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*Washington University in St. Louis*

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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

*Department of American Cultural Studies*

Washington Park Cemetery: The History and Legacies of a Sacred Space

By Terri Williams

A thesis presented to  
The Graduate School  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts

December 2018  
St. Louis, Missouri

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Terri Williams

*Washington University in St. Louis*

*December, 2018*

Dedicated to Kenneth L. Coleman



ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Washington Park Cemetery: History and Legacies of a Sacred Space

for the Department of American Cultural Studies

by

Terri Williams

Masters of Arts in American Culture Studies

Washington University in St. Louis, 2018

Professor Denise Ward- Brown

Dean William F. Tate

Michael R. Allen

Washington Park Cemetery (WPC) is an historically African American cemetery that has struggled to endure countless years of mistreatment and negligence. It is important to identify not only the cemetery itself as sacred, but also the legacies and stories of those who are laid to rest in the space. Provided is a comprehensive history of the once prominent African American cemetery that examines its origins, various controversies, and current physical state. Since the history of this cemetery has never been collected and compiled into a comprehensive document, this research serves as a historical tool that allows individuals to learn about the triumphs and hardships African Americans have experienced in life and death at WPC.

# Introduction

Just north of St. Louis City, near the intersection of interstates 70 and 170 lies a burial ground that holds generations of African American history. Now, covered in untamed greenery and foliage, it is nowhere near the charmingly impressive landscape that it was originally developed to be. The grass stands tall and walkways are cluttered with wild tree limbs and branches. Washington Park Cemetery (WPC) is nothing but a former shell of what was once identified as a premiere a burial ground for African Americans in the St. Louis metropolitan area.



*Figure Intro:1 View of the Interstate 70 from the southern section of WPC.*  
(Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG.)

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, WPC was designated the final resting place of some of the most influential African Americans in St. Louis history. Biographies of some of those individuals are included in this thesis. Notable African American figures buried at WPC include, but are not limited to, attorney George L. Vaughn, politician John C. Caston; St. Louis philanthropist Preston Myree; Lieutenant Ira B. Cooper, and journalist Joseph E. Mitchell.

Although these individuals are not often mentioned in reference to St. Louis history; their impact upon history is undeniable.

Typically, burial grounds are identified as sacred. For many of the African Americans buried in WPC, this sacredness was identified with beliefs associated with Christianity and the church. Unfortunately, it's sacred status as a burial ground has been neglected, desecrated, and nullified repeatedly. The deceased have been physically disturbed multiple times for what has been labeled by many as *urban expansion* and others by others, a continual disrespect and mistreatment of black lives... even in death. Modifications made to the burial grounds and confiscation of land have focused on the *advancement of* St. Louis's transportation system; starting with the construction of the Mark Twain Expressway (Interstate 70) in 1956. This trend to usurp WPC's sacredness continued in 1972 when St. Louis city officials were involved in the controversial purchase of cemetery grounds and airspace north of the expressway. During the 1990's thousands of graves were removed from the northern half of the cemetery to clear way for further Lambert Airport expansion and the creation of the Bi-State Development Agency's Metro-Link light rail system. A victim of cruel mismanagement by ownership in the 1980's; the cemetery has not had a burial in over thirty years

## Chapter 1

# WPC is a Sacred Space

Sacred spaces are religious places of worship, holy sites, or spaces of burial. Historical research and documentation of funeral rites have allowed historians to identify some of the world's oldest funeral rituals and relevance of death rites to respective cultures. Traditional burial rituals vary across the world; influenced by faith, religion, race, ethnicity, and tradition. However, no matter the variables, a common theme remains that burials and burial grounds are sacred to life. “The sense of sacredness seems to be associated with the dead and the rites performed for them.”<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 1.1 Headstone at WPC covered in grass. (Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG.)*

For African Americans, the identity of sacredness in relation to death has evolved from the shores of West Africa to the American mainland. Specifically, this evolution has occurred between West African spirituality and the traditions of African American Christian faith. In many West and Central African cultures “belief in an afterlife encouraged adherence to the

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Holm and John Bowker, *Sacred Place* (London: Continuum, 2003).42.

shared tenant that the dead must be interred according to custom.”<sup>2</sup> Although incorporated through a different faith system, customs associated with death are still followed in the African American community today. Dr. Lerone Martin states, “There’s some thought particularly within African-American religious tradition that if we don’t conduct ourselves and carry out this ritual properly...our loved one will sometimes visit us in ways to let us know that they are not pleased about how their funeral was handled.”<sup>3</sup>

Tenants of West African beliefs and customs evolved and translated to new burial rituals for the African enslaved and their descendants. Over time, a fusion of African and westernized Christian rituals have manifested into a large part of the modern African American burial experience. An understanding of this evolution, and the spiritual connection between burial and the belief in the afterlife in the African American tradition, is why WPC is a consecrated space.

## **The Evolution of African American Burial Grounds**

Throughout American history “segregation pervaded all of American life; including death.”<sup>4</sup> Pre-American Civil War, most plantation owners required the racial segregation of burial grounds on their land. As “Africans endured the long period of slavery in the American South, they continued some of their burial traditions.”<sup>5</sup> The enslaved were oftentimes allowed; if not required, to bury their own dead. This allowed them limited ability to incorporate some traditional African practices into the burial procedures. In *Becoming America*, John Butler states,

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<sup>2</sup> King, Charlotte. "Separated by Death and Color: The African American Cemetery of New Philadelphia, Illinois." *Historical Archaeology* 44, no. 1 (2010): 125-37. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.wustl.edu/stable/27820824>.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Larone Martin, interview by Denise Ward-Brown, May 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Kathy McCoy, "Afro-American Cemeteries in St. Louis," *Gateway Heritage* 6, no. 3 (1985)

*“Eighteenth-century British mainland colony plantations allowed slaves to bury their dead with at least some African customs.” Even though they suppress other African religious practice, they felt reluctant to intrude directly upon slave burial rights.”<sup>6</sup>*

Especially through the evil and dehumanizing act of American slavery, death still demanded a sacred reverence. At times, the enslaved possessed ability to acknowledge and honor burial practices and faiths of their ancestors. Such actions provided the opportunity to pass rich cultural tradition from generation to generation. It is unclear if and when many of these traditions may have lost their original meaning and now only serve as symbolic gesture. In contrast, some scholars believe burial privileges extended to the enslaved were freedoms “traded off against “the more powerful unfreedoms of the institution of slavery.”<sup>7</sup>

Burial services were often held at times and places hidden from public eye; at night, usually after the full workday. These services served as a mourning ritual, as well as, a social gathering. Funerals were one of the few times the enslaved were allowed to gather in large groups without surveillance. The deceased were often buried on property owned by the enslaver; in undesirable plantation grounds away from the plantation owner’s family plots. St. Louis history records the practice of enslaved people being buried in cemeteries with their oppressors.<sup>8</sup>

During slavery, it was not uncommon for gravesites and funerals of the enslaved to reflect African ritual and traditions. West Central-African cultures like the Akan of Ghana and the Bakongo people of the Democratic Republic of Zaire influenced many African American burial traditions.<sup>9</sup> Leaving items that belonged to the deceased at the gravesite, and decorating

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<sup>6</sup> Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, (2001).221.

<sup>7</sup> Jamieson, Ross W. "Material Culture and Social Death: African-American Burial Practices," *Historical Archaeology* 29, no. 4 (1995): 41, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.wustl.edu/stable/25616423>.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Morris *Sacred Green Space; A Survey of Cemeteries in St. Louis County*,8.

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte King, "Separated by Death and Color: The African American Cemetery of New Philadelphia, Illinois,"127.

gravesites with seashells are examples of burial customs from these regions. Items belonging to the deceased were believed to possess their power. Graves covered in seashells have been discovered in southern states where American slavery was prevalent.<sup>10</sup>

The second line in New Orleans funeral processions to and from the gravesite is a prominent example of African Americans continuing to embrace rituals from Africa and



*Figure 1.2 Cemetery sign prohibiting the use of plants and shrubs at gravesites. (Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG.)*

American slavery. Over time, traditional singing and dancing during African American funeral services has proven to be highly culturally specific. The practice of positioning graves in certain directions has significant meaning in African tradition as well. Graves that face east are often associated with the rising of the sun.

Traces of African rituals have been identified at WPC, however, there is no evidence these traces have direct correlation with African custom. For example, many of gravesites along the perimeter of WPC cemetery face east. There is no evidence to support if their positioning relies solely on the tradition of African burial ritual or belief. Physical negligence and disturbance of the grounds have erased artifactual

evidence over time. Decoration restrictions placed on grave markers by former owner, Harlan Brown, also attributes to lack of evidence.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

Some traditions may not have been attempted at WPC because they were prohibited. During Harlan Brown's tenure as owner at WPC from 1956 until 1986, grave markers were not allowed to have photographs, and mourners were prohibited from planting flowers or greenery around gravesites.<sup>11</sup> Since there has not been a burial at WPC for nearly thirty years, there are no newer graves sites to examine for supporting evidence. WPC's history has negatively affected the possibility of establishing a true connection to African tradition. That stated, general knowledge of African American burial experience serves as a basis for inference.

## **WPC and Christianity**

When WPC was established, the Christian faith was definitively a spiritual foundation in the lives of many African Americans. To combat the emotional and physical horrors of slavery and the subsequent systematic and legislative oppression and violence, the African American church became a source of refuge. Just as many African cultures; Christian principals taught followers that after death, spirits transitioned to another world. Through Christianity as a belief system, many felt reassured of a peaceful transition into the afterlife.

As in West African tradition, death has important symbolic and literal meanings in the Christian faith. Through Christian baptism, an individual "dies unto themselves" and is "reborn as a new creature into life as a child of God". In physical death, the soul leaves the body and is reunited with its creator away from "this world". Although the Bible was constantly used by the oppressor as a tool to justify the use of slavery, African Americans grew to interpret the scriptures as uplifting examples of the Christian God as a deliverer.

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<sup>11</sup> Kathy McCoy, "Afro-American Cemeteries in St. Louis," *Gateway Heritage* 6, no. 3 (1985), 33.



Biblical texts read to enslaved worshippers included the story of the Israelites being carried out of the bondage of Egypt by God. Biblical stories like this helped to build a faith system that would allow an entire race of people to interpret death as a gateway to peace, joy, and salvation. Just as Jesus conquered the grave after death, so could they through their faith. In *This Far by Faith*, author Juan Williams explains, “Individual black people took on a cloak of faith, an unshakable belief that God would carry them through slavery and lift them up to freedom.”<sup>12</sup>In the African American Christian tradition, the idea of freedom transcends the boundaries of this world and reaches heaven. In death, an individual can view themselves as truly free from the oppression of this world and finally at peace.

A familiar Biblical scripture used at burial services in the African American tradition comes from 2 Corinthians 5:8. It states, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”<sup>13</sup> Scriptures such as this provide solace and peace to mourners. This thought of one day obtaining freedom after death provides enabling strength to persevere through the burdens of this world. Funerals and interments are intended to leave mourners with the satisfaction of their loved ones “resting in peace”. This expectation was no different than those who have buried loved ones at WPC



Figure 1.3 Cross shaped headstone at WPC, Terri Williams Personal Collection

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<sup>12</sup> Juan Williams and Quinton Hosford. Dixie, *This Far by Faith: Stories from the African-American Religious Experience* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2003),2.

<sup>13</sup> <sup>13</sup> *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

### **“Honoring Those We Love”**

*“I’ve heard this said... there are two times when we get recognized as a people. When you are born, and when you die. I think that for us... we hold the death process in high esteem. This is our last chance to honor those we love.”<sup>14</sup>*

In conversation with President and CEO of Officer Funeral Home, P.C, Bernadette Officer, she articulated the significance of African American funerals, burials, and viewing of the deceased. African Americans have suffered centuries of unjust, and at times, violent lives and deaths. Funeral services and burials have been revered in the African American community because they give African Americans the ability to honor loved ones with dignity; regardless of those circumstances. In Officers words, “We hold our loved ones and the death process at a high esteem. This is our last chance to honor those we love, our family...I think because we experience undue hardship on all levels of our lives.”<sup>15</sup> Since 1918, four generations of the Officer family have provided personalized and professional funeral services. Founders, William and Annette Officer were interred at WPC in the early 1950’s.

Ms. Officer believes the desecration of the body and a burial site is a serious offense. When Officer Funeral Home was involved with the removal and reinterment of individuals at WPC for the Bi-State and Lambert Airport expansion projects in the 1990’s, Officer made it priority to perform a committal service for each reinterment the establishment serviced. All staff were required to dress in full uniform attire, and traditional scripture reading, and prayers were performed. When asked why she enforced such detail she responded, “Because that’s just respect. My mother used to say, ‘I am not in the disposal business. I am in the funeral business.’ She made that distinction.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bernadette Officer, interview by author, August 21, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

Occurrences at Washington Park Cemetery have resulted in bodies being exhumed, removed, and improperly buried for what many outside the African American community view as *progress*. Washington Park Cemetery is a sacred place. However, “Particularly abused by progress have been the final resting places of African Americans.”<sup>17</sup> Although ritual and faith systems have changed, burial grounds and funeral procedures have maintained a vital and sacred role within the African American community. The following chapter will explain how sacred grounds at WPC have been disrespected in existence.

