



ZION CEMETERY: CONDITION ASSESSMENT

Hampton, Georgia

Abstract

A preservation-minded condition assessment of the historic Zion Cemetery, part of Zion Baptist Church, in the Rosenwald neighborhood of Hampton Georgia

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Preservation as a Living Practice

Preservation, at the most basic level, is maintenance. It is also a practice best made when it is proactive, though sometimes it must be reactive. The goal of preservation should be to protect and keep stable artifacts from the past so they can be enjoyed and engaged with in the present and future. Zion Cemetery is a dynamic cultural landscape with many areas of intrigue, of tranquility, and of reverence with deep roots in the communities of both Zion Baptist Church and Hampton. As such the preservation approach must, too, be dynamic and tailored to the challenges presented by different areas. Cemeteries, particularly historic ones, are beautiful patchworks and each lot, section, or other denomination should be considered individually and also in relation to the whole. As the years evolve, preservation should also evolve. As families are still involved in the care of gravesites, they should be a part of the preservation and maintenance conversation at Zion Cemetery.

General Preservation Practices and Resources

If nothing else is taken from this chapter, remember three simple words: DO NO HARM. Preservation is a light-touch approach intended to do as little as is required to stabilize something by using the gentlest means necessary. The National Park Service defines preservation as *“the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction”* (National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, *Standards for Preservation*).

From time to time a heavier-handed approach may be necessary. For example, when dealing with a monument that has been broken into several pieces and one or more pieces are unable to be located, one may choose to use a modern material to fill or replace the lost pieces. This constitutes restoration, which is a type of treatment under the more broad terms of preservation. It should only be carried out by trained professionals who understand the characteristics of the stone substrate as well as the intended repair materials. Improper use of materials can cause more harm than intended.

The Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards for Preservation* are an excellent tool, and further guidance can be found in the Secretary’s *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. Zion Cemetery is a

cultural landscape because of its continuous use as a cemetery and therefore evolving use of materials and techniques for marking gravesites.

Finally, The National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, or NCPTT, provides a wealth of information on the care of historic cemeteries. The treatments discussed by the NCPTT are generally more technical in nature and can be used by stewards of Zion Cemetery to better understand unique preservation challenges at therein and how to create scopes of work for their care and maintenance.

Preservation at Zion Cemetery

The consulting team visited Zion Cemetery several times in the Summer and Fall of 2022 to conduct a conditions assessment, take photographs, and create a template for a grading system to provide stewards from the City of Hampton and Zion Baptist Church with an overview of the site's condition from a preservation lens and to highlight trends, patterns, and particular concerns that should be addressed.

The cemetery is defined by a large amount of handmade or “vernacular” tombstones and grave markers which give it a tremendous amount of character and are features very worthy of preservation. Specifically, there are a great deal of concrete markers with handmade inscriptions and concrete and plaster “funeral home” markers which were common in much of the middle 20th century. Some carved stone markers dot the landscape on the western half of the cemetery while more are present in the eastern half. Many marked gravesites also have concrete ledgers or grave coverings which is regular enough to be considered a defining feature of the site.

The presence of flowers and other objects left by visitors and family members paying tribute to their loved ones is indicative of how important a space this cemetery is. A celebrated space should be maintained and elevated. This assessment is by no means a criticism of the effort of any person or persons who have maintained Zion Cemetery heretofore, but rather a snapshot in time of its condition from the lens of historic preservation and conservation and recommendations on ways to breathe new life into a significant historic site and cultural landscape. The assessment should be considered a tool to be used to plan, fundraise, and carry out preservation projects and enhancements to the cemetery.

