(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Registration Form

237

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mt. Olivet Cemetery

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number East Forest Avenue N/A☐ not for publication

city or town Jackson N/A☐ vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Madison code 113 zip code 37301

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act. 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 for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Harper 2/4/02

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, 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 for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet
☐ 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

Edson H. Beall 3/20/02

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
- ☐ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☒ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
	1	buildings
1		sites
	1	structures
		objects
1	2	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

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)

N/A

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A
walls N/A
roof N/A
other Stone, Concrete, Brick, Metal

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage – African-American
Settlement
Art

Period of Significance
1885 - 1951

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)
Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** moved from its original location.
- ☒ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Dates
NA

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Multiple; unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☒ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:
MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 10 acres

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Jackson North 438 NE

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	335636	3945037	3	16	335788	3944967
2	16	337588	3944960	4	16	335662	3944762

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nancy Adgent Morgan, Anne-Leslie Owens, and Carroll Van West
organization Center for Historic Preservation date September 25, 2001
street & number Middle Tennessee State University, Box 80 telephone 615-898-2947
city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37132

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A** USGS map **(7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Mt. Olivet Cemetery Association, c/o Mrs. Mattie Miliken
street & number 1245 Highway 18 telephone 731-427-0344
city or town Medon state TN zip code 38356

DESCRIPTION

Mt. Olivet Cemetery is a ten-acre, African-American cemetery established in 1885 on East Forest Avenue in Jackson, Madison County, Tennessee. Located approximately halfway between two major north/south thoroughfares (Highland Avenue and North Royal Street), it is within 1½ miles north of the Madison County Courthouse (NR 3/30/95). East Forest Avenue also lies nearly at equal distances from the county's two main east/west transportation routes, Interstate 40 and Highway 70/1.

Situated within a working-class and lower middle-class residential neighborhood of modest, frame houses, most of which were built after the establishment of the cemetery, Mt. Olivet Cemetery is shielded from the busy commercial traffic of Highland Avenue, two blocks to the west and North Royal Street, three blocks to the east. On the north side, a twenty-two acre undeveloped parcel separates the cemetery from the Briarcliff subdivision. In its quiet setting, the cemetery retains a visual identity consistent with an early twentieth century cemetery located outside city boundaries, and, if the tombstones were not present, the grounds could be mistaken for a park.

The entrance is on East Forest Avenue in the center of the cemetery's southern road frontage, through chain link gates supported by brick pillars painted white. Inset into the left pillar is a concrete memorial plaque dated October 20, 1965 recognizing the cemetery association officers: Mrs. Capitolia Barham, President, Mrs. Vasoline Love, Vice President, Mrs. Maude Hunt, Secretary, Mrs. Carrie Diggs, Assistant Secretary, and Mr. Shellis Lane, Treasurer. A five foot high chain link fence, circa 1970, protects the cemetery along East Forest Avenue and extends north from each corner toward the north, wooded end of the cemetery. On the west side, the fence ends at a 1940s concrete block wall, over six feet high at the cemetery's north end, which continues into the wooded area. (NC, since the majority of the resource is less than fifty years old.)

The cemetery gates open onto an original historic dirt and gravel driveway aligned on a north/south axis through the center of the parcel facing the wooded, overgrown north end of the cemetery. The main driveway forms a reverse "P" shaped loop with separate lung-shaped loops intersecting on the right and left sides. At the intersection of the two loops sits a small approximately 6' x 6' concrete block service building, built circa 1960 (NC, due to construction date), within the cemetery's boundaries. All roads appear to date to the cemetery's formation and contribute to the overall integrity of setting and landscape conveyed by the cemetery. Scattered hackberry, elm, sycamore, maple, and cedar trees dot the west and east fence lines and the "P" loop driveway. Large magnolia and cedar trees accent the east and west sides. Most trees have over fifty years growth, dating to within

the period of significance. A five foot high chain link fence, circa 1970, protects the cemetery along East Forest Avenue and extends north from each corner toward the north, wooded end of the cemetery. On the west side, the fence ends at a 1940s concrete block wall, over six feet high at the cemetery's north end, which continues into the wooded area. The wooded, uncleared portion of the cemetery, occupying approximately one-fifth of the site, contains some marked graves; however, according to oral history traditions, it is primarily a "potters field."