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<sup>17</sup> Jon Van Der Graff, "St. Louis Must Learn to Honor It's Dead," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, February 3, 1993, accessed March 24, 2018, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

## Chapter 2

# History of WPC

A hundred years prior to the conception of Washington Park Cemetery, burial grounds were confined to small spaces; often on church grounds or private property. These sacred spaces were identified as graveyards. Burial grounds would not be identified as cemeteries until 19<sup>th</sup> century. The intentions of these quaint burial grounds were sacred spaces that focused on the spiritual well-being of the dead. “For example, in as early as 1770 in St. Louis, Catholic priests began burying deceased parishioners in consecrated burial grounds.”<sup>1</sup>

Eventually in St. Louis, the combination of population growth, property value escalation within city limits, and threat of disease caused a shift in paradigm. As the St. Louis population grew, property became more valuable for residential or business use. It was unprofitable for landowners to use their property for burial grounds instead of residential or commercial space. Once a burial ground was full, there was no longer any potential to make money. Health scares motivated the removal of cemeteries from residential areas.<sup>2</sup> The practice of burying dead bodies in close proximity to the living became viewed as unsanitary. Specifically, in St. Louis, an ordinance was passed in 1823 restricting the creation of any new burial grounds within city limits.<sup>3</sup> Deadly disease outbreaks, such as yellow fever and cholera, were blamed on the

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Morris, *Sacred Green Space: A Survey of Cemeteries in St. Louis County* (St. Louis, MO: A. Morris, 2000), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Marianna Riley, "Study of Cemeteries Reveals, History Insight," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, September 28, 1998, Accessed June 3, 18. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1904683437/pagelevelImagePDF/68E290DBF20A4A28PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.

<sup>3</sup> "Burial Laws 1823," St. Louis Genealogical Society, August 4, 2016, accessed November 30, 2018, <https://stlgs.org/research-2/life-death/burials/burial-laws-1823>.

proximity of the dead to the living population. As the boundaries of St. Louis expanded west, graveyards within city limits were closed. The bodies interred in those sites were removed and placed in cemeteries located on the outskirts of the city. At the time, the outskirts of the city was rural farmland.

American Rural Cemeteries followed the design of the Pere Lachaise cemetery established in 1804 in Paris, France.<sup>4</sup> This cemetery design introduced people to graveyards that considered emotions of mourners, as well as the dignity of the dead. The pastoral landscape and serene sitting areas provided a sense of relaxation, and respite for the living. The placement of burial grounds to the outskirts of cities was intended to allow mourners the ability to leave the cares of the world behind and concentrate on spiritual meditation.<sup>5</sup> “The main elements of the rural cemetery include: a location outside the city, rolling hills, picturesque vistas, winding roadways, planned landscape, and many family monuments.”<sup>6</sup> In 1831, the first rural cemetery in America was created in Cambridge, Massachusetts.<sup>7</sup>

The first cemetery in St. Louis to utilize rural design was Bellefontaine Cemetery in 1849.<sup>8</sup> Still in operation today, Bellefontaine Cemetery never practiced “a segregation policy for gravesites.”<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, St. Louis was a heavily segregated city. Bellefontaine Cemetery’s lack of segregation policy was an anomaly. Racially segregated burial practices resulted in the creation of many African American Cemeteries in St. Louis, including Washington Park Cemetery.

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Morris, *Sacred Green Space: A Survey of Cemeteries in St. Louis County*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> "Bellefontaine Cemetery," Bellefontaine Cemetery, accessed November 16, 2018, <http://bellefontainecemetery.org/destination/history/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ann Morris, *Sacred Green Space; A Survey of Cemeteries in St. Louis County*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia J. Finney, "Landscape Architecture and the "Rural" Cemetery Movement," *Focus on Global Resources*, 2012, , accessed November 24, 2018, <https://www.crl.edu/focus/article/8246>.

<sup>8</sup> Bellefontaine Cemetery," Bellefontaine Cemetery.

<sup>9</sup> Joe Holleman, "Plots at Bellefontaine Cemetery Hold Stories of Both Famous and Forgotten Black St. Louisans," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, February 3, 2008, accessed March 3, 2018.

## The Establishment of Washington Park

Following the trending style of rural cemetery design, WPC manifested under the direction and efforts of G.D. Joyce, Andrew H. Watson, and Joseph Hauer in 1921. The 75-acre tract was purchased from prominent businessman B.H. Lang for \$50,000 in 1920.<sup>10</sup>

By occupation, Joyce was partner in the Joyce Surveying Company, Watson was a lawyer, and Hauer was a member of the St. Louis Real Estate Board. Collectively, these white businessmen pooled their talents and resources to establish the segregated Washington Park Cemetery at Natural Bridge and Brown Roads; in today's city limits of Berkeley, Missouri.

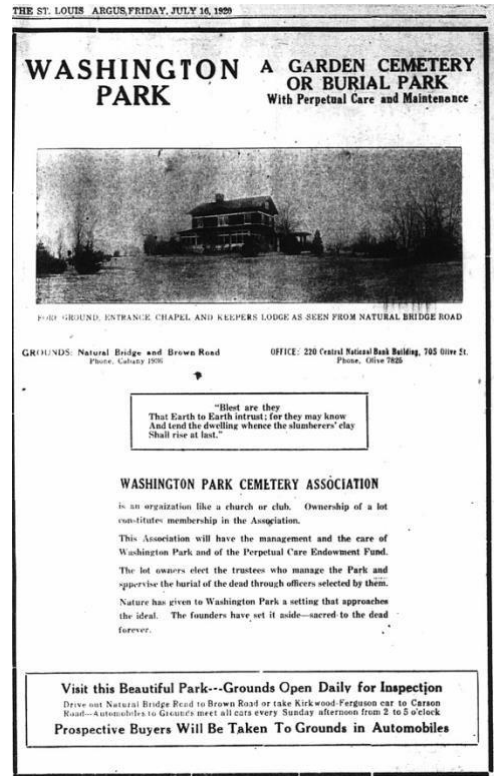


Figure 2.1 Advertisement for WPC placed in the *St. Louis Argus* from 1920. (St. Louis Argus, 1920.)

Washington Park was not the first African American cemetery in St. Louis. Racially segregated cemeteries were not a new concept. Greenwood Cemetery and Father Dickson Cemetery, founded in 1873 and 1903 respectively, are African American cemeteries.<sup>11</sup> Along with WPC, these cemeteries initially provided respectful resting places for African Americans in the St. Louis region in response to Jim Crow laws. Prior to this era, enslaved African Americans were buried on the property of their owners. Free African Americans were often buried in potter's fields or church graveyards.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "County Residents Object to Negro Burial Ground," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, September 9, 1920, accessed March 3, 18, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9108934/wpc1920/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ann Morris, *Sacred Green Space; A Survey of Cemeteries in St. Louis County*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

The creation of burial grounds like WPC, Greenwood, and Father Dickson became popular during the era in which African American undertakers gained prominence. Educational opportunities in mortuary sciences after the Civil War, allowed African Americans to receive proper training in the field. The ability to choose African American undertakers and an African American cemetery allowed the community to control the burial and funeral rites of those within their communities. Although a segregated experience, the use of African American funeral directors in African American cemeteries truly reflected the burial process in the African American tradition.

Washington Park Cemetery was designed to be anything but small or confined. Originally, the space was intended to inter up to 90,000 individuals.<sup>13</sup> The vast landscape followed the trending fashion of blending the concepts of public parks, and sacred spaces. The cemetery utilized the beauty of planted trees, paved walkways, and benches. In an original advertisement in *The St. Louis Argus* circa 1920, Washington Park Cemetery is described as “A Cemetery Yet a Lovely Garden Spot where Not of a Woe Obtrudes it’s Melancholy”. Joyce, a primary designer of Washington Park, had previous experience designing segregated “for-profit suburban lawn park cemeteries for whites.”<sup>14</sup> Although WPC was a segregated cemetery for African Americans, it’s design and landscape was not inferior to cemeteries Joyce had previously designed.

In its genesis, there was a promise of perpetual care. A.H. Watson was responsible for establishing the real estate trust, Washington Securities Company. The trust was established

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<sup>13</sup>“County Residents Object to Negro Burial Ground,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, September 9, 1920, accessed March 3, 18, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9108934/wpc1920/>.

<sup>14</sup>Michael R. Allen, “No Landscape Tells But One Story, No History Follows But One Path: Considering Washington Park Cemetery and Narratives of a Divided City,” *Higher Ground: Honoring Washington Park Cemetery, Its People and Place*, , accessed September 24, 2017, <http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/washington-park/essays/michael-r-allen>.

so he and his partners “could manage the perpetual care endowment funds separately from the management of the cemetery.”<sup>15</sup> The perpetual care endowment fund was established, but it is defunct today. It is unclear how or when those funds dissolved.<sup>16</sup>

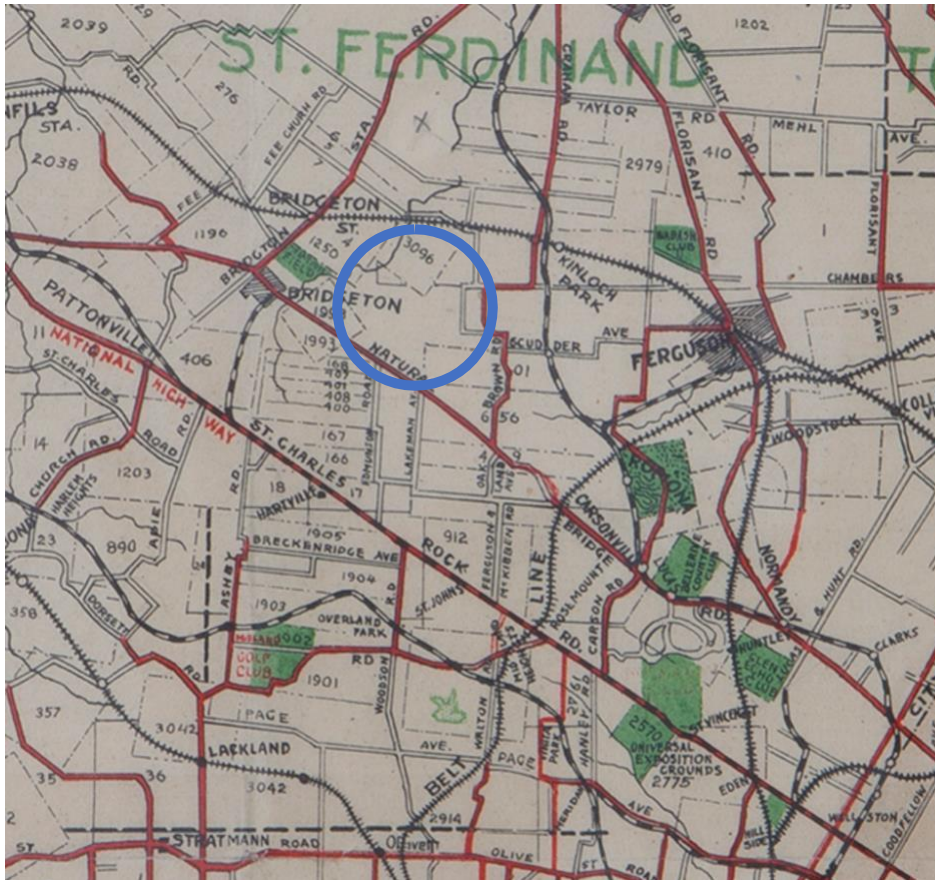


Figure 2.2 Automobile road map from 1921. This map was drawn before the establishment of WPC. WPC was established in 1921 near the intersections of Natural Bridge and Brown Rd. Location is indicated with the blue circle placed on map by author. (Charles Hoelscher Maps, “Lib64: Automobile road map of St. Louis County,” WUSTL Digital Gateway Image Collections & Exhibitions, accessed November 16, 2018, <http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/items/show/13438>.)

At the time of its creation, WPC’s location placed the cemetery in close proximity to mostly white residential neighborhoods. Just five miles northeast of WPC was the city of

<sup>15</sup> Morris Ann, *Sacred Green Space*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Michael R. Allen, “No Landscape Tells But One Story, No History Follows But One Path: Considering Washington Park Cemetery and Narratives of a Divided City”.



Kinloch, “Missouri’s first all- black city.”<sup>17</sup> With exception to the geographical proximity to Kinloch, WPC was enveloped by surrounding white towns. As an African American cemetery, Washington Park catered not only to the citizens of Kinloch, but African American communities throughout the St. Louis and East St. Louis regions. The use of the land to inter people of color was met with great resistance given its location near white communities. The racial climate in St. Louis was tense.

