

Gravely Speaking



Teacher Notes

A cemetery can be a valuable resource in learning local history. Just walking through one can provide valuable clues about the lives of those buried below. While this investigation centers around Oaklawn Cemetery in Tampa, Florida, it can be easily adapted to any cemetery close to you.

Thank you for joining me on this special Periscope field trip. It is the first of what I hope will be many more in the future. Some of them will be “Mystery Periscopes” where I will be live from historic locations throughout the nation and viewers will need to guess my actual location before a tour begins.

As far as what to expect from Oaklawn Cemetery, here is what will be discussed and shown.

Historical Background:

Brief history of the cemetery. It is the first public burial ground in the city and it contains the remains of Tampa’s first pioneers, pirates, slaves, Native Americans and a mass grave for victims of the yellow fever.

Notable Graves:

William and Nancy Ashley: This grave is the most famous and visited grave in the cemetery. William and Nancy showed up in Tampa prior to the Civil War. Nancy was William’s slave but the two of them lived together as husband and wife even though it was illegal at the time. People suspected the relationship but it was confirmed at the time of their deaths. When Nancy died, William’s grave was opened up and the two of them were buried together. This was fairly controversial for the time since graveyards were supposed to be segregated. Nancy left money for the executor of the will to erect a tombstone which reads

*Here lies
Wm. Ashley and Nancy Ashley,
Master, and Servant,
Faithful to each other in that relation*

*in life, in death they are not seperated.
Stranger consider and be wiser,
In the Grave all human distinction,
of race or caste, mingle together
In one common dust.
To commemorate their fidelity to each other
this stone was erected by their Executor.
John Jackson, 1873.*

Adam the Slave: This is Tampa's own version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Adam was accused of murdering a local man and a tense 4 day trial ensued. Ossian B. Hart defended Adam and was thoroughly convinced of his innocence and fought passionately in his defense. The jury found him guilty but Hart appealed the higher courts to overturn the sentence. Shortly after a vigilante group seized Adam and hung him in downtown Tampa.

John and Charlie Wall: These two men are father and son and they couldn't be more different. John was a well respected doctor who fought vainly to try and convince people that mosquitos were carriers of yellow fever. His son, Charlie, eventually became an infamous mob boss in Tampa.

Other grave sites will be included if time permits. There are plenty of interesting stories to share!

Tombstone Iconography:

During our Periscope I'll point out some of the iconography on the stones and talk about their meanings. A great field guide to iconography can be found [here](#).

Preservation:

Sadly, Oaklawn has been vandalized through the years and funds have simply not been there to conduct the proper preservation and maintenance. Throughout the Periscope I'll discuss the need for preservation and how to properly respect and preserve burial ground, no matter the location.

Naturally, I'm hoping for a lot of give and take during the Periscope. I'm looking forward to spending this time with you and your students. Please direct any questions to my email at oneifbylandmike@gmail.com



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A Cemetery Investigation: Oaklawn Cemetery: Tampa Fl.

All throughout our country is filled with burial grounds of all shapes and sizes. Some are revered and considered almost sacred like Arlington National Cemetery, while others are weed covered and practically forgotten to memory.

Beneath these burial grounds lie the remains of our history as a nation. These are the people who lived, died and helped shape our country into what it is today.

This cemetery investigation centers around Oaklawn Cemetery in Tampa, Florida. It is the oldest burial ground in the city and contains the remains of a wide variety of interesting characters that first created and inhabited the city.

What comes to mind when you think of cemeteries?

What information do you think that you can learn from a cemetery?

Tampa's Oaklawn cemetery is often called the resting place for "White and Slave, Rich and Poor". Throughout the grounds are also the graves of Native Americans and victims of yellow fever who are buried in mass graves.

The most famous grave in the cemetery is the grave of William and Nancy Ashley seen below.



Why is this grave so famous?

Do you think this grave provoked some controversy?

Check out the weeping willow at the top. What do you think it represents? Why is it there?

Tombstone Iconography: When you walk through a cemetery you might notice all kinds of sculptures or symbols on the stones. Often, these had strong symbolic meaning and were chosen on purpose to represent the person's life or religious/club affiliations. Below are just a few that we will encounter on our tour of Oaklawn. What do each mean?

Easter Lily



Draped Urn



Freemason



Create an Epitaph

Pick a famous or interesting person in history and write an epitaph for their gravestone below. What did they accomplish? What should they be known for?