Mt. Olivet's green space isolated within an urban area connotes a more pastoral, rural setting than expected of a city cemetery bordered on three sides by dense residential developments (Photographs 31-36). Although tombstones are anticipated features of a cemetery, Mt. Olivet has a surprising number of three to six foot tall truncated and vaulted obelisks prominent throughout its acreage. Most are modest in circumference; nevertheless, they instantly impart a sense that the cemetery contains upper middle class remains. Several large trees (estimated to be seventy-five years old) create a park-like setting, and, due to the tombstones visibly entangled among roots, indicate age. Over a dozen family plots are outlined in concrete or brick. Small areas of tall grass, vines, and weeds testify to sporadic grounds maintenance while the overgrown area at the north end evidences the cemetery association's financial struggle in recent years to extend the maintained section to the north property line. The overall appearance is of a periodically mowed graveyard with some shrub, grass, and vine overgrowth along the fences, in corners, and in the trench.

Another unusual feature of Mt. Olivet is the large trench crossing from the south to the north end of the cemetery. (Photographs 25-28). Beginning approximately twenty feet to the west of the entrance gates, the trench extends to the northwest corner of the cemetery lot at approximately a 45-degree angle. It ranges from one foot to approximately five feet in depth and is approximately six feet wide through most of its length. There are no grave markers within one to two feet on either side of the trench along most of its length. While this trench could have been an old roadbed or creek bed, local tradition maintains that it was once part of the Union army's fortifications, which, according to *Historic Madison*, were built around Fairmont Street (two blocks south of the cemetery) in 1862 during Union occupation of Jackson.[1]

Mt. Olivet Cemetery contains many historic grave markers, from the late 1800s to the present, although the vast majority of markers were erected between 1885 and 1951. Based on Jonathan Smith's exhaustive 1995 transcription, the cemetery contains 1,598 marked graves. Unmarked burials include approximately an additional 1,000 interments. The majority of the burials are prior to 1951; however, because burials are arranged in family plots rather than in "old" and "new" sections, post-1951 burials have minimal visual impact on the historic landscape, thus the entire ceme-

tery should be considered within the period of significance. More recent tombstones, interspersed throughout, do not alter the cemetery's early twentieth century appearance. Several markers have fallen as the ground beneath has sunken; a few have fallen or been pushed off their bases. Nevertheless, Mt. Olivet retains a high degree of integrity, both in setting and features, with three-fourths of the total acreage in existence since 1885 and the balance since 1895, and with the layout of gravesites in family plots continuing according to the original concept.

Family plots bounded with brick, stones, or concrete block, and handmade headstones are frequent (Photographs 32, 35, 36). Approximately one-third of the family sections are so outlined, a pattern noted in earlier nominated urban African-American cemeteries such as the Golden Hill Cemetery (NR 11/21/01) in Clarksville and the Rest Hill Cemetery (NR 3/25/93) in Lebanon. A few graves are covered with poured concrete following the contours of fresh grave mounds. Two or three remnants of wrought iron fences define family plots. There is little evidence of regular "cult of piety" or Decoration Day displays of flowers on individual graves. Although few ornamental plantings exist, at least two graves were adorned with greenery rooted in used household pots (Photograph 21). Rather than completely following religious traditions of placing all graves facing east, it appears that the funeral directors followed the slope of the land so that tombstones would be erected on the higher elevation of a gravesite. Oral history relates that some re-interments from other cemeteries were done during Mt. Olivet's first few years in operation; however, no markers were found with death dates predating Mt. Olivet's founding.

Tombstones vary from simple, unadorned hand carved limestone markers to five-foot-high carved truncated and vaulted granite obelisks to government-issued military headstones to temporary metal plaques furnished by funeral homes. Approximately five percent are handmade of concrete with crude lettering. Symbolic motifs on the carved stones include flowers (signifying grief or sorrow), lambs (innocence), doves (peace or Holy Spirit), tree stump (immortality or ending of family tree), Tree of Life, handshakes (goodbye or friendship), open "pearly" gates (passage of the soul into heaven), flying angel (rebirth), single hand with index finger pointing heavenward (gone home to heaven), broken chain with index finger pointing down to the break (soul breaking the bonds of earth and body), open Bible (symbol of faith often used to mark grave of deceased teacher or minister), and crosses (Christian faith). In addition, several include the Masonic Compass and Square emblem and Eastern Star insignia.

