

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

VLR 12/5/7  
NRHP 3/28/8

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name People's Memorial Cemetery  
other names/site number VDHR File #123-5031-0001

2. Location

street & number 334 South Crater Road not for publication N/A  
city or town Petersburg vicinity N/A  
state Virginia code VA county Independent City code 730 zip code 23803

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide X locally. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] Date 2/14/08  
Signature of certifying official  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

=====  
**5. Classification**  
=====

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register** 0

**Name of related multiple property listing** (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
African-American Cemeteries in Petersburg, Virginia, 1818-1942, MPD

=====  
**6. Function or Use**  
=====

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Funerary Sub: Cemetery  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Funerary Sub: Cemetery  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

=====  
**7. Description**  
=====

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

n/a  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation \_\_\_\_\_  
roof \_\_\_\_\_  
walls \_\_\_\_\_  
other Stone: Marble  
Granite  
Concrete  
Metal: Iron

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====

**8. Statement of Significance**

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**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: African-American  
Social History  
Art  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance** ca. 1840 - ca. 1942

**Significant Dates** 1840, 1866, 1880

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) n/a

**Cultural Affiliation** n/a

**Architect/Builder** n/a

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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**Acreage of Property** 8.173 acres

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1 18	288080	4122367	2 18	288161	4122265	3 18	288062	4122175
4 18	287922	4122218	5 18	287869	4122281	6 18	287887	4122365

See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====  
**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

name/title Anna Klemm, VDHR intern from James Madison University, 2007

(1999 research, survey, and draft document done by Sarah Fick for the Chicora Foundation)

organization Virginia Department of Historic Resources date June 2007

street & number 2801 Kensington Avenue telephone (804) 967-9899

city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23221

=====  
**Additional Documentation**  
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs** Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====  
**Property Owner**  
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Petersburg

street & number 135 North Union Street telephone (804) 733-2308

city or town Petersburg state VA zip code 23803

=====  
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**People's Memorial Cemetery  
Petersburg, VA**

Section 7 Page 1

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**Summary Description**

The People's Memorial Cemetery is being nominated under the African-American Cemeteries in Petersburg, Virginia, 1820-1942, MPD. The land comprising the cemetery was deeded by William H. and Edith Williams to various prominent African-Americans in Petersburg in three sections: the first tract of one acre was deeded in 1840, the second tract (two acres south of the first) was added in 1865, and the final five-and-one-eighth acres were deeded circa 1880.<sup>1</sup> The full 8.2 acres comprise a roughly trapezoidal shape.

Dotted with mature oak trees and a few ornamental shrubs, the cemetery's irregular topography contains no formal pathways. Grassy areas are broken only by a straight, narrow, two-track gravel road, which bisects the cemetery, running east from South Crater Road to St. Andrews Street on the western border. The burials themselves are organized into family plots of four to eight graves each; many are enclosed by low concrete walls or iron fences. Burials outside these groups may represent single burials or remnants of those that have lost their markers and/or surrounding walls.

Over half of the monuments in People's Memorial Cemetery are made of concrete, while the remaining markers have been carved from marble or granite. Many display vernacular examples of Victorian and early-twentieth century designs. Also included are a number of small marble "lodge stones," which denote an individual's membership in a fraternal order or other organization. The conditions of the stones and other monuments vary. Most of the remaining stones are in relatively good condition, but a few have been toppled or broken. The grass is kept neat, but some of the plot fences are falling over. Lighting in the cemetery is limited to a streetlamp in the far southern corner on Talliaferro Road.

**General Description**

People's Memorial Cemetery lies on the west side of South Crater Road, south of the adjacent Little Church Cemetery. A ridge runs northeast-southwest into Little Church Cemetery and is paralleled by a shallow ditch, which terminates on the southwest corner along Talliaferro Road. This southern portion contains the steepest terrain in the cemetery, while the earlier, northern portion is much more level, thus providing what would probably be considered the prime lots. In addition to the gravel road that bisects the property, a dirt road of about 125 feet in length extends into the southeastern corner from South Crater Road, and a narrow path of about fifty feet extends into the southeastern border from the Windy Ridge apartment complex.

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**People's Memorial Cemetery  
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Maintenance efforts have been sporadic over the years and often resulted in the damage of various features of the property: many graves show the scars of nylon-string weed trimmers and some of the human remains investigated in the spectrometer survey showed unusually high compaction rates, probably due in part to the heavy equipment the City of Petersburg contracted to clear the underbrush.<sup>2</sup> The debris from these efforts, which was dumped near the center of the cemetery, is now covered in grass. Although some stones are broken, the pieces are kept close to the bases, and the surrounding weed and grass cover is well-trimmed. Many broken stones do show evidence of attempted repairs, but the use of Portland cement has led to further breakage on some. Of the Victorian iron fences that remain, some are missing sections, and several more have been either partially or completely uprooted, but remain on site. However, four remain intact with only minor cracks and a thin rust cover, despite their age.<sup>3</sup>

