.⁹⁵

⁸² United States Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Superintendent of Education and of the Division of Education 1865-1872, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1868, Manuscript. The Freedmen's Bureau refers to this school only as the "city colored church school." This may have been the Black Baptist churches of the Roanoke Association school on Roanoke Avenue.

⁸³ *The Falcon*, "Rev's W.C. Butler, Manley, and Newby," May 18, 1888, 3; *News and Observer*, "To Uplift His Race, "Negro Local Christian Educational Congress" at Elizabeth City," July 12, 1908, 12.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior, Inhabitants in Elizabeth City, in the County of Pasquotank, State of North Carolina, 1880.

⁸⁵ *North Carolinian*, "Colored Educational Mass Meeting," January 29, 1890, 3.

⁸⁶ Find A Grave, Rev Joshua A. Fleming, Memorial 200932761, 2024.

⁸⁷ *News and Observer*, "Old Negro Dies," February 5, 1909, 3.

⁸⁸ *North Carolinian*, "Pasquotank Court," September 25, 1895, 2.

⁸⁹ *North Carolinian*, "Public Meeting of Colored Citizens—Vote of Thanks—Cane Presentation to Mr. Cale," March 18, 1891, 3.

⁹⁰ *The Economist*, "A Publican Feed," October 22, 1878, 2; *North Carolinian*, "Public Meeting of Colored Citizens—Vote of Thanks—Cane Presentation to Mr. Cale".

⁹¹ Find A Grave, Alexander A. "Alex" Small, Memorial 242846629, 2024.

⁹² Pasquotank County Register of Deeds, Alexander A Small, North Carolina, Marriage Records, 1741-2011, Ancestry.com, May 18, 1882, North Carolina Department of Archives and History.

⁹³ Pasquotank County Clerk, Deed Record 007:633, 1886; James McMurren, "Funeral Aged Negro," *The Daily Advance*, March 18, 1924, 4; North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Matha Jackson, North Carolina, U.S., Death Certificates, 1909-1976, Ancestry.com, March 9, 1919, North Carolina State Archives; North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Jordan Pool, North Carolina, U.S., Death Certificates, 1909-1976, Ancestry.com, April 15, 1921, North Carolina State Archives.

⁹⁴ Pasquotank County Clerk, Deed Record 1278:878-880, Elizabeth City, May 15, 2017; *The Independent*, "Thirty Day Sentence for Criminal Neglect," September 17, 1926, 15.

⁹⁵ Clauser Jr. and Cross, *Investigation of the Old Pear Tree Burying Ground*, 8; *The Independent*, "T.P. Nash Sells to Jas. B. Ferebee," July 1, 1927, 9; *The Salisbury Post*, "T.P. Nash Dies," December 3, 1931, 2.

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Shortly after expanding the cemetery, Walson began to refer to the original portion of the cemetery as the old Oak Grove Cemetery and advertised lots on the high and dry land adjoining it.⁹⁶ Aerial photographs indicate that these high and dry lots were the Nash burials plots and that the northeast burial plot eventually expanded south along the east boundary of the Oak Grove Cemetery parcel.⁹⁷ During most of Walson's ownership, the cemetery continued to be the lone formal burial ground for Elizabeth City's Black community. It also remained an important location for community remembrance. In the early 1930s, Oak Grove Cemetery was the terminus of the Black community's Memorial Day parade; a local Black educational leader gave a speech at the cemetery and flowers were placed on veterans' graves.⁹⁸

When S. J. Walson died in 1955, he devised his property south of the original Oak Grove Cemetery to William H. Jones Jr. and Virginia P. Jones in his last will and testament (**Photographs 26-30**).⁹⁹ Both the Joneses were local beloved Black educators; William was a principal, and Virginia was a grammar school teacher in both the segregated and desegregated eras.¹⁰⁰ Roughly the north half of the property was already in use, but the south half appeared to have no burials when inherited. However, during their stewardship, burials extended to the present-day boundary by 1975. In 1964, the heirs of Thomas P. Nash sold the rest of Oak Grove Cemetery north of the Joneses' parcel to Elizabeth City. It is unknown when the Nash heirs acquired the entire cemetery from the founders, but the deed for the transaction describes the city as purchasing "All land situated on the East side of Peartree Road ... which were formerly a part of the T.P. Nash Farm and property, same to include, but not limited to the area used by the negro race as a cemetery and including the area known as the Nash cemetery lots."¹⁰¹

In 2017, Virginia Jones, widowed in 1982, sold the "Cemetery [sic] Property East Side Peartree Road... south of Oak Grove Cemetery's original boundary" to Elizabeth City, which has maintained the entire cemetery since then.¹⁰² However, in 2021, the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources recommended that the city close the cemetery until a GPR survey was conducted to determine where unmarked burials are after skeletal remains surfaced in 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2021. The city commissioned the survey, which ECSU helped conduct, but did not prohibit burials if individuals already had a deed to a plot.¹⁰³

Black Burial Practices and Culture at Oak Grove Cemetery

Throughout Oak Grove Cemetery, there are burials from almost every decade and memorials were retroactively added as prosperity increased in the community despite the lingering effects of systemic racism. The cemetery's physical characteristics and the associations of those interred within it capture the social, economic, and cultural attributes of Elizabeth City's Black community from the late

⁹⁶ *The Daily Advance*, "In Time of Bereavement Call S.J. Walson," March 24, 1926, 3.

⁹⁷ Nationwide Environmental Title Research, Aerial Image, 1958; Nationwide Environmental Title Research, Aerial Image, 1975.

⁹⁸ *The Independent*, "Our Colored Folk Observed Memorial Day," June 2, 1933, 8.

⁹⁹ Pasquotank County Clerk, Deed Record 1278:878-880, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Census of Population and Housing, Enumeration District 70-14, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1950, Manuscript; Virginia State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, William H. Jones, Virginia, Death Records, 1912-2014, Ancestry.com, April 15, 1982.

¹⁰¹ Pasquotank County Clerk, Deed Record 269:215, Elizabeth City, December 31, 1964.

¹⁰² Pasquotank County Clerk, Deed Record 1278:878-880, 2017.

¹⁰³ Eddie Jr. Buffalo, "Memorandum: Update - Oak Grove Cemetery " (City of Elizabeth City 2021; reprint, repr.).

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nineteenth century through the Jim Crow era. As the lone community cemetery serving Elizabeth City from 1886 to the early 1940s, Oak Grove Cemetery provides a cross-section of the community during this period. Like the many Black businesses, churches, educational facilities, and other amenities established by and for Elizabeth City's Black community during the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, the establishment and development of Oak Grove Cemetery was a necessity of prejudice and segregation, but also an expression of agency and resiliency. Unlike individual buildings historically associated with the Black community, Oak Grove Cemetery captures the diverse range of backgrounds and demographics in the Black community and depicts the impact of Jim Crow on numerous aspects of Black life.

Historic Black cemeteries in North Carolina share distinct qualities that reflect the cultural practices, socioeconomic status, and resourcefulness of their associated communities. These qualities include the presence of vernacular markers, often made of concrete; an informal arrangement of markers, with graves often aligned in relation to family plots; a lack of a formal landscape design; and a high number of unmarked graves, due either to the lack of markers or the loss of markers. These traits are not limited to historically Black cemeteries, but they occur most frequently as a collective whole in them.¹⁰⁴ While not significant on the state level due to these typical traits, Oak Grove Cemetery gains its local significance from being the only formal Black cemetery serving Elizabeth City from the late nineteenth century through the early 1940s.

Oak Grove Cemetery lacks a formal plan and landscape design, yet it demonstrates vernacular knowledge of the Rural Cemetery Movement trend that grew out of scientific advancements and diversification of American religious denominations in the nineteenth century. Established away from the communities it served, internments are generally organized in linear north-south rows on a gently sloping, grassy field interspersed with small to large deciduous trees and some ornamental bushes. It has no designated walkways, and its entry roads are gravel and dirt roads that were added to throughout the period of significance. A formal cemetery landscape design required funding, which would be a greater financial burden on the Black community due to the economic limits given to the segregated workforce. The cemetery's informal layout also reflects its utilitarian nature: the community needed a sanitary collective place to inter their deceased, as they were not permitted to use white cemeteries, and Oak Grove Cemetery met their need.

