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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

JAN 23 1990

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Zion Cemetery  
other names/site number Zion Christian Cemeter

2. Location

street & number South Parkway East and Pillow Street NA not for publication  
city, town Memphis NA vicinity  
state Tennessee code TN county Shelby code 157 zip code 38106

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: NA  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
Herbert C. Berger  
Signature of certifying official Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date 1/19/90  
Tennessee Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register. Entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet. Melores Seger 2/23/90  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

NA

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other STONE

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

Zion Cemetery is located on the north side of South Parkway East, east of Pillow Street and covers an area of approximately fifteen acres. When it was founded in 1876, the cemetery was located outside the city limits on Grand Municipal Driveway, later renamed South Parkway East. The development of the neighborhood followed the construction of the Memphis Parkway system in the early twentieth century (NR7/3/89). In fact, city planners adjusted the design and construction of South Parkway to accommodate the historical boundaries and features of the cemetery. The cemetery is surrounded by residential development on the south across South Parkway, on the west, and on the east with some vacant parcels on the east side. It is bounded on the north by the Frisco railroad tracks.

The site is characterized by rolling hills and large mature trees. The site is well drained with an open concrete lined culvert on the east side flowing southeast. The cemetery was once carefully landscaped and well kept. However, it has been largely neglected for the last fifty years and has become overgrown and in a state of disrepair.

Some efforts were made to clean up the cemetery in 1979 by Reverend Isiah Rowser, pastor of the Tree of Life Baptist Church, on behalf of Divine Motivation, Inc., a nonprofit religious organization headquartered in Nashville. Unfortunately, his efforts led to the bulldozing of the southwest corner of the cemetery, an area of about fifty by seventy feet. The tombstones in this area were lost in the process. His work was stopped by court order. Nothing else was done to clean up the cemetery until July of 1988, when the General Board of Personnel Services of the CME Church began efforts to restore Zion Cemetery to its historic character. The cemetery was deeded to the CME Church by the widow of George Christian in 1986.

Access to the grave sites is aided by a system of unpaved drives. Center Drive is situated in a depression and runs up the middle of the cemetery from South Parkway to within twenty feet of the railroad tracks. Zion Road runs east from Gleason Avenue, forms a rough figure eight, and links to Center Drive near the railroad tracks (see sketch map). Center Drive is still easily recognizable, although it is in poor condition. Zion Road is virtually indistinguishable.

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The system of drives separates the cemetery into different sections. Each of these sections is named. The circle on the east side of Center Drive is called Morris Henderson Circle, after the cemetery's founder. Many of the cemetery's larger and older tombstones are located here, such as those marking Morris Henderson's and Georgia Patton Washington's graves. The other sections are Emmanuel Square, Felix Square, Zion Hill, W.M. Ramier, Mt. Ninevah, Shephard Hill, and North Shephard Hill.

The monuments in Zion Cemetery range from small simple stones to large elaborate stones, some are obelisks or statues. Most of the monuments are made of limestone, while others are concrete, granite, or marble. Some of the graves are surrounded by wrought iron fences. Many of the monuments have lodge symbols, such as the Masonic symbol, or lodge numbers, showing the prevalence of fraternal organizations in the African American community.

Large mature trees provide shade and serve as landmarks in much of the cemetery, especially in Morris Henderson Circle and Emmanuel Square. However, it is difficult to determine whether most of the trees were planted or are volunteers, since the cemetery has been neglected for so long. A row of large oaks along South Parkway defines the southern boundary and entrance to the cemetery. There are also three large magnolia trees in the middle of the cemetery east of Center Drive. One of these is at the head of the grave site of Dr. Georgia Patton Washington and her two infant sons.

Burial records indicate that all of the Zion Cemetery site has been filled. There were at one time two burial registries for the cemetery, one dating from 1876 to 1894 and the other dating from 1895 to 1974. Unfortunately, the former register was lost or destroyed some years ago, and the Health Department records for the period have been archived and are not currently available. Therefore, an accurate list of burials could not be obtained for the years 1876 to 1894.

The second burial registry lists 21,978 burials in the period from 1895 to 1974. The number of burials jumped from ninety-six in 1896 to 478 in 1897. After 1897, the number of burials steadily increased to a peak of 1,060 (almost three per day) in 1907, and then gradually declined to 437 in 1925. The following year, the number of burials dropped off dramatically to forty-four. Thus, the primary years of use for Zion Cemetery seem to be 1876 to 1925. From 1926 to 1974 the number of burials declined into the teens and single digits. The last two burials were in 1974. The burial registry also indicates the locations of burials. In the years 1895 to

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1974, the most burials, 9,707, were in the W.M. Ramier section. Only 856 burials took place in the Zion Hill section. In the rest of the sections, the number of burials range from 1,663 to 2,864.