With the exception of the gravel road and the two paths mentioned, there is no circulation plan for the cemetery. Visitors may roam through the cemetery by whatever route they choose. Compressed soil and less healthy grass point to the location of a horseshoe-shaped track that once provided access to many grave sites, but it has grown over since the addition of the gravel road nearly forty years ago. The lack of any traces of paving material suggest that the original paths of the cemetery were never more than dirt walkways, most likely following the outline of family plots. Although original plans for the layout of these plots have been lost, varying amounts of concrete and granite curbing appear around many sites. Granite curbing was usually carved in four- to eight-foot sections, often with taller corner posts, and attached by iron dogs. Concrete curbing was typically manufactured on site; several fragments show a family name impressed at the entry point.<sup>4</sup> Some of the curbing at People's is in very good condition, while other sections are cracked, displaced, or tilted.

Original lots are estimated to have been between seventeen and eighteen feet square, providing about three hundred square feet per plot.<sup>5</sup> Visual reconnaissance has shown evidence that many lots, especially along South Crater Road (route 301), had either fences or curbs to mark them. These features, along with the general lack of pathways and the asymmetrical groupings of deciduous trees and old cedars, show the influence of the rural cemetery movement. This movement emphasized the use of pastoral landscapes and natural, gently rolling terrain in contrast with earlier more extravagantly adorned and symmetrical Classical cemetery layouts. The unique evolution of People's Memorial Cemetery is evident of the fact that it shows very little influence from later cemetery movements.

People's Memorial Cemetery currently contains 692 stones.<sup>6</sup> The grave sites are consistently orientated in one of two patterns. All of the stones in the original section are oriented in an east-west fashion, while those relocated from the 1943 widening of South Crater Road (re-interred in the southwestern portion of the cemetery) have a north-south orientation.<sup>7</sup> The variety of markers present is great, with headstones comprising the most common type of marker (See Figure 1 for an illustration of these designs). Most of these are of the traditional marble or granite forms, typically square, rounded, or segmented tops. While most are of a very plain, simple style, there are also many ornamented ones. The presence of a number of Victorian styles indicates that the African-American community was influenced by these late nineteenth and early twentieth century designs. Also prevalent are "lodge stones," which denoted an individual's

membership in a lodge or fraternal organization. These typically only document the name of the

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organization, the individual, and a death date.

These stones appear to have been created by the same stone carvers who crafted the rest of the monuments in People's Memorial Cemetery. While a cemetery of this size certainly contains the work of many craftsmen, only four have been identified. The most commonly occurring inscription belongs to the firm of Burns and Campbell. Also identified are the insignia of C. M. Walsh (found on some of the more ornate stones), Pembroke Granite Works, and M. R. (Milton Rivers).<sup>8</sup>

Many of the headstones are believed to be of the "die in socket" forms, which consist of a usually rectangular vertical slab of marble or concrete fitted into a horizontal square base.<sup>9</sup> Next in popularity are the die in base stones, constructed of granite, marble, or concrete in the same manner as the die and socket stones, without a socket. The vertical marker is attached with metal rods implanted in the two stones.<sup>10</sup>

Third in popularity were plaque markers, with bases made either of concrete, or stone such as marble or granite. These bore metal plaques, detailing the interred individual's information. Marble or granite lawn-type markers were the next most common. These were simple square or rectangular monuments, never more than two feet square and typically raised only a few inches above the ground. The fifth most commonly-occurring style of headstone was the government-issued military stones, which date from the Spanish-American War to the First World War.

Metal funeral home plaques also are present as is the bedstead style monument. A bedstead monument included a footstone and side rails laid to imitate the form of a bed. The majority of these are made of marble.

More extravagant and rarer markers strongly resemble those in the white section of Blandford Cemetery (also in Petersburg). Raised-top markers are rectangular, usually granite slabs raised about six inches above the ground with the inscription on the flat top of the marker. Neoclassical pedestal tombs consisted of an often high and multi-tiered base, which terminated with an urn or other decorative element. Also referred to as obelisks, these markers usually predate 1920. Pulpit markers are typically less than thirty inches tall and inscribed on the slanting top of the marker. Finally, base, die, and cap monuments were usually constructed of granite or marble and predate 1930. These heavy stones consisted of at least three or more pieces: a base, which is often tiered and inscribed with the family name; a central massive die, which usually contains the epitaph; and a cap.<sup>11</sup>

The remaining markers fall into none of the previously mentioned categories. Some are chunks of building materials or rough stone, probably found or purchased very cheaply from local stonecutters. One example is a brick inscribed only in magic marker. Popular in white cemeteries of the same time period, concrete ledger stones were thin horizontal stone slabs laid to cover graves of about three-by-six feet. Occasionally set on a low masonry base, the stone would be supported by four to six pillars.<sup>12</sup> Another interesting stone is a marble column with an integral base, with crude carving on the base. The presence of only one

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capabilities of the families purchasing stones.