At approximately six feet tall, one of the larger obelisks at Mt. Olivet is a variation of the standard obelisk in which the top one-third of the taper is omitted. Located on the Johnson family plot, it contains only the surname inscription but is ornamented with carved, open "pearly" gates and a

closed Book of Life on the angled top of the column. Abie Gilmore's (died 1888) shorter, variation on a blunt obelisk (3 ½ feet) also has carved "pearly" gates and the closed Book of Life on an angled shelf; however, there is a star above the center of the gate and the shelf has a roll across the edge. One of the taller tablet style markers, Ellen Kay Alston (died 1917), has a recessed area in the upper third of the stone adorned only with an open Bible (Photograph 18).

Several markers are artistically distinctive. If it were on its base, Caleb Cunningham's (died 1913) tombstone would be approximately four feet high. His obelisk is topped with a circular stone containing a carved five-pointed star beneath what appears to be a sunburst (Photograph 3). Although the five pointed star generally means "rising up to the creator," and a rising sun signifies resurrection, their exact meaning in combination is unclear. In addition, the square portion of the marker below the round section has Egyptian style symbols similar to wheels on each side of the front. Another marker, not found replicated in other cemeteries to date, is a four-foot high marker of Ava W. Campbell (died 1920). The entire stone outline is in the shape of a vase and is ornamented with a carved bird in flight, usually a representation of the soul or a child's death, within a circle above the name. A carved bouquet of flowers, a symbol of impermanence, is above the bird. Another unusual shaped, graceful stone, approximately two feet tall, is for Willie Boyd (died 1917). Its exact meaning is unclear and its carved decoration appears to be leaves with a rolled scroll down one side (Photograph 2). Another unique marker is a double ellipse with the bottom third, smallest arc cut out, possibly indicating the extinction of the "river of life" or crossing over into the afterlife (Photograph 8). One square post style marker, approximately two feet tall, appears to represent a church as each of the four sides has a Greek temple style roof line topped with a cross (Photograph 36). Decorative carving in the "eave" area tops a recessed circle containing a round orb, possibly symbolizing the sun or earth. Crosses were often used to represent Christian faith or creation.

Religious themes appear on all sizes and shapes of markers, from the large "pearly gates" obelisks to the 18 inch high cross of Julia Blakemore (died 1924, Photograph 17) and Audry S. Perry's (died 1942) cross-shaped stone with a carved cross in the circle at the intersection of the arms. An average size marker for Maud Smith (died 1913) depicts a lamb at the base of a tree stump, signifying purity and immortality.

Non-religious themes occur in all sizes of markers. Rev. C. H. Lea's four-foot granite tombstone includes the Compass and Square (V-shape overlaid with an inverted V with the letter G in the middle) indicating Masonic membership. The compass depicts the creation of the spirit while the G stands for God, geometry and geomancy. A less massive marker, the tablet style stone for one-year-

old Charley May Morris (died 1912), contains a beautifully rendered rope, carved deep into the vertical sides, with a slightly curved olive branch across the top of the marker.

Mt. Olivet contains several folk markers, most of poured concrete with hand lettering, such as Baby Sister Dora P. Turner (died 1937?, Photograph 19). Others are amateur carved stone tablets similar to that of Oscar Eavens (no death date) which has a mirror image "N" letter style for "Eavens" and "born" (Photograph 6). The vernacular tradition continues into modern decades as exemplified by the poured flat concrete slab inside a brick-outlined plot, inset with individual granite markers. Part of the inscription of its largest plaque reads "Stinson Kin and Friend and Pets," "Lucky Collie," "Big Red Rooster," and "Jessica Terrier" (Photograph 7).