Oak Grove Cemetery contains a substantial number of unmarked burials. In 2022, a GPR survey identified approximately 2,315 unmarked burials dispersed throughout the cemetery. These unmarked burials represent nearly 43% of the probable burials in Oak Grove Cemetery. The high percentage of unmarked burials may indicate that impermanent markers, like wood headboards or fieldstones, were historically used to mark graves in the cemetery. They may also be a result of the loss of vernacular markers, which frequently do not withstand the tests of time. Some early twentieth-century burials have also been marked with more modern markers, like mass-produced and laser engraved granite headstones. This may indicate the burial never had a permanent marker due to financial circumstances or that its historic marker deteriorated to the degree that replacement was necessary. Oak Grove Cemetery's many unmarked graves—due to either a lack of funding to mark burials or the loss of

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Smith, "Hidden and Sacred: African American Cemeteries in Eastern North Carolina" (East Carolina University, 2010), 67; M. Ruth Little, "Oberlin Cemetery, Raleigh, Wake County," North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (2018), National Register of Historic Places Designation, 8:13.

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impermanent and vernacular markers—demonstrate the financial hardship the Black community faced during the Jim Crow era.

A considerable number of grave markers are vernacular (also called folk). These types are handmade by families or local craftsmen rather than commercially or mass-produced and are present in a variety of readily available materials, shapes, and sizes. Vernacular markers often indicate lower socioeconomic status,¹⁰⁵ and they can indicate creativity, resourcefulness, artistic expression, or religious views of an individual creating a personalized marker honoring their loved one. Vernacular markers can reflect the skill and availability of a local craftsperson who carved, formed, or engraved cemetery markers for their community members. Many vernacular markers in historic cemeteries date from the 1920s through the 1940s, corresponding with periods of national economic hardship. Due to the handmade nature of vernacular markers, which are often composed of concrete and lack internal reinforcement like steel rebar, they are easily damaged and more frequently lost to the passing of time.¹⁰⁶ In Oak Grove Cemetery, vernacular markers range from concrete headstones with handwritten inscriptions, to concrete vaults at grade with stamped concrete plaques, and more complex vernacular markers, like a large cross. A few mass-produced headstones are set on vernacular cast concrete bases. Some share common traits, indicating they were produced by the same local craftsman. Many concrete vault lids and ledgers in the cemetery are painted white or silver (**Photograph 11**), a common decoration in coastal Black cemeteries. Reflective surfaces represent water, which was seen as a path to the spirit world in Congolese culture adopted by Black Americans.¹⁰⁷ The prevalence of vernacular markers in Oak Grove Cemetery reflects that there were limited well-paying jobs offered to Black people during the Jim Crow era. They also reflect community resourcefulness and resilience in the face of oppression.

Specific headstone iconography in the cemetery also indicates important associations among the Black community, including military service and fraternal organizations. The cemetery is home to the interments of numerous veterans from the Civil War through the Vietnam War. The prevalence of military-issued markers demonstrates the high rate of Black military enlistment due to the opportunities it afforded to Black individuals. During the Civil War, military enlistment offered Black men not just a path to freedom, but also an opportunity to secure the freedom of their race and exert their own agency. During World I and World War II, enlistment offered an opportunity for Black men to demonstrate their patriotism, loyalty, and worthiness for equal rights, although Black soldiers were assigned to segregated units and were often relegated to low-level positions. Cemeteries are perhaps the best tangible indicator of military service in a community, as grave markers depict military service across conflicts and decades. Oak Grove Cemetery's collection of military grave markers captures the prevalence of Black military service in multiple conflicts and illustrates the social importance of military service among the Black community. Its collection of Civil War Black veterans' graves is particularly important, as it demonstrates the desire of Black men to assert their agency and attain their community's freedom, and the local GAR posts desire to provide the community with a single location to honor Civil War veterans.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, "Hidden and Sacred: African American Cemeteries in Eastern North Carolina", 43.

¹⁰⁶ Feambach, "John N. Smith Cemetery, Southport, Brunswick County", 7:5.

¹⁰⁷ Feambach, "John N. Smith Cemetery, Southport, Brunswick County", 8:21; Smith, "Hidden and Sacred: African American Cemeteries in Eastern North Carolina", 68.

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The associations with fraternal organizations, as depicted by grave marker iconography in Oak Grove Cemetery, also reflect an important facet of the Black community from the Reconstruction era through the Jim Crow era. Fraternal organizations provided important mutual aid to members, offered a space for community solidarity in the face of discrimination, and often encouraged collective action for the betterment of communities. While Black fraternal organizations were increasingly popular during the Reconstruction era, they became more important during the Jim Crow era as Black communities were forced to become more self-reliant.¹⁰⁸ The three fraternal organizations reflected in interments at Oak Grove Cemetery were important pieces of the social fabric of Elizabeth City's Black community, particularly during the Jim Crow era when nearly all aspects of Black life were dictated by segregation. Like with military service, Oak Grove Cemetery provides unique insight into associations with Black fraternal organizations in Elizabeth City, which are not collectively illustrated by other types of tangible resources.

In addition to burials associated with military service and fraternal organizations, Oak Grove Cemetery contains the interments of numerous individuals with religious associations and religious leadership roles, particularly reverends. One of the earliest interred reverends is Methodist preacher Alfred L. Newby, born in 1833 and deceased in 1909.¹⁰⁹ Newby lived in Elizabeth City beginning in ca. 1888, and in addition to supporting the community as a preacher, he was also an outspoken proponent for establishing the State Normal Colored School (now ECSU).¹¹⁰ Religion has been a pillar of the Black community since Africans were first forcefully brought to the American colonies. Scholar of Black history, Henry Louise Gates Jr., succinctly summarizes the importance of the church in Black culture, stating, "The Black church has influenced nearly every chapter of the African American story ... [it functions] as a spiritual center ... and as a social center and cultural repository as well."¹¹¹ Black churches offered a place of refuge for the Black community during the Jim Crow era, were a social outlet, and fostered community bonds. Black churches also often offered important public services—like job-training, libraries, and athletic clubs—that Black individuals were restricted from due to segregation. Leadership roles in the church gave individuals social standing and recognition. The many religious associations of the interred in Oak Grove Cemetery reflect the churches' role as the social center of Elizabeth City's Black community during the Jim Crow era.

The variety of markers and lack of markers in Oak Grove Cemetery reflect the Black community's social, economic, and cultural characteristics during the period of significance. The occupations of those interred show the changing socioeconomic status of the community, from primarily working-class in the nineteenth century to a greater variety of occupations in the twentieth century. The few extant nineteenth-century grave markers in Oak Grove Cemetery mark the burials of farmers, housekeepers, servants, and a Civil War veteran.¹¹² Twentieth-century graves display numerous occupations, including day laborers, mill hands, sawyers, and mill firemen; reverends, preachers, and ministers; farmers and

¹⁰⁸ National Park Service, Independent Order of St. Luke, 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Find A Grave, Alfred L. Newby, Memorial 114642577, 2024; *Lincoln Courier*, "The Marriage of a Colored Couple," March 31, 1893, 3.

¹¹⁰ *North Carolinian*, "Colored Educational Mass Meeting"; Ancestry Contributor, Coley Family Tree, 2024.

¹¹¹ Henry Louise Gates Jr., *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song* (Penguin Press, 2021), 1–2.

¹¹² U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Inhabitants in Elizabeth City Township, in the County of Pasquotank, State of North Carolina, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1870, Manuscript; U.S. Department of the Interior, Inhabitants in Elizabeth City, in the County of Pasquotank, State of North Carolina, 1880.

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farm hands; cooks; launderers; teachers and educators; house workers; dock workers; butchers; a
lineman; railroad workers; an undertaker; and a beautician.¹¹³

Collectively, the physical characteristics of Oak Grove Cemetery embody the defining features of historically Black cemeteries in the American South. Oak Grove Cemetery's physical characteristics set it apart from Elizabeth City's white cemeteries, which have fewer vernacular markers, more formal historic-period physical layouts, and likely fewer unmarked burials. The variety of interments Oak Grove Cemetery contains reflects the community's social, economic, and cultural characteristics, providing unique insight into the historical development of the community generally not captured by other extant historic resources. Oak Grove Cemetery stands as a testament and remains an important resource to Elizabeth City's Black community, evident by its use through 2022 and its continued maintenance.

¹¹³ Find A Grave, Symera Rice, Memorial 111580990, 2024; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States, Shceulde No. 1, Population, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, Enumeration District 0077, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1900, Manuscript; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States, Shceulde No. 1, Population, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, Enumeration District 0078, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1900, Manuscript; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States, Shceulde No. 1, Population, Nixonton Township, Pasquotank County, Enumeration District 0080, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1900, Manuscript; U.S. Department of the Interior, Twelfth Census of the United States, Shceulde No. 1, Population, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, Enumeration District 0076, 1900; U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States, Shceulde No. 1, Population, Elizabeth City, Pasquotank County, Enumeration District 0075, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1900, Manuscript; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Elizabeth City Ward 1, Pasquotank, North Carolina, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1920, Manuscript; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Elizabeth City Ward 2, Pasquotank, North Carolina, Ancestry, National Archives and Records Administration, 1920, Manuscript; U.S. Department of Commerce, Elizabeth City Ward 4, Pasquotank, North Carolina, 1920.

