



National Context

Memorial Park Cemetery is one of several cemeteries for African American residents established during segregation and remains an active site of burial and remembrance. Members of Tampa's Belmont Heights community and organizations like the NAACP, Friends of Belmont Heights Memorial Park Cemetery, and The Cemetery Society continually work to bring dignity to the dead at Memorial Park through their advocacy.

Memorial Park Cemetery represents one piece of a broader national story. From New York City; to Tulsa, Oklahoma; Richmond Virginia; and Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Black burial grounds were marginalized, sold, paved over, and redeveloped, often without redress, in the name of "progress." Cemeteries contain America's stories and Black cemeteries contain stories about people, places, and families often missing from the larger public narrative.

Learn more at www.blackcemeterynetwork.org

Memorial Park Cemetery



Soulwalk is a community-centered arts & cultural initiative that elevates and amplifies the cultural heritage, character, and identity of Tampa's historic African American neighborhoods. Traversing approximately 46 miles and 25 neighborhoods, Soulwalk currently includes nearly 100 stops that visitors can explore, including public art installations, historic landmarks, museums, cemeteries, and more. This collaborative initiative, with a growing list of partners that includes Hillsborough County, the Tampa Bay History Center and the University of South Florida, seeks to bring fresh insights, opportunities to participate, learn, and remember.



TAMPA
SOULWALK
Art. Community. Growth.



www.tampa.gov/soulwalk

History

Memorial Park Cemetery was purchased by John Robinson in 1929. He operated the cemetery (as a sole proprietor) until his death in 2019. The City of Tampa secured official ownership of the cemetery in 2023 and currently maintains the 20-acre cemetery after initially losing it in a tax sale and repurchasing it from a real estate investor.

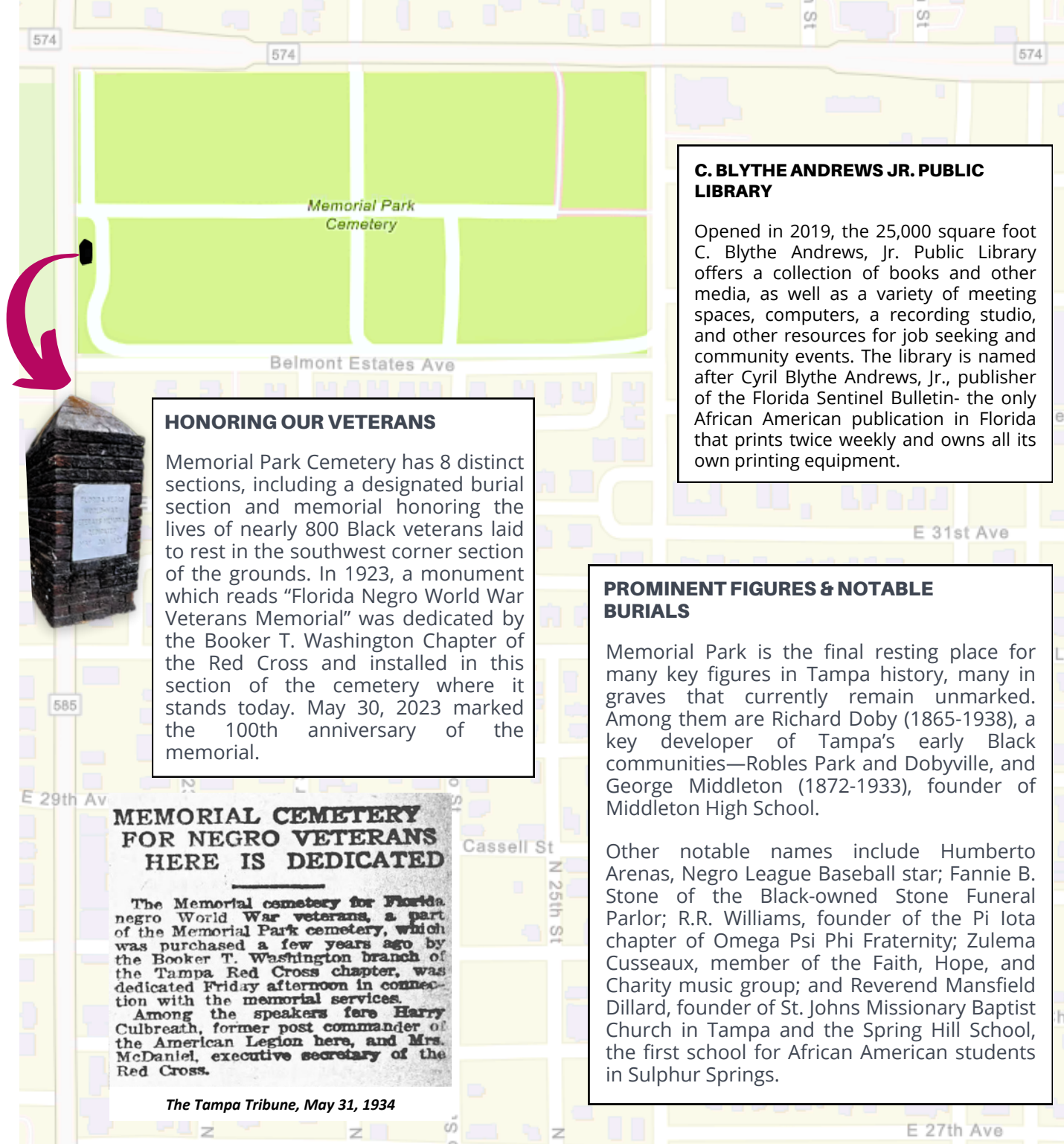
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Cemeteries & Segregation-Tampa