There are several manmade features in addition to the gravestones. Most appear to have marked the boundaries of certain plots. One example is a carved marble tablet inscribed "HENRY H. KERR'S / SQUARE." Due to the fact that no comprehensive plan for the location of graves within the cemetery is known to have existed, it seems likely that people would have wanted to take extra measures of precaution to protect personal plots. Other surviving spatial markers include a concrete and brick wall along a 25-foot section of St. Andrews Street; presumably put into place to separate the cemetery from the adjacent neighborhood. There is no evidence that benches or park-style furnishings—common features of the Rural Cemetery Movement—ever existed in People's Memorial Cemetery, although it appears that several family plots contained trash cans at one point, though none of these remain.

Five plots, all located at the north end of the cemetery, contain remnants of iron fencing. The fencing on plots 20, 21, and 27, which exhibits a pattern of apex-topped posts and an ornamental name-plate gate,<sup>13</sup> was manufactured by Valley Forge in Knoxville, Tennessee.<sup>14</sup> Two gates contain the winged shields associated with this company's insignia. Plot 25 was once bounded by a fence, and, although most of it is now stacked on the edge of the lot, the remaining gate shows a circular shield with the name "C. HANIKA / & / SONS / MUNCIE, IND." Plot 37 is surrounded by a hairpin-and-picket fence, manufactured by the Cincinnati Iron Fence Company in Cincinnati, Ohio, in a design that is very similar to Stewart Iron Works design pattern 26-28.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that many iron manufacturers used essentially the same designs, with only minute variations. Finally, there is a remnant of woven wire fencing set on wood posts with a bottom rail (set at a grade). Dart-shaped "pickets" occur every six inches, woven into the horizontal wires.

Many of the inscriptions and symbolism on the stones of People's Memorial Cemetery are distinctly Judeo-Christian. Many scriptural references can be found. While some refer to the Christian hope in life after death (such as Revelation xiv, 13, "Happy are the dead who die in the faith of Christ!"); others reflect on promises of peace (for example, Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd..."). Unique to African-American cemeteries in Petersburg are numerous references to "Mizpah," the Old Testament site of a "protective bargain" struck between Jacob and Laban after Jacob had escaped Laban's mistreatment. Traditionally used as a benediction of God's protection, this word seems to have taken on new meaning in the African-American community. Perhaps invoking Jacob's declaration that "the God of Abraham...will judge between us," they may have hoped for divine justice concerning injuries suffered at the hands of whites.<sup>16</sup>

Plants, such as the dogwood, ivy, rose, and acanthus leaves provide much of the cemetery's symbolism. Dogwood flowers, for example, are often icons of Christ's crucifixion, while acanthus leaves have been known to represent Christ's crown of thorns. Other symbolism includes doves, lambs, praying hands, the gates of Heaven, and an anchor.<sup>17</sup>



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**Statement of Significance**

The People's Memorial Cemetery is being nominated under the African-American Cemeteries in Petersburg, Virginia, 1820-1942, MPD. The cemetery reflects the organization of "free persons of color" and is evidence of the evolution of the entrepreneurial efforts of African-American undertakers and stonecutters; the activities of mutual aid societies; and the community's social, religious, and artistic values from 1840 to 1942. The progression in styles of stonecutting and the ownership of African-American undertaking and artisan businesses are documented in this cemetery while most written records of these enterprises have been lost. Excluded from both state and city government positions, antebellum African-Americans formed "mutual aid societies" to provide members with social connections within their community, health benefits, and care for any surviving family members at their death. Individuals organized by several of these societies purchased the land for, and maintained, People's Memorial Cemetery until 1931. The success of these organizations enabled their members to purchase property and enjoy burial rights that would otherwise have been impossible.

**Acknowledgements**

The majority of this material has been taken from the research and survey work of Sarah Fick for the Chicora Foundation done in completion of a three volume report entitled "The African-American Cemeteries of Petersburg, Virginia: Continuity and Change." Three individual nomination drafts and one Multiple Property Document draft were also completed but never submitted for listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register or the National Register of Historic Places. This report and these materials were turned over to the archive files of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in 1999.

As of August 2007, Anna Klemm, a student at James Madison University, with the permission of the City of Petersburg, and under the guidance of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, has completed the research and compiling of this material for submission into these registers.

**Justification of Criteria**

People's Memorial Cemetery is eligible under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic History: African-American and Social History because it demonstrates the evolution of the physical and social structure of African-American communities and bears witness to the development of African-American entrepreneurialism. The social status of individuals within the community was often denoted by the type of grave marker they displayed, and People's contains the burials of members of many long-established Black families.

People's Memorial Cemetery is eligible under Criterion C in the area of Art because it embodies many of the distinctive characteristics of several different movements of stonecutting and grave ornamentation implemented by African-Americans. The techniques of stonecutting and engraving vary greatly to include many monuments not found elsewhere in the area.