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Oak Grove Cemetery

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): PK1161; 31PK122

Oak Grove Cemetery

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 13.59

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

Coordinate ID	Latitude (WGS84)	Longitude (WGS84)
1	36.287199	-76.222652
2	36.286879	-76.222575
3	36.286462	-76.221996
4	36.286063	-76.221721
5	36.284778	-76.221503
6	36.284203	-76.221781
7	36.284121	-76.223583
8	36.286991	-76.223812

Verbal Boundary Description

The National Register boundary for Oak Grove Cemetery encompasses tax parcel 891316844230, shown on the accompanying 2024 Tax Map from Pasquotank County, North Carolina, and extends approximately 15 feet (4.6 meters) to the west to the eastern edge of Peartree Road. The boundary encompasses 13.59 acres. The boundary is shown with a bold line on the enclosed map. Scale 1" = 100'

Boundary Justification

The National Register boundary for Oak Grove Cemetery encompasses all the property historically and functionally associated with the cemetery. It includes all burials identified in the 2022 GPR survey conducted for Elizabeth City and land within the same parcel to the north and east, because there is potential for additional burials along the tree line and adjacent wetlands. The area encompassed by the National Register boundary is composed of at least four historically Black burial grounds: the 2.53-acre Negro or Colored Cemetery dating to 1884, two Nash-owned burial plots that extend north of the northernmost drive on the west side and northeast side, and an L-shaped plot to the east, southeast and south, which was owned by the proprietor of Walson Funeral Home. Though the parcels were not entirely merged until 2017, they have all been referred to as Oak Grove Cemetery since the 1920s. The western boundary for Oak Grove Cemetery extends beyond the tax parcel line to include known burials historically associated with the cemetery that appear to lie beyond the tax parcel line.

Oak Grove Cemetery

Name of Property

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Althea Wunderler-Selby, Architectural Historian; Anna Maas, Senior Architectural Historian; and Jennifer Brosz, Architectural Historian

organization: Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.

street & number: 8401 Shoal Creek Boulevard, Suite 100

city or town: Austin state: TX zip code: 78757

e-mail: althea.wunderler-selby@stantec.com

telephone: 503-207-4360

date: March 2025

Oak Grove Cemetery

Name of Property

Pasquotank County, NC

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Additional Documentation

Photo Log

Name of Property: Oak Grove Cemetery

City or Vicinity: Elizabeth City

County: Pasquotank

State: North Carolina

Photographer: Anna Maas

Date Photographed: May 30, 2024

Location of Original Digital Files: 8401 Shoal Creek Blvd Suite 100, Austin, TX 78757

Photographs:

Photograph #1. Old Peartree section main entrance, view facing east.

Photograph #2. Northwest Nash lot and Old Peartree section, view facing east-southeast from northwest corner.

Photograph #3. Nash lots and Old Peartree section, view facing south-southwest from northeast corner.

Photograph #4. Walson-Jones and Jones lots, view facing northwest from southeast corner.

Photograph #5. Walson-Jones and Jones lots, view facing northeast from southwest corner.

Photograph #6. Grave of Hugh Cale at the cemetery's main entrance in the Old Peartree section, view facing west.

Photograph #7. Family headstone with the makers mark of John T. Davis Funeral Home in Old Peartree section, view facing west.

Photograph #8. Family plot in the Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.

Photograph #9. Marble obelisk in Old Peartree section, view facing northeast.

Photograph #10. Marble headstone atop a brick ledger in Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.

Photograph #11. Painted ledger in the Old Peartree section, view facing southwest.

Photograph #12. Ledgers produced by the Walson Funeral Home in the Old Peartree section, view facing southwest.

Photograph #13. USCT markers in the Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.

Photograph #14. Vernacular concrete marker in the Old Peartree section, view facing west.

Photograph #15. Markers impacted by tree growth in the Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.

Photograph #16. Leaning marker in the Nash lot, view facing north.

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Photograph #17. Nash lot, view facing east-northeast.

Photograph #18. Nash lot and Old Peartree section, view facing south-southwest.

Photograph #19. Vernacular concrete marker with handwritten inscription in the Nash lot, view facing east.

Photograph #20. Sunken marker in the woods in the Nash lot, view facing northeast.

Photograph #21. Walson lot, view facing east.

Photograph #22. Walson lot, view facing east.

Photograph #23. Walson lot, view facing southeast.

Photograph #24. Stamped vernacular concrete marker in the Walson lot, view facing west-southwest.

Photograph #25. Walson lot, view facing west.

Photograph #26. A family marker in the Walson-Jones lot, view facing northeast.

Photograph #27. Walson-Jones lot, view facing southeast from the Walson lot.

Photograph #28. Walson-Jones lot, view facing west.

Photograph #29. Statue and early marker in the Walson-Jones lot, view facing northeast.

Photograph #30. Commercial marker and a temporary marker in the Walson-Jones lot, view facing west.

Oak Grove Cemetery

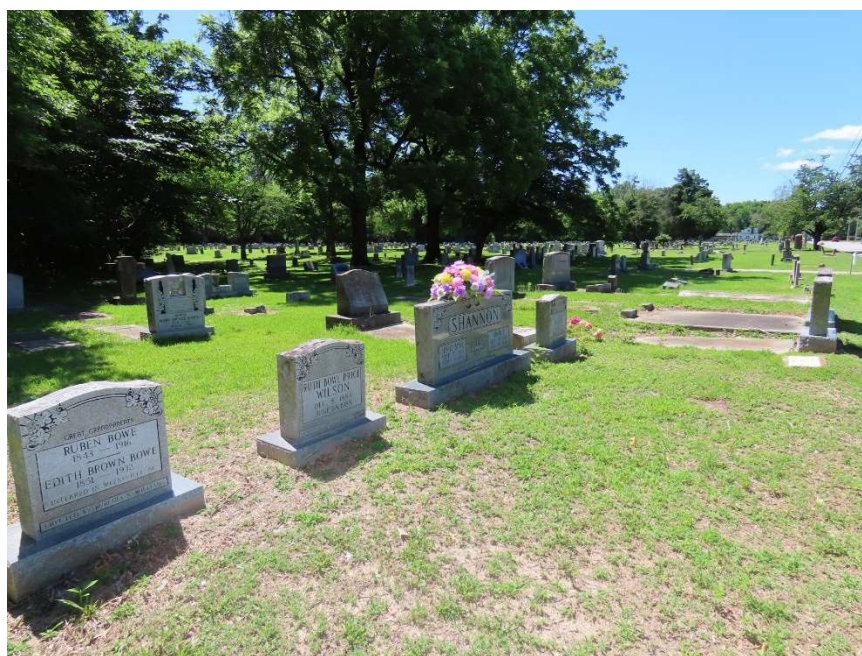
Name of Property

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Photograph 1. Old Peartree section main entrance, view facing east.



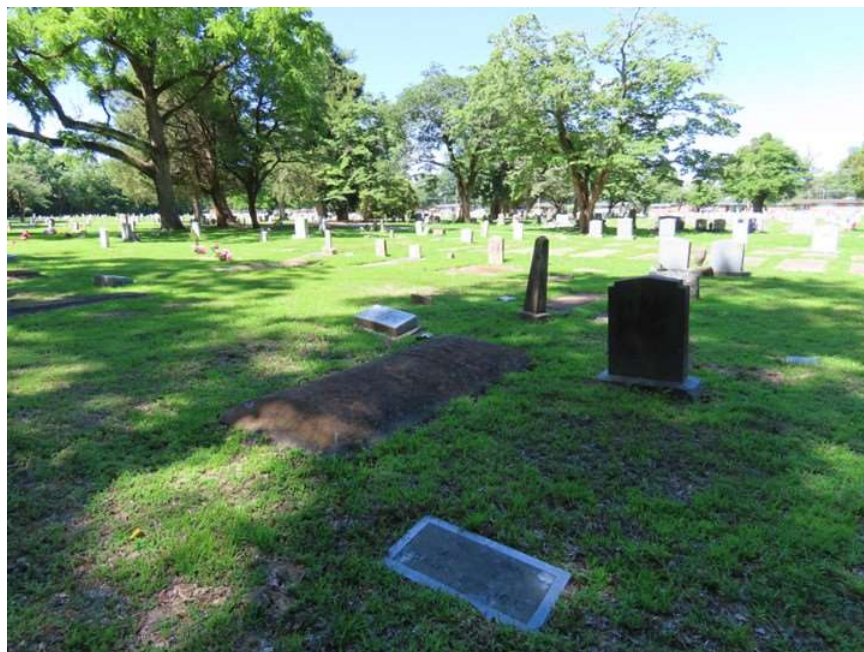
Photograph 2. Northwest Nash lot and Old Peartree section, view facing east-southeast from northwest corner.

