Tampa Bay Times

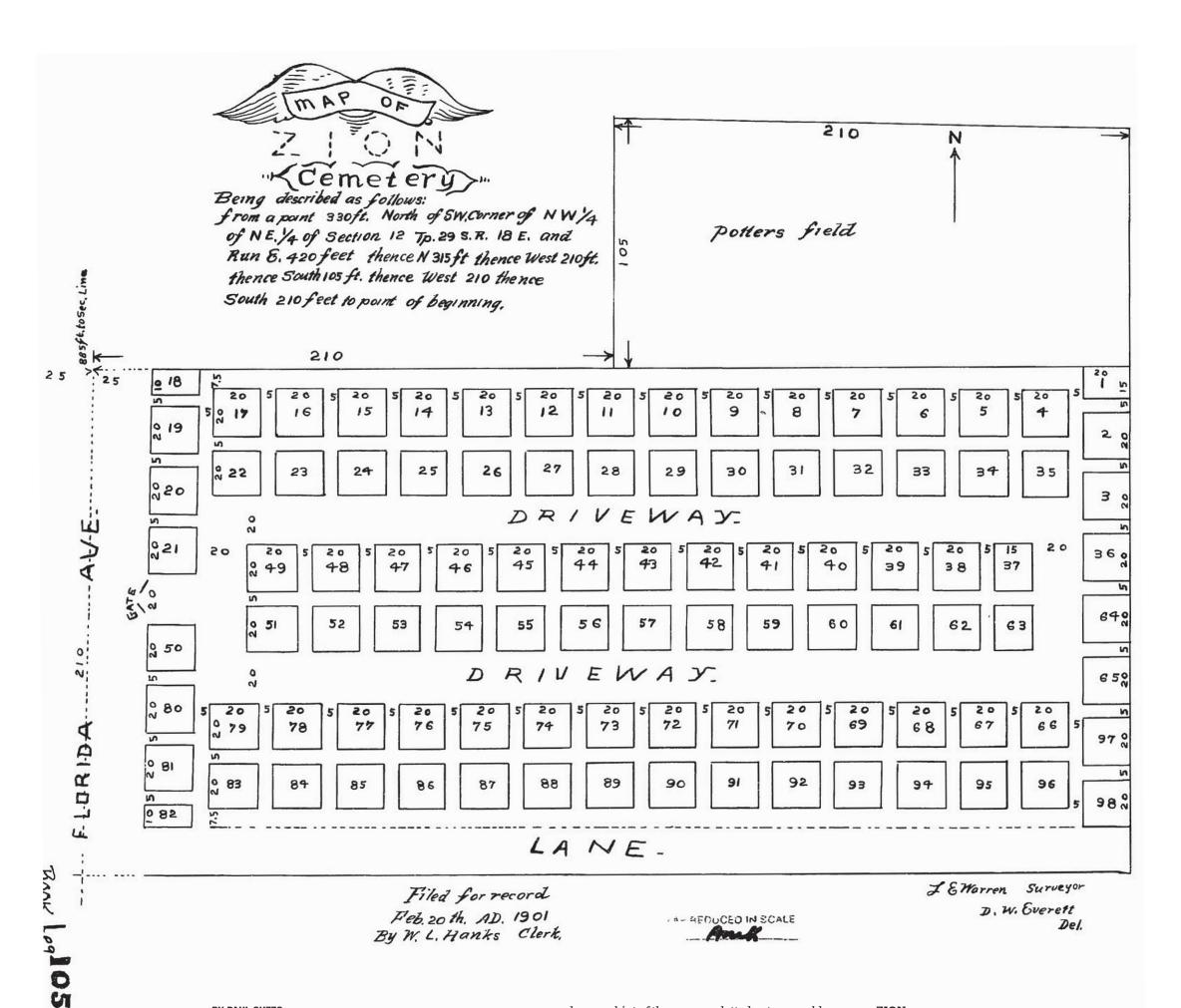
FLORIDA'S BEST NEWSPAPER

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THE FORGOTTEN

In the early 1900s, nearly 400 African-Americans were buried in Zion Cemetery on Tampa's edge, then records stopped. Where are the bodies?



BY PAUL GUZZO *Times Staff Writer*

TAMPA yron Pressley parked along the side of the road and sat for a few minutes looking out the window of his car.

He got out, walked slowly toward a chainlink fence, and asked himself: "Will people watching think I'm crazy?"

Pressley, a church pastor, knelt in front of the fence and prayed. Then he stood, took a breath and sang *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*, a hymn popular among African-Americans in the decades after slavery was abolished.

Minutes before on this January afternoon, Pressley had learned from a reporter that Tampa's black community buried its dead for two decades along this stretch of N Florida Avenue — now home to a couple of Columbia restaurant warehouses and the back of the Robles Park public housing complex.

There's no sign today that a cemetery once occupied $2\frac{1}{2}$

acres here, no hint of the squares plotted out on an old map showing nearly 800 graves.

Zion Cemetery, the first African-American cemetery recognized by the city, has been forgotten. Acting on a tip last fall, the *Tampa Bay Times* began examining what became of it.

After reviewing thousands of historic records, and conducting dozens of interviews, reporters identified death certificates for 382 people who were buried at Zion from 1913 to 1920. There were likely many more.

The cemetery was established in 1901 but deaths were not always recorded in an era when no regulations protected graves and when African-Americans were treated as second-class citizens.

The *Times* determined that 13 of the bodies were moved, most of them to two Tampa cemeteries.

No one knows what became of the others. Were they moved, too? Or do they still lie beneath the ground where restaurant trucks and the residents of a half-dozen apartments come and go? » See ZION, 12A

ZION CEMETERY:

This is a map of the cemetery on Florida Avenue, filed with the Hillsborough County clerk on Feb. 20, 1901. Zion contained 98 plots that were 20 feet across and 5 feet apart.

Courtesy of Hillsborough County clerk

Dems' postcards from Florida



Courtesy of Kirsten Gillibrand's campaign U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (middle) at age 5 during a family vacation in Fort Lauderdale. This won't be the first visit to the Sunshine State for most of the candidates coming to Miami to debate.

BY STEVE CONTORNO *Times Political Editor*

FLORIDA — They came to dig their toes into the sand and to catch a glimpse of Mickey. They tossed baseballs and swung rackets. They admired the natural wonders and sought shelter from natural disasters. They won redemption and even found love — lasting and fleeting.

They came to Florida for the same reasons so many do: its shores and sunshine, its theme parks and temp-

tations.

The Democratic presidential contenders gather in Miami on Wednesday and Thursday to debate for the first time. But for most, it won't be their first visit to the Sunshine State. Many have relationships with Florida that go back decades, to childhood vacations and their early careers. Some recall seminal experiences here that ranged from coming of age to laying their political foundation. **» See DEMOCRATS, 4A**



MARTHA ASENCIO-RHINE | Times

LOCAL

Tens of thousands celebrate Pride

Florida's largest LGBTQ parade celebrates truth, love and freedom on a sizzling Saturday night. **1B**

SPORTS Can the Rays' Montreal Plan work?

Grab some strong coffee and read Marc Topkin's breakdown of the complicated two-city idea. **1C**

BUSINESS

And the boom goes on

Three (more) big Tampa Bay area construction projects? And yes, luxury apartments included. **1D**



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