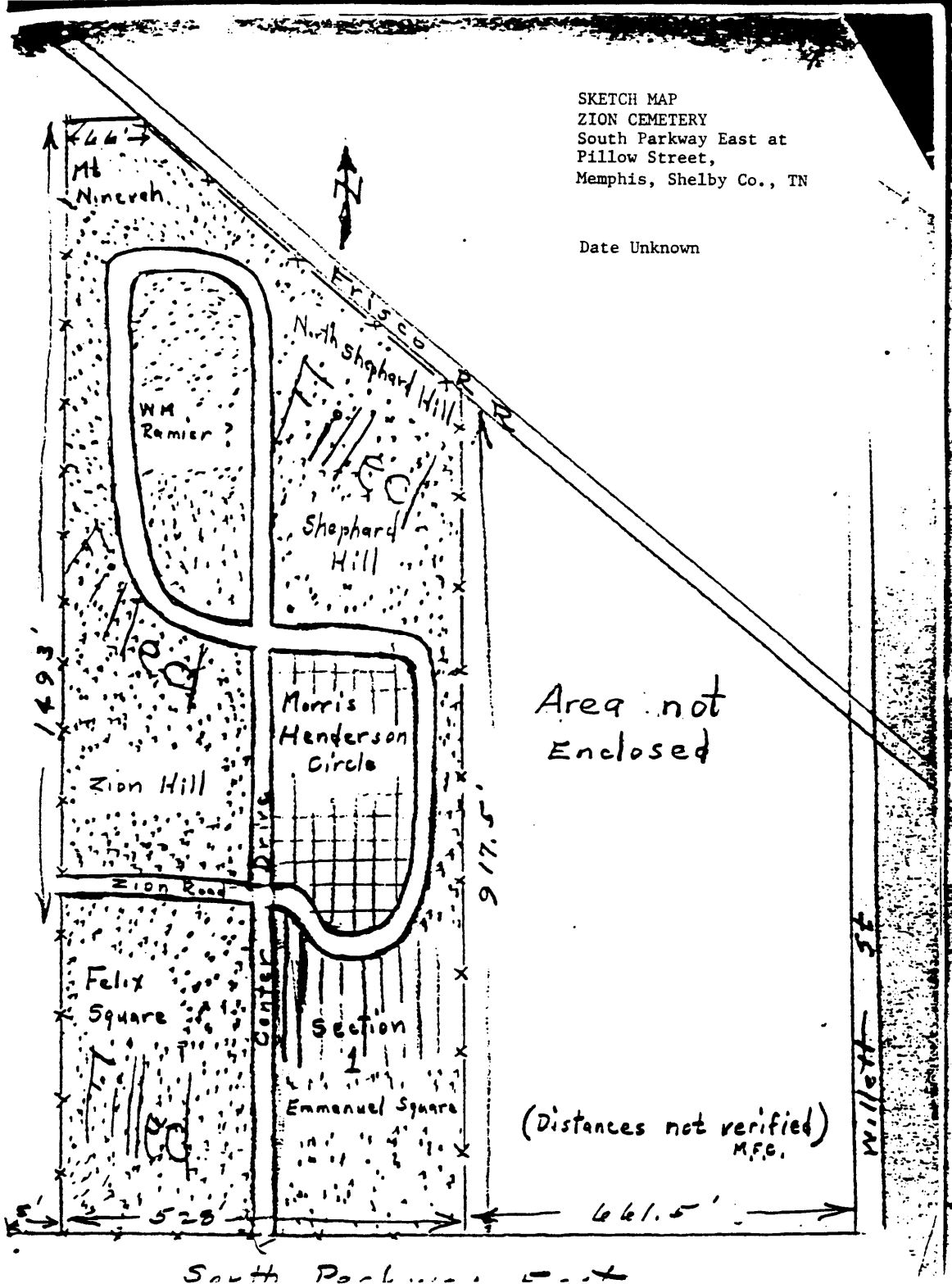
SUMMARY:

<u>AREA</u>	<u>NUMBER OF BURIALS</u>
EMMANUEL	1,663
MORRIS HENDERSON CIRCLE	2,864
NORTH SHEPHARD HILL	2,418
FELIX SQUARE	1,843
ZION HILL	856
W. M. RAMIER	9,707
MT. NINEVAH	2,627
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>21,978</u>

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SKETCH MAP  
ZION CEMETERY  
South Parkway East at  
Pillow Street,  
Memphis, Shelby Co., TN

Date Unknown

Area not  
Enclosed

(Distances not verified)  
M.F.C.