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Photograph 3. Nash lots and Old Peartree section, view facing south-southwest from northeast corner.



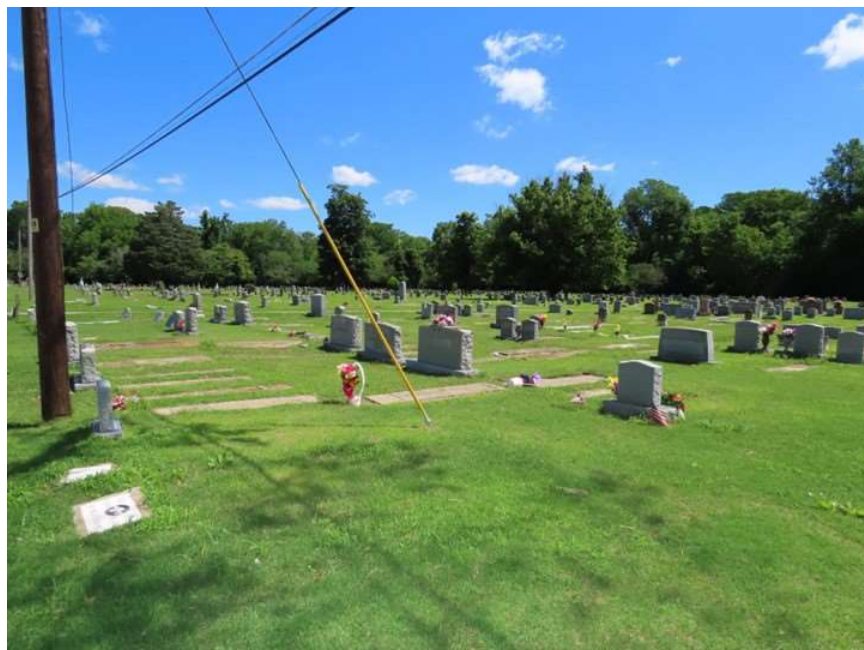
Photograph 4. Walson-Jones and Jones lots, view facing northwest from southeast corner.

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Photograph 5. Walson-Jones and Jones lots, view facing northeast from southwest corner.



Photograph 6. Grave of Hugh Cale at the cemetery's main entrance in the Old Peartree section, view facing west.

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Photograph 7. Family headstone with the makers mark of John T. Davis Funeral Home in Old Peartree section, view facing west.



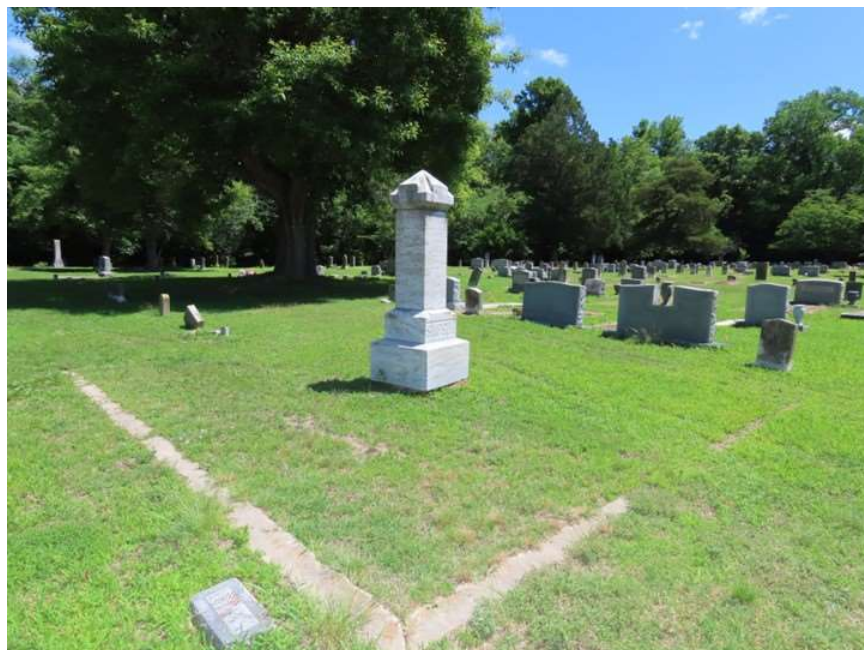
Photograph 8. Family plot in the Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.

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Photograph 9. Marble obelisk in Old Peartree section, view facing northeast.



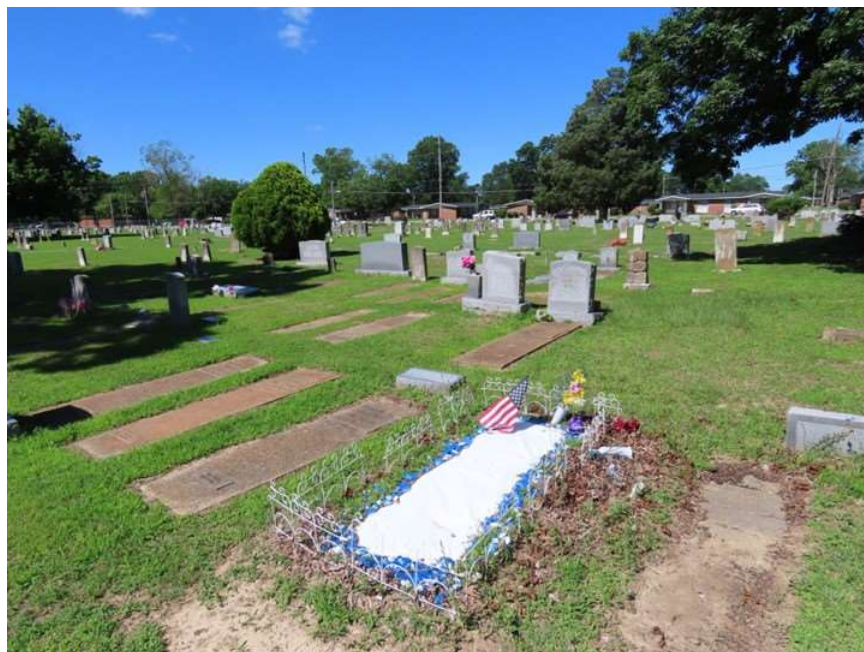
Photograph 10. Marble headstone atop a brick ledger in Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.

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Photograph 11. Painted ledger in the Old Peartree section, view facing southwest.



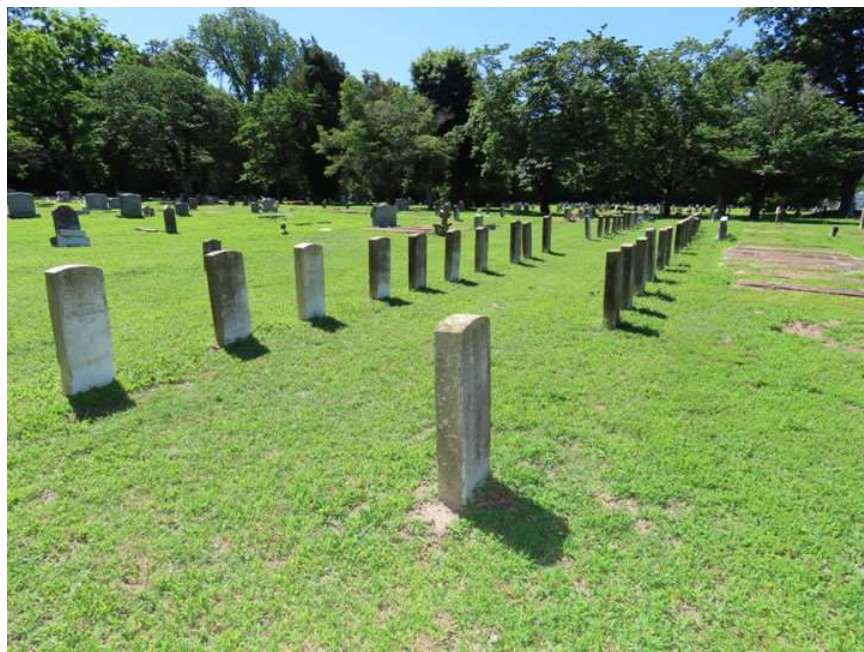
Photograph 12. Ledgers produced by the Walson Funeral Home in the Old Peartree section, view facing southwest.