In 1916, just four years prior to the establishment of Washington Park, St. Louis voters approved a segregation ordinance in St. Louis City. The ordinance prohibited citizens from purchasing homes in “neighbors that were 75% percent occupied by groups of another race.”<sup>18</sup> The following year, one of the deadliest mob attacks against African Americans in American history took place only 20 miles away in East St. Louis, Illinois. When Joyce, Hauer, and Watson originally purchased WPC “property owners protested against its use as a negro cemetery.”<sup>19</sup> To appease neighborhood concerns, the cemetery owners initially offered to sale the property; even at a loss.<sup>20</sup> None of their offers were ever accepted.

Prior to the official opening of WPC, the owners of WPC used various tactics to gain customer attraction. A primary advertisement ploy was the use of some of the cemetery grounds for social gatherings. A small piece of cemetery property was set aside to host African American church and organizational gatherings. At these gatherings, participants would possibly be approached by salesmen seeking to sell burial plots. An article in the St. Louis Post Dispatch

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<sup>17</sup> John C. Wright, *Kinloch: Missouri's First All Black Town* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012),7.

<sup>18</sup> Jeannette Cooperman, "The Story of Segregation in St. Louis," *St. Louis Magazine*, October 17, 2014, accessed November 16, 2018, <https://www.stlmag.com/news/the-color-line-race-in-st.-louis/>.

<sup>19</sup> "Jazz in Sale of Cemetery Lots to Negroes Alleged," *St. Louis Star and Times*, August 26, 1921, accessed March 3, 18, [https://www.newspapers.com/clip/8404312/the\\_st\\_louis\\_star\\_and\\_times/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/8404312/the_st_louis_star_and_times/).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

stated “Watson and his associates have advertised in negro publications and have interested negro churches and lodges by inviting them to have “outings” on the tract...”<sup>21</sup>

Early advertisement for the cemetery offered free transportation to the grounds in order for prospective purchasers to view the land. While Watson argued the dignity of such outings, white residents complained of disorder and even acts of trespassing on their land. They claimed these outings hosted loud jazz bands whose music could be heard miles away from the cemetery and very late into the evening. Many white residents from surrounding neighborhoods threatened to contact local law enforcement to disperse of the crowds.

When WPC opened to the public for burials, grave plots were priced at one hundred dollars. Grieving family members and loved ones did not have to wait for the plot to be paid in full before they could bury their loved ones. The cemetery only required the first payment in order to proceed with burial. After an initial down payment of ten dollars, the buyers were allowed to pay the rest in installments. For the next decades, segregated cemetery was identified as a premiere burial ground intended for the use of African Americans.

Over the years, the cemetery changed ownership many times. In 1955, white businessmen Harlan Brown and Charles Lasky procured ownership of the cemetery. Under their ownership, the structural landscape of WPC underwent many changes. The first of which, was the invasive landscape divide created by the Mark Twain Expressway project of the mid 1950’s.

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<sup>21</sup>"County Residents Object to Negro Burial Ground," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, September 9, 1920, accessed March 3, 18, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/9108934/wpc1920/>.

## Mark Twain Expressway (Interstate-70) and WPC

The 1947 Comprehensive City Plan of St. Louis City predicted “that by 1970 barely a generation hence-the city proper can have 900,000 population.”<sup>22</sup> In addition to newer housing and public infrastructure, this expected population increase would require “adequate traffic ways for the added automobiles.”<sup>23</sup> However, that simply was not the case. The St. Louis population faced continual decline. St. Louis saw population decline from 85,6796 in 1950, to 62,2236 in 1970.<sup>24</sup> As of 2010, St. Louis only accounted for a population total of just under 320,000 people.<sup>25</sup>

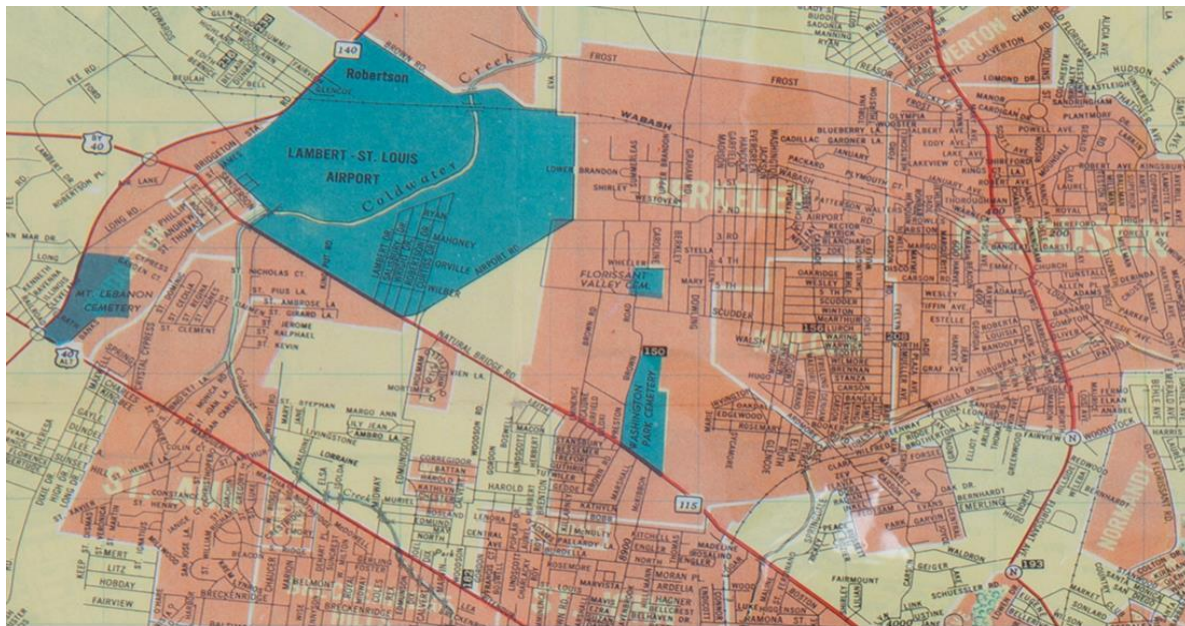


Figure 2.3 This map illustrates WPC territory in 1955, before the construction of the Mark Twain Expressway. (Ashburn Maps, “Lib62: St. Louis city map and adjoining municipalities,” WUSTL Digital Gateway Image Collections & Exhibitions, accessed November 16, 2018, <http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/items/show/13475>.)

<sup>22</sup> "The 1947 Comprehensive Plan." Comprehensive City Plan 1947, Accessed November 07, 2018. <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/archive/1947-comprehensive-plan/>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Dewar, Margaret E., and June Manning. Thomas. *The City after Abandonment*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

When creating the City Plan of 1947, its architects believed the city would grow and felt an expressway system was one of the only ways of alleviating an already congested traffic area. The Mark Twain Expressway, also known today as Interstate 70, was one of the three expressways thought to help solve the city's traffic problem. Financed primarily by the Federal Highways Act, construction of the Mark Twain Expressway officially began on November 14, 1956.<sup>26</sup> The expressway was intended to expand from downtown St. Louis to the Northeastern location of Lambert Airfield. At the time of the original proposal, WPC was located just south, parallel to the airfield. The expressway's dissection of the cemetery resulted in the separation "of nearly 12,000 bodies buried in the northern section from the rest of the cemetery."<sup>27</sup> Most of the citizen protest and opposition to the creation of the expressway stemmed from citizens of the neighborhoods that laid in the destruction path of the transit route. "With only minimal opposition, the Mark Twain Expressway opened for traffic" in 1960.<sup>28</sup>

Many African Americans within the St. Louis region believe the bodies that lie in the path of the expressway were not removed before construction began. Historians like Elsi Hamlin support this belief by stating, "there is no evidence any exhumations were done during done at Washington Park when Interstate 70 was constructed on part of its land."<sup>29</sup> Other researchers believe bodies removed during the construction of the expressway were simply dug up with bulldozers and dumped into mass graves.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Highway History," U.S. Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration, accessed November 30, 2018, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/50interstate.cfm>.

<sup>27</sup> Michael R. Allen, "No Landscape Tells But One Story, No History Follows But One Path: Considering Washington Park Cemetery and Narratives of a Divided City.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010), 62.

<sup>29</sup> Jon Van Der Graff, "St. Louis Must Learn to Honor It's Dead," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, February 3, 1993, accessed March 24, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1902721522/2CC624F029C04369PQ/1?accountid=15159>.

<sup>30</sup> Carolyn Tuft, "Disturbing the Living and the Dead," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis), May 15, 1994, accessed January 9, 18, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1903662161/pagelevelImagePDF/2131542DDD534277PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.



Figure 2.4 Advertisement for Mark Twain Expressway from 1961. ("No Pavement Could be Stronger Even if Carved from Solid Rock" advertisement. *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, July 30, 1961.)

Descendants of the deceased at WPC, like St. Louis resident John Parker, grew up hearing those exact statements from their parents. Parker's great grandparents were buried at WPC just prior to the construction of the expressway. When he was a child his mother told him, his grandparents were buried under the highway's pavement. As an adult, he inquired further about her statements to which she replied, "They just plowed right over everybody".<sup>31</sup> If this was true, the construction of the Mark Twain Expressway was the beginning of a cruel cycle of grave disturbances at WPC.

## The 1972 Lambert Airfield Scandal

Nearly 20-years after the construction of the Mark Twain Expressway, WPC underwent yet another traumatic transformation in the name of St. Louis's transportation system. In 1972, under the initial supervision of St. Louis City councilor Robert W. Van Dillon, the city purchased nine unoccupied acres of Washington Park cemetery, and aerial rights for 11.7 acres of land, for \$1,200,000 from Harlan Brown and Manuel Laskey. This deal was made for the benefit of Lambert Airfield; also owned by St. Louis City. WPC property, located north of the Mark Twain Expressway, was purchased to "ensure flight landing safety."<sup>32</sup> Most of this section of WPC did not possess gravesites. Only three graves and one monument were required to be

<sup>31</sup> John Parker, interviewed by Denise Ward- Brown, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Louis J. Rose, "City Paid \$350,000 Over Appraisal for Airport Tract." *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, October 8, 1972. Accessed March 7, 2018. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1901422412/pagelevelImagePDF/B18294CF86E04F78PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.

moved. Prior to completion of this deal, St. Louis City considered purchasing all of the WPC territory located north of Interstate 70. Lack of financial ability and fear of pushback from the African American community halted those efforts.

Before his death, Van Dillon negotiated the buying price of the cemetery property only \$1000 less than real estate appraiser John M. McCarthy's estimate of \$1.3 million. Three months prior to McCarthy's appraisal submission, another appraisal was conducted by Arthur C. Schneider. Schneider, considered an expert at cemetery appraisals, valued the 9 acres of purchased land \$350,000 dollars cheaper than McCarthy.<sup>33</sup> After the acquisition, an accusation was leveled that there was an over-exaggeration of the value of unused graves according to McCarthy's appraisal. When a reporter from the St. Louis Post Dispatch visited the cemetery in order to investigate the proceedings and grave plot pricing surrounding the purchase of land at WPC, a secretary spoke through a speaker system and informed the employees not to provide any information about grave prices.<sup>34</sup> It is suspected that voice belonged to future owner, Virginia Younger.

Initially, the purchase was publicly condemned by city officials, including former mayor Alphonso Cervantes. Mayor Cervantes and other members of the city's Board of Estimate and Approval claimed to be were unaware of another appraisal that evaluated the acquisition at a much lower price. Cemetery owners, Brown and Lasky, made significant profit from the

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<sup>33</sup> Louis J. Rose, "\$200,000 Fee in Airport Deal." *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, July 20, 1975, Accessed March 7, 2018 <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1903263141/pagelevelImagePDF/B18294CF86E04F78PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159> .

<sup>34</sup> Louis J. Rose, "City Paid \$350,000 Over Appraisal for Airport Tract," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, October 8, 1972, Accessed March 7, 18. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1901422412/pagelevelImagePDF/B18294CF86E04F78PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.



Figure 2.6 Map taken from *St. Louis Post Dispatch* illustrates section of WPC acquired in Lambert Airport acquisition. (Rose, Louis J. "City Paid \$350,000 Over Appraisal for Airport Tract." *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, October 8, 1972, <https://search-proquestcom.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1901422412/pagelevelImagePDF/B18294CF86E04F78PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.)

acquisition. Both remained relatively silent throughout the process regarding the appraisal values of the grave plots.

It is believed Brown and Lasky remained silent on the matter due to a possible backdoor deal made with local businessman Anthony Sansone. Three years after they sold cemetery property to city officials, investigative reporters at *St. Louis Dispatch* discovered evidence that suggested, Sansone, an associate and former business partner of Mayor Cervantes, received a \$200,000 payment from Harlan Brown for negotiating the sale of the property in question.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, the newspaper suggested transactions and fee payments such as this were a common theme within the Cervantes administration. Investigative reports by Post-Dispatch staff discovered at least four other instances in which influential Democrats from Cervantes administration received monetary payment or negotiated land acquisitions for the airport's expansion.<sup>36</sup> Upon the discovery of Sansone's possible involvement with the WPC deal, a third appraisal was completed at the recommendation of the Federal Aviation Administration. This

<sup>35</sup> Louis J. Rose, "\$200,000 Fee in Airport Deal," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, July 20, 1975, Accessed March 7, 2018. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1903263141/pagelevelImagePDF/B18294CF86E04F78PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

appraisal valued the land at \$571,000.<sup>37</sup> That evaluation meant the city paid Brown and Lasky over \$600,000 above value for property and airspace at WPC.