It is also proposed under National Register Criterion Consideration D as an individual cemetery.

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**Historical Background**

“Free persons of color,” a class of individuals whose rights were under white control, have been an integral part of the Petersburg community from its founding in 1748.<sup>18</sup> By 1830, they comprised nearly a quarter of the city's population. Most positions in Petersburg's rapidly-growing tobacco factories were held by this class of individuals. Many established themselves as craftsmen, trades people, entrepreneurs, blacksmiths, barbers, carpenters, mechanics, preachers, shoemakers, boatmen, and restaurant owners.<sup>19</sup> Despite the fact that whites ran both the local and state governments, the African-American community in Petersburg was one of the most prosperous in the nation, due largely to their success at organizing in churches and benevolent societies. When the nation experienced an economic crash in the 1870's, Petersburg was one of the first areas to recover.

William H. and Edith Williams deeded one acre of land to twenty-eight prominent members of the black community in 1840. This was the first black-owned cemetery in Petersburg's Hustings Court, and it became the largest Black cemetery in Petersburg.<sup>20</sup>

Burial practices had evolved as highly important in the African-American community, as they provided a chance for plantation-bound individuals to acknowledge a member of their own community. Handed-down African customs dictated that an individual's funeral was one of the most important events in his/her life, and the conversion to Christian funeral practices ensured that white owners usually condoned these funerals.

African-Americans were influenced not only by Christian burial practices, but also by European cemetery design. In 1830, the French-inspired “rural” cemetery movement began to take root in this country. Starting in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, cemeteries took on the look of pastoral landscapes designed to evoke the feeling of a calm retreat in nature. Monuments were interspersed with groupings of trees and plants to create an image of the continuity of life. Winding pathways (such as the original horseshoe-shaped drive at People's Memorial Cemetery) ensured that visitors traveled slowly through the graveyard.<sup>21</sup>

The creation of benevolent societies ensured that “free persons of color” received respectable burials. The Elebecks and Stewarts, two of the families represented among the 1840 purchasers of this “burying ground,” were members of the Benevolent (later “Beneficial”) Society of Free Men of Color (BSFMC), which caused the cemetery to be known as “Beneficial.” The earliest American benevolent society dates to 1783, and the BSFMC, Petersburg's first society, was chartered in 1818.<sup>22</sup> The importance of benevolent societies stems from the sense of community they fostered among city-dwelling African-Americans. These societies functioned by collecting an initiation fee and monthly dues from each member, which ensured the member “a square in the place of internment,” along with small cash grants to surviving family members. As every member was required to attend each member's funeral, funerary arrangements soon became the primary function of these societies. The graves of members were marked with plaques or “lodge stones.” The stones associated with twenty-four benevolent societies have been identified within People's Memorial Cemetery.<sup>23</sup>

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In 1865, William H. Williams sold the two acres south of the first tract to a group of ten prominent free blacks, including undertaker Thomas Scott. These men had business dealings with each other and the purchasers of the first tract, and were more than likely members of a mutual-assistance or burial society.<sup>24</sup> Three African-American craftsmen (Peter Archer, Armistead Wilson, and William Jackson) purchased the final five and one-eighth acres, adjacent to the existing cemetery property, from Williams' estate in 1868. Each of these men established a sixteen-foot-by-sixteen-foot grave plot in the northeast corner and Archer built a house on his portion to the south of these lots. Archer, Wilson, Jackson, and their families, are believed to be interred in this area, now the northern corner of People's Memorial Cemetery. The heirs to Jackson's estate, Eloise and J. C. Drake, purchased Archer's third of the land in 1877 and the southern half of Wilson's tract in 1879. The northernmost half of Wilson's parcel was sold to undertaker Thomas Scott in 1879, and the cemetery was generally referred to as "Scott Cemetery" by 1880.<sup>25</sup>

Peoples' private ownership meant that there was often no standing agreement for the care of the burial grounds and no common repository for burial records. This not only caused periodic physical neglect, but has made it impossible for a comprehensive map of the burials to be drawn. Another result of the numerous owners of People's Memorial Cemetery is that the different sections were referred to by different names throughout its history. The names of the sections included, from north to south: Old Beneficial, Beneficial Board/Scott Cemetery, Providence First Section, Providence Second Section, and Jackson Cemetery/Jackson Memorial Cemetery Section.<sup>26</sup>

In 1931, J.M. Wilkerson, another African-American undertaker, attempted to consolidate his two-and-a-half-acre Little Church Cemetery (which formed the northern border of People's) with the larger cemetery. However, the deed for this transaction was lost and the title to Little Church remains in Wilson's name.<sup>27</sup> People's lack of fences may have also contributed to the blurring of responsibility for its care. Observers, such as W.E.B. Du Bois (1907), referred to the entire Little Church/People's tract as "Providence Cemetery."<sup>28</sup>

