

# THE TIMES *Apalachicola & Carrabelle*

## Eternity in Apalachicola: Magnolia Cemetery

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Magnolia, located on Bluff Road near 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, is the largest cemetery in the county.

The original burial ground "Old Magnolia" is the westernmost portion of the current cemetery. To the east lie "New Magnolia" and "Magnolia Oaks."

Old Magnolia was established around the turn of the 19th century. Local historian Mark Curenton found a deed stating that the City of Apalachicola purchased 3.3 acres from Lela R. Glazier for a cemetery in Sept, 1887. The land was located on Bluff Road in the general area of Magnolia Cemetery. Additional land must have been purchased because Old Magnolia occupies about seven acres.

The land for a second cemetery, Snow Hill, also located on Bluff Road, was purchased by the city in 1928.

The earliest grave believed to be original to Old Magnolia is the resting place of William Theobald, who was born on Oct. 17, 1897

and lived for just five days.

Most of the occupants of an earlier cemetery located at the site of the current Lafayette Park were relocated to Magnolia probably around the time the burial site was founded.

At the center of the original cemetery is a round plot that became the second burial site of Dr. John Gorrie after his remains were relocated from the bayside cemetery.

Why the bayside cemetery was moved is unclear, but oral tradition says that the graves were relocated after a strong storm undermined the coastline and began washing the graves away.

Rumor has it that Gorrie's current resting place in Gorrie Square actually contains only the bones of one of his feet.

The storm in question could have been the Aug. 1, 1899 hurricane that leveled Carrabelle and destroyed the Lanark Inn. It also lifted a train off the tracks and either destroyed or stranded most of the boats and ships anchored in and around Carrabelle and Dog Island.

For many years, it was referred to as the "storm that blew the water out of Apalachicola Bay." The cyclone was accompanied by a fierce storm surge.

To the northeast of Gorrie's plot is a little cluster of graves that must have been moved from bayside cemetery. They bear dates much in advance Magnolia's establishment.

Buried here are "Mary E. consort of Albert L Barkley." She lived from Jan. 6, 1836 to May 9, 1857. A consort is the term traditionally used for a woman who is survived by her husband.

Also among those moved to Magnolia are William Hayward, who died in 1855, and Phineas Laprade, who lived from 1799 to 1859.

There is a monument to the children of Albert and Isabella V. Semmes that attests to the dangers of childhood before modern medicine. Little James Powell Semmes lived just six years, from 1835 to 1841. Mary Herbert Semmes lived to be only 11, from 1830 to 1841, and after her death, the Semmes bestowed the same name on a second daughter, Mary Herbert. She lived just six years, from 1842 to 1848.

### **Two dozen Confederate soldiers buried here**

One of the loveliest memorials in the cemetery was move from bayside and marks the grave of Confederate cavalryman Matthew Rawdon Myers, who served as a sergeant with Florida's 2nd Cavalry Regiment, a unit of 1,190 men from the Big Bend area mustered during the late spring of 1862. The regiment fought at Olustee, Gainesville, and Braddock's Farm, and surrendered at Tallahassee on May 10, 1865.

Myers died on Nov. 4 1864 at the age of 20 years, two months and 11 days. The pink marble stone was erected by his grieving parents, Robert and Louisa Myers.

Twenty-three other Confederate veterans are buried at Magnolia. These are R.C. Blocker, William Donahoe, Nicholas Dumont, S.A. Floyd, Albert H. Fry, J.H. Glenn, John M. Hall, Reubin Hill, James Robert Hodges, R.C. Mahon, William Nash, W.H. Neel, George A. Patton, Hugh Riley, James Ryan, Philip Schoelles, Amos R. Sharit, Ben R. Sharit, J.H. Shipke, W.F. Solomon, Capt. Henry Bascom Tucker, George H. Whiteside and James T. Witherspoon.

Many of these names are still prominent in Franklin County.

Other notable Apalachicolans resting in Magnolia include Pearl and Herbert Marshall, boat builders Neel Hinckley and Fred Sawyer, lighthouse keeper Edward G. Porter, Judge Wakefield and his wife, Elgin and Eugenia Wefing, World War II naval hero Ellis Van Vleet and Vietnam airman hero Herbert Smith.

They rest among headstones bearing the names of Kirvin, Sizemore, Sangaree, Speed, Floyd, Maddox, Branch, Lichardello, Zingarelli, Messina, Weems, Mosconis, Russ, Wing, Ward, Vause, Wynn and Marks.

African-American business pioneer and boat builder Spartan Jenkins owned two plots in Magnolia - Block 105 lots one and two - but it is unclear if he is actually buried there. There is no headstone and his wife, Belle, is buried in Tallahassee.

Magnolia was established with segregated areas for whites and African-Americans and contained a pauper's field which was also segregated by race.

From 1907 until the early 1950s, the tracks of the Apalachicola Northern Railroad formed one border of the graveyard.

### **Indian mounds damaged over time**

Magnolia was originally flanked by two Indian mounds, Cool Springs Mound, which has since disappeared, and Cemetery Mound, which still exists on adjacent private property but has been badly damaged by off-road vehicles. Periodically, motorcycles and off-road vehicles have been a problem in the cemetery itself and a large barrier has been erected in one corner to exclude them.

During the 1950s to '70s, Cemetery Mound was a popular nighttime haunt for teenagers who told ghost stories about it and the cemetery. There were rumors of an Indian chief looking for scalps, a man with his

throat cut from ear to ear and a flying ghostly wringer washing machine. Sadly, during the mid-century, the Indian mound and old railroad line were used as a trash dump.

Prior to the beginning of the 20th century, it was not uncommon for families to have private cemeteries. Burial permits from the late 1800s note that a Mr. Maddox was buried "in his cemetery" and Thomas Orman was buried at his home.

The Orman house is widely reputed to be inhabited by some ghostly residents. Ranger Mike Kinnett, who works at Orman House State Historic Site, said he has heard many stories about footsteps on the stairs and other noises as well as apparitions, although he has never experienced anything unusual.

He said one haunt is reportedly a butler who worked in the house. Some say Thomas Orman himself remains as well.

An Apalachicola man tells the following story about his own experience in the house.

"During the 1960s, I was married to a girl whose mother owned the Orman House. She never saw anything, but she believed there were ghosts in the house. One morning, I had come to fix a hot water heater. I had been working all night at the mill, so I was tired when I finished. I decided to go upstairs to one of the bedrooms and take a nap before going home. As I lay there falling asleep, I heard footsteps on the stairs. I don't think it was a dream. For some reason, I thought it was my mother-in-law. The footsteps stopped at the door and the knob rattled so I got up to let her in. When I opened the door, there was nobody there. It scared me half to death. I went down those stairs three at a time. I don't know what that was, but I knew I didn't want to be there anymore."

Orman and his wife were eventually relocated to Chestnut Cemetery by a later resident of the Orman House. Perhaps restless spirits prompted the relocation.

But that's another story.

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