## **WPC Mismanagement Under Virginia Younger**

WPC has changed ownership several times. However, no owner has become more infamous than Virginia Younger. In November of 1986, Younger received ownership of the cemetery from Harlan Brown.<sup>38</sup> Prior to ownership, Younger worked for Brown as the cemetery's secretary. By the time Younger became owner, the once nearly 90-acre site, dwindled to just over 55 acres of land. Younger maintained ownership of the property until January of 1991. Under her ownership, an estimated 925-1480 graves were dug at WPC.<sup>39</sup>

Younger's gross mismanagement of WPC ultimately led to the cemetery's downfall. Various complaints by members of the community began to surface during the late 1980's. Under Younger's tenure, accusations included, "poor maintenance of the grounds, late delivery of tombstones, and misrepresentation of the completion dates for foundations for tombstones."<sup>40</sup> During the 1990's, evidence even suggested Younger was responsible for mass graves on the site.

The most horrific of accusations was Younger's involvement with "missing or misplaced bodies" at WPC.<sup>41</sup> People visited the cemetery in hopes of paying respects to their loved ones only to discover the deceased not in the appropriate plots, or to find previously purchase

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> William C. Lhotka, "Fraud Action Names Owner of the Cemetery," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis), January 8, 1991, accessed January 19, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1903314084/pagelevelImagePDF/5D1CD3834F7E47BAPQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> William C. Lhotka, "Fraud Action Names Owner of the Cemetery.



headstones not in the correct place. Some suspected Younger of dumping bodies into graves and reselling the caskets. Such accusations and panic brought heavy newspaper coverage, and ultimately in 1989, criminal and civil investigations led by St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney, “Buzz” Westfall and Missouri Attorney General William Webster, and organized protest by The St. Louis Concerned Citizens Council.

Rev. Walter Johnson led the St. Louis Concerned Citizens Council. The group was comprised of disgruntled citizens who had relatives buried at WPC. Many members of the council admitted to never actually seeing their loved one buried at WPC. Instead they described attending an “outdoor service held at the edge of the cemetery.”<sup>42</sup> These services were held on cemetery grounds away from the actual burial plot the family purchased. Conducting these types of services never allowed family members to see the deceased lowered into the ground. Implementing burial services like this raised suspicion that Younger was in fact dumping bodies into graves and reusing purchased caskets.

Suspicious of wrongdoing were confirmed in August of 1990, when exhumations at the cemetery gave supporting evidence of grave mismanagement by Younger. At the request of the prosecuting attorney, Younger agreed to pay to exhume two gravesites in order to investigate complaints made on behalf of The St. Louis Concerned Citizens Council. The exhumations confirmed their worst fears. One grave was improperly marked, while the other contained the wrong casket.

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<sup>42</sup> Bill McClellan, "Of Racial Stereotypes Realities and Dreams," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis), August 1, 1990, accessed March 24, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1902244013/B31D6E0646EE424FPQ/1?accountid=15159>.

Westfall's investigation ultimately yielded no proof of criminal violations, but he "called management of the cemetery despicable."<sup>43</sup> Webster's investigation into possible consumer protection laws committed by Younger continued. In addition, Younger faced various civil suits from family members of those buried at WPC that totaled as estimated \$1.4 million. On many occasions Younger vowed to help families locate graves, but was unable to fulfill those promises.

In addition to these horrific complaints, cemetery employees complained of union violations committed by Younger. In 1990, two cemetery workers accused Younger of defaulting on their labor contracts. The complaints stated Younger "failed to pay the employees vacation pay, holiday pay, healthcare benefits, and allowance for uniforms."<sup>44</sup> They also accused Younger of hiring non-union workers to complete landscaping tasks around the cemetery.

Unlike Brown and Lasky, Younger was unable to make significant financial profit from ownership of the WPC. Instead, she ended up in financial ruin. On Tuesday, January 29, 1991, Younger was found dead in her home of an apparent suicide. It was suspected by a close friend that Younger's suicide was a result of her legal circumstances. She felt as if she was "being persecuted" and "everybody had turned against her."<sup>45</sup> Younger was only 46 years old.

After Younger's death, St. Louis City gained ownership of WPC. Cemetery territory north of the interstate was identified as abandoned and ultimately condemned by St. Louis City.

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<sup>43</sup> William C. Lhotka, "Cemetery's Owner Will Face State Legal Action," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, January 6, 1991, accessed March 24, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1903348325/A97F6F41E58F4484PQ/1?accountid=15159>.

<sup>44</sup> Cynthia Todd, "Cemetery Under Fire by Workers," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, September 23, 1990. Accessed March 7, 18. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1902255587/84ADB11F8A1A4513PQ/1?accountid=15159>.

<sup>45</sup> Kim Bell, "Owners Death Won't End Cemetery Suits," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, February 1, 1991. Accessed March 7, 18. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1903338567/DAD8660254764E02PQ/2?accountid=15159>.

Ownership rights of WPC eventually became divided by I-70. The City of St. Louis gained ownership of the cemetery property north of the interstate in 1991 and utilized it for Lambert Airport improvement and the development of the city's first light rail system, the Metro Link.<sup>46</sup> Eventually, two local attorneys purchased the southern portion of WPC in 1995.

## Lambert Airport and the Metro-link

In 1992, the City of St. Louis purchased the condemned WPC territory north of Interstate 70 for \$130,000.<sup>47</sup> The land was home to at least 12,000 graves. S. Louis City purchased the property for development of the Bi-State Metro-Link system and expansion and the improvement projects for Lambert Airport. Over the following decade, the Bi-State Development Agency and Lambert Airport jointly implemented a two-phase grave removal process at WPC. The attempt to propel St. Louis' transit system into a new era would be at the cost of exhuming and reintering thousands of African Americans buried at WPC. No descendants of the

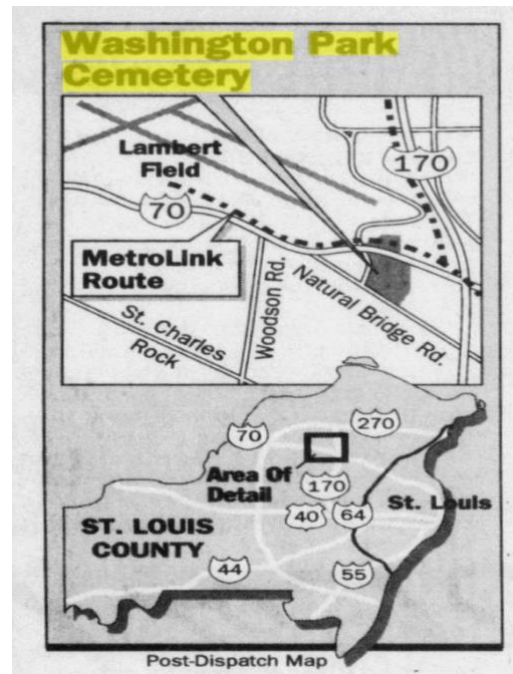


Figure 2.6 Map illustrates the proximity of WPC to the Metro Link Route, and Lambert. (William C. Lhotka, "Descendants Sought in Suit Involving Cemetery," December 17, 1992, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispstdispatchshell/docview/1902686855/126F9B919B4947B1PQ/6?accountid=15159>.)

<sup>46</sup> Carolyn Tuft, "Disturbing the Living and the Dead.

<sup>47</sup> William C. Lhotka, "Descendants Sought in Suit Involving Cemetery," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, December 17, 1992. Accessed June 3, 18. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispstdispatchshell/docview/1902686855/F96D83D373404601PQ/1?accountid=15159>.

deceased were financially compensated for the emotional distress that accompanied the removals.

The first phase of grave removals was essential to the construction of the Metro-Link light rail system route that extended from East St. Louis, Ill to Lambert Airport in St. Louis, MO. Completion of the light rail project halted when construction of the rail system reached WPC, located just east of Lambert. About 2,500 graves laid in the pathway of the Metro-Link route.<sup>48</sup>

At the time, the method for removing bodies from the construction site was still undetermined. However, Lambert officials began to seek descendants of the deceased that were subject for removal. In 1993, circuit court Judge Harry Stussie made a court ruling to determine just how Bi-State and Lambert would remove bodies that laid in the path of the light rail system. Only 300 families came forward to claim the remains of the deceased.<sup>49</sup>

Stussie ruled Bi-State would be allowed to complete construction through WPC's land, if they adhered to several stipulations he set in place. Among Stussie's stipulations, Bi-State would have to reinter the 2,200 unclaimed deceased to court-selected cemeteries, create a trust that ensured perpetual care at the new cemetery, reinter the 300 claimed bodies in a cemetery of the families choosing, and provide grief counseling to descendants of the deceased. The remains of unclaimed bodies were to be interred at St. Peters Cemetery or Calvary Cemetery; both located in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Exhumation began in June of 1993.<sup>50</sup> The removal and

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<sup>48</sup> William C. Lhotka, "Judge Rules for Metrolink." *St. Louis Post Dispatch*(St. Louis), May 21, 1993. Accessed June 3, 18. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1902741488/pagelevelImagePDF/F96D83D373404601PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.

<sup>49</sup> William C. Lhotka, "Final Resting Place: A Disturbing Trend," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis), May 22, 1993, accessed August 9, 18, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1902753647/1D1AF0B2422843ABPQ/8?accountid=15159>.

<sup>50</sup> Lori T. Yearwood, "Bi-State Moving Bodies from Cemetery," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis), June 22, 1993, accessed August 9, 18, <https://search-proquestcom.libpr oxy.wustl .edu/hnpstlouis postdispatchshell /docview/1902737424/1D1AF0B2422843ABPQ/17?accountid=15159>.

reinternment of all 2,500 bodies was financed by a \$6.5 million grant received from the Federal Aviation Association.<sup>51</sup>

Federal law mandated the presence of an archeologist and environmentalist at the grave removal sites.<sup>52</sup> Bi-State was initially responsible for hiring archeology firms to oversee the project. Among those hired for the position were Triad Research, the minority run archeological firm Ayudar, and archeologist Michael Weichman, from the Department of Natural Resources. Representatives from the St. Louis Urban League were on site to “provide grief counseling and witness the digs.”<sup>53</sup>

Archeologist were used to verify the identity of remains and to ensure state and federal laws were followed. By cross-referencing cemetery records with gravesite details; including headstones, and casket designs, the archeological team successfully identified nearly 1,200 remains. However, controversy erupted when Michael Weichman, and the head archeologist from Triad, Gary “Rex” Walters, were accused of ethical misconduct.

In the fall of 1993, accusations arose that claimed Walters removed human remains from the WPC site during the removal project. An investigation by the airport, prompted by Stat Rep. Charles Quincy Troupe, found the accusations to be true. Walters had in fact removed at least 221 sets of bones from unidentified corpses at WPC.<sup>54</sup> He stored the remains at facilities at

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Yvonne Samuel, "Airport Seeks Relatives of Deceased in Cemetery," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis), July 2, 1992, accessed June 19, 18, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1902703981/9D78D450154FDAPQ/4?accountid=15159>.

<sup>53</sup> Carolyn Tuft, "Disrespect for the Dead Sullies Reburials," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis), November 5, 1995, accessed February 7, 18, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1904001541/pagelevelImagePDF/CODEAAA8BD084B08PQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.

<sup>54</sup> Carolyn Tuft, "Disturbing the Living and the Dead".

University of Missouri, at Columbia, and in a refrigerated trailer in rural Missouri.<sup>55</sup> Walters attempted to justify his actions by claiming to conduct scientific research. He said, “There are no good skeletal, genetic studies available for this population-the lower socioeconomic class of African Americans- that we are aware of.”<sup>56</sup> Charges were leveled because Walters was hired to properly identify the remains; not to conduct independent research.

Later, further allegations arose from State Rep. Troup, that Walters had removed more remains from WPC. Walters denied the accusation of taking more bodies from the cemetery and no evidence further supported the claim. Walters was relieved of his position at WPC in December of 1993. He did not return the human remains to airport officials until April 1994; after he had been paid for his services. In total, Walters archeological firm was paid \$330,000.<sup>57</sup>

In September of 1994, Weichman was fired by Missouri’s Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). It was determined he did not perform his duties with the dignity and sensitivity the removal process required. Accusations included his failure to report Walter’s actions to the proper officials in a timely manner, and possession of a firearm in a MDNR vehicle.<sup>58</sup>

The discovery of misconduct performed by Walters and Wiechman prompted Lambert officials to relieve Bi-State of responsibilities overseeing the reburial process at WPC. Lambert officials took over the responsibility. After Lambert announced its intention to continue the plans of removing thousands more graves during the second phase of grave removals, Marylin

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Carolyn Tuft, "State Fires Archeology Supervisor," *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis), September 20, 1994, accessed June 19, 18, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1903674029/A8C7186AF8DB4000PQ/9?accountid=15159>.