Despite the lack of physical care it received, most of Petersburg's African-Americans continued to take pride in the cemetery. Periodic attempts to reconstitute or replace the organizations in charge of the cemetery tracts usually died, but interest in the Cemetery never did. In 1906, the Women Union Cemetery Club raised \$350 to purchase a new iron fence with a central arched gate, which read "Providence Cemetery."<sup>29</sup>

Thomas H. Brown, who began his undertaking career under Thomas Scott, became the sole owner of People's Memorial Cemetery by 1920.<sup>30</sup> He campaigned to secure tax-exempt status for the Cemetery, and, in 1922, he reorganized the existing People's Association as the Colored Cemetery Association. Brown convinced the city government to draw up plans for bringing the cemetery into line with city health and safety regulations, as well as provisions for improving the grounds. Funding was to come from the public and, despite Brown's campaigning, the money was not forthcoming. In 1926, however, the Cemetery Memorial Association and Colored Chamber of Commerce sponsored a \$3000 improvement program. Elaborate plans were drawn up to organize the plots into neat rows, named for prominent local

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African-Americans.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, funding fell short again and no more significant improvement efforts were attempted.

The final blow to Thomas Brown's vision for People's Memorial Cemetery came in 1943, when the City government decided to widen South Crater Road, thus paving over about one-tenth of an acre of the cemetery. To compensate for this, the city deeded People's one acre of land on the southwest margin of the cemetery for the re-interment of the 108 burials that had to be removed from the roadway (see Figure 2). While these provisions allowed the new section to be neatly organized for the first time on a grid system, the City's pledge to reset the fence and 1906 gate went unfulfilled and both have disappeared entirely.

As of 2007, the cemetery is neatly maintained, with evenly-cut grass and weeds framing both sides of the dirt-and-gravel track that bisects the cemetery. This undergrowth is trimmed carefully around each stone, and the debris pile from the city's 1998 efforts to clear more excessive underbrush is covered in grass, making it look like an oddly-shaped hill in the middle of the graves. Talliaferro Road has been paved. The large, deciduous trees are still present and in good condition, though a few are overgrown with vines. While the city appears to be maintaining the cemetery on the most basic level, more complete restoration is needed. The iron fences surrounding several of the grave plots are either partially or completely missing, and one shows signs of vandalism. The trees pose a threat to the graves and ornamentation. Several trees near the center have encroached upon and toppled some stones. Others are encroaching upon the iron fences or breaking up the curbing. While these trees add to the rural cemetery feel, they are threats to the site's most precious asset: the graves themselves. The remains of curbing mark many plots, but nearly all of these are either broken or missing large sections. One site on the eastern half of the cemetery has attempted to remedy this by replacing the damaged concrete curbing with cinderblocks. However, as one 1890's observer noted, the cemetery still needs some form of fencing, both to protect from future vandalism and carelessness and to frame it once again as a proud reminder of the community's heritage.

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> See Sarah Fick, *The African-American Cemeteries of Petersburg, Virginia: Continuity and Change*, Vol. 1 (Columbia, Chicora Foundation, 1999), page 54 for the names of the individuals. Hustings Court, City of Petersburg, Deed Book 11, p. 321 records the sale of this land.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Fick's 1999 survey noted that the city had cleared underbrush after acquiring the cemetery in 1986 (Fick, pp. 52, 84-7). The frequency of such maintenance efforts seems to have increased since 1999: the graves are no longer matted with the dried-out remains of overgrown grass, and the excess grass from the mowing has been cleared.

<sup>3</sup> These fences probably date from ca. 1860- ca. 1920, based on the dates that their manufacturers were in business and the dates that such fencing was popular in the South. C. Hanika and Sons was one of the shortest-lived, existing under this name from 1907-1910, according to personal correspondence with Michael Trinkley of the Chicora Foundation, August 25, 1999. For more information on history of the fence manufacturing companies and the popularity of such fences, see Fick, pp. 42-44, 83-84, 86.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of how this fencing was constructed, see Fick, pp. 44-45.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the spacing of graves and plot markers, Fick estimates that the graves were probably around seventeen to eighteen square feet, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> For a complete listing of these stones and the names of the interred individuals, see Appendix 2 of Fick, *African American Cemeteries of Petersburg*. The standard format of recording the name on the marker, the inscription technique, material, measurements, design features, and coping and fencing information was used.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on this widening, see Section 8 of this document, Harvey L. Parks, "Plan of Markers and Other Features at People's Cemetery, Virginia" (The Chicora Foundation, Chester, Va, 1999), and Fick, pp. 62-69.

<sup>8</sup> For a complete listing of the carvers whose work is present in Petersburg's African-American Cemeteries, see Fick, pp. 44-46.

<sup>9</sup> Due to the fact that die in socket are not distinguishable from the simple tablet stone (which does not include the base) unless cut out of the base, only 0.2% were identified with certainty (Fick, pg. 78).

<sup>10</sup> See Fick pp. 45-47 for a listing of the stonemasons whose work can be seen in People's Memorial Cemetery. Descriptions of the varying types of stones may be found in Fick, pp. 34-36.