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Photograph 13. USCT markers in the Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.



Photograph 14. Vernacular concrete marker in the Old Peartree section, view facing west.

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Photograph 15. Markers impacted by tree growth in the Old Peartree section, view facing southeast.



Photograph 16. Leaning marker in the Nash lot, view facing north.

Oak Grove Cemetery

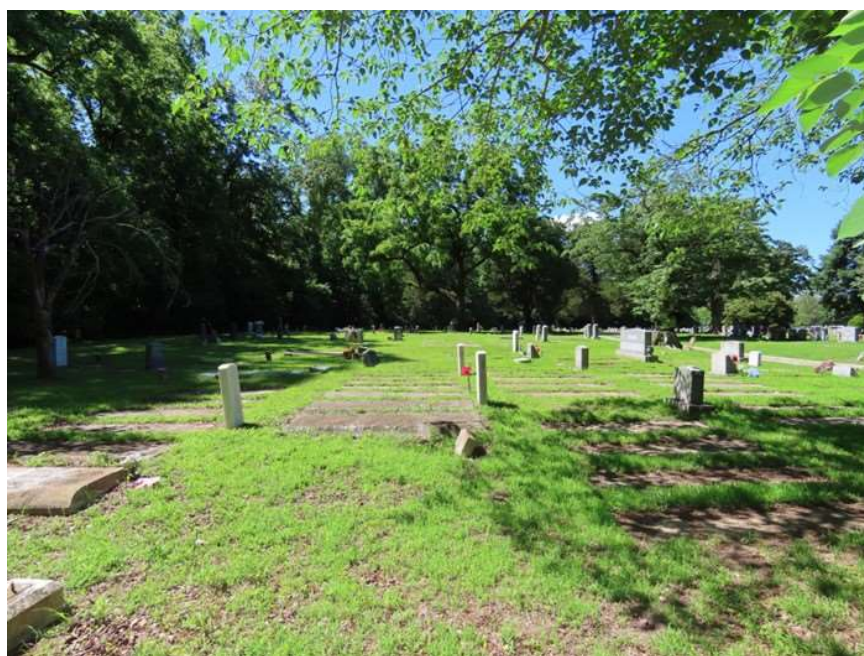
Name of Property

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Photograph 17. Nash lot, view facing east-northeast.



Photograph 18. Nash lot and Old Peartree section, view facing south-southwest.

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Photograph 19. Vernacular concrete marker with handwritten inscription in the Nash lot, view facing east.



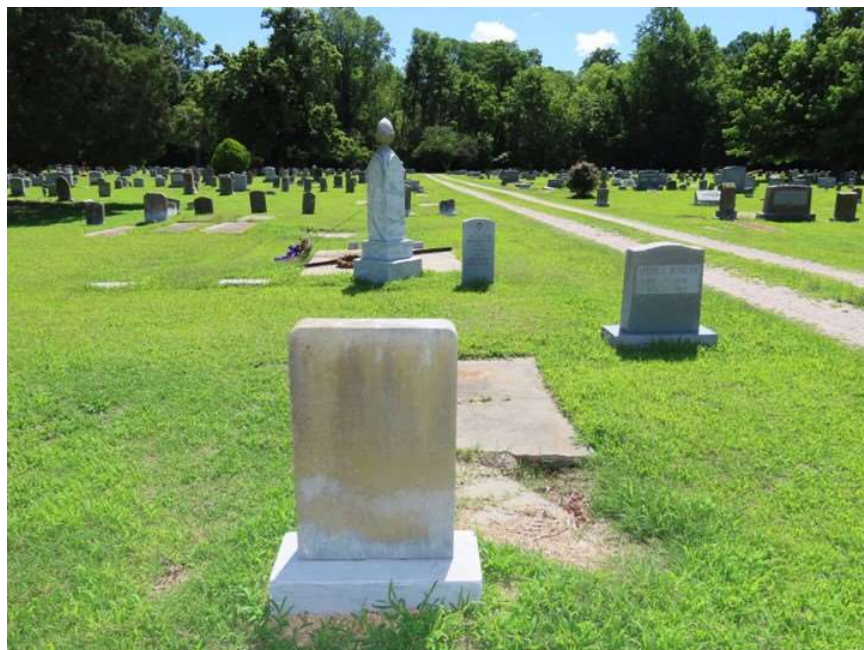
Photograph 20. Sunken marker in the woods in the Nash lot, view facing northeast.

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Photograph 21. Walson lot, view facing east.



Photograph 22. Walson lot, view facing east.

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Photograph 23. Walson lot, view facing southeast.



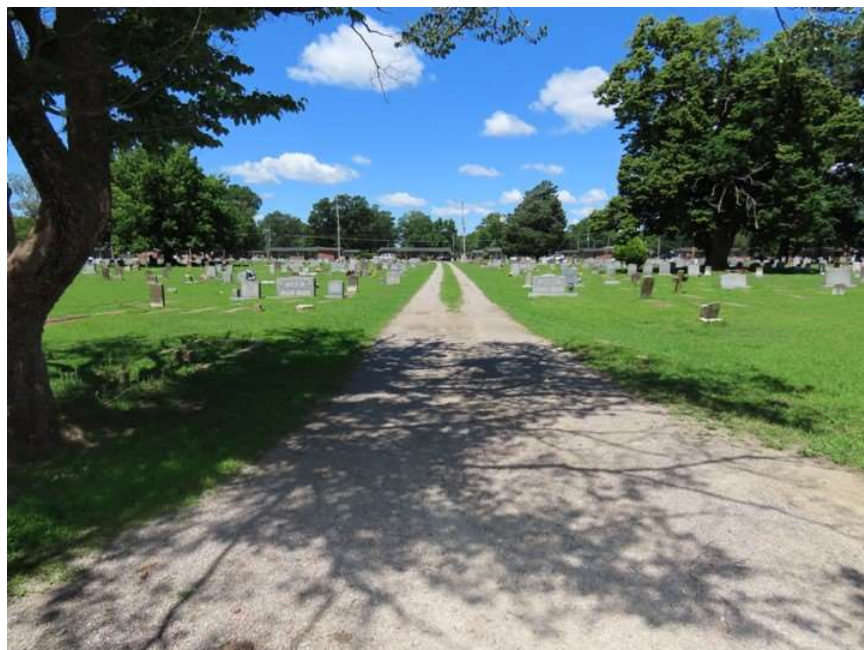
Photograph 24. Stamped vernacular concrete marker in the Walson lot, view facing west-southwest.

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Photograph 25. Walson lot, view facing west.



Photograph 26. A family marker in the Walson-Jones lot, view facing northeast.

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Photograph 27. Walson-Jones lot, view facing southeast from the Walson lot.



Photograph 28. Walson-Jones lot, view facing west.

Oak Grove Cemetery

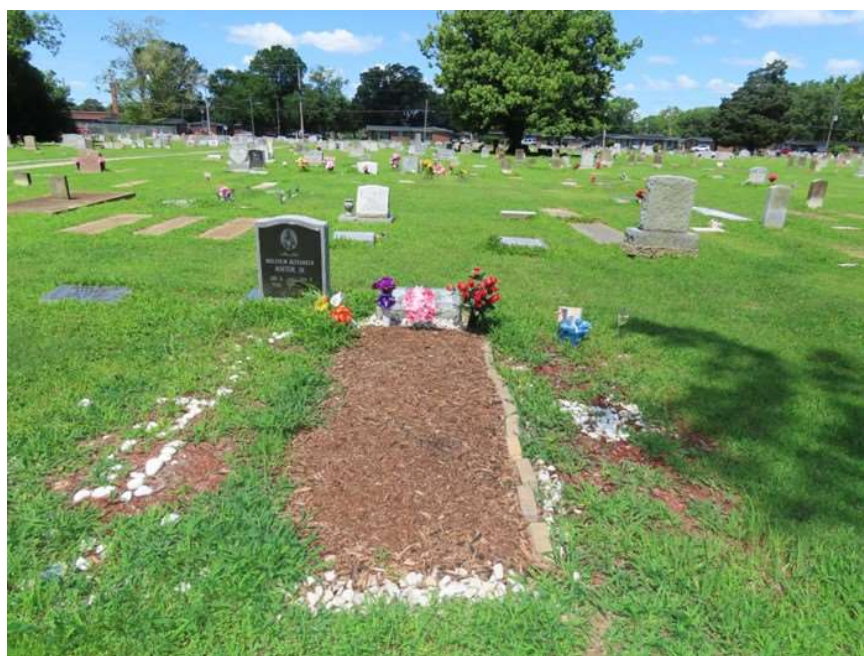
Name of Property

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Photograph 29. Statue and early marker in the Walson-Jones lot, view facing northeast.