Unique folk art markers crafted by Shellis Lane (1888-1974) are scattered throughout the cemetery. A letter from one of his descendants describes his creations as red colored concrete bordered by plain concrete.[2] Lane's early markers from the 1920s had an indented area for the addition of a nameplate. Resembling a concrete encrusted, elongated brick, the markers are approximately three inches deep, twelve inches long, and six inches wide. Rather than being placed flush with the ground, most sit, unattached, on top of a family plot's concrete border. A few were found barely inset into the earth when no plot border existed. Lettering is hand drawn into the wet, red concrete. Since the small size marker limited wording, most contain only the deceased's name and death date. He produced most of his markers during the Depression. Two examples are "Mr. Alfred Shelton" (died 1920) and "Miss Sarah Bell Utley" (death date illegible), (Photographs 11 and 13, respectively).

Another unusual, albeit post-1951, type of marker found in this and a few other Madison County African-American cemeteries is constructed of small individual stones set on edge in mortar, similar to the style used in building a stone veneer wall. An example is Letha M. Cole (born 1920, no death date).

Military markers range from the shield design of the Civil War era for United States Colored Troops veterans to the rounded tablet with carved inset cross of the World War I and World War II periods to modern brass plaques set flush with the ground. Henry Kinney's U. S. C. T. Civil War marker is depicted in Photograph 41 and Hubert Cook's World War I marker is in Photograph 23.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Mt. Olivet Cemetery on East Forest Avenue in Jackson, Madison County, Tennessee, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the development of African-American institutions (such as churches, schools, and cemeteries) in the late Reconstruction through Jim Crow period and for its association with people of achievement within the black community who serve as sources of ethnic pride and identity. Mt. Olivet Cemetery also embodies folkways and artistic traditions of Madison County's African-American community – all rarely documented in general county and state histories. The cemetery is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for its funerary art. Monuments and markers in the cemetery represent good examples of traditional cemetery symbolism and many display excellent craftsmanship. In addition, there are examples of more vernacular or folk tradition in Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Burials in this cemetery reflect stages in the city's growth from earliest settlement through the present. Cemeteries document much of an area's history through tombstones – participation in wars, evidence of affiliation with religious and civic organizations, and occupations. The cemetery is a microcosm of Jackson's historic African-American community and forms a cornerstone in the early pattern of distinctively ethnic properties following the Civil War. The cemetery's period of significance dates to 1885 and continues to 1951, fifty years prior to the date of nomination.

Established in 1821-22, Jackson is centrally located in the Western Grand Division of the state. From its earliest settlement, the town's proximity to the Forked Deer River led to an economy based on commerce (river transport of cotton and lumber). By 1858, three railroad lines junctioned in Jackson, significantly spurring its growth in the late antebellum era while making the town of strategic importance once the Civil War began in 1861. The Mississippi & Tennessee Central, Mobile & Ohio, and Illinois Central rail lines increased the town's importance as a hub for transportation of cotton and lumber before and after the war. Railroads played an important role in the late nineteenth century development of Jackson, since eventually the town was served by five railroads that employed many working class African-Americans.[3] Many of these African-American workers were former slaves, because Jackson and Madison County never had a strong tradition of free black communities before the war. On the eve of Civil War, according to the 1860 census, the white to black population was nearly equal at 11,400 versus 10,095 (only 83 of the African Americans were free) and most of the slaves toiled on the prosperous farms and plantations that ringed the Jackson area.

The Civil War directly impacted Jackson in 1862 with the arrival of Union forces that occupied the town. In June 1862 Union Brigadier General Jeremiah Sullivan occupied the town and used it as a

supply center for approximately nine months until Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest briefly re-took the area in March 1863. After a July 13, 1863 battle in which the most intense fighting occurred on Talbot Hill, about halfway between Mt. Olivet and the county courthouse, the Union army again occupied Jackson, remaining until the war ended. As can best be discerned by available war records, the Union's outer breastworks were along present-day US Highway 45 (Highland Avenue) and East Forest Avenue, approximately three blocks from Mt. Olivet and the inner breastworks were at Tabor Street, approximately ¼ to ½ mile in the opposite direction from the cemetery.[4] Emma Williams's county history *Historic Madison* states: "For years the remains of earthen breastworks could be seen in the northwestern and northeastern parts of the city on the west side of old Talbot Hill and at the top of the hill on Fairmont Street."[5] Fairmont is two blocks south of Mt. Olivet.