Peaston, the African American archeologist from the Ayudar archeological firm, vocalized she witnessed other mistreatments of the deceased at WPC by Walters, and Weichman.

In a 1995, Peaston shared her experiences with the St. Louis Post Dispatch for a newspaper article. In the article she describes instances in which Weichman mocked the removal process by staging fake funerals and posing for photographs in unused caskets. She also details a moment when Weichman arranged remains of the deceased in the form of skull and crossbones.<sup>59</sup> One of the most horrendous details Peaston provided to the Post were those performed by Gary “Rex” Walters. The article stated

*“Walters walked up, grabbed a rib and cracked it off. She says he then took a leg bone and used a pair of pliers to pull out a molar. He put the remains in a grocery bag and noted the name and lot number...”*<sup>60</sup>

Peaston also express her opposition to the expedited removal process instituted after Lambert officials took over the removal process during phase one. Both Peaston and Weichman confirmed that Bi-State and Lambert officials pressured excavation teams to produce a certain number of removals a day. When Lambert took over responsibilities for the removals in December of 1993, an estimated 1,500 grave still needed to be reinterred by February 1994.<sup>61</sup> When phase one began, the body removal process at WPC was executed with sensitivity and respect to the deceased and their descendants. Workers carefully exhumed about twelve bodies a day using shovels and light equipment. Family members were given the opportunity to be on-site when the remains of their loved ones where exhumed and relocated. However, as time progressed and deadlines for completion neared, sensitivity to the process became inconsistent, and at times irrelevant to those performing the exhumations. Heavy machinery, provided by the

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<sup>59</sup> Carolyn Tuft, "Disrespect for the Dead Sullies Reburials".

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

airport, was used to remove bodies from plots. Use of such machinery in cold weather often damaged the caskets and sometimes the human remains inside them. At one point, workers were removing 100 graves a day.<sup>62</sup>

Airport director Lenard Griggs, attempted to assure the public, that the machinery was used carefully. However, Peaston recounted times when the caskets and remains of babies were destroyed by the use of heavy machinery.<sup>63</sup> Peaston witnessed workers perform an exhumation so quickly that “the coffins disintegrated and the skulls and pelvises cracked.”<sup>64</sup>

Phase two of grave removals began in the spring of 1997. This phase of the reinternment process focused on territory needed for the airport improvements. A 23-foot hill located on the northern section of WPC was considered a runway obstruction by the Federal Aviation Association (FAA). To remove the hill, over 9,500 bodies were removed from the site.<sup>65</sup> Before the removal process began, Judge Stussie issued the same guidelines to remove and reinter the graves during phase one.

Officials at Lambert Airport were determined to gain the public's trust for phase two of grave removals. To avoid repeating rushed and negligent practices that damaged many caskets and remains during phase one, Griggs stipulated only twelve graves to be removed a day. He also banned exhumations in the winter. This action would deter the temptation to use heavy machinery to exhume the bodies.

The archeological firm responsible for overseeing phase two of grave reinternment was the Environmental Research Center of Missouri (ERCM). This firm was selected by Griggs to

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> "Bodies at Cemetery Removed," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, April 5, 1997, accessed March 24, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1904364201/37B1D80BB8F743C9PQ/1?accountid=15159>.



oversee the project after the dismissal of Walters and Triad Research. This archeological firm was led by archeologist Craig Sturdevant. Instead of the Urban League Urban Planning and Development were hired to provide grief counseling to families.

### **Ronald Kuper, Kevin Bailey and WPC Today**

While Bi-State and Lambert officials decided the fate of WPC north of Interstate 70, Ronald Kuper and Charles Clardy were responsible for the burial grounds that lay south of the interstate. The property was purchased by Kuper and Clardy, in an estate tax sell during the early 1990's. The purchase price was \$3,500.<sup>66</sup> Due to drawn out legal proceedings, Kuper and Clardy were not legally awarded ownership of the property until 1995.<sup>67</sup> When Kuper and Clardy gained official ownership, the land was overgrown with weeds and debris was everywhere. Eventually, Clardy's involvement with the cemetery diminished.

Newspaper articles described Ronald Kuper's efforts to keep the cemetery clean by cutting the grass himself, and using personal funds to purchase necessary equipment. In addition, Kuper made public pleas to get assistance with the upkeep of the property. One influential helper was African American funeral director, Ted Foster, owner of Ted Foster & Sons Funeral Home. Foster felt an obligation to assist with the upkeep of WPC. Foster sponsored the upkeep for Section 1 of the cemetery in the late 90's.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Victor Volland, "Washington Park's New Owner Tries to Bring Cemetery Back up to Par," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, June 15, 2000, North Post sec., accessed January 19, 18, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1905045208/pagelevelImagePDF/9F9827B092D24B4EPQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=15159>.

<sup>67</sup> Riley, Marianna. "Owner Trying to Restore Cemetery." *St. Louis Post Dispatch*(St. Louis), July 22, 1995. Accessed October 19, 18. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1903826546/F96D83D373404601PQ/22?accountid=15159>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

Although Kuper made attempts to restore WPC to its former glory, he faced many critics. Unknowledgeable about his non-involvement with the northern half of the cemetery, many people blamed Kuper for the Bi-State and Lambert removals.<sup>69</sup> Others were angered by the appearance of the cemetery. Kuper was never able to rid the entire cemetery of overgrown forestry and debris. The following owner of WPC questioned Kuper's true intentions of purchasing the cemetery and his willingness to clean it up.

Washington Park Cemetery was purchased from Ronald Kuper by Kevin Bailey for \$2 in July of 2009. To protect himself from any legal ramifications, the cemetery is currently owned and operated under Bailey's company, Amazing Grace Enterprises. Bailey's purchase of WPC was not inspired by monetary gain. Unlike his predecessors, Bailey is African American and has family buried at WPC. His connection to WPC was established well before he became the owner, and will last as long as his family is interred there. His father was murdered when he just two years old and has been buried at WPC for nearly 40 years. He spent his childhood visiting the cemetery to visit the graves of his father and other family members to celebrate many personal milestones.

As an adult, Bailey moved to New York. He eventually moved back to the St. Louis area in 2006. Following the tradition of his childhood, he made a visit to the cemetery. The cemetery was not the neatly landscaped space he remembered as a child. Instead, weeds were overgrown, the grass was uncut, and headstones were toppled. Bailey felt compelled to contact then owner, Ronald Kuper. In following months, Bailey and Kuper met several times to discuss the status of the cemetery. Eventually Bailey and Kuper were able to reach an agreement in which Kuper gave Bailey power of attorney over the cemetery. The two had an understanding that Bailey

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<sup>69</sup>Victor Volland, "Washington Park's New Owner Tries to Bring Cemetery Back up to Par".

would search for possible financial opportunities that would aide in managing upkeep of the land.

Kuper died soon after this arrangement was made. After his death his estate reached out to inquire if Baily had any interest in purchasing WPC. Bailey was interested, however the initial price for the property was not financially feasible for Bailey. Eventually they reached an agreement of the \$2 purchase price. For Bailey, the purchase was not a for-profit venture.

*“The property itself is worth millions of dollars, but that wasn't the purpose. When that occurred on the 31st of July, it wasn't the purpose of me to resell this property to make financial gain for myself and my family. I think it took somebody like me, that doesn't have an interest in that, but my interest is to rectify a wrong that occurred twenty years before we even took over. That's all, that's my plan.”<sup>70</sup>*

In an interview with documentary filmmaker Denise Ward-Brown, Bailey explained he did not understand how city officials allowed Kuper to let the cemetery get in such an unkept state. By the time Bailey gained ownership of the cemetery, the land had fallen far into disrepair. Many tombstones were broken, and large mounds of trash were dumped in various part of the cemetery. Shortly after he became the owner of the cemetery, Bailey was served with over \$60,000 of fines for the properties neglect.<sup>71</sup> When Bailey requested to see fines acquired from the City of Berkeley by previous owners, none could be provided.<sup>72</sup>

Nearly ten years from his original purchase date, Bailey is in danger of losing the property. In a 2018 article with the St. Louis Post Dispatch, Bailey expressed his fear of losing the cemetery. “It’s scary as hell that somebody could buy the property out from under me, but it’s on the tax sale”.<sup>73</sup> When he gained ownership, operation of the cemetery had not garnered

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Kevin Bailey,

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

any profit in over 20 years. When asked about his personal intentions for purchasing the property, Bailey explained, “I want to create that perfect resting place.”<sup>74</sup>

During the Summer of 2018, negative attention was once again drawn to WPC. Volunteer Wanda Brandan, a descendant of several individuals interred at WPC, led an unsuccessful campaign to demand the removal of three billboards that tower above the edge of Interstate 70 and thousands of headstones at WPC. DDI Media own the obtrusive billboard advertisements. Although Bailey and a large number of cemetery volunteers do not endorse the use of the land for commercial purposes, they appreciate DDI’s upkeep of the land surrounding the billboard. The land surrounding the billboard has not belonged to WPC since 1986.<sup>75</sup>



*Figure 2.7 Billboard overlooking Interstate 70 and WPC. (Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG.)*

Bailey struggles with the cost of upkeep and the payment of taxes and fines, yet he is grateful for the faithful volunteers that have given countless hours to the upkeep of the cemetery grounds in recent years. Volunteers, like Dan Newman, are unpaid and often use personal

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Benchaabane, Nassim. "Billboards Tower above Headstones in Run-down, Historic Black Cemetery. One Volunteer Says They Must Go. Others See Wider Concerns." *Stltoday.com*. June 16, 2018. Accessed November 25, 2018. [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/billboards-tower-above-headstones-in-run-down-historic-black-cemetery/article\\_93d51c6d-df62-5dd0-826f-6ec51b59f7b3.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/billboards-tower-above-headstones-in-run-down-historic-black-cemetery/article_93d51c6d-df62-5dd0-826f-6ec51b59f7b3.html).

finances to purchase or rent various equipment needed to maintain the grounds. Church groups, school groups, and general volunteers responsible for the clearance of cemetery sections that were once beautifully landscaped.

*“I’ve gotten help from people of all walks of life... They volunteer their time, their money, to help make a difference for people like myself and at least, 39,999 other families. Just out of sheer compassion for mankind.”<sup>76</sup>*

According to Baily, WPC currently holds about 40,000 graves.<sup>77</sup> At its height, WPC was once viewed as one of the premiere burial grounds for African Americans within the St. Louis region. WPC is home to various civil rights activist and community leaders, as well as blue collar laborers. People from all walks of life chose Washington Park Cemetery as a final resting place. However, the history of the cemetery proves interment at WPC did not guarantee finality or rest. The cemetery has struggled to provide the peace and serenity to grieverers that its rural design was intended to give. Thousands of grave removals have occurred at WPC due to first Lambert Field and then Lambert International Airport, and the Bi-State Developments Agency. Other graves are suspected to lie underneath Interstate 70 as a result of Mark Twain Expressway construction. Virginia Younger’s abysmal, and immoral management of WPC resulted in mourners experiencing tremendous difficulty locating graves. Improper burial records and misplaced headstones means many graves are simply unidentifiable and certainty of exact burial locations is not guaranteed. The physical condition of the cemetery today is a result of years of neglect and the inability to maintain the upkeep of the once abundant landscape.

Washington Park Cemetery started as a business venture by white entrepreneurs looking to capitalize on segregated burial spaces and to make monetary gain from the African American

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Kevin Bailey, 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

community. No attention to the sacredness of the space seems to have been considered. Over the last century, WPC and those interred there have encountered various disturbances that were never intended to improve the land or help in/attend to the grieving process for thousands of descendants.

Today, WPC is African American owned. Unfortunately, this ownership comes after years of being deconsecrated by those other than the African American community to secure financial gain and “progress”. In recent years, news articles and art exhibits, such as *Higher Ground: Honoring People and Place*, has helped people re-acknowledge the sacredness of WPC. Installments for *Higher Ground* included photography by Jenifer Colten, videography by Denise Ward- Brown, and an art instillation by Dail Chambers.<sup>78</sup> Collectively, these contributions exposed WPC’s horrific history to wider audiences. Those who were unaware of WPC’s history and current condition became cognizant of the cemetery’s continual desecration. Exhibits like *Higher Ground* and Kevin Bailey’s personal attachment to WPC may be the catalysts needed for WPC to once again garner respect as a sacred space.

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<sup>78</sup> American Staff, "Honoring Washington Park Cemetery," St. Louis American, February 15, 2017, accessed December 2, 2018, [http://www.stlamerican.com/black\\_history/honoring-washington-park-cemetery/article\\_69fdcdd6-f3fe-11e6-ba26-5f3f8ac8da01.html](http://www.stlamerican.com/black_history/honoring-washington-park-cemetery/article_69fdcdd6-f3fe-11e6-ba26-5f3f8ac8da01.html).

