

African American Cemeteries

Early Burials

Prior to the civil war, enslaved African Americans were generally buried with the family who owned them. Slaves are mentioned in the records of many public and protestant cemeteries as well as in family graveyards. Free Blacks were generally buried in city-owned public cemeteries, potter's fields, or in Catholic cemeteries. Unfortunately, early burials were often marked with fieldstones, wooden headstones or crosses, or personal items - all of which have disappeared.

Church Cemeteries

There were many small African American church congregations that formed following emancipation and many of these churches had churchyards or cemeteries where they performed burials. As with early protestant and catholic parish cemeteries, funds for perpetual care were not set aside and because burials in these cemeteries were free - little care was performed. It was the responsibility of the families to maintain their loved one's graves.

Commercial Cemeteries

In 1874, Greenwood Cemetery opened on Lucas & Hunt near St. Peter's Cemetery. In 1903, Father Dickson cemetery was opened by the International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor on Sappington Road in Crestwood. In 1920, Andrew H. Watson opened Washington Park Cemetery on Natural Bridge Road. All three cemeteries were built in the rural cemetery tradition. However, unlike other rural cemeteries, no plans were established for perpetual care. In the 1970s, control of the cemeteries transferred to new owners. The new owners - discovering no funds for perpetual care - realized the only way to profit from the cemeteries was new burials. The cemeteries quick fell into disrepair and soon became overgrown, vulnerable to vandalism, and other illegal activities. Fortunately, in the 1990s concerns were raised and Greenwood Cemetery and Father Dickson Cemetery benefited from large scale volunteer restoration projects which continue to this day.

Washington Park's story is more tragic. Interstate 70 projects and airport expansion resulted in large removal projects at the cemetery with thousands of burials removed. Other burials bordering on the airport or interstate were flooded by water disposition from the new infrastructure projects. From September 1987-1989, new ownership did a particularly poor job of record-keeping, failing to record the section / lot / grave of a large number of burials. Today, the cemetery is in extremely poor condition despite multiple active efforts to save it. Large portions of the property are overgrown and impossible to venture into without significant clean-up. Burial markers are missing / damaged or completely lost to woods or water.

List of African American Cemeteries of St. Louis and St. Louis County

- Ballwin Missionary Baptist 14483 Clayton Road
- Coldwater Creek (New) 13701 Old Halls Ferry Rd. Black Jack
- Father Moses Dickson 999 Sappington Road, Crestwood (845 Sappington Road, Crestwood)
- First Baptist 16398 Chesterfield Airport Rd, Chesterfield
- First Missionary Baptist 14483 Clayton Rd. Chesterfield
- Greenwood 6571 St. Louis Ave., Hillsdale
- Hope 5909 Hornecker Rd., Pacific
- Mount Pleasant 18725 Wild Horse Creek Rd, Wildwood
- Musick Baptist 790 Fee Fee Rd Maryland Heights
- New Coldwater Creek 13701 Old Halls Ferry Rd. Black Jack
- Quinette 12188 Old Big Bend Road
- Union Baptist 17233 Church Rd, Chesterfield / Wildwood
- Washington Park 5500 James S. McDonnell Blvd.