<sup>11</sup> A more detailed description of these stones can be found on Fick, 34-36.

<sup>12</sup> Fick, p. 38

<sup>13</sup> The only design we have been able to identify from the company shows a bow-and-picket design with an identical gate to these. This suggests that the more ornamental gate was used to "dress up the otherwise plain fence (Fick, 83).

<sup>14</sup> See the survey map produced by Harvey L. Parks, Inc. Land Surveyors for the Chicora Foundation, "Plan of Markers and Other Features at People's Cemetery, Petersburg, Virginia" (Chester: Harvey L. Parks, Jan. 1, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> According to Karl J. Litzenmayer, "Stewart Iron Works, a Centenary Company," *Northern Kentucky Heritage* (1998, vol. 5, no. 1) pp. 1-14.

<sup>16</sup> Background on the use of the word "Mizpah" in African-American culture can be found in Langston Hughes, ed., *Book of Negro Folklore* (New York, Dodd, Mead & Company, 1958), pp. 589-590. Scripture reference from Genesis xxxi, 48-53.

<sup>17</sup> Hebrews vi, 19, describes faith in Christ as an "anchor of the soul, both sincere and steadfast."

<sup>18</sup> Petersburg was officially recognized as a town in 1784. In 1848, the town was incorporated with several surrounding towns, including Pocahontas, Appomattock, and Blandford (in which People's Memorial Cemetery would have been located). Edward A. Wyatt, IV, *Along Petersburg Streets: Historic Sites and Buildings of Petersburg, Virginia* (Richmond, Dietz Publishing Company, 1943), p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Luther Porter Jackson, *Free Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860* (New York: D. Appleton Century Co., 1942).

<sup>20</sup> Women typically worked at stripping the stems from the tobacco leaves while the men twisted the stems so that they could be compacted evenly to distribute moisture. Despite this contribution to the economy, blacks earned considerably less money in their trades than whites did and as a result, only one-third of the free families in Petersburg owned property in 1860 (Fick, 11-2). This deed can be found in Hustings Court, City of Petersburg, Deed Book 11, p. 321.

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<sup>21</sup> For a brief overview of the Rural Cemetery Movement, see Elizabeth Walton Potter and Beth M. Boland, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Fick, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> For more information on Mutual Benefit Societies, see Fick, pp. 15-19, also *Constitution, Rules and Regulations of the Beneficial Society of Free Men of Color, of the City of Petersburg and the State of Virginia, as revised on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of August A.D. 1852* (Special Collections, VSU). Fick identifies 24 organizations by their initials or names on the cemetery's "lodge stones."

<sup>24</sup> Hustings Court, Deed Book 28, p. 347 gives record of the transaction. Luther Porter Jackson, *Free Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860* (New York: D. Appleton Century Co., 1942) and Lucious Edwards, Jr., *Free Black Property Holders in Petersburg, Virginia* (Petersburg: unpublished M.A. thesis, 1977) further examine this claim. Thomas Scott is later mentioned as being the president of the Old Beneficial Board.

<sup>25</sup> Fick, 45-57.

<sup>26</sup> Fick, 45-57.

<sup>27</sup> The history of James M. Wilkerson is available at J.M. Wilkerson Funeral Establishment, "J. M. Wilkerson Funeral Establishment, Inc.: About Us: Our Story," [http://www.webfh.com/fh/aboutus/history.cfm?&fh\\_id=10691&s\\_id=881B6CD163802528920528CE02B145B6](http://www.webfh.com/fh/aboutus/history.cfm?&fh_id=10691&s_id=881B6CD163802528920528CE02B145B6), accessed June 16, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> This observation from Du Bois can be found in his book, *Economic Cooperation Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta, Atlanta University Press, 1907).

<sup>29</sup> The Women Union Cemetery Club was headed by Nellie Coleman, Cinderella Byrd, and Malinda Johnson. They appealed to several Black churches, Sunday Schools, Lodges, and Societies to help with the funding of this gate, Fick pg. 57.

<sup>30</sup> According to a letter written by Thomas H. Brown in 1942, the men who purchased the first three sections of the cemetery (in 1840, 1865, and 1879) did so on behalf of three mutual aid societies: Old Beneficial Board (1840), and the Providence Mutual Society, and the Jackson Club (1865 and 1879). In an unrecorded deed, Beneficial and Jackson transferred their ownership to Providence Mutual Society, of which Thomas H. Brown was the last surviving member.

<sup>30</sup> Fick, 62-3 provides a map of the tax parcel.

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**10. Geographic Data**

**Verbal Description**

The People's Memorial Cemetery boundaries are known as Tax Parcel 021-17-0009 as identified by the City of Petersburg's Tax Assessor's information online and is the same information referenced in Deed Book 421, page 524.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries include all the land currently designated as People's Memorial Cemetery by the City of Petersburg.