Overall Site

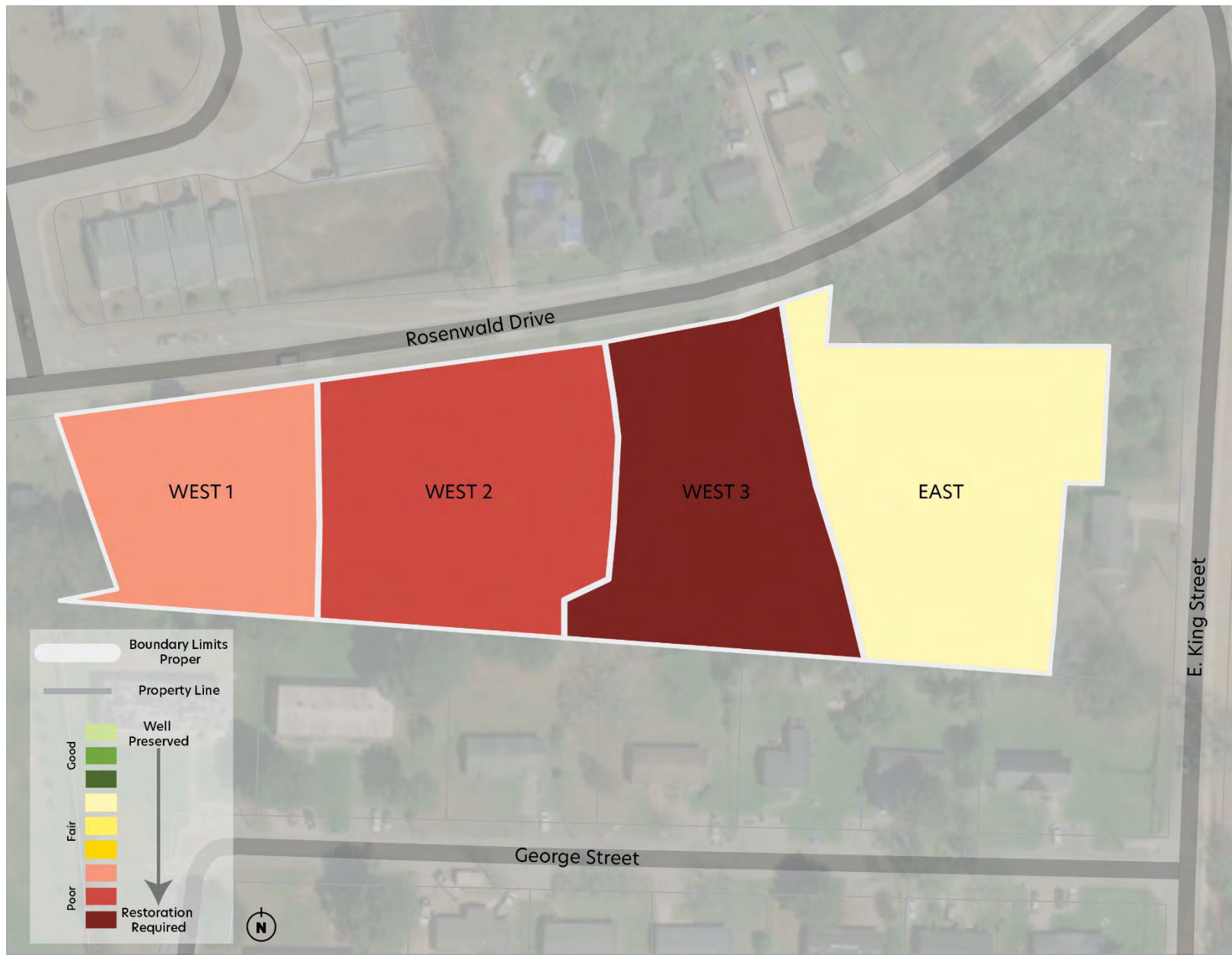
The Cemetery comprises approximately 3.6 acres along Rosenwald Drive and East King Road in Hampton, Georgia. Along its south border and portions of its northeast borders it is loosely defined by chain link fence. A main entrance sits across from 33 Rosenwald Drive. A secondary entrance is along East King Road and may pass through the property located at 8 East King Road via a possible easement, though deed research would need to confirm that.

Bisecting the property on an approximate north-south line is a drainage ditch with a culvert crossing midway to allow vehicles and pedestrians to cross from one area of the cemetery to the other. Though it

is not clear if there are formally designated areas or sections of the cemetery, for the purposes of this assessment there are 4 areas that are defined by their major characteristics: the West 1, 2, and 3 sections and the East section (reference Zion Cemetery Conditions Map). In general it appears that the older sections of the cemetery lie to the west and the newer or more recently active to the east.