## Chapter 3

# Buried Legacies

Knowledge about Washington Park Cemetery, along with its inhabitants, have become nearly invisible threads in the tapestry of St. Louis history. This chapter will tell the stories of selected individuals who are interred at WPC. The rich heritage and legacies of those who have failed to be mentioned in local; sometimes national history, will be highlighted to allow the reader to experience a humanizing impact with this research. These biographies will encourage the reader to make emotional and compassionate connections with the deceased; as well as the communities they have affected.

To complete this chapter, I took multiple visits to WPC. While there, I photographed headstones to reference for research purposes. Information from headstones aided my ability to successfully research and piece together personal histories of those buried at WPC. In addition to dates of birth and death, some headstones listed specific accomplishments of the deceased. The headstone belonging to St. Louis's first African American Alderman, Jasper C. Caston, had very detailed description of his contributions to St. Louis's historical and political landscape. Throughout the cemetery, engravings on some headstones were more legible than others due to weather deterioration of different materials: marble, granite and cement. The effects of time, neglect, and disturbance, have left numerous headstones faded or broken. Over the years, growing trees have moved and toppled headstones. However, many tombstones are still intact.



*Figure 3.1 Broken Headstone at WPC. (Denise Ward Brown Personal Collection, 2016, JPEG.)*

Historical documents such as US census data, cemetery burial cards, newspaper articles, passport documents, and military draft cards, were collected to cross-referenced with information obtained from headstones. Census data, and military and passport documents supported the ability to track the lives of researched individuals; verifying employment, living residences, and possible military involvement. Washington Park Cemetery burial cards and Missouri death certificates, provided verification of burial at WPC. Collectively, all of these resources aided in the creation of accurate historical biographies of those interred at WPC.

Unfortunately, some searches yielded more information than others. At times, gravesites could not be physically located due to lack of headstone identification, or physical obstacles limiting gravesite accessibility. Census documentation could not be counted as reliable if handwriting on the original document was illegible. Due to years of mismanagement, every burial card could not be accounted for to verify burial took place at WPC. This made the process of creating biographies extremely difficult at times.

It is not to be assumed the lives of these few highlighted individuals in this chapter are/and should be deemed as more valuable than another interred in WPC. Nor should the reader conclude that these individuals are the only ones who have provided groundbreaking achievements and/or contributions to local and historical landscapes. Every soul buried in WPC



is valuable and “matters”. Biographies created for this project are fortunate to share the common themes of political and civic engagement influence within the St. Louis region. No one buried at WPC should be forgotten; but instead celebrated.

## Highlighted Legacies

### Jasper Chandler Caston

**December 28, 1898 - November 13, 1950**

**Verification of Interment at WPC** - Burial Cards and Death Certificate indicate burial at WPC; Gravesite has been physically located at WPC



Figure 3.2 Photo of Jasper C. Caston ("Victors in Aldermanic Race," St. Louis Post Dispatch, April 7, 1943, <https://search-proquestcom.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1875940713/D31E363B22ED4E4CPQ/4?accountid=15159>.)

Jasper Chandler Caston was born December 28, 1898 to John Tolbert Caston and Leota Caston in Macon, Missouri. His grandfather, Jonathan Caston, was a member of the 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry - the first African American regiment organized for the American Civil War.<sup>1</sup> John Tolbert, Caston's father, was a respected clergyman and physician. Caston's career and civic engagement would further carry the torch lit by his father and grandfather before.

A graduate of Western Bible College, Jasper was heavily involved in the work of ministry. His passport records indicate he was performing missionary work in Liberia as early as January of 1924.<sup>2</sup>

After his return to America in 1926, he pastored churches across the St. Louis region; including Memorial Baptist Church.

<sup>1</sup> Luis Fenollosa. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-1865* (Place of Publication Not Identified: General Books, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Caston, Jasper, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington D.C.; Roll #: 2403; Volume #: Roll 2403 - Certificates: 358850-359349, 15 Dec 1923-18 Dec 1923

In 1941, Caston was appointed Missouri's first African American liquor inspector. This appointment as a liquor inspector provided prestige and a generous salary. Prior to this appointment, he had "long been active in politics and civic affairs."<sup>3</sup> In 1934, Caston ran an unsuccessful campaign for State Representative of St. Louis City's Fourth District. That defeat did not deter his political aspirations. In March of 1943, 44-year-old Caston won the Republican nomination for an Aldermanic seat in the City's Sixth Ward. The following month he was slated to run against a white opponent, Democratic candidate Joseph B. Schweppe.

This election differed from the ones previously held in St. Louis. Instead of a city-wide election, the election was instituted by wards. Previous city-wide elections never allowed wards to elect officials that necessarily represented the population makeup of each ward. Whichever, political party was in power swayed the vote for the whole city. This change allowed the heavily African American populated Fourth Ward to elect the Republican candidate, Caston, as Alderman in April. The results were overwhelmingly in Caston's favor. The final results indicated Caston defeated Schweppe "by a vote of 1642-422".<sup>4</sup>

Although Caston was able to achieve such a convincing victory, his attempt to create social change and chip away at the segregation that eroded the city took much determined effort. In January of 1944, Caston introduced a bill to the Board of Alderman that prohibited discriminatory practices. Prior to the bills introduction, he headed an investigative committee that concluded "evidence of racial discrimination" in the lunchrooms and lunch stands of several

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<sup>3</sup> "Negro Made Liquor Inspector," *The Chicago Defender*, December 6, 1941, National ed.

<sup>4</sup> "St. Louis Pastor Victor in Aldermanic Race: Rev. J. C. Caston Leads 1,672 to 422 to Take Post in Hotly-Contested Campaign and Election ALDERMAN," *Pittsburg Courier*, April 17, 1943, accessed March 24, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/202133135/37BC7C02B5724BBEPQ/1?accountid=15159>.

St. Louis municipal buildings; including City Hall. <sup>5</sup> If successful, the bill would fine perpetrators of this offence anywhere between “\$25 to \$ 500 for each discriminatory act.”<sup>6</sup> In April, the measure passed and it became a misdemeanor for any lunchroom located in a public building owned by the city to exercise discriminatory practices.

Caston was a pioneer of civil rights in St. Louis City. Over the following years, Caston continued to write legislative bills for advancement of African Americans. The first African-American Alderman the city had ever successfully elected, Caston was not afraid to introduce bills to city council that opposed segregation and the mistreatment of African Americans.

On November 13, 1950. Jasper Chandler Caston died tragically in an automobile accident. While traveling, Caston lost control of his car and crashed into a parked bus along the road. Caston was only 51 years old.



Figure 3.3 Headstone belonging to Jasper C. Caston. Inscription reads “First Negro Elected Alderman in St. Louis.” (Terri Williams Personal Collection 2018 JPEG.)

Name <i>Jasper Chandler Caston</i>		No. of Internment <i>204-229</i>	Burial Permit No.
Last Residence <i>U.S. Highway 36 Columbia, Mo.</i>		Age Years <i>51</i> Months <i>0</i> Days <i>0</i>	Sex Male <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>
Place of Birth	Place of Death <i>Mo.</i>	Undertaker <i>B. Love</i>	
Cause of Death <i>Fracture skull</i>		<i>3103 Washington</i>	
Date of Death <i>11-13-50</i>		Date of Internment <i>11-20-50</i>	
Lot No. <i>493</i>	Cont't No. <i>1001</i>	Section <i>5</i>	Grave No. <i>4</i>
Pur. Price		Lot Owner <i>Rev. J. J. Caston</i>	
Remarks			

Form 1 2M - 3-61

Figure 3.4 Jasper Caston Burial card. Burial cards were cross-references with other documents to ensure accuracy when creating biographies. Source: Courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society.

<sup>5</sup> "Introduces Bill to End Lunchroom Discrimination," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, January 29, 1944, accessed March 24, 2018, <http://libproxy.wustl.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/docview/567818882?accountid=15159>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

**George L. Vaughn**

**March 9, 1880- August, 17, 1949**

**Verification of Interment at WPC-** Burial Card and Death Certificate indicate burial at WPC; Gravesite has been physically located at WPC



*Figure 3.5 Photograph of George L. Vaughn. (Photograph of George L. Vaughn, digital image, State Historical Society of Missouri / Research Center-St. Louis Photo Database. [http://tjrhino1.umsl.edu/whmc/view.php?collnum\\_get=336](http://tjrhino1.umsl.edu/whmc/view.php?collnum_get=336).*

George L. Vaughn may be a slightly more recognizable name than others in this chapter. As an attorney, he is most remembered for his role in the historic 1948 Shelley v. Kraemer case that outlawed the use and practice of restrictive covenants. His voice and activism was respected within the African American community. Born March 9, 1880 in Columbus Kentucky, Vaughn's legacy and impact upon the world began well before he represented the Shelley's. He was a veteran, a judge, and an attorney, amongst many other things.

Vaughn received his elementary education in Kentucky before relocating to Tennessee to obtain his college training. Soon after graduating from Lane College and Walden University Law School in Tennessee, he relocated to St. Louis, MO.<sup>7</sup> Vaughn's home remained in St. Louis until his death. His legacy of winning a landmark United States Supreme Court case made its biggest impact in St Louis.

In February of 1916, St. Louis City held a special election to vote on a measure that would legally enforce racial segregation within the city of St. Louis. The "Negro Segregation Ordinance", as it was commonly referred to, passed with overwhelming success. The ordinance restricted citizens from occupying residential quarters on blocks where "75 percent of the

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<sup>7</sup> "George L. Vaughn," *The Journal of Negro History* 34, no. 4 (October 1949), 490.

population was of another race.”<sup>8</sup> The final results of the election supported a “three to one vote for the ordinance throughout St. Louis City.”<sup>9</sup>

Vaughn was a vocal opponent against the segregation ordinance. He believed certain components of the ordinance to be “a scheme of the real estate man to work his will with the negro.”<sup>10</sup> Along with attorney Homer G. Phillips, Vaughn worked in conjunction with the NAACP in hopes to repeal this practice. In 1917, the Supreme Court decision of Kentucky’s *Buchanan v. Warley* outlawed the use of segregation ordinances nationwide. In accordance with that ruling, the St. Louis segregation ordinance was overturned the same year.

Unlike Jasper Caston, Vaughn was a member of the Democratic Party. Although a member of an opposing political party, he shared Caston’s love for public service. In 1936, Vaughn was named Justice of the Peace in the City’s Fourth District.<sup>11</sup> His political and civic aspirations only grew larger as time went on. In 1941, Vaughn unsuccessfully ran for Alderman. In spite of defeat, Vaughn solidified himself as a leading voice in Missouri’s Democratic Party after her he made the Minority Report at the 1948 Democratic Convention held in Pennsylvania.

Vaughn made civil rights history as representing attorney for J. D. Shelley in the *Shelley v. Kraemer* case of 1946. The judgment ruled that racially restrictive housing covenants were illegal. After an initial defeat, Kraemer’s attorney managed to get the ruling overturned by the Missouri Supreme Court. However, Vaughn succeeded in getting the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court, to reinstate the original verdict in 1948. This victory was the perfect ending

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth S. Jolly, *Black Liberation in the Midwest: The Struggle in St. Louis, Missouri, 1964-1970* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 4.

<sup>9</sup> “Negroes Take Segregation Fight to the Courts,” *St. Louis Star and times*, March 1, 1916, accessed March 24, 2018, [https://www.newspapers.com/search/#query=Negros to take segregation fights to the courts&dr\\_year=1916-1916&offset=2&p\\_place=MO](https://www.newspapers.com/search/#query=Negros+to+take+segregation+fighters+to+the+courts&dr_year=1916-1916&offset=2&p_place=MO).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> “George L. Vaughn,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 490.

to a cause Vaughn started fighting decades prior with St. Louis' segregation ordinance. Vaughn's victory was short lived. He passed away suddenly on August 17, 1949. When he died, Vaughn held the position of Assistant Attorney General. He was 69 years old.



Figure 3.6 Gravesite of attorney George L. Vaughn. (Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG.)

Name <i>George L. Vaughn</i>		No. of Interment <i>1403</i>		Burial Permit No. <i>7235-318</i>	
Last Residence <i>3744 Fenway</i>		Age Years <i>69</i> Months <i>0</i> Days <i>0</i>		Sex Male <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>	
Place of Birth <i>St. Louis Mo</i>		Place of Death <i>St. Louis Mo</i>		Undertaker <i>Peoples Hall</i>	
Cause of Death <i>Coronary Occlusion</i>		Date of Death <i>8-17-49</i>		Date of Interment <i>8-20-49</i>	
Lot No. <i>481</i>	Cont't No. <i>2929</i>	Section <i>1</i>	Grave No. <i>5</i>	Par. Price	Lot Owner <i>Eva L. Vaughn</i>
Remarks <i>Small</i>					

Figure 3.7 George Vaughn Burial Card. Source: Missouri Historical Society

## Preston Myree

b. Dec. 31, 1872- d. Nov. 22, 1960

**Grave Site Verification-** Burial Card and Death Certificate indicate burial at WPC; Gravesite has been physically located at WPC



Figure 3.8 Photograph of Preston Myree. (Jet Magazine, February 16, 1961, 22.)

