

Key dates in the history of Tampa's forgotten Zion Cemetery

During the first two decades of the 20th century, Tampa's black community buried its dead at the site along North Florida Avenue.

Tampa Bay Times, Paul Guzzo June 23, 2019

THE TAMPA DAILY TIMES

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Second Section

**REAL ESTATE
BUSINESS NOW
ON FIRM BASIS**

Tampa Dealers Have Overcome Boom Obstacles.

Real estate in Tampa is slowly, but apparently surely, coming to its own as a business, after two years of depression which followed the collapse of the world's most famous boom, late in 1925, with its widespread reactionary effects.

The years 1928, 1927 and 1928 found the substantial real estate dealers of Tampa, those who were reliable and trustworthy before the boom, struggling to hold their own against the tide of falling markets and trying to address something tangible from the wreck of the boom operation.

According to statistics kept by the recorder of deeds at the court house, the efforts of these real estate dealers are beginning to be reflected in increasing business.

The air of pessimism which pervaded the city for a time after the boom's collapse, is giving way before increased confidence in the future, the real estate operators declare. And this is greatly because of the fact that the early months of this year brought a notable stimulation in trade.

January, February, March and April witnessed a great increase in warranty deed transfers over the last four months of 1928, and the first three weeks of May show that the same stable conditions exist during the present month. During the first week of May, 117 warranty deeds were filed, representing the number of original purchases. During the next week, 174 were filed, and during the third week, purchasers of property filed 148 transfers.

Officials in the recorder's office disclosed the percentage of warranty deeds filed is well above the average for the past three years, and they predict that unless an unexpected slump occurs during the summer months the year will be the best since 1923 for the real estate business.

Madison Higgin Condemned.

Interest shown in this section of Florida, and particularly in Tampa, by northern investors and nation-

Here and There With the Cameraman; Three Types of Construction Now Under Way Here

The structure at the left is the new Western Union Telegraph company building, corner of Twiggs and Marion streets, which will be completed about Sept. 1. The total investment in the lot, building and fixtures will total \$750,000, officials of the company said today. The building will be occupied by the company about January 1. The residence in the group above which should be completed soon after June 1 is being built for G. A. Hansen. It is located in Golf View park, just north of the Palma Ceia golf course, and will cost approximately \$35,000 when completed. The new row of stores shown at the lower right are located on Florida avenue and owned by H. P. Kennedy.

Second Section

**BIG BUILDING
TOTAL LIKELY
THIS MONTH**

Kress and Rutland Permits to Add to Figures.

Starting off with a rush this year, building permits totaled \$292,381 in the month of January. There was a lull in the business for several months after which it started on the upward grade again with noticeable force in the month of April which totaled \$194,188. If permits are issued for the Kress building and the Rutland building during May receipts in the building inspector's office will be larger than any month of the year, so far.

The total permits to date, consisting mostly of small jobs, total \$842,812. The permits for Kress and Rutland will total over \$200,000, the building inspector said. The Kress building permits, which range between \$250,000 and \$200,000, and the Rutland building will cost about \$150,000.

January Building.

Many of the large buildings which are either completed or under construction had permits issued in January. The Phoenix Hotel company completed a building recently at a cost of \$450,000.

The permit for the Western Union building which is being constructed at the corner of Twiggs and Marion streets, was for \$1,000,000. The building when completed will be the most modern telegraph office in the United States. Practically all of the steel has arrived on the piles and much of it has been erected. The building is being constructed by Kress and Rutland.

Many dwellings have been erected within the city in the past few months. In the month of January, 23 dwellings were erected at a cost of \$45,245. In February 18 dwellings were completed at a cost of \$10,540. Much new work began on 18 dwellings at a cost of \$21,510. In April \$22,200 was spent in the erection of 28 dwellings.

Monthly Totals.

**OLD BUILDINGS
COMING DOWN
FOR NEW ONES**

Ancient Structures Are Eye Sores, Builders Say.

**College Professor
Forgets His Class
And Goes Fishing**

In the January Press.

New York, May 21.—A professor at Columbia university absented himself from his class yesterday while 100 students looked on anxiously for his return.

When Professor Parkes Thomas Moore failed to appear to give the scheduled lecture, their examination in "Interna-

**STATE RACING
VOTE INCLUDED
IN TRACK BILL**

Referendum Would Be Allowed at General Election.