General concerns about the site:

- Significant overgrowth, particularly along fences and borders
- The south half of the culvert has been allowed to grow up and should be controlled
- The culvert is exhibiting signs of erosion
- There is no signage identifying the cemetery from the surrounding roads
- While there are sidewalks along Rosenwald Drive, there are no crosswalks to show pedestrians where they may safely enter the cemetery
- In some of the larger open areas of the cemetery there are field stones (possible grave markers) and smaller grave markers that are difficult to see and may be tripping hazards for pedestrians
- The “roads” through the cemetery are poorly designated. Vehicles entering may not know where to travel to avoid driving on gravesites
- While overall good, the current landscape maintenance practices may be causing some unintended damage to gravesites
- Several large trees within the site need to be pruned and/or cared for by an arborist to prevent falling limbs which might cause damage to monuments or visitors
- Large open areas with occasional evidence of markers now at risk of being lost by settlement and ultimately covered by grass/soil indicates possible unmarked (or formerly marked) gravesites. GPR or other sounding techniques should be considered to help identify unmarked graves.



Zion Cemetery Conditions Map

West 1

SCORE: RED 1

This area appears to be one of the older parts of the cemetery, though due to degradation dates on headstones are difficult to read. There are few markers here which may indicate that either the area has not been fully utilized or there are unmarked graves. In general the condition of this area is poor to fair. With a reasonably small amount of work, it could be restored, mostly because there are so few markers for the size of the area.

Major conservation concerns:

- Older markers
- Mixture of stone and concrete
- Graffiti
- Broken stones
- Degradation of inscriptions/stone face
- Encroachment of vegetation
- Possible loss of grave identifiers
- Settling/vault collapse

West 2

SCORE: RED 2

This area also contains older markings but is largely open, which, similar to West 1, may indicate the presence of unmarked graves. In several locations the tops of field stones or carved markers can be seen peeking out from grass. Because of its relatively few markers, this section is in poor to fair condition and like West 1 could be restored with fairly minimal effort and investment.

Major conservation concerns:

- Largely open area may indicate unmarked burials
- Several field stones settling into earth – possible former grave markers
- Old markers with degradation of surfaces/inscriptions
- Encroachment of vegetation
- Markers disassembled/knocked off bases
- Settlement of graves and damage to markers and ledgers

West 3

SCORE: RED 3 (most significant amount of work)

The most densely populated of the west portion of the cemetery, West 3 is characterized by family lot copings and grave coverings ranging from concrete to gravel. There are significant issues caused by erosion and settlement, mostly to concrete grave coverings and lot copings. A mixture of more modern markers and older ones exist here, and many are damaged or at a minimum unlevel and at risk of further settlement and/or damage. Considered as a whole, this section would take the most effort to restore, involving a great deal of soil stabilization, careful conservation of headstones and vernacular markings, and reconstruction of concrete coverings and lot borders.

Major conservation concerns:

- This area is defined by more density, presence of more copings/family lot defining features
- Copings (concrete blocks, etc.) are loose, damaged in most cases
- Several gravesites/plots have trees and other plants growing through them causing damage
- Signs of lawnmowing equipment driving over top of grave coverings, potentially causing damage
- Settlement/breaking of grave coverings and ledgers
- Loss/degradation of vernacular grave markers (e.g., hand inscribed markers, funeral home markers)

East

SCORE: YELLOW 1

The most modern area of the cemetery, the East section is dense and its stones are in generally good condition. However, there are areas of settlement and cracking/sinking of grave coverings, broken headstones, and areas of concern related to landscape maintenance, a challenge given the density of the area. While relatively little preservation work is required here, best practices need to be implemented to ensure the long-term stability of the gravesites herein.

Major conservation concerns:

- Newer section in general with more densely populated markers – challenge for landscape maintenance

- Areas of brown/dead grass around markers indicate possible use of herbicides which can be harmful to grave markers
- Several areas indicate lawnmowing equipment being driven over top of grave markers/coverings
- Some broken/degraded headstones
- Some settlement of grave coverings

Recommended Treatments

Cemetery conservation and preservation is something that is usually best left to those trained in dealing with historic monuments, markers, walls, and landscapes. However, there are basic skills that can be learned by those with an interest and some level of technical understanding. For simple repairs, such as leveling small headstones or cleaning markers, first seek advice and instruction from professionals who follow preservation best practices. Once learned, these simple repairs can be carried out by trained maintenance staff or even volunteers.