Photograph 30. Commercial marker and a temporary marker in the Walson-Jones lot, view facing west.

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

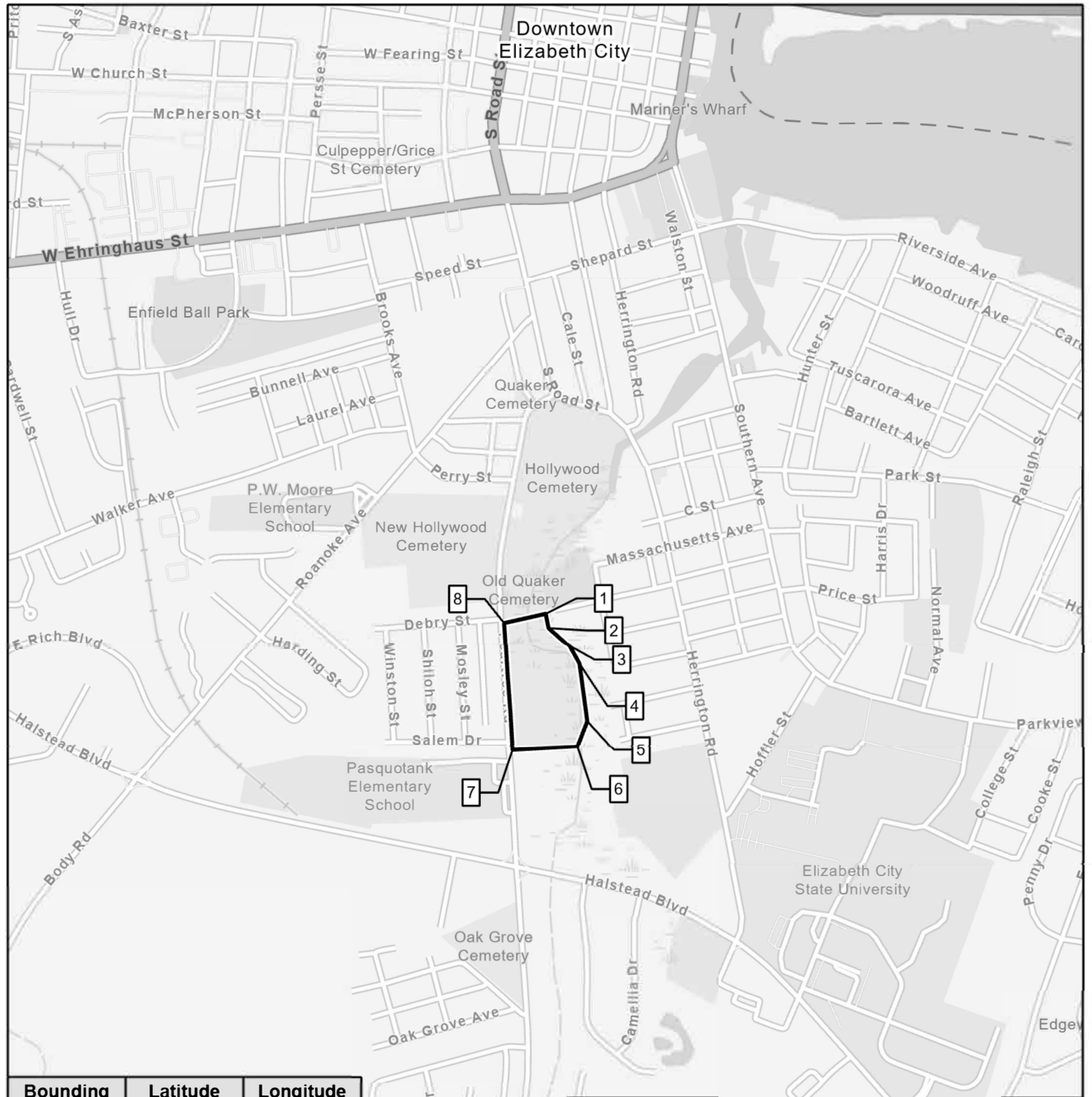
Tier 1 – 60-100 hours

Tier 2 – 120 hours

Tier 3 – 230 hours

Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



Bounding Coordinate ID	Latitude (WGS84)	Longitude (WGS84)
1	36.287199	-76.222652
2	36.286879	-76.222575
3	36.286462	-76.221996
4	36.286063	-76.221721
5	36.284778	-76.221503
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7	36.284121	-76.223583
8	36.286991	-76.223812

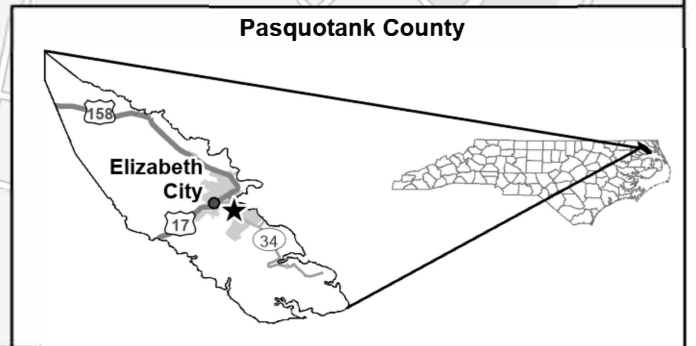


Figure 1. Location of Oak Grove Cemetery
Oak Grove Cemetery
Elizabeth City, North Carolina

 National Register Boundary

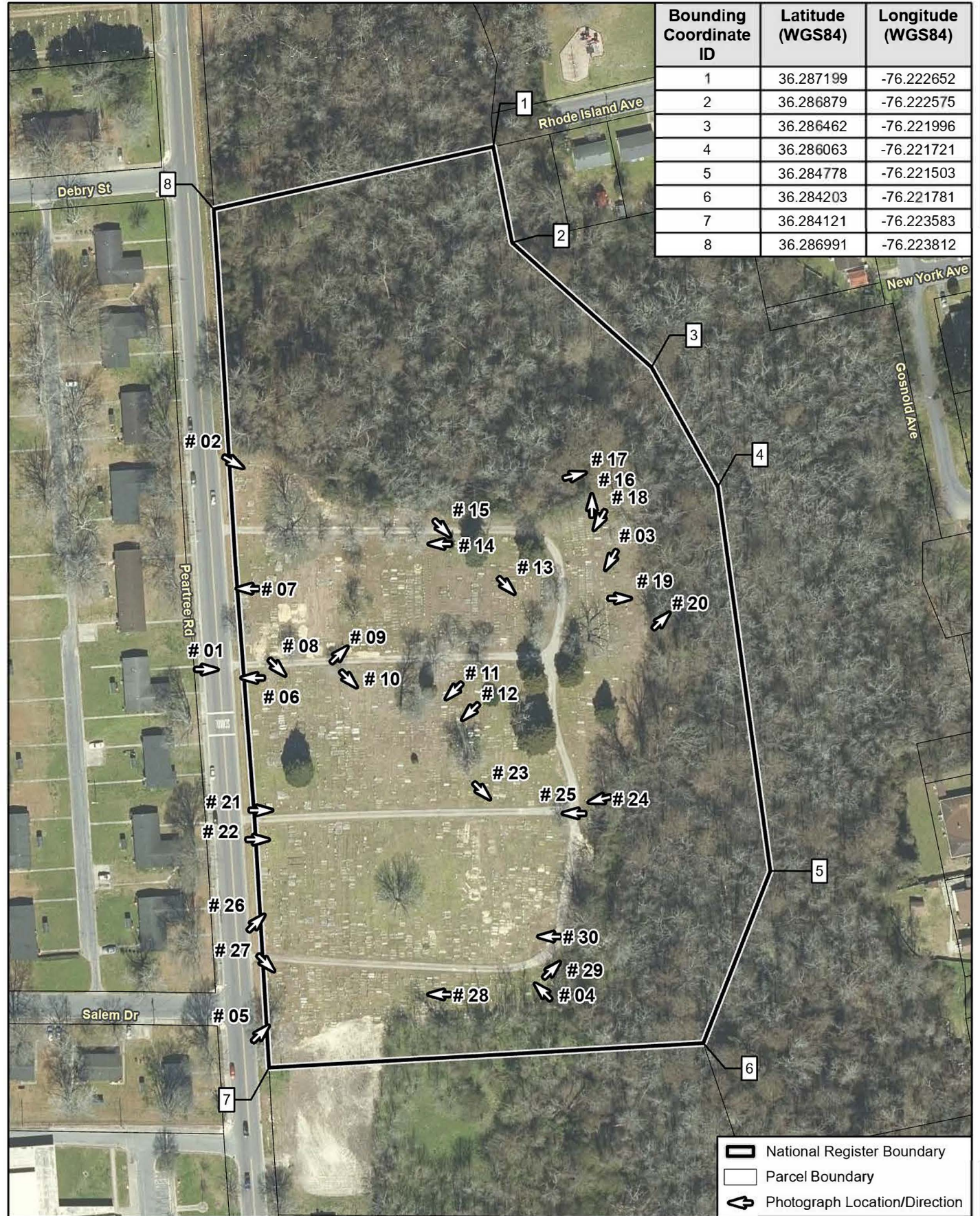


 Stantec



Date: 9/3/2024

Basemap Source: Esri (2024)