With Union occupation secured and emancipation announced in the summer of 1863, many slaves left the plantations in search of freedom and safety behind Union lines and became contraband labor for the occupying troops. According to Dr. Bobby L. Lovett, many African-American communities in Tennessee arose near former contraband camps. Although the predominantly black community surrounding Mt. Olivet is not on the site of a contraband camp, it is within an area occupied by Union troops; therefore, it is also likely that the settlement began as a "safe" area for former slaves within Union lines.

Once the war ended, African Americans in Jackson busily established basic community institutions such as schools and churches. In fact, Jackson became the national headquarters of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) in the 1870s. The CME officially organized in December 1870 in Jackson as a black-led and black-controlled offspring of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The conservative group particularly attracted the growing population of upwardly mobile African Americans. In 1882 the CME established the CME High School, which later evolved into Lane College (NR 7/2/87 & 11/8/91). By this time, the urban black community was also in search of its own town cemetery. For the first fifteen years after the war, black and white citizens of Jackson continued to be buried, albeit in different sections, in Riverside Cemetery, but in May 1880, the city council voted to buy three acres for a segregated African-American cemetery known as Eastside and then closed Riverside Cemetery to any future lot purchases by African Americans. The city council stated: "no permit shall be issued for the interment of colored persons in said cemetery Riverside cemetery in the city of Jackson except to such as of them as own lots therein."[6]

Thus, the establishment of the Mt. Olivet Cemetery in 1885 came at the end of the Reconstruction era in Tennessee, and represents the slide toward local ordinances enforcing "local customs" that

became better known as Jim Crow segregation, a strict process of separating the races that characterized many aspects of Tennessee life, culture, and institutions. In 1886-1887, as Riverside neared its capacity, local white investors opened their own new, elaborately landscaped cemetery, segregated as white only, as Hollywood Cemetery (opened in 1887).

Mt. Olivet is the largest, private African-American cemetery in the city and is still in use. Approximately 28 percent of the burials are post-1951. In March 1885 the Trustees of Mt. Olivet Cemetery (Wade Hampton, George Collier, Live Brown, C. H. Lea, J. C. Watson, H. N. Snow, C. Wells, Lawrence Ellison, and Jack Saunders) purchased 7.83 acres for the cemetery from A. C. White. The land was on the northeastern edge of town, just beyond the city limits at that time. In 1895 the city council added four acres to Mt. Olivet and closed Eastside (colored) Cemetery.[7] Years later, when bodies were removed from Eastside in order to convert the land to Centennial Park (and eventually to a school campus), those deceased were likely re-interred at Mt. Olivet as it was "the principal burial ground for the black citizens of Jackson for many years."[8] It was especially popular with the growing upper middle class and professional segment of the local black community from 1890 to 1930. Prominent burials include doctors, ministers, businessmen, a lawyer, and many educators.

Based on a 1995 survey of extant cemetery grave markers, the earliest marked burial is that of Ellen Hurt who died in 1885 at age fifty-three. Twenty-four marked burials were prior to 1890. Judia Bomar's tombstone reflects a birth year of 1787 – the earliest of any marked grave in Mt. Olivet. To African Americans residing in Jackson today, the cemetery holds special significance to their sense of identity and prior achievement because it is the final resting place of many prominent citizens in local history and affairs. At least five Civil War veterans are buried at Mt. Olivet – four Union and one Confederate: Corpl. Jas. Stevens, Co. A, 3 U.S.C.H.A., Henry Kinney, Co. F, 3 USC CA; "Sergt." William Blair, Co. F, 100 USC Infantry; Thomas Allen, Co. K, 108 USC Infantry; and Richard H. H.[sic] Bradley, Co. I, 29 TN Infantry, CSA. The "Lest We Forget" website describes Henry Kinney's unit as having

> the proud distinction of being one of the finest cavalry regiments (Union or Confederate) in the Army of the Tennessee to serve in the Mississippi Valley and the Department of the Gulf. A majority of the enlisted men were ex-slaves from Mississippi and Tennessee, and the regiments brilliant achievements are mentioned in general orders of the war department. The history of the regiment will show a long list of brilliant victories and no defeats. It was aggressive and never violated the laws of