**Photographic Data:**

All the following information is the same for the photography  
People's Cemetery, City of Petersburg, VDHR file #123-5031-0001  
Photos taken by: Anna Klemm  
Photos taken: Summer 2007  
Digital Photos stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Photo 1 of 8  
Looking south from South Crater Road at granite coping plot #315.

Photo 2 of 8  
Looking south towards Talliaferro and St. Andrews Streets.

Photo 3 of 8  
Looking across cemetery at landscape and fallen headstone.

Photo 4 of 8  
Looking from paved/gravel drive just off South Crater Road to the southwest.

Photo 5 of 8  
Looking west over Plot #19 with granite coping to iron fenced plot #21.

Photo 6 of 8  
Looking from paved/gravel drive just off South Crater Road to the south.

Photo 7 of 8  
Looking west at Plot #356 with iron fencing.

Photo 8 of 8



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Looking west from South Crater Road at Bedstead Monuments in Northeast Corner of Cemetery, #200A and 200B.

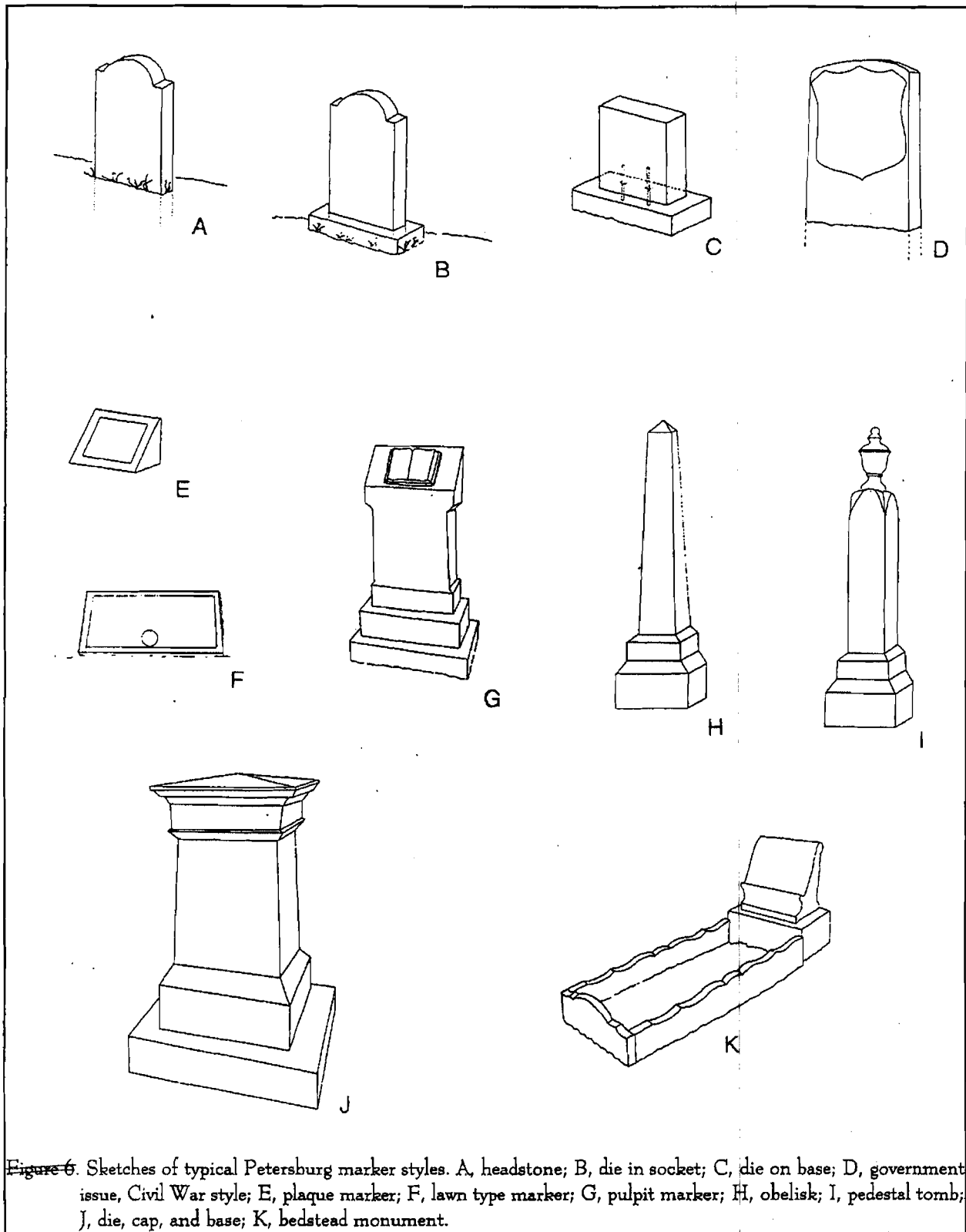


FIGURE 1 : PEOPLE'S CEMETERY

FIGURE 2: PEOPLE'S CEMETERY

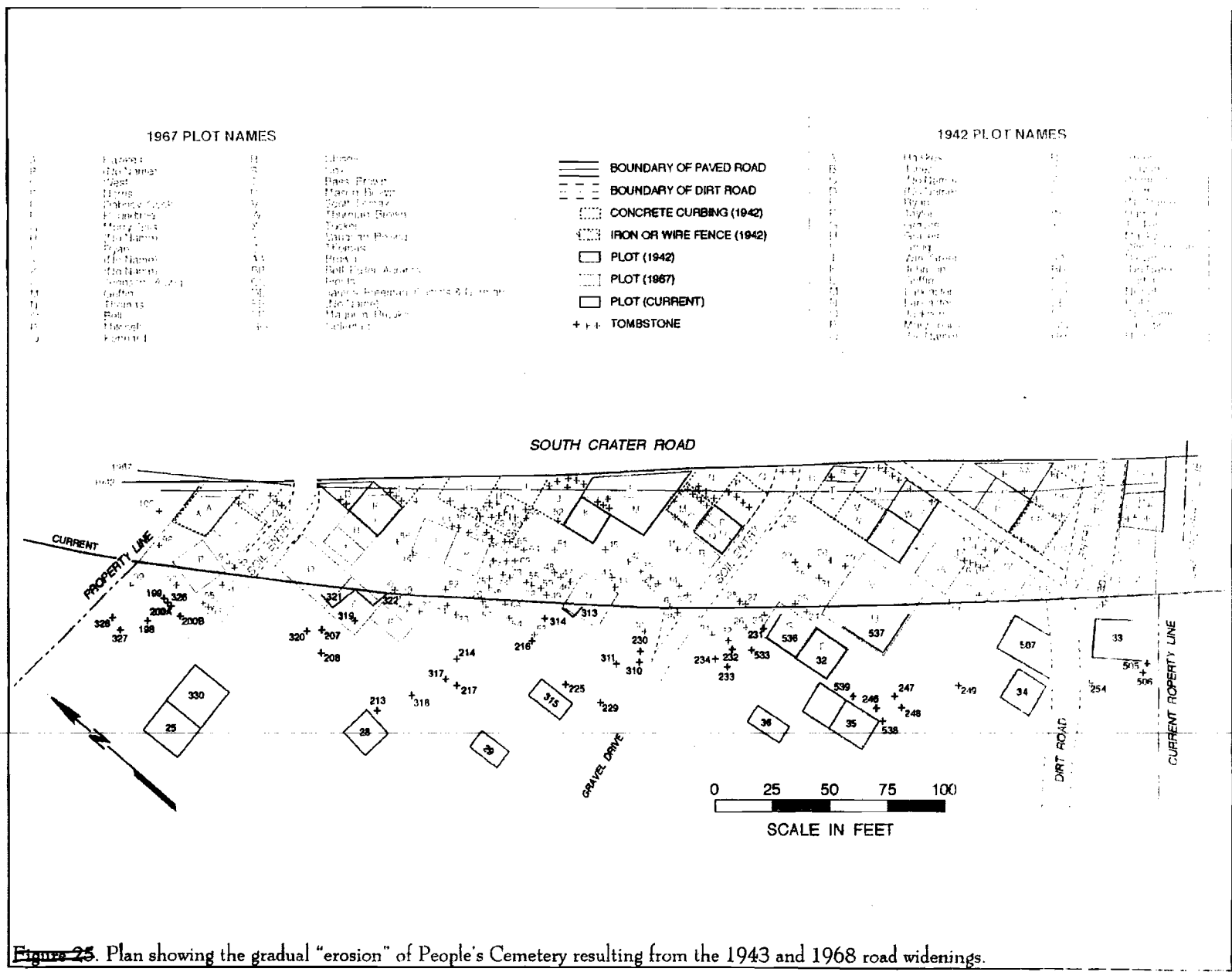


Figure 25. Plan showing the gradual "erosion" of People's Cemetery resulting from the 1943 and 1968 road widenings.

# CITY OF PETERSBURG



SCALE: 1" = 100'



MAP 21

PETERSBURG QUADRANGLE  
 VIRGINIA  
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5558 IV SE  
 (HOPEWELL)



25' 286 RICHMOND 21 MI 287 2 320 000 FEET 289 77°22'30" 37°15'  
 4125  
 HOPEWELL 7 MI  
 330 000 FEET  
 4123  
 4122  
 DISPUTANTA 10 MI SUFFOLK 57 MI  
 5 MI TO U.S. 301  
 4121  
 12'30"  
 4120

Peoples  
 Memorial  
 Cemetery  
 Petersburg, VA  
 123-5031-0001  
 UTM ZONE 18  
 1. 288080E  
 4122367N  
 2. 288161E  
 4122265N  
 3. 288062E  
 4122175N  
 4. 287922E  
 4122218N  
 5. 287069E  
 4122281N  
 6. 287887E  
 4122365N