More complicated tasks including reassembling broken pieces of stone or rebuilding walls should always be completed by professionals – conservationists or masons, usually. Cemetery conservation consultants can be involved to help create specific treatments and scopes of work. Anything that requires the use of special equipment or anything that is dangerous should always be handled by professionals.

Basic preservation rules that should always be followed include:

- Do not cause more harm than good with your selected treatment
- Replacement materials should be sympathetic to the substrate (e.g., mortar should be softer than bricks surrounding it)
- Treatments should be reversible
- Regarding cleaning, it should be done only when necessary (when the stone is suffering from soiling/staining/vegetative growth) and not simply to make something “shine”
- Defer to higher skilled/trained individuals when you are uncertain about a proposed treatment – play it safe

Burial Site Assessments:

Site assessments will evaluate the condition of a burial site or plot and provide a plan of action for repairs. They may be conducted by trained members of the church or City staff or by outside resources, as needed. It is recommended that an annual walk-through be scheduled to take note of serious concerns – either safety hazards or monuments or hardscape elements that are in critical condition and at risk of major failure. Additionally, after storm events (e.g., tornados) a cemetery official or their designee should survey the cemetery and all burial sites for possible damage.

Site assessments should include the date of the assessment and weather conditions, if relevant, the site location, a general description of the site, photographs showing condition of all monuments, hardscape, and landscape features from multiple angles, and treatment recommendations.

Before any work is conducted, burial site owners should be contacted and made aware. The site steward should determine if the repairs are within the scope of their responsibility or of that of the owner before commencing.

If staff have been trained in conservation basics, they may make recommendations about repairs at their level of training. If repairs exceed their level of training, the recommendation should be for further evaluation by a cemetery conservation professional. Recommendations should be thorough and should include any notes on materials and time anticipated for planning purposes. They should also include an assignment of who is responsible for completing the repairs and by what date they should be completed.

After repairs have been completed, the work should be documented in narrative and photographic form. It is recommended that documentation be kept in a secure and organized database such as ArcGIS or Excel. Once conditions and repairs are logged in a database, it can be consulted before future repairs to help inform the history of repairs at that site.

Sample conditions assessment forms are available from the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT) at the following site: <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/documentation/>

See: “Cemetery Conditions Assessment Form” and “Rapid Cemetery Documentation Form”

General Maintenance:

Properly trained members from Zion Baptist Church, the City of Hampton, or designated volunteers or contractors should be capable of performing important daily maintenance of Zion Cemetery. Kinds of maintenance that do not require outside consultation may include refreshing plot coverings, roadway maintenance, mowing, trimming, and pruning landscape materials, maintenance of signage, and other routine work. Given the sensitive nature of a cemetery, some guidelines for these types of activities follow:

Plot Coverings

- Many families choose to install gravel or concrete as plot coverings to reduce the need for grass or other vegetative control or maintenance. Unfortunately, weeds are persistent and these

treatments don't actually eliminate the need for weeding. When weeding is necessary, as much as possible it should be done by hand. Avoid using herbicides as they can cause harm to stone markers. If weeds are not near any markers, herbicides may be used with care to avoid overspraying or drifting.

- On occasion gravel may be added to tidy up the plots. Use shovels to place gravel and rakes to spread it, taking care to avoid contact with markers and wall copings. Do not dump gravel on the lot in such a way that stones may be covered. Hand work is best.

Roadway Maintenance

- The roads in Zion Cemetery are poorly defined and it is recommended that they be defined and maintained as ensuring proper traffic circulation will avoid damage to grave sites. Where the road crosses the drainage ditch, ensure the integrity of the culvert and watch for periodic settlement and erosion. Gravel is an acceptable material for the road and should be refreshed periodically to ensure definition and provide traction. Where necessary, bollards or posts/chains may be installed to create even more obvious circulation routes.

