

On Saturday, March 7, 2020, History Bike Tampa completed the Forgotten Cemeteries ride. The ride was a visit to three Tampa Cemeteries, Oaklawn, Centro Español, and Memorial to review the conditions at the three sites.

The topic of Tampa's forgotten cemeteries has become interesting because of the Zion Cemetery, recently the subject of articles by Paul Guzzo of the Tampa Bay Times, and the focus on Memorial Cemetery was deliberate because it was established for African-American veterans of WWI and WWII. Recently, Memorial Cemetery is in the news because the owners no longer want to be responsible for maintenance (with no funding).

Many of Tampa's African American cemeteries have been lost because of systematic racism, greedy landowners, and institutional neglect. Organizations including the City of Tampa, the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN), the NAACP, and the Tampa Bay Times have worked to uncover their history

The bike tour began downtown, then went to Oaklawn Cemetery (a city funded cemetery), then to Centro Español, and finally to Memorial. At Memorial, Jeff Moates of FPAN discussed the present circumstances of the cemetery, the legal status, and the efforts to preserve the cemetery being conducted by the City of Tampa City Council. After his presentation, riders were shown how to clean gravestones and volunteers spent some time cleaning monuments. We discussed ways to prevent further loss of historic cemeteries, including requiring Environmental Due Diligence to include significant cultural resources at the Florida Division of Historical Resources.



Jeff Moates of FPAN

Gravestone before cleaning

Gravestone after cleaning

History Bike Tampa was organized seven years ago by Eric Turner, Assistant Principal at the Sam Rampello downtown school, with bimonthly rides covering areas of historic interest including the Tampa school system, women's history, Tampa's transportation (from bikes to streetcars to automobiles), and the many interesting characters including Judge James Magbee, famous drunk, who while in a state of drunkenness was covered with molasses and corn and had his clothes eaten off by pigs, Charlie Wall, the White Shadow, black sheep and mobster, and the Ashleys, an early interracial couple.

Before and after cleaning pictures by Dayna Lazarus.