> honorable warfare. It gave and took blow for blow and in a fair and open field acknowledged no superior.[9]

In contrast to the Union veterans, Bradley's Confederate Pension Application reflects experiences similar to those of many former male slaves in the South during and after the war. Bradley, born a slave in Desoto County, Mississippi in 1849, accompanied his master, Harper Spann, as a "colored servant and cook" when Spann joined the 29th Mississippi Infantry. During the war, he acquired a "slight wound" from a "stray ball" but was not incapacitated.[10] He was with the remnants of the unit when it surrendered at Greensboro, NC in 1865. Soon thereafter, he settled in Madison County, Tennessee and, typical of freed slaves, he selected a surname, in his case, Bradley. S. A. Pepper's affidavit attached to Bradley's pension application verifies the latter's identity:

> ". . . I am a resident of State of Tennessee, residing in Shelby County, Tennessee, and have so lived for many years. I am president of Johnston & Vance Co., Memphis, Tenn. and am 78 yrs. old, I was a member of Co. C, 29th Mississippi Regiment, and served during the greater part of the War, I was in co. C, until after the Battle of Lookout Mountain, when Cos. C.F.G. & I were consolidated, and was personally acquainted with Dick Spann, who was a colored servant and Cook in company I, 29th Miss. Regt., and served during the War as such. He came into the army through his master Harper Spann, and served continiously [sic] throughout the War as a cook and servant to Co. I, as aforesaid. He was a faithful soldier and was never guilty of unbecoming conduct, in fact his record was excellent. That after the War the name of Dick Spann was changed to R. H. Bradley, under which name he now goes. Dick Spann and R. H. Bradley are one and the same persons."[11]

That a white person of means and social stature was willing to vouch for Bradley is a testament to Bradley's character. Referring to black Confederate veterans, Dr. Bobby L. Lovett states, ". . . a strong letter from a white patron was necessary to secure a state pension."[12] In Lovett's sampling of over one-third of the Tennessee Colored Veteran's pension applications, Madison County had the third highest number (16), behind Davidson and Shelby counties.

During World War I, Jackson's African-American men responded to their country's call. More World War I veterans (64) are buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery than veterans of any other war. (The county's ratio of blacks to whites gradually decreased from 50% black in 1880 to 33% in 2000 and was at 41% in 1910.)[13] Regimental information on the veterans' grave markers tells what actually happened in military ranks. For example, "319 Labor BN

QMC," "804 Pioneer Infantry," and "304 STEV Regt. QMC" reflect the reality that blacks were relegated to primarily manual labor. At least two markers indicate that the deceased veterans were corporals and one lists the veteran as sergeant; however, commissioned officers in World War I were almost always white. A few black units, including the 371st Infantry, 93rd Division, were dispatched to France and merged with segments of the French army and participated in fierce battles during the Champagne Offensive.[14] At least two members of the 371st are buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery – Willie Tankersley and Isaiah Savage.

It was not until World War II, however, that African Americans were allowed to serve in all branches of the armed service, as pilots, and as Navy officers.[15] Mt. Olivet Cemetery burials reflect the change with at least two Navy veterans among the fifty-five World War II veterans. Mt. Olivet's Willie Phillips, who earned a Purple Heart, exemplifies the move to integrate blacks into full combat roles in World War II.

Mt. Olivet Cemetery also contains the graves of prominent religious leaders, reflecting the rise of a black middle class in the city during the 1880s and 1890s. Among the first CME Conference delegates were Charles Lea (also spelled Lee in some records) and Isaac H. Anderson. Both are buried in Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Lea served on the CME's Public Worship Committee. In 1874, he was "presiding elder of the Jackson District," and on the committee that started the CME High School.[16] Lea's tombstone inscription reads, "Rev. C. H. Lea, Born Fairfax Co., Va. 1823, Died Madison Co., Tenn. Mar. 16, 1889, I shall not die but live and declare the words of the Lord." The marker also bears a Masonic emblem.