Landscape Maintenance

- One of the biggest threats to cemeteries comes from improper landscape maintenance. Specifically, damage to stones may occur when mowers and string trimmers are carelessly or improperly used. In general, mowers should not be used where they cannot be easily taken. If there are walls surrounding a plot, a string trimmer should be chosen to trim the grass therein. There are many examples of scarring to the bottoms of stones at Zion Cemetery from string trimmers. When they are used, make sure that poly trimmer line is in the spool (trim line must be flexible – no hard knife-style blades). Close to hardscape features, use low throttle and maintain a safe distance from the stones. Always take care not to damage grave markers and other hardscape features.
- As stated earlier, limit the use of herbicides around stones. Herbicides can cause damage to stones. Marble is particularly susceptible. Only manual forms of weed control in areas immediately adjacent to hardscape features are recommended.
- Sometimes well-intended plant installations become problems when they are not properly maintained. Several examples exist at Zion Cemetery, including plots that have shrubs or trees planted near corners of walls and have caused damage due to overgrowth and root penetration. In general, families should be encouraged to select landscape materials that are known not to

have vast and potentially damaging root systems, and plant locations should be selected to allow for growth of the plant without causing damage to hardscape elements.

Maintenance of Signage

- There are currently no signs in Zion Cemetery but ultimately directional and interpretive signage may be considered. Maintaining signage is important to ensure information is conveyed as intended. Signs may need to be cleaned from time to time or be touched-up with paint. Depending on the materials used for the signs, different methods may be necessary. It is recommended to follow manufacturer's instructions for maintaining signs.

Ongoing Maintenance:

Ongoing maintenance is necessary to protect the initial preservation investment. Once the cemetery is restored, staff should inspect it during their daily or weekly work to look for any obvious issues or concerns. Each year, a thorough walk-thru should be conducted to take note of any issues that need to be addressed including cleaning, resetting, damage from landscape equipment, etc. Once every five years, a consultant should be brought in to perform a conservation assessment and make recommendations for treatments. In general, with sound preservation practices and with normal "wear and tear" (excluding damage from trees falling, vehicular or pedestrian damage, etc.), one should not expect to have to intervene for major work for at least 15-20 years.

It is a good idea to maintain a pool of funds specifically for emergency preservation work. Some other cemeteries call this a "Critical" fund. When vandalism occurs or when tree limbs damage a lot, this resource could be utilized to cover repairs.

Additional Considerations:

Though the purpose of this assessment focuses on the preservation of the existing hardscape and landscape, some general recommendations for the site may be considered, including:

- Installation of decorative fencing and gates for both vehicles and pedestrians. Fencing not only defines the cemetery but provides a level of protection as a visual clue for vehicles and others. Carefully located pedestrian entrances, combined with crosswalks and sidewalks, will help funnel visitors and passive users to the cemetery

- Signage was briefly mentioned, but it is worth restating that signage is very important. There should be general wayfinding and orientation signage as well as information about the site stewards and how to contact them, rules and regulations, and historical/interpretive information. Signs should be of the same brand and general appearance.
- Connectivity to other areas in the city will promote more visitation. A coordinated effort with city officials to include the cemetery on walking maps, informational signage, etc will drive awareness of the great historic and cultural resources at Zion Cemetery.
- Records should be maintained not only for every burial but also for any non-routine maintenance, such as preservation work. All records should be reviewed and compiled so that everything is in one format and has simple instructions for understanding and interpreting them.
- Ground Penetrating Radar or a similar technology may be considered to determine where unmarked graves may be located. This may also inform the stewards of open space for future burial opportunities. GPR typically costs around \$7,500/acre.

Estimated Costs

Cost estimation is intended to provide general guidelines for budgeting purposes only. Any actual costs should be determined by the creation of a scope of work, solicitation of bids, and receipt of hard cost bids that are reflective of the level of detail desired and construction, labor, and material costs at the time of creation. The ranges provided below are based on experience with similar project types and geographic areas. These costs would be inclusive of hardscape repairs (repairs to tombstones, ledgers, copings, etc. including graveshaft compaction) and initial landscape control, or removing enough vegetative material to allow for hardscape repairs, but not inclusive of ongoing landscape maintenance.

Costs do not include general site improvements including roadway, ditch, culvert, fence, and tree work.