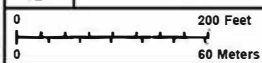


**Figure 2. Oak Grove Cemetery
National Register Boundary**

Oak Grove Cemetery
Elizabeth City, North Carolina

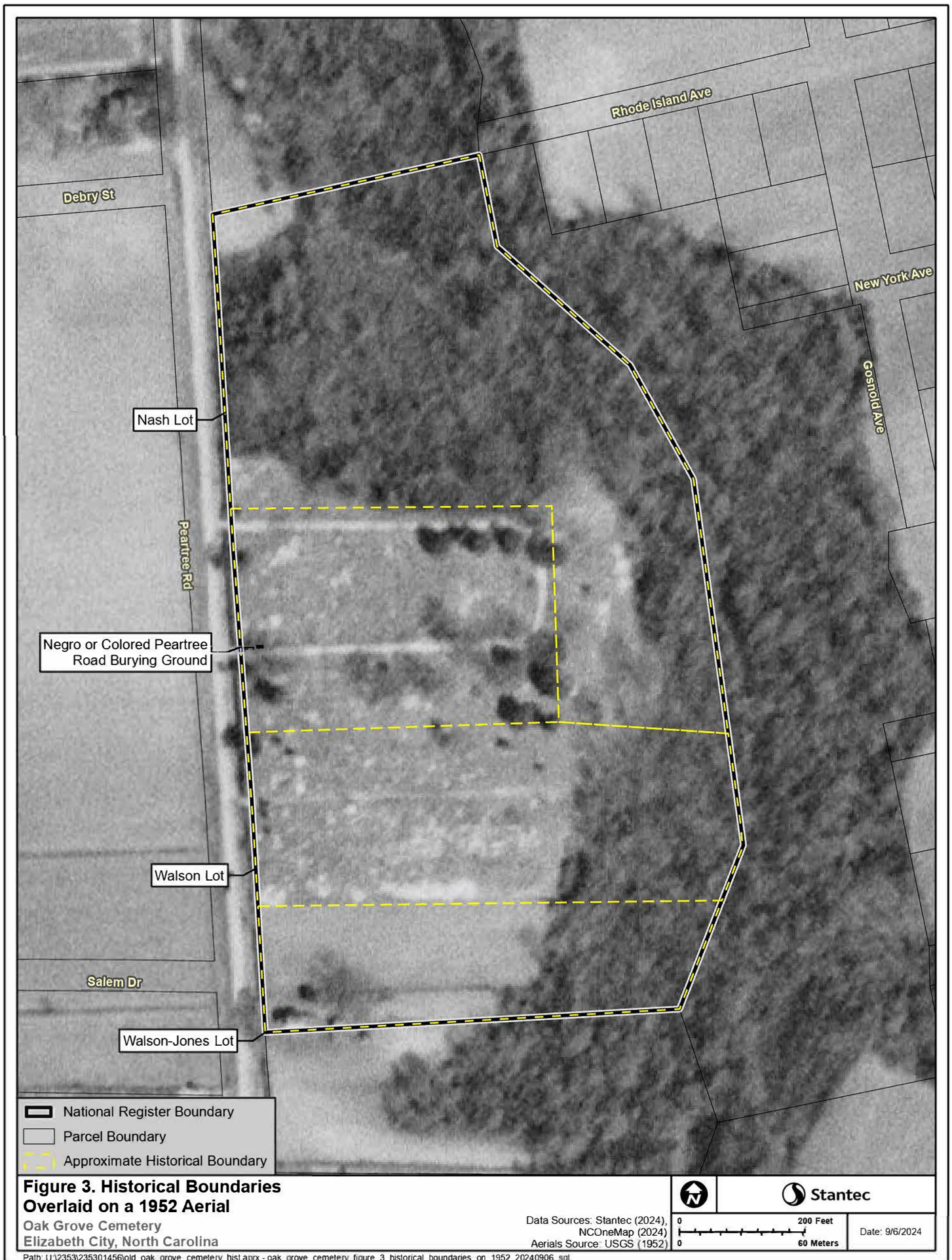


Data Sources:
NCOneMap (2024), Stantec (2024)
Aerial Source: NCOneMap (2024)



Date: 9/6/2024

Path: U:\2353\235301456\old oak grove cemetery hist.aprx - oak grove cemetery figure 2 nrhp boundary 20240903.sgl





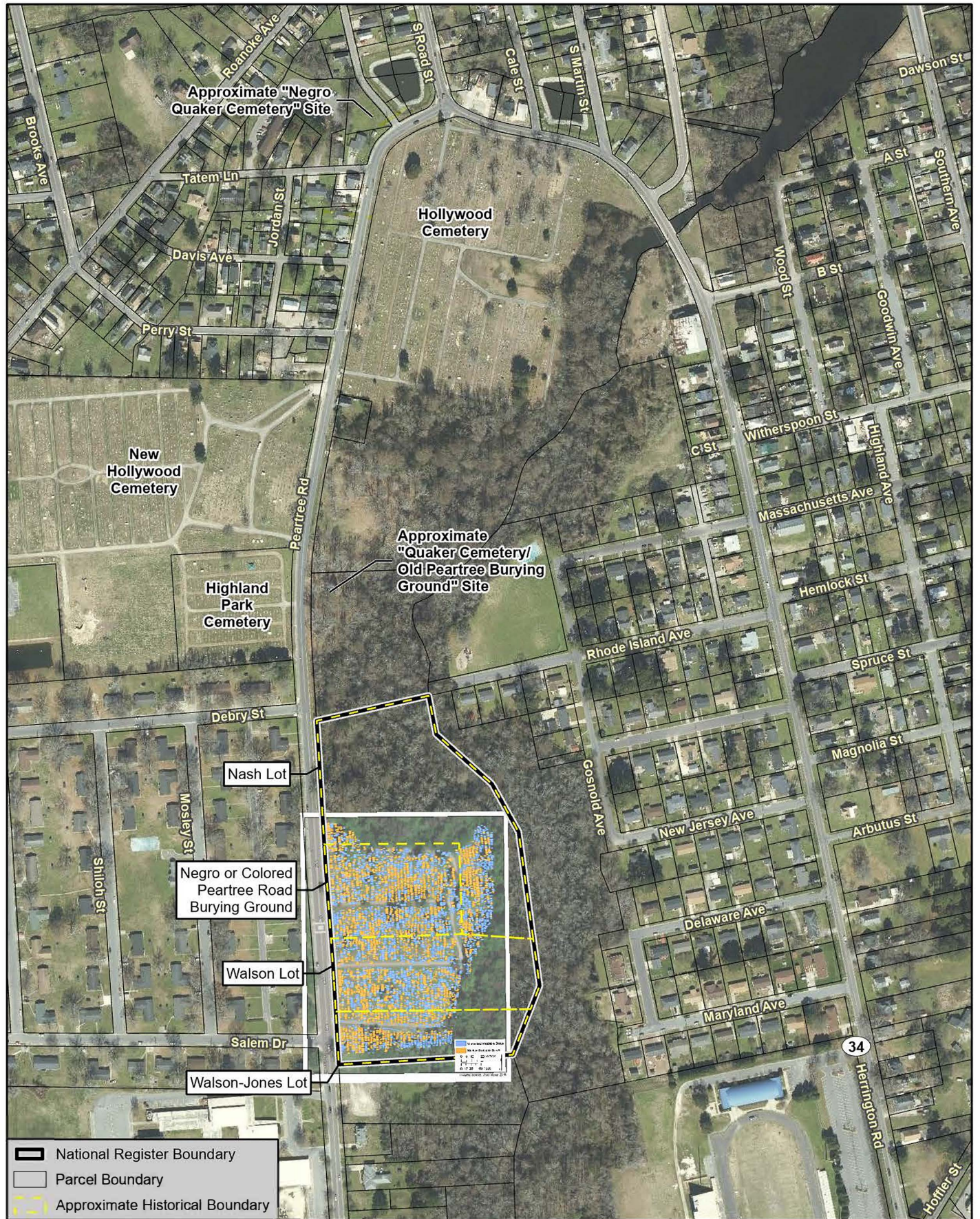


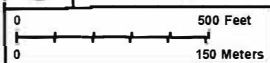
Figure 5. Historical Boundaries and 2022 GPR Results