South Parkway East

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ethnic heritage/black

Period of Significance

1876-1925

Significant Dates

NA

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Zion Cemetery is being nominated under National Register criterion A for its significance in the area of African American history in Memphis. It was established in 1876 by a group of former slaves who responded to their community's need for an honorable and respectable burial site for African Americans. From 1876 until 1925, the cemetery also was the burial place of numerous important African American leaders from Memphis.

Zion Cemetery is the oldest and one of the largest cemeteries for the African American population in Memphis. The United Sons of Zion Association purchased the land in 1873 and the cemetery was established three years later. Prior to this there was no burying ground solely for blacks, and they limited to certain sections of white cemeteries such as Elmwood Cemetery (Gray 35, Elmwood 38; office and entrance building NR5/22/78). The founders felt that it was much more desirable to have a whole cemetery open to the African American population. They formed a fraternal and benevolent organization and purchased a large tract of land, which was at that time outside the city limits (Hamilton 18).

The years following Reconstruction saw many difficulties and racial injustices in Memphis. However, the standing of the African American population was vastly improved over its prewar status. During this time period, African American ministers built their congregations and churches virtually without white aid, African American politicians held offices in city government, and fraternal societies cared for their sick and buried the dead. Race relations remained relatively good until the 1890s when Southern subordination of their rights began (Harkins 86). Many of these African American men and women who were able to achieve so much only years after the Civil War are buried in Zion Cemetery, as it was "patronized by the best classes" of the African American population (Hamilton 18).

According to Mary Gray, whose first husband was an original shareholder and was the caretaker of the cemetery, Zion Cemetery was started by the United Sons of Zion Association in October 1876 with Reverend Morris Henderson

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A  
 preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:  
 State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 15.4 acres

UTM References

A 

16	772190	3889250
Zone	Easting	Northing

  
C 

16	772100	3889040
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B 

16	772190	3889040
Zone	Easting	Northing

  
D 

16	772100	3889520
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See continuation sheet

SW Memphis 404SE

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary for Zion Cemetery is drawn on the accompanying Shelby County tax map.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the entire city lot that has been historically associated with Zion Cemetery.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Milbrey Heard, Planning Intern and Zhukov Camphor, Research Consultant  
organization General Board of Personnel Services, CME date September 29, 1989  
street & number 531 S. Parkway East Churchtelephone (901) 947-3135  
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38106

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(1802-1877) as its founder (Carter 1). He was the pastor of Beale Street Baptist Church (NR2/11/71) and provided the primary leadership that was basic in the founding of the cemetery and many other community ventures, including a day school begun in 1865. Henderson served as a member of the Tennessee Missionary Baptist Association.

The cemetery was operated on a non-profit basis until 1893. At that time certain members of the United Sons of Zion Association organized the Zion Cemetery Company and purchased the cemetery from the United Sons of Zion. Ownership of the new company was held primarily by members of the United Sons of Zion Association. One of the charter members, Henry C. Shephard, was the general secretary of the Zion Cemetery Company and the United Sons of Zion. In The Bright Side of Memphis he is referred to as one of Memphis' most enterprising and respected young men (Hamilton 289-291). A section of the cemetery called Shephard Hill is apparently named for him. He was active in Zion Cemetery affairs until 1925, when he opened up another African American cemetery called New Park, which is located in Whitehaven (Carter 2). After that time, Zion Cemetery began to fall into a state of neglect as there was no endowment for the maintenance of the cemetery.

Administration and cemetery operations were supervised by shareholders of the newly formed company. Zion Cemetery, the only asset of the company, was later conveyed to various individuals through perpetual inheritance until 1986 when the cemetery was given to the General Board of Personnel Services of the Christian Methodist Church by the widow of George Christian, the last sole owner of the Zion Cemetery Company. In July 1988, the General Board of Personnel Services initiated action on a plan to restore Zion Cemetery to its historic acclaim.

At its inception, 113 years ago, Zion Cemetery was situated outside of Memphis city limits. In subsequent years, the rural countryside grew and developed into a prominent residential neighborhood with all of the complementary amenities. It is significant to note that as urban expansion advanced, city planners adjusted the design and construction of the Parkway system to accommodate the historic boundaries and features of Zion Cemetery. Other significant historical events and occurrences can be associated with Zion Cemetery. As a sample, consider the following:

During the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878, many African American victims were buried in Zion Cemetery. The epidemic devastated Memphis and reduced city population to approximately 20,000 residents of which seventy percent were African Americans.