West 1: approximately 0.66 acres, density low to very low, RED 1

- **\$10,000 to \$20,000 estimated**

West 2: approximately 0.95 acres, density medium to low, RED 2

- **\$20,000 to \$40,000 estimated**

West 3: approximately 1 acre, density medium to high, RED 3

- **\$120,000 to \$180,000 estimated**

East: approximately 1 acre, density high, YELLOW 1

- **\$20,000 to \$40,000 estimated**

TOTAL COSTS: \$170,000 - \$280,000 estimated

Photo Index

West 1

Condition Photos

1



Variety of older headstones and ledgers; settling, overgrowth, lichen growth

2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



Simple field stone, possible grave marker; should be studied to determine burial presence

11



Marble grave marker, fallen and nearly covered by sod

12

West 2

Condition Photos

13



Obelisk with significant lean due to settlement; reset on footing, clean

14



15



16



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28



29



30



Slant headstone on damaged and settling concrete ledger

31



Marble headstone with yellow lichen growth

32



Fragile and unlevelled/settled marble headstone; broken, skilled repair required

33



Broken concrete ledger with evidence of lawnmower being driven on top of it

34



35



36



37



38



39



40

West 3

Condition Photos

41



Ledger settlement, simple grave marker

42



Major overgrowth of tree/shrub. Roots and branches causing damage to surrounding markers

43



Alternate view of significant overgrowth

44



Shaft collapse, thin headstones fallen/leaning, tree growing from shaft

45



Closeup of shaft collapse with headstone (right) damaged

46



Concrete ledger with hand-carved inscription, encroachment of sod

47



Concrete ledger broken, settled

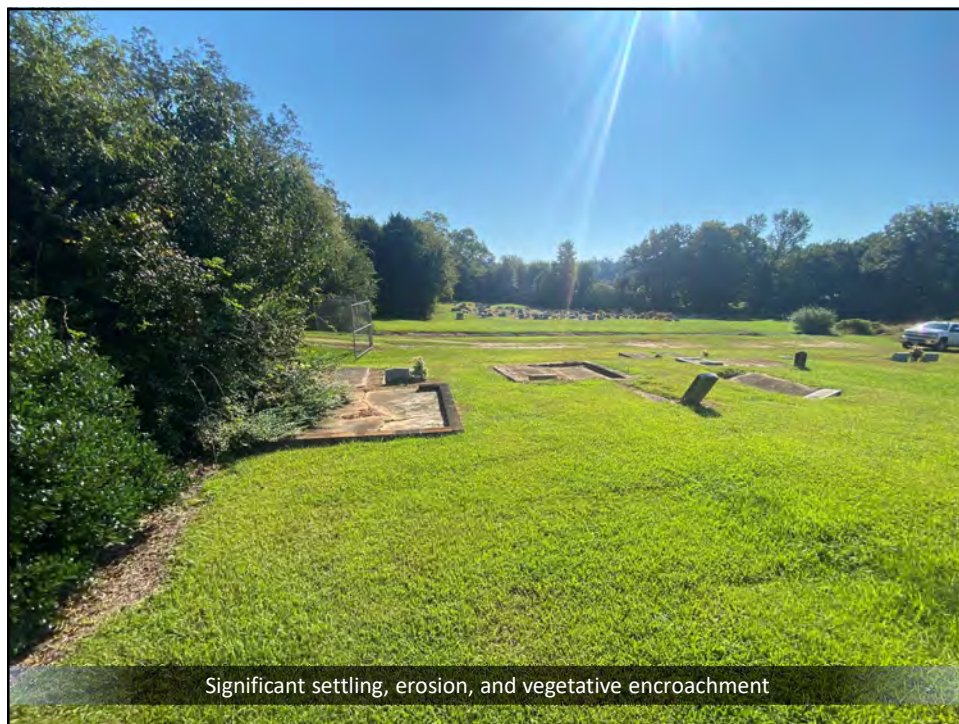
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54