Preston Myree was born December 31, 1872 in Perryville, Alabama. The son of Aaron and Charity Myree, Preston migrated from Alabama to St. Louis, Mo in 1891. From humble beginnings, Myree eventually became a cherished figure within the African American community; so much so his death made national news.

In 1898, seven years after he migrated to St. Louis, he began working for George Warren Brown of the Brown Shoe company. Originally, his employment as coachman required him to look after horses and drive the coach wagon for Brown and his family. As technology and industry evolved, so did Myree. He began to utilize the automobile for the family's transportation.

Through years of service, Myree was respected and trusted by Brown. Myree enjoyed his job and remained employed by the Brown family for many years. When Brown died in 1921, he included Myree in his will by leaving him shares of stock in the Brown Shoe Company.<sup>12</sup> That financial gift allowed Myree to become one of the most influential African Americans in St. Louis during his lifetime.

Myree believed that self-confidence would help the African American community succeed. In 1938 he was quoted as saying,

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<sup>12</sup>Larry Still, "Rich Ex-Chauffeur Remembered," *Jet Magazine*, February 16, 1961, 22.

*“Confidence in one another is our greatest need. The St. Louis Negro does not have confidence in himself. With more confidence there will be more cooperation, better business judgment and more success.”<sup>13</sup>*

Myree possessed self-assurance and used his influence for the good of the community. He eventually became a board member of the Pine Street Y.M.C.A., located in the historic Mill Creek Valley neighborhood. It was estimated Myree donated around 20,000 dollars to the facility and its causes over the course of 40-years.<sup>14</sup> Myree was also the former VP for the African-American owned New Age Federal Loans and Savings Bank, located in St. Louis, MO.

When Preston Myree died in 1960, he left nearly 300,000 dollars to friends and charitable causes. Among the benefactors were his beloved church of more than 40 years, Central Baptist Church, and The Ferrier Harris Home for the aged.<sup>15</sup> His business savviness and disciplined lifestyle allowed him to nurture that initial investment given to him by the Brown family. At the time of his death in 1961, his net worth was estimated to be around 500,000 dollars. That amount calculates to over 4 million dollars in 2018. Preston Myree was a pillar of the community and wanted nothing other than to see the African American community thrive.



*Figure 3.9 Gravesite of Preston Myree.(Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2017, JPEG.)*

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<sup>13</sup> "What Are the Greatest Needs of St. Louis Negros," *Pittsburg Courier*, June 22, 1938, City Edition ed., accessed February 12, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/202039686/abstract/606EC8A9776547CFPQ/4?accountid=15159>.

<sup>14</sup>Larry Still, "Rich Ex-Chauffeur Remembered", 23.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 22.



## LT. Ira L. Cooper

b. May 17, 1877 - d. Feb. 15, 1939

**Verification of Interment at WPC** - Burial Cards and Death Certificate indicate burial at WPC; Gravesite has been physically located at WPC



*Figure 3.10 Photograph of Ira L. Cooper. (Digital image, St Louis Police Veteran's Association City of St Louis Metropolitan Police Department City of Saint Louis Missouri, <http://www.slpva.com/historic/stlpoliceblackhistory.html>)*

American history is riddle with examples of law enforcement figures using violent tactics against African Americans to maintain oppression. This form of systematic oppression has led many African Americans to mistrust law enforcement officials. Unfortunately, this stigma has allowed African Americans; who have served in law enforcement with dignity and pride, to be unrecognized or forgotten. Such is the case for the first black lieutenant and sergeant in the St. Louis Police Department, Ira L. Cooper.

Cooper was born May 17, 1877 in New Florence, Missouri. His father Elijah Cooper, was a college educated man.<sup>16</sup>

Ira followed those footpaths and obtained his college education from Central Tennessee College, and Northern Illinois College of Ophthalmology. When Cooper relocated to St. Louis he hoped to pursue ophthalmology, but circumstance and prejudice rerouted that ambition to his longstanding career in law enforcement.

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<sup>16</sup> Louis LaCoss, "A RACE POLICE SERGEANT: With An Enviably Record For Twenty Years Ira L. Cooper Has Been a Member of the St. Louis Police Department, Successfully Tracking down Law-breakers," *Pittsburg Courier*, October 9, 1926, accessed March 24, 2018, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/docview/201853137/60CF0BEBF7B34A6APQ/1?accountid=15159>.

In 1906, Cooper was hired by the St. Louis Police Department as a “negro special”.<sup>17</sup> In this position his role was circumscribed to the investigation of crimes within the African American community. Although restricted to the command of African American units, Coopers role expanded and became more influential throughout his career. He was responsible for solving some of St. Louis’s most newsworthy crimes. In 1917, “he exposed a \$35,000 bank embezzlement scheme.”<sup>18</sup> Later in his career, he was also responsible for exposing a city-wide kidnapping ring. On a separate occasion, he rescued the kidnapped grandson of beer baron, August A. Busch.<sup>19</sup> In 1923, Cooper was promoted to sergeant. By 1930, he was promoted to lieutenant.<sup>20</sup>

Cooper’s legacy was not only created by his crime-solving abilities, but his role in civil rights as well. Cooper played a vital role demolishing discriminatory policy practiced by St. Louis’s Police Relief Association that hindered African American officers and their families from receiving equal treatment. The association was responsible for providing “pensions for retired members of the department and their widows.”<sup>21</sup> In February of 1924, Cooper, along with 23 other African American officers applied for membership in the association.<sup>22</sup> Their initial applications were not denied, but amended to exclude the officers of voting privileges within the association. Cooper response to the Executive Committee of the St. Louis’s Police Relief Association was influential enough to gain nonrestrictive membership to all of the African American applicants. Cooper was a respected law enforcement official whose voice could not be

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<sup>17</sup> W. Marvin Dulaney, *Black Police in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 49.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>19</sup> Rosalind Early, "St. Louis's First Black Detective Always Cracked the Case," National Endowment for the Humanities, , accessed October 01, 2018, <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2018/spring/statement/st-louiss-first-black-detective-always-cracked-case>.

<sup>20</sup> W. Marvin Dulaney, *Black Police in America*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Dulaney, W. Marvin, and Ira L. Cooper. "Sergeant Ira L. Cooper's Letter to the St. Louis Police Relief Association, May 25, 1924." *The Journal of Negro History* 72, no. 3/4 (1987): 84-86. doi:10.2307/3031514.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

silenced. Ira L. Cooper, one of St. Louis's most notable African American police Officers, died in 1939 at the age of 61.



Above Figure 3.11 Ira Cooper's family plot. (Denise Ward Brown Personal Collection. 2016, JPEG.)

Name <i>Ira L. Cooper</i>		No. of Interment <i>1443</i>		Burial Vault No. <i>1578-991</i>	
Last Residence <i>4404 Bonright Ave</i>		Age Years <i>61</i> Months <i>-</i> Days <i>-</i>		Sex Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Place of Birth		Place of Death <i>St. Louis, Mo</i>		Undertaker <i>Chapel of St. Peter</i>	
Cause of Death <i>Cardiac Failure</i>		Date of Death <i>2-15-39</i>		Date of Interment <i>2-18-39</i>	
Lot No. <i>1436</i>	Cont. of No. <i>2547</i>	Section <i>8</i>	Grave No. <i>1</i>	Fur. Price	Lot Owner <i>Cooper</i>
Remarks					
Form 1 2M-11-38					

Figure 3.12 Burial Card for Ira L. Cooper. (Courtesy of Missouri Historical Society)

**Joseph E. Mitchell**  
**August, 1, 1876- Dec. 17, 1952**

**Verification of Interment at WPC-** Burial Cards and Death Certificate indicate burial at WPC



Figure 3.13 Photo of Joseph E. Mitchell. ("Joseph E. Mitchell Buried in St. Louis," *Afro-American*, December 27, 1952, [https://search-proquestcom.libproxy.wustl.edu/cv\\_1091849/docview/531793196/51E759C550674180PQ/5?accountid=15159](https://search-proquestcom.libproxy.wustl.edu/cv_1091849/docview/531793196/51E759C550674180PQ/5?accountid=15159).)

Joseph E. Mitchell was born in 1876 in Coosa County, Alabama. One of eight children, Mitchell spent his childhood working on his father's farm. When Mitchell was in his early 20's he moved to Atlanta. While there, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and "was assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment, one of the six African American regiments in the U.S. Regular Army" during the Spanish American War.<sup>23</sup> He completed his service and was honorably discharged in 1902. Soon after, Joseph and his family moved to St. Louis, Missouri. Upon arrival in St. Louis, Mitchell furthered his education by taking night classes at the local Y.M.C.A.

In 1905, Mitchell was recognized as the general manager for the Western Union Relief Association (WURA). The association was an insurance company that operated to provide financial assistance and social support for those in the African American community. In 1912, Mitchell was listed alongside George L. Vaughn and others as managers of the association.<sup>24</sup> The *St. Louis Argus*, an historic African American newspaper, was birthed by Mitchell during this time. The *Argus* initially served as a trade paper for WURA, and evolved into a newspaper that gave a positive voice to the African American community. On March 27th

<sup>23</sup> Debra Foster Greene, *Published in the Interest of Colored People: The St. Louis Argus Newspaper in the Twentieth Century* (University of Missouri, Columbia, 2003), 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

1916, Mitchell, along with his brother William, Benjamin James and Lewis Hawkins, incorporated the *St. Louis Argus*.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout its existence, *The Argus*, as it became commonly known, was viewed as one of the most influential newspapers for St. Louis's African American community. It was a reliable source that advertised black businesses and products. The publication kept the community close in life and death as it listed family vacations, birth records, obituaries, and who was on vacation. The *Argus* was a monumental resource where black people could read black news.

Mitchell played an active role in St. Louis politics for at least 35 years.<sup>26</sup> He “was a fighter for better schools, educational opportunities, and full civil rights for Negro Americans.”<sup>27</sup> Echoing the beliefs of Booker T. Washington, he believed in business development and self-help in the African American community. Mitchell was an avid supporter of the Pine Street Y.M.C.A. In 1924, *The Argus*, and the Pine Street Y. partnered to create the St. Louis Argus Worthy Boys Dinner. The annual event-provided Christmas meals and presents to underprivileged boys in the local African American community. The tradition continued for nearly forty years. Eventually Mitchell became chairman of the board in 1943.<sup>28</sup>

Mitchell also held leadership positions for the St. Louis Colored Children's Home (later renamed Annie Malone Children's Home), the National Negro Business League, and the New Age Savings and Loans Association and the St. Louis Branch of the NAACP Mitchell was

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<sup>25</sup> Debra Foster Greene, *Published in the Interest of Colored People: The St. Louis Argus Newspaper in the Twentieth Century*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> "Joseph E. Mitchell, Negro Publisher, Dies," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, December 11, 1952, accessed March 3, 18, <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.wustl.edu/hnpstlouispostdispatchshell/docview/1880804185/BB386D7A00714C62PQ/1?accountid=15159>.

<sup>27</sup> Edwina W. Mitchell, "The St. Louis Argus History," *St. Louis Media History*, May 2008, , accessed November 30, 2018, <http://www.stlmediahistory.org/index.php/Print/PrintPublicationHistory/st.-louis-argus>.

<sup>28</sup> Debra Foster Greene, *Published in the Interest of Colored People: The St. Louis Argus Newspaper in the Twentieth Century*, 113.

appointed by two separate Missouri governors to serve on the State Board of education. Under Mitchell’s leadership, the St. Louis Branch of the NAACP was influential “in carrying the fight for equal education through the courts.”<sup>29</sup> Upon his death in 1952, Mitchell had solidified himself as a champion of the African American community.

Name <i>Joseph E. Mitchell</i>		No. of Interment		Burial Permit No. <i>11676-318</i>	
Last Residence <i>St. Louis, Mo.</i>		Age Years <i>76</i> Months _____ Days _____		Sex Male _____ Female <i>M</i>	
Place of Birth		Place of Death <i>St. Louis, Mo.</i>		Undertaker <i>Chas. J. Gates</i>	
Cause of Death <i>Cerebral apoplexy</i>		Date of Death <i>12-17-52</i>		Date of Interment <i>12-20-52</i>	
Lot No. <i>839</i>	Cont'ct No. <i>2630</i>	Section <i>1</i>	Grave No. <i>4</i>	Pur. Price	Lot Owner <i>J. E. Mitchell</i>
Remarks					

Above Figure 3.14 WPC Burial Card for Joseph Mitchell (Courtesy of Missouri Historical Society)



Figure 3.15 Front page of an issue of the St. Louis Argus. The Argus featured stories that concerned the African American community. ("St. Louis Argus: December 24, 1915 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming," December 24, 1915, accessed November 30, 2018, <https://archive.org/details/St.LouisArgusDecember241915Vol.IvNo.38>.)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 148.