Prior to 1964, “segregation era” often meant racial separation even in death—with Black people and white people buried in separate cemeteries or separate sections of cemeteries. Work is underway throughout the Tampa Bay area to identify and memorialize burial locations of Black residents which have often been built over, ignored, under-resourced, and erased from public records and hometown histories.



1956 USGS Tampa Map; Historical Topographic Map Collection courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey, Esri



HONORING OUR VETERANS

Memorial Park Cemetery has 8 distinct sections, including a designated burial section and memorial honoring the lives of nearly 800 Black veterans laid to rest in the southwest corner section of the grounds. In 1923, a monument which reads “Florida Negro World War Veterans Memorial” was dedicated by the Booker T. Washington Chapter of the Red Cross and installed in this section of the cemetery where it stands today. May 30, 2023 marked the 100th anniversary of the memorial.

C. BLYTHE ANDREWS JR. PUBLIC LIBRARY

Opened in 2019, the 25,000 square foot C. Blythe Andrews, Jr. Public Library offers a collection of books and other media, as well as a variety of meeting spaces, computers, a recording studio, and other resources for job seeking and community events. The library is named after Cyril Blythe Andrews, Jr., publisher of the Florida Sentinel Bulletin- the only African American publication in Florida that prints twice weekly and owns all its own printing equipment.

PROMINENT FIGURES & NOTABLE BURIALS

Memorial Park is the final resting place for many key figures in Tampa history, many in graves that currently remain unmarked. Among them are Richard Doby (1865-1938), a key developer of Tampa’s early Black communities—Robles Park and Dobyville, and George Middleton (1872-1933), founder of Middleton High School.

Other notable names include Humberto Arenas, Negro League Baseball star; Fannie B. Stone of the Black-owned Stone Funeral Parlor; R.R. Williams, founder of the Pi Iota chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity; Zulema Cusseaux, member of the Faith, Hope, and Charity music group; and Reverend Mansfield Dillard, founder of St. Johns Missionary Baptist Church in Tampa and the Spring Hill School, the first school for African American students in Sulphur Springs.

MEMORIAL CEMETERY FOR NEGRO VETERANS HERE IS DEDICATED

The Memorial cemetery for Florida negro World War veterans, a part of the Memorial Park cemetery, which was purchased a few years ago by the Booker T. Washington branch of the Tampa Red Cross chapter, was dedicated Friday afternoon in connection with the memorial services. Among the speakers were Harry Culbreath, former post commander of the American Legion here, and Mrs. McDaniel, executive secretary of the Red Cross.

The Tampa Tribune, May 31, 1934