Isaac Harold Anderson (1834-1906) was born into slavery in Fort Valley, Georgia and later inherited money from his father who owned cotton gins there.[17] He was a pastoral delegate from Georgia to the CME's initial 1870 General Conference. He also served on the Organization Committee, and later as Vice President of the CME's General Missionary Board.[18] Rev. C. H. Phillips, author of *The History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church*, lists Anderson as one of the most influential pioneer CME leaders and a "member of every General Conference, except the one of 1874, and has just rounded out eight years as Book agent and manager of the *Christian Index*."[19] In 1877, he transferred from Georgia to Sardis, Mississippi and continued as a delegate to the CME's annual General Conference. He was appointed to represent the CME at the AME Zion conference in 1880 and was elected CME's book Agent at the 1890 Conference. Four years later he received votes for Bishop; however, another minister was elected. In 1898, four years after relocating their publishing operation to Jackson, Tennessee, the CME organization bought a "suitable property" from Anderson to house the facility. After moving to Jackson in 1894, Anderson used his wealth to support the

flagging CME publishing house as well as to finance black entrepreneurs.[20] Anderson's double tombstone in Mt. Olivet reads, "Rev. Isaac Harold Anderson, 1834-1906/ Louisa Byrd Anderson, 1860-1951, He being dead yet speaketh." "Professor" Austin R. Merry, Sr., the principal of the CME High School in Jackson, also rests in Mt. Olivet (Photograph 43).

Judging by Masonic symbols and script naming specific clubs, membership in fraternal and civic organizations was very important to the black community. Mt. Olivet tombstones give evidence of such membership in burials from 1917 through 1988. For example, the marker for Alfred Bonds who was born in 1858 and died in 1917 shows that he was a member of Progress Temple 717 as was Henry Walker (died 1915) (Photograph 39). At least two fellow members, John Green and Roddy Cary, are also buried here. Women's organizations are also represented by markers such as those of Mariah Turnipseed, Rose Smith (Magnolia Chamber 794,) and Violet Chilton (Rose of Sharon Chamber 908). Ella Banks's (died 1921) stone contains a representation of her Magnolia Blossom Chamber 794 insignia (Photograph 40). Masonic emblems designate membership of George Lewis Anderson (1879-1947), Herman Cobb (1905-1988), and Charles L. Howell (1877-1924), while the women's sister group, Eastern Star, is shown on markers for Alberta B. Anderson (1898-1975) and Lillie Cobb (1908 – [n.d.]). Macedonia Circle No. 1242 and No. 3021 and Berean Circle No. 125 are also represented in the burials. Masonic symbols indicate that Rev. C. H. Lea, Rev. Chars Moor, and Rev. James Windom belonged to that organization.

For the black community, such organizations provided more than an opportunity for social contact. Even before the Civil War, some were assisting needy families. During Reconstruction and Jim Crow days, secret societies provided moral and financial support for activists, educated members on political issues, and acted as training grounds for future leaders. In Jackson as well as the rest of the country, particularly in the south, advancement of their race depended on a strong network within the black community because prevailing segregationist views of whites excluded blacks from white social, political, educational, and economic institutions. Even Jackson's most progressive proponent of the "Social Gospel," Rev. Mark Matthews of the white First Presbyterian Church adhered to typical views of the day: "Southern people love the Negro and are doing great things for his elevation. He will ever be the trusted servant of the white man."[21] A Mt. Olivet marker reflecting the typical views of the period is inscribed: "In memory of my faithful servant Ada Buckley, died Feb. 1923." Another tombstone symbolizes the society blacks faced during the early 1900s – one in which entry into occupations other than servant and manual labor was difficult: "Dandy Routh, May 11, 1884—February 23, 1918, Janitor MCFI/Memphis Conference Female Institute, Jackson, a faithful friend." At least two tombstones at Mt. Olivet Cemetery include "Mr." before the names –

a respectful form of address rarely heard during the lifetime of black citizens in the Jim Crow decades in Jackson.