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Although many Memphis residents vacated the city, most African American residents remained to nurse the sick and to provide for the general welfare and protection of the city. Patrolling city streets day and night, companies of militia prevented looting and maintained order. One such group of law enforcement officers was called the Tennessee Rifles, a cadre of Civil War veterans and members of various fraternal organizations, such as the Pallbearers Association and the United Sons of Zion.

Lynchings and murders of African Americans throughout the United States was unprecedented from 1885-1915. One such lynching in Memphis involving three African American merchants elicited an international anti-lynching crusade in the life of Ida B. Wells, editor and owner of a Memphis newspaper Freedom of Speech. In the course of events leading to the lynching, the Tennessee Rifles voluntarily set guard at the jail house to protect the three indicted suspects. While the Tennessee Rifles were off duty, the three jailed suspects were illegally removed from custody by a mob of seventy-five men and lynched. By court order, the Tennessee Rifles were disarmed and disbanded permanently. The same militia that protected Memphis during the yellow fever epidemic was restricted from protecting three African American merchants from lynching. The three merchants were buried in Zion Cemetery.

Zion Cemetery is the final resting place for many outstanding African Americans whose accomplishments and achievements have contributed greatly to the development of Memphis, Shelby County, and the state of Tennessee. As a sample, consider the following:

GEORGIA PATTON WASHINGTON, (1864-1900) the first African American female medical doctor in the state of Tennessee. She served as a missionary in Monrovia and established a school there. Later she had a practice in Memphis.

MORRIS HENDERSON, (1802-1877) affectionately called "Uncle Morris", was one of the most powerful, influential, and progressive Christian leaders in the history of Memphis. There is a large section of the cemetery known as Morris Henderson Circle and within that circle, a section marked Pall Bearers Society. Morris Henderson was buried in Zion Cemetery in October 1877, and his funeral was attended by five thousand people (Tucker 12). His grave is marked by one of the largest and most elaborate monuments in the

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cemetery. Although it is hard to tell today, it seems to be located within the Pall Bearers Society section.

THOMAS F. CASSELS, (1850-1903) an outstanding lawyer, served as Assistant Attorney General and served in the Tennessee General Assembly representing Memphis and Shelby County from 1881 through 1883.

PHILIP M. NICHOLSON, (1846-1925) a wealthy planter and land owner. Operated a large truck farm business specializing in fancy produce. He was the first African American to occupy a unit on Beale Street, an area established for selling fresh produce.

WALTER NICHOLSON, (1877-1912) wealthy farmer and owner of real estate in Tennessee and Mississippi.

CHARLES HOOKS, (18??-1903) truant officer of a small juvenile detention home. He was the grandfather of Benjamin Hooks, National Executive Director, NAACP, and the great-grandfather of Michael Hooks, Shelby County Tax Assessor and former Memphis City Council member.

THOMAS MOSS, (18??-1892) retail merchant and one of three victims of the tragic and historic lynching in March, 1892. Ida B. Wells, a close friend and community activist, reported the murders in her newspaper, Freedom of Speech, which became the beginning of her international anti-lynching crusade.

CALVIN MCDOWELL, (18??-1892) retail merchant and one of three victims of the tragic and historic lynching in March, 1892. Ida B. Wells, a close friend and community activist, reported the murders in her newspaper, Freedom of Speech, which became the beginning of her international anti-lynching crusade.

WILLIAM STEWART, (18??-1892) retail merchant and one of three victims of the tragic and historic lynching in March, 1892. Ida B. Wells, a close friend and community activist, reported the murders in her newspaper, Freedom of Speech, which became the beginning of her international anti-lynching crusade.