**Growers Call Mass
Meet to Discuss Fly
KILLS MASHER
THEN RETURNS
TO HER WORK**

Farmer Girl Found in Berry Patch; Clubbed Man.

Construction wrapped up in May 1929 on a new building that housed businesses along North Florida Avenue in Tampa, lower right, according to this article from the Tampa Daily Times. The property once was the site of Zion Cemetery. The building, no longer in use, is still there today.

The first burials occurred by 1905 at Zion Cemetery, Tampa's first officially recognized burial ground for African-Americans.

By 1923, the cemetery at Florida and Virginia avenues had disappeared from public documents and news reports, leaving leaders in the city's black community to wonder now whether the bodies were moved or remain in the ground.

Here are key dates in the history of Zion.

1894

Nov. 24: Richard Doby, a prominent African-American land developer, purchased the plot of land that would later become Zion Cemetery. He bought it for \$1 from Isaac W. Warner.

Mount Carmel AME Church begins holding services on Sundays in the one-room, wooden Robles Pond Elementary School at 3819 N Florida Ave., according to a federal document recorded by the Works Progress Administration. The school is on Richard Doby's property.

1901

February: A map of Zion Cemetery is filed with the Hillsborough County Clerk's Office.

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1905

August: First mention of Zion in a newspaper article, though not by name. A teenager was said to have been buried in the African-American cemetery north of city limits — the description later used by newspapers routinely to describe Zion Cemetery.

1907

Nov. 27: Doby sells the cemetery for \$300 to Florida Industrial and Commercial Co. Among the company's officers is Daniel A. Perrin, former pastor of St. Paul AME Church.

Mount Carmel AME Church moves to 415 E Lake Ave. at the corner of Florida Avenue, a block away from Zion Cemetery. Mount Carmel AME spins off another church, today's Greater Mount Carmel AME Church at 4209 N 34th St.

1912

James J. Head, a former county treasurer and a former Confederate commander, claims he is the rightful owner of Zion Cemetery because he paid its back taxes. Records show Florida Industrial and Commercial retained ownership.

1914

The city limits of Tampa has grown to include the Zion Cemetery. The privately published Polk City Directory for Tampa lists Zion for the first time. The address is Florida Avenue near Buffalo Avenue. Buffalo was later renamed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

1915

Zion receives a numerical address in the Polk City Directory — 3801 N Florida Ave.

March: Zion Cemetery is auctioned off by the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office to pay a debt owed to Orleans Manufacturing Co. by Florida Industrial and Commercial Co. It's not clear who purchased the land.

1916

"Mt. Carmel AME" is scribbled at the corner of the Zion property on an atlas map published by Hillsborough County.

1919

Memorial Cemetery becomes Tampa's second official African-American burial ground.

1921

New Salem Christian Church appears in the city directory at 320 Ruth Ave. That address is on Zion Cemetery property.

1922

A map from insurance company Sanborn shows an African-American cemetery where Zion is located but does not include a name. An unnamed chapel is also on the plot of land.

1923

December: A *Tampa Times* article lists Zion in a story about prominent cemeteries.

Zion Cemetery does not appear in the annual Polk City Directory. It never reappears.

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1925

July: The *Tampa Tribune* reports that black communities near Florida and Lake avenues are getting squeezed out by white developments. Zion Cemetery is in this area.

1926

Jan. 28: Alice W. Fuller of Los Angeles sells Zion for \$1 to Tampa developer H.P. Kennedy. It is not clear who sold it to Fuller or when.

May: The *Tampa Tribune* reports about a mass reburial of bodies, from Tampa's Catholic Cemetery to Myrtle Hill Cemetery.

August: The *Tampa Times* reports that 50 bodies were removed from a black cemetery in St. Petersburg.

1929

February: The *Tampa Times* reports that H.P. Kennedy obtained approval to build a five-shop storefront at 3700 N Florida Ave. This is on the Zion Cemetery property.

1931

There is no reference to a cemetery at Florida and Virginia avenues, named or unnamed, on a Sanborn map.

1951

November: While building the Robles Park Apartments, on land that includes part of the Zion site, crews unearth three caskets. The city tells reporters that other bodies had been moved in 1925 by the unnamed owner of the land at the time.

Minutes from Housing Authority meetings include discussion of the caskets and the need to reinter them, but there's no mention of halting construction or searching for more graves.

2019

The current owners of the Zion land, the Tampa Housing Authority and restaurateur Richard Gonzmart, learn from the *Tampa Bay Times* that a forgotten cemetery had been located there.