

# THE TIMES *Apalachicola & Carrabelle*

## Eternity at East End: Isle of Rest

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2011-10-05 16:02:38



The Isle of Rest Cemetery, just east of the Carrabelle city limits, began as an informal burying place for African Americans.

How long the site has been in use as a burial ground is unknown. The marker bearing the earliest death recorded memorializes Webster Goosby, who died at 16 in 1906. The stone also bears the names Jane and Queen Debow and Robbie Ward who died between 1923 and 1937.

The next oldest marker belongs to Frank Miller, who died in 1920. The epitaph on the stone reads "An American Woodman."

The "Modern Woodmen of America" was an insurance and fraternal society founded by Joseph Cullen Root in 1883 in Iowa, its membership initially limited to white men between 18 and 45 living in the "12 healthiest states;" the Dakotas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

A member could not work as a railway brakeman, railway engineer, fireman, and switchman, miner, mine inspector, pit boss, jockey or race car driver, in gunpowder factory, or in any job associated with alcoholic beverages, aeronaut, sailor, plough polisher, brass finisher, professional baseball player, professional fireman, submarine operator, or soldier in regular army in time of war. All religions were welcome, including atheists.

By the 1920s, the Woodmen had welcomed women into their midst in the form of an auxiliary, the Royal Neighbors of America, and apparently Southerners and African Americans were allowed to join as well.

Several generations of matriarchs and midwives from a prominent Carrabelle family are interred at Isle of Rest.

Classie Lowery was mother to 20 children and adopted several more. She was matriarch to 42 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren. Classie Lowery Park was dedicated to her in 2008, after a poll of the African American community named her as the most respected historical figure.

Her mother, Savannah Brown, is buried nearby and possibly her grandmother, "Aunt" Laura Wiggins, as well. Wiggins is reputed to have been half-Cherokee and is said to have reached the ripe old age of 111.

Another Isle of Rest resident, Mrs. Sallie Walker, passed away in 1997, three months shy of her 104<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Lowery's husband, Henry Lowery, who left her after the birth of their 20th child, is also buried in Isle of Rest but his grave is at the opposite end of the graveyard.

Isle of Rest is located on land that once belonged to The St. Joe Company.

Mayor Curley Messer said St. Joe gave the land to Carrabelle for use as a cemetery in 1971, while he was mayor. The company received a \$10,000 reduction in taxes in exchange for the gift.

Isle of Rest contains graves of veterans from World War I and II, Korea and Vietnam.

A number of plots are marked with seashells and coral. According to the Carrabelle Historic Preservation Survey, "On African American graves, the use of seashells represents the body of water that the deceased travels over in their journey to the afterlife."

Is Aunt Laura Wiggins buried in Isle of Rest? Do you have more information about this cemetery? Please contact Lois Swoboda at 653-1819.

***Next week: The largest cemetery in Carrabelle is Evergreen. It contains graves of immigrants from a half-dozen nations and is the resting place of veterans of as many wars.***

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