

# THE TIMES *Apalachicola & Carrabelle*

## Eternity in Apalachicola: Buried along the Bay

By [Lois Swoboda](#)

2010-10-08 11:47:37



A cemetery is a burial ground not located on the grounds of a church.

Apalachicola currently has at least three cemeteries, although two may have started as churchyard burial grounds.

With the exception of several Indian burial mounds, Chestnut Cemetery is undoubtedly the oldest graveyard in the river city.

But once upon a time, there was another cemetery that vied for that honor.

On an 1857 survey map of the city hanging in the dining room of the Raney House, the area now occupied by Lafayette Park is labeled "cemetery."

This bayside burial ground, whose name has been lost in time, was the original resting place of Dr. John Gorrie, father of modern refrigeration.

At the beginning of his last will and testament he wrote, "I wish to be buried plainly and neatly: my body to be reposed in the public burial ground, situated on the margin of the Bay of Apalachicola."

Gorrie was laid to rest in 1855, but he didn't stay put.

Around during the 1930s, most of the bodies in the bayside cemetery were moved to unmarked graves in the potter's field at the then-new Magnolia Cemetery.

The municipal library has a notebook containing the transcription of burial permits for the city from 1856 to 1886. Most of the entries are labeled "Apalachicola Cemetery" or "old graveyard." Four are labeled "new graveyard." None of these names are found on a roster of the occupants of Chestnut Cemetery. These entries probably refer to people buried in the graveyard by the bay. The names are Bob English; Wm N. Ashley, 1869; Child of Abner Bright, 11 months; and Suida Turner, 1873.

When the occupants of the cemetery were moved, Gorrie received special treatment. He was installed as the centerpiece of Magnolia in a circular plot which can still be seen at the intersection of two access roads.

Apparently, a few of the residents of the bayside cemetery were left behind.

According to cousins Dan and Lawrence Sangaree, workers digging the foundation for a house located across Avenue C from the park discovered a metal box.

Believing it to be treasure, they reburied it and returned to retrieve it by lantern light. What they found when they pried the box open must have shocked them. The box contained the mummified remains of a young woman with a child in her arms.

Reportedly the bodies were beautifully preserved and their hair had apparently continued to grow after

death and surrounded the faces in luxuriant curls.

Joseph "Snookie" Barber, 87, of Carrabelle and Apalachicola, said he too remembers the discovery of the coffin although he did not see it. He said he was told the woman inside was blonde and the coffin was shaped to conform to the outline of her body.

He said it was not surprising that the workmen believed they had discovered a treasure. "When I was growing up, there was always somebody in town looking for treasure," said Barber. "They'd come and go digging in different places."

Barber said other graves have also been discovered during the construction of houses at the west end of Avenue B.

Delores Roux said the coffin within the metal box had a glass lid. "I remember that they propped her up in the old in Lafayette Park pavilion and everybody went to see it, but my mother wouldn't let me go," she said. "People said she (the corpse) was a Spanish woman. Maybe she was somebody who died at sea and they brought her here to be buried."

If any headstone or marker was found at the cemetery by the bay, nobody remembers. The occupants of the coffins removed to Magnolia Cemetery slumber unremembered, with the exception of Gorrie, whose remains were later relocated to Avenue D and Sixth Street, across from the museum that honors his famed ice machine.

Are the souls of these Florida pioneers happy in their new home? Some people say that the specters of those stolen away from their bayside resting place glide through Lafayette Park after midnight.

Betty Davis, of the Big Bend Ghost Trackers, said she believes the spirits remain in the park because many of the remains had disintegrated so completely they could not be moved.

Sheriff Skip Shiver said he remembers being told ghost stories about the park and surrounding houses as a child. "They told me there were scratch marks on the lid of one of the coffins like somebody was trying to get out," he said, but that's another story.

© Copyright 2012 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.  
[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)