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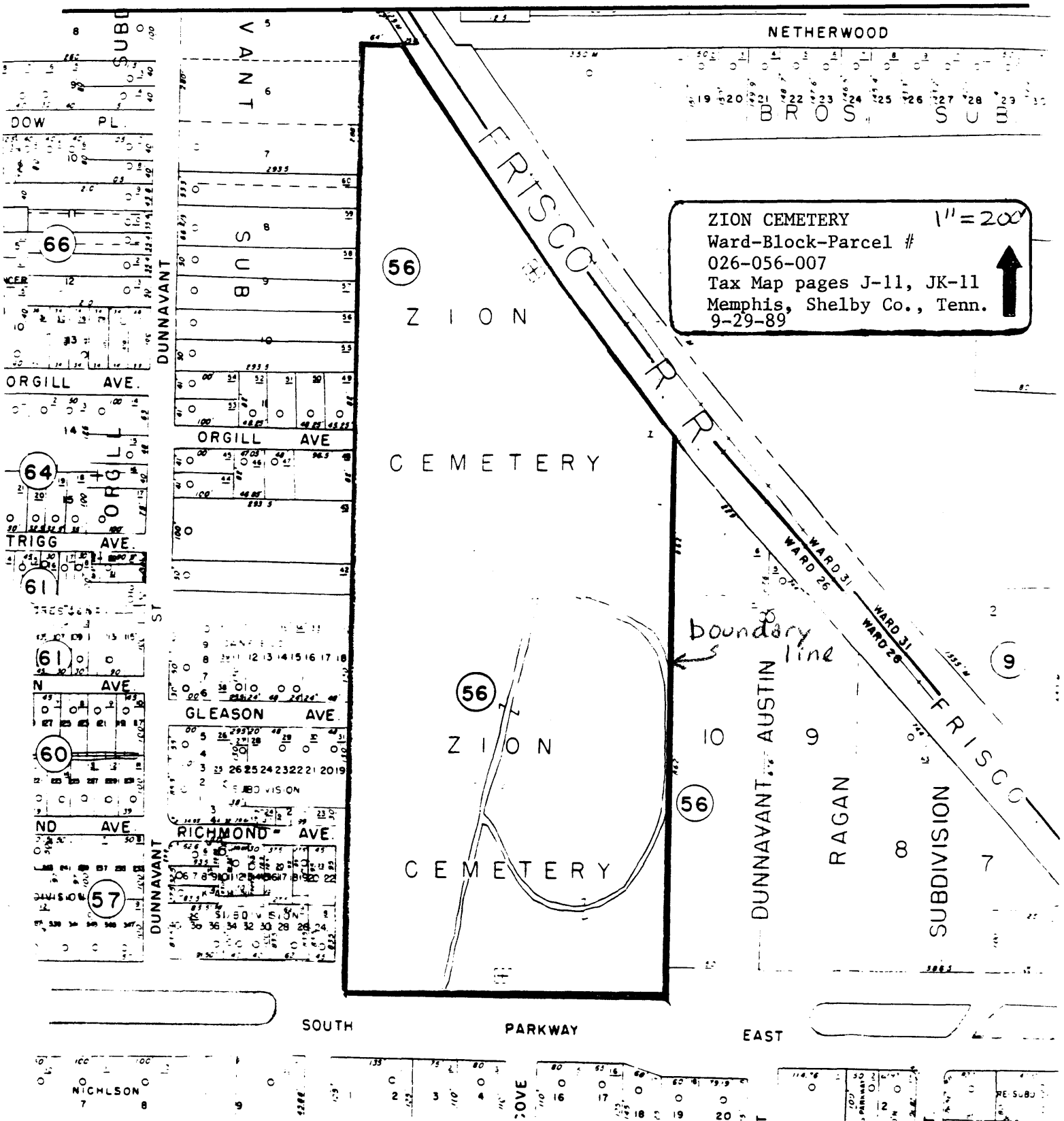
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ZION CEMETERY 1" = 200'  
 Ward-Block-Parcel #  
 026-056-007  
 Tax Map pages J-11, JK-11  
 Memphis, Shelby Co., Tenn.  
 9-29-89

boundary line

SOUTH PARKWAY EAST

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Zion Cemetery  
South Parkway East and Pillow Street  
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee  
Photo by: Cathy Bruner  
Date: September 5, 1989  
Neg: Tennessee Historical Commission  
Nashville, Tennessee

Facing south, view from lower Morris Henderson Circle.  
#1 of 10

Facing north, view from Zion Hill section.  
#2 of 10

Facing north, view in Emmanuel Square section.  
#3 of 10

Facing east, view in Morris Henderson Circle near Magnolia tree.  
#4 of 10

Facing east, view in Emmanuel Square.  
#5 of 10

Facing west, view in Morris Henderson Circle.  
#6 of 10

Facing west, view from South Parkway East across street.  
#7 of 10

Facing east, view from Sheppard Hill.  
#8 of 10

Facing southwest, view in lower Morrison Henderson Circle.  
#9 of 10

Facing north, view in Emmanuel Square.  
#10 of 10