Oak Grove Cemetery
Elizabeth City, North Carolina

Data Sources: Stantec (2024),
NCOneMap (2024),
New South Associates (2022)
Aerial Source: NCOneMap (2024)

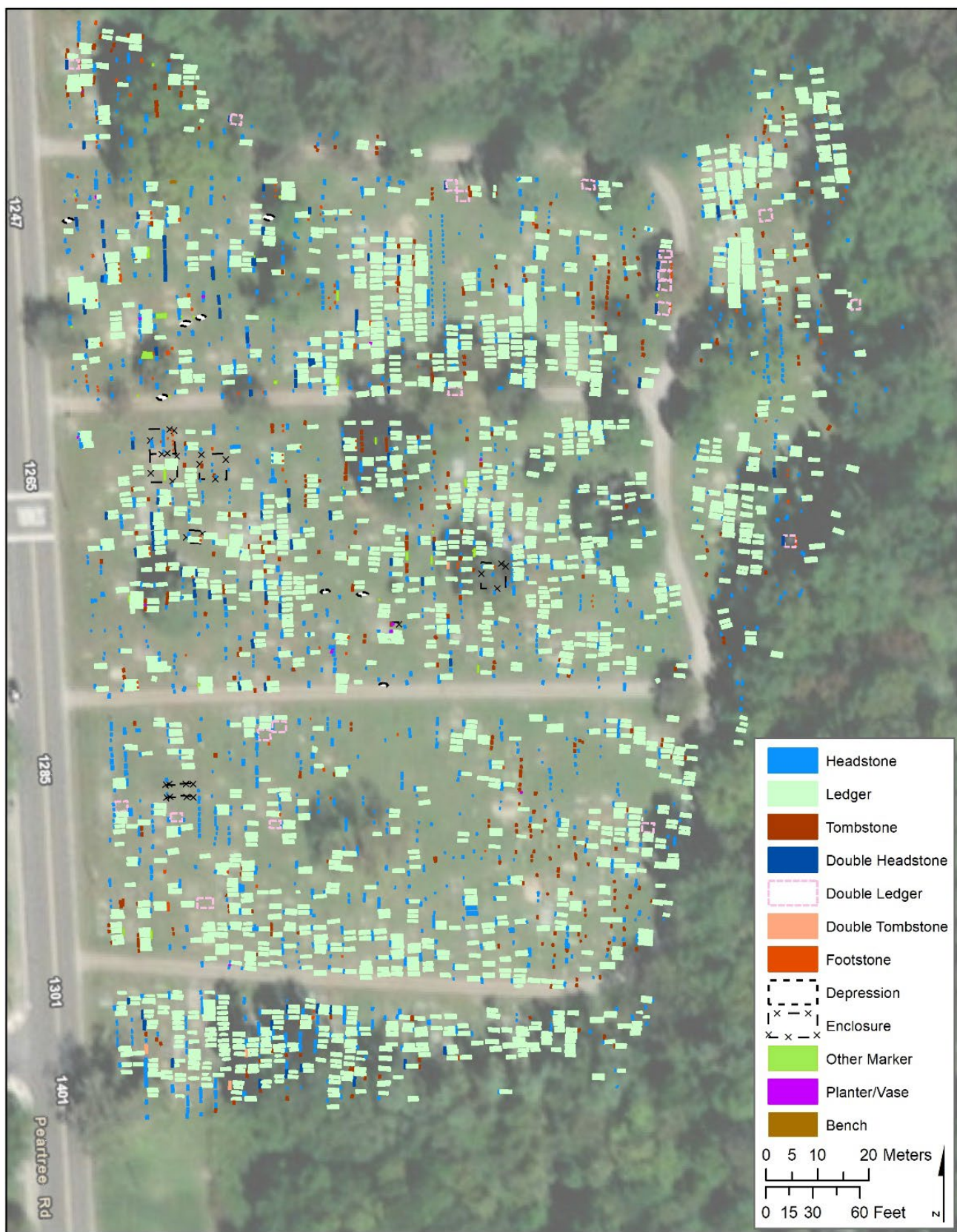


Stantec



Date: 9/6/2024

Path: U:\2353\235301456\old oak grove cemetery hist.aprx - oak grove cemetery figure 5 historical boundaries and gpr 20240906.sgl



Imagery Source: Vivid Maxar 2019

Figure 6. Grave marker map of Oak Grove Cemetery. Source: New South Associates 2022.

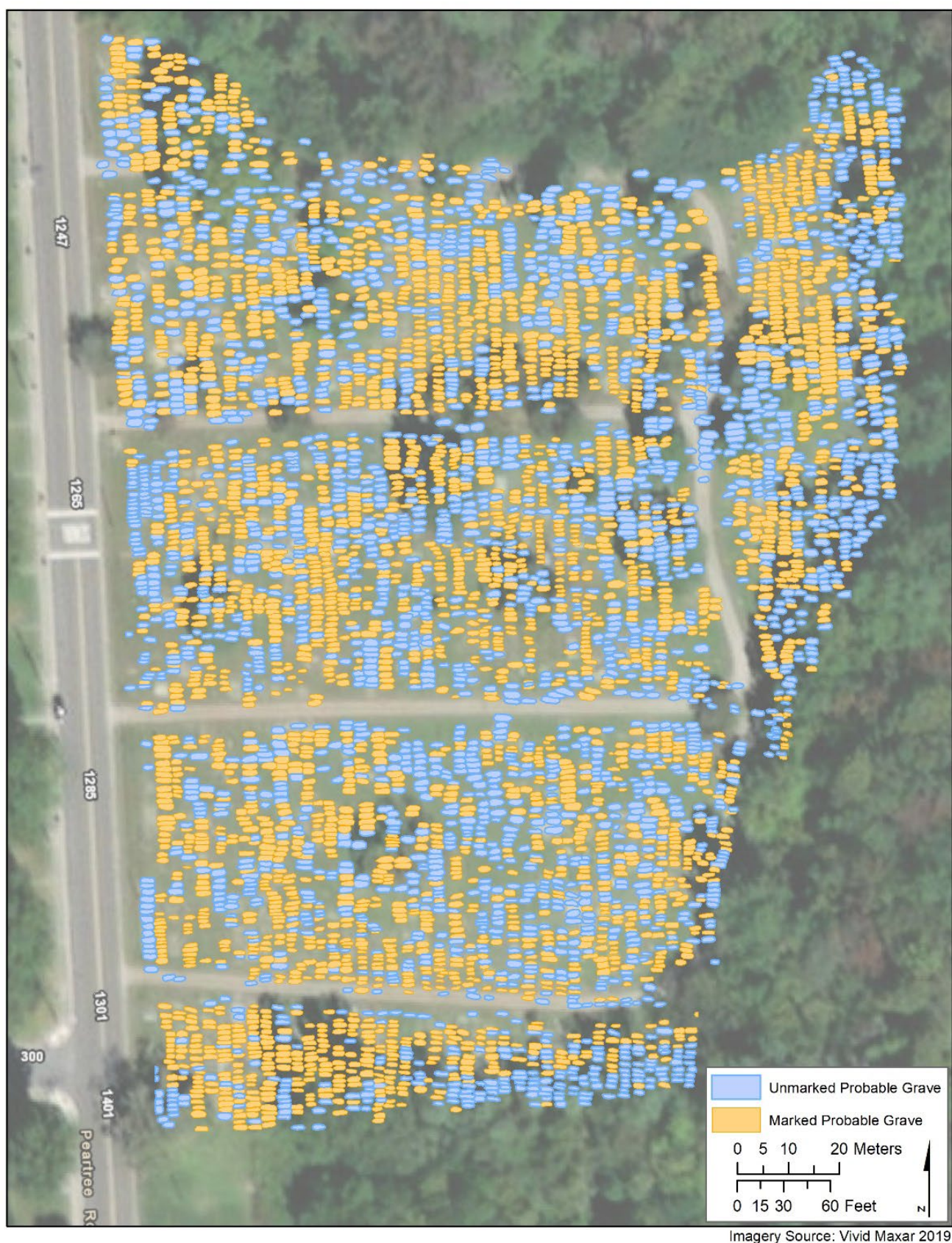


Figure 7. Probable burials in Oak Grove Cemetery. Source: New South Associates 2022.