## Veterans

As I explored WPC, I noticed many military headstones. Through research, I learned about the military history buried at WPC. George L. Vaughn obtained the rank of First Lieutenant in the First World War.<sup>30</sup> Joseph E. Mitchell fought during the Spanish American War.<sup>31</sup> While conducting research, I was intrigued to find the draft registration cards of Preston Myree and Jasper Caston.

19

**REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897)**

<b>SERIAL NUMBER</b> U 1471	<b>1. NAME (Print)</b> George Louis Vaughn <small>(First) (Middle) (Last)</small>	<b>ORDER NUMBER</b>
<b>2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print)</b> 3744 Finney Ave. St. Louis, Missouri <small>(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)</small>		
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]		
<b>3. MAILING ADDRESS</b> The same as above <small>(Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same)</small>		
<b>4. TELEPHONE</b> Je. 2389 <small>(Exchange) (Number)</small>	<b>5. AGE IN YEARS</b> 62 <b>DATE OF BIRTH</b> Mar. 9, 1880 <small>(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)</small>	<b>6. PLACE OF BIRTH</b> Columbus-Hickman County <small>(Town or county) (State or country)</small>
<b>7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS</b> Dr. A. N. Vaughn 14 North Jefferson (Peoples Building)		
<b>8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS</b> Roy McKittrick Jefferson City, Mo.		
<b>9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS</b> In Charge of Tax Cases (lawyer) 2316 Market Ave. <small>(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)</small>		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.		
<b>D. S. S. Form 1</b> (Revised 4-1-42)	(over)	16-21630-2 George Louis Vaughn <small>(Registrant's signature)</small>

Figure 3.16 Military Registration Card for attorney George Louis Vaughn. (The National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; World War II Draft Cards (Fourth Registration) for the State of Missouri; Record Group Title: Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975; Record Group Number: 147; Box or Roll Number: 1134.)

St. Louis is home to one of the largest military cemeteries in the country, Jefferson Barracks. Established as a national cemetery in 1866, policy at Jefferson Barracks did not restrict African American burials. However, African Americans were buried in a segregated part of the

<sup>30</sup> William Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War: His Splendid Record in the Battle Zones of Europe*. (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1970).

<sup>31</sup> John A. Wright, *Discovering African American St. Louis: A Guide to Historic Sites* (Saint Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2002), 57.

cemetery. According to a WPC volunteer, the servicemen were interred at WPC because they wanted to be buried with their families.

The soldiers buried at WPC never expected the physical conditions of the cemetery to reflect anything other than the perpetual care it was once promised. Below is a list of veterans who are buried at WPC. Their interment at WPC has been identified by the visual proof of their headstone at WPC. Very little is written in history books about these veterans, but I was compelled to include them in this project. The “patriotic spirit” that has swept this country in recent years, neglects to include the celebration or inclusion of people of color. This small gesture is an attempt to recognize soldiers of color at WPC. There are undoubtedly more servicemen and women interred at WPC.



*Figure 3.17 Military issued headstone embedded in grass.*(Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG)

**Charles W. Williams**, (Unknown)

-Company C, US Volunteer Infantry, Spanish American War

**Elzey Robert Ross**, **b.** June 3,1879 - **d.** November 4, 1931

-Private 65 Pioneer Infantry

**Hester Ballard**, **b.** March 7,1896 – **d.** (unknown)

-Corporal, US Army WWI

**Phillip Woods**, **b.** July 25,1896 – **d.** Aug. 02, 1936

--Private, 806 Pioneer Infantry

**Leon C Pegram**, **b.** March 7, 1897 - **d.** August 29, 1921

Private Med. Dept.,



WAR DEPARTMENT  
O. G. M. G. FORM NO. 403  
Approved Aug. 12, 1919  
Revised 1-27-20

**ORIGINAL**  
**APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE**  
PLEASE MAKE OUT AND RETURN IN DUPLICATED Army Serial #1,171,082 ✓

Name ✓	Rank ✓	Company ✓	U. S. Regiment, State Organization, or Vessel ✓	Date of Death ✓
PEGRAM, Leon G.	Regular ✓	Army Reservist, 1st	1st Camp Jackson & C	Aug. 29, 1921
Name of Cemetery	Located in or near—		If World War Veteran—	
	City	State	Division	State
Washington Park Cemetery	St. Louis, Missouri	Missouri	None	Missouri ✓

TO BE SHIPPED TO: Mrs. Jessie Pegram, St. Louis, Missouri  
(Name of consignee)

POST OFFICE ADDRESS OF CONSIGNEE: 4894 W. Cote Brillante, St. Louis, Missouri. O. H. Bridges, Major General ✓  
(Give town, county, and State)

DO NOT WRITE HERE

I hereby agree to accept the headstone at above destination, freight prepaid, and properly packed and delivered at the railroad station or wharf as above indicated, at Government expense, freight prepaid, and agreed it will be promptly returned and set up at private expense.

This application is for the UNMARKED grave of a soldier. It will be furnished and delivered at the railroad station or wharf as above indicated, at Government expense, freight prepaid, and agreed it will be promptly returned and set up at private expense.

Witnessed:  
S. H. CHURCH, A. A. AUG. 13 1931  
From: Mrs. Jessie Pegram, Applicant.  
Address: 4894 W. Cote Brillante, St. Louis, Missouri. Date: June 2, 1931

Shipped: 10-1-31

\*These must not be requested for any grave at which a private stone, monument, or other permanent marker is already erected or is to be erected.  
†These whether soldier, sailor, marine, Army nurse, etc.

Figure 3.18 Application for a military headstone for Leon Pegram. Pegram was buried at WPC in 1921. (Ancestry.com.U.S., Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925-1963[database on-line],Provo, UT, USA:Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.)

**Frederick White, b.** February 19, 1888 – **d.** April 6, 1927  
-Private, 414, Labor Battalion

**Clifford Dillard, b.** December 23, 1899 – **d.** June 13, 1981  
-Private First Class, US Army WWII

**Hershell Williamson, b.** October 25, 1902- **d.** October 8, 1979  
-Private US Army WWI

**Lee Wright Jr.,** August 3, 1919- **d.** April 9, 1979  
-Corporal US Army , WWII



Figure 3.19 Photo of Lee Wright Jr.'s Headstone at WPC. The headstone has fallen on its back and lies flat on the ground. (Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG.)

**James Akens, b.** August 17, 1920 – **d.** November 19, 1966  
- Missouri Private, Company C, 9th Engineer Training Battalion, WWII

**James Wynne, b.** December, 13, 1930 – **d.** (date of death illegible on tombstone)  
-Cook, 812 Pioneer

**Eddie Jeffries, b.** October, 2, 1939 – **d.** (date of death illegible on tombstone)  
-Private, 506 Pioneer Infantry

**Lamar Oliver Gleason, b.** 1948- **d.** 1979  
-US Navy, Vietnam



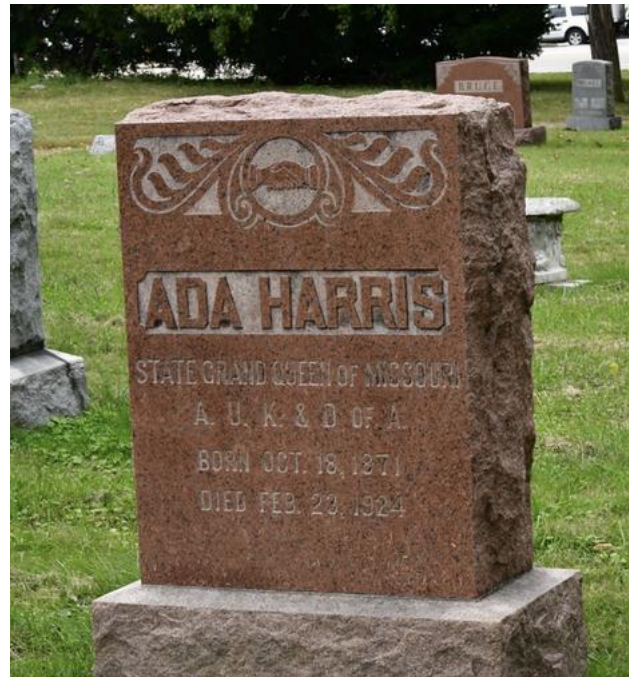
*Figure 3.20 Freddy Jefferson a Vietnam veteran, volunteers at WPC because he wants to honor his fellow veterans. (Denise Ward Brown Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG.)*

## Heritage

WPC's rich heritage can never be limited those mentioned in this thesis. Educators George Brantley, James Meyers, and Frank L. Williams were buried at Washington Park. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these men help to cultivate the spirit of academic excellence and pride Sumner and Vashon high schools. Sumner and Vashon were segregated high schools created to service St. Louis's African American population during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. Others like, Aaron E. Malone, former husband to businesswoman Annie Malone, and African American architect, John R. Steele are also interred at WPC.

WPC is also designated the final resting place of to several members of St. Louis's historic African American undertaker community such as Ellis Jones, Raleigh Manuel, Fulton Culkin and William and Annette Officer. After the American Civil War, African Americans were given full freedom to carry out the burial rituals of their choice for their loved ones. As time progressed the role of the African American undertaker became more significant in the community. Just as ministers and educators, morticians were seen as leaders within the community.

The lack of women mentioned in the chapter supports the unfortunate reality that many achievements accomplished by African American women have been forgotten. Attempts to retrieve information about women buried at WPC, like former president of fraternal society Daughters of Africa (D.O.A.) Ada Harris, yielded very little results. The elaborate detail of Harris' standing headstone implicates she once held great importance to the African American community. However, there is very little detailed documentation of her, or the D.O.A.'s, contributions to society.



*Figure 3.21 Gravesite of Ada Harris.(Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG.)*

The lack of written African American history combined with the mismanagement of cemetery files, makes it increasingly harder for anyone to construct history of the souls buried at

WPC. This chapter is an attempt to begin documentation of the personal legacies of African Americans buried at WPC.

# Epilogue

Currently, much of the land at WPC sits dormant; finding its only peace ironically in its lack of human activity and the growth of aggressive vegetation. The foliage that was once a selling point of Washington Park now has become a hindrance to those who have spent countless hours searching for deceased loved ones and to those volunteers who must yearly fight to keep it groomed. Trees canopy the inaccessible gravesites of countless African Americans who lived and died. The grounds have shifted, which raises speculation that the human remains are not necessarily under the appropriate grave marker. Tree roots have spread causing damage or knocking over headstones that once stood firm as a symbol of honor and pride. Cattails have invaded the northern edge of the cemetery, which indicates where unplanned water has begun to



*Figure Epilogue1 Broken headstone at WPC.(Terri Williams Personal Collection, 2018, JPEG)*

occupy the cemetery grounds. This is considerably alarming due to possible health and sanitary risks. Similar risks are what inspired the installation of the rural cemeteries like WPC away from city centers during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Looking south from the highway I-70, there is little evidence that anything even

exists beyond the forestry that engulfs the historic and sacred space that the Interstate-70 now dissects. Looking north of the highway, there is no evidence whatsoever of WPC's previous extension.

When Kevin Bailey purchase the cemetery in 2009, he hoped to correct many of the cemetery's wrongs by restoring the beauty to the sacred land. As an African American with family members interned at WPC, he sustains a hope to restore the cemetery to its once gloriously tailored landscape vistas. Within recent years, volunteers, led by Dan Newman, have attempted to return the cemetery to its respectful exuberance. But this task can be deemed as far too great for the small team of volunteers; most of which are not African American.

For those currently hoping to find the graves of loved ones at WPC, all hope is not lost. Burial cards for WPC are in possession of the Missouri Historical Society. The burial cards identify the name of the deceased and the location of their burial site. Accessing the burial cards may not always accurately identify burial locations of the deceased. However, gaining possession of the information on these cards is often the beginning of a successful grave search. The staff from the Historical Society works quite frequently with volunteer John Newman to help individuals find the graves of their loved ones. Newman has become a reliable guide to families that search the cemetery hoping to find gravesites of their relatives. Many descendants of those interred have exhumed their loved ones to be interred at other cemeteries that have maintained the promise of perpetual care.

In 2021, WPC will have garnered 100 years of existence, but it has not been fully operational since the last burial took place in the late 1980's. The expansion the highway system and the local airport have been prioritized over securing the peace of those who designated WPC as their final, sacred resting place. As generations of African Americans transcend further away from the generators of oral traditions and history, the stories of WPC are in danger of being lost forever. This history must be given to the next generation through oration or written documentation. If this does not occur, African American history becomes susceptible to narration

by other groups. The ability to control the dialogue provides empowerment to the African American community as a whole; with each generation empowering the next.

Washington Park Cemetery is an African American cemetery established during the Jim Crow Era by white men for financial gain. The sacred land has been defiled on numerous occasions. However, a spirit of resilience shines through as volunteers attempt to restore beauty to the land. The history of Washington Park Cemetery and of those interred there are valuable pieces of American history that must never be overlooked or forgotten.

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