"Funeral home" marker, damaged and eroding

55



Concrete ledgers and plot coverings, significant settlement and cracking

56



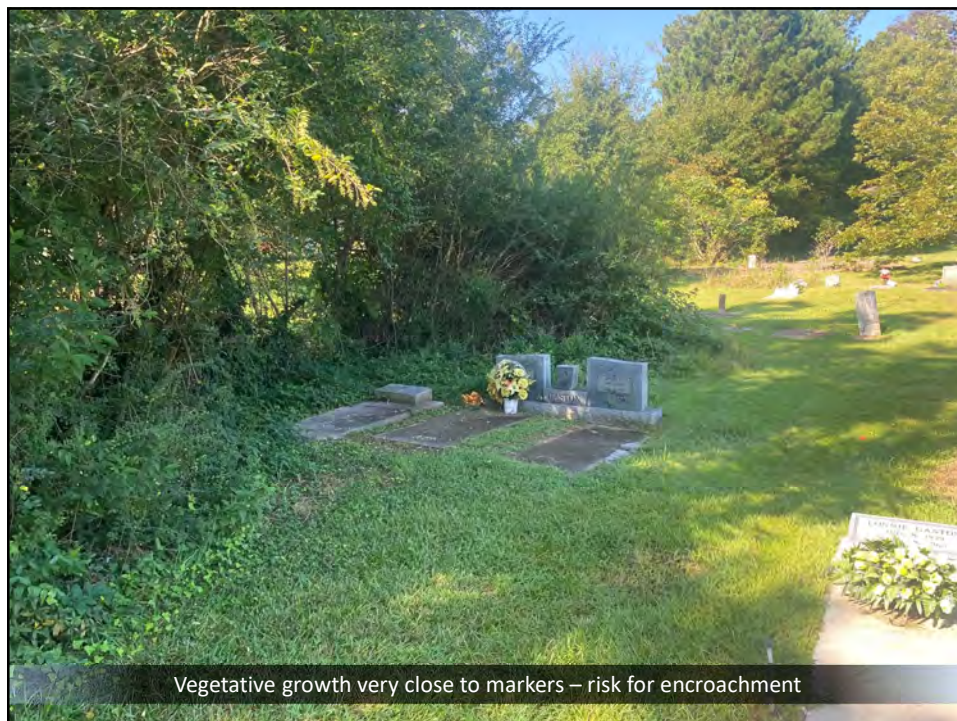
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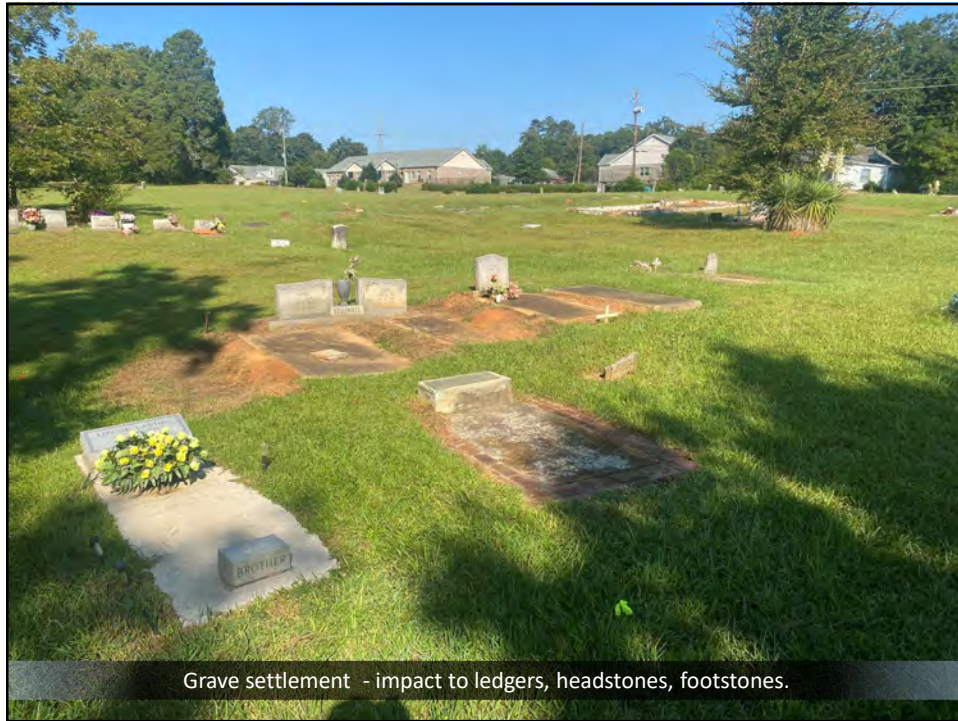
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59



60



Grave settlement - impact to ledgers, headstones, footstones.

61



Example of intentionally placed plants with no maintenance consuming grave sites

62

East

Condition Photos

63



64



65



66



67



68



Painted concrete ledgers with artificial turf plot covering

69



Loose stone plot covering, concrete ledgers with settling, lichen growth, headstone shifted off

70



Example of homemade vernacular headstone

71



Broken ledger with significant settling, lichen growth

72



73



74



75

General Site

Condition Photos

76



77



78



79



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