By mid-century, opportunities for advancement improved, as evidenced by the marker for John Emmett Ballard (died 1977) who is buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. His tombstone inscription verifies that he was a "Practicing attorney & member of Bar Association, Madison County, 1935-1977." Although the period of significance ends before the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, it is worth noting that Mt. Olivet's burials include attorney Ballard, who defended many Civil Rights movement activists arrested in the 1960s, and Dr. Isaiah L. Hildreth who supplied financial assistance for the local effort. Pioneer NAACP officers, James and Elizabeth Paster, are also buried at Mt. Olivet.[22]

The importance of "proper" burials, including grave markers, in traditional African-American heritage is reflected by the presence of nearly 1600 tombstones, including several for children, and many with elaborate carving. According to one scholar of African-American life, "The fact that gravestones function in a social system is an important proof that these items have a traditional basis. Resulting not only from an individual's skill but also from collectively maintained attitudes, the gravestone represents communal sentiments . . .."[23] While Mt. Olivet's markers are not as ornate or as large as those typically found in white cemeteries such as Hollywood Cemetery in Jackson, they embody and reflect shared basic middle-class Victorian era tastes. The choice of decoration elements and inscriptions crosses racial lines. For example, near the north end of Mt. Olivet Cemetery stands a granite, truncated obelisk approximately five feet tall, topped with a finial. It sits on a staggered base ranging from approximately two feet square to eight inches square. Motifs include religious symbols, fraternal organization insignia, flowers, hearts, angels, birds, and lambs. The variety of classic as well as Egyptian symbols indicates the education of the deceased, or his heirs, and the desire to express artistic individuality. Despite some similarities to other cemeteries, the range of tombstone decor and forms at Mt. Olivet is remarkable.

Elements of the Victorian era's cherishing attitude toward children, pervasive in upper class white cemeteries of the time, exist at Mt. Olivet Cemetery on a less grand scale. Jackson's African Americans expended precious dollars on markers for their children's graves. Stones identifying the "innocents" include typical symbols of the unblemished souls – lambs signifying innocence and sacrifice and cherubs denoting angelic status. Flowers and birds, elements of nature associated with youth, adorn tombstones of others who died as youngsters. For example, Alford Williams (died 1917, age 15) was memorialized with a marker whose top one-third consists of a bouquet of flowers indicating grief (Photograph 5). Birds and flowers also appear on a few markers of adults, and, in

those instances, indicate, respectively, grief or sorrow and eternal life or the soul's flight. John Cary (died 1888) has a tablet style marker with a recessed circle containing a wreath of flowers indicating victory in death (Photograph 1). An unusual raised, layered-petal, flower adorns Clarence Tyson's (died 1908) marker (Photograph 15).

Religious symbols and motifs denoting religious meanings abound at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Many stones, both old and modern, rudimentary or professionally made, display crosses – the emblem of Christian faith. With the close ties between the CME church and Jackson's black citizenry, it is not surprising that the African-American community's religiosity is expressed in Mt. Olivet Cemetery markers. Inscriptions reflect the importance of Christianity to the African-American community. For example, Beulah Barker's (died 1924) marker reads, "Here lay my burden down. Change the cross into the crown;" Theodore Light's (died 1911) has "Budded on earth to bloom in heaven;" and Rev. I. S. Person's (died 1914) says, "Earth has no sorrows that heaven cannot heal." Tombstone art depicts a variety of faith-based representations: doves (soul reaching peace), gateway (entering the "pearly gates" of heaven), hand with finger pointing upward (gone home to heaven), and hand-shakes (brotherly greeting or goodbye and unity in Christ). Martha Bennett's (died 1914) stone has a hand with upward pointing index finger set within a recessed circle (Photograph 4). The tomb-stone for Sarah Devene (died 1919) has a graceful, full length, winged female form effigy in flight on the top half of her stone, indicating flight of the soul (Photograph 10). I. and C. Shelton (died 1919 and 1904) are buried beneath a double arch, bridge style marker with a cutout ellipse at the center adjoining the base, indicating the extinction of the "river of life" or transition from earthly realm to heavenly realm. Wings carved on the face of the larger section at its top likely represent flight of the soul to the heavenly realm (Photograph 8). Some markers, even though for people connected to religious institutions, indicate secular affiliations. Rev. Chars. Moore (died 1912) is identified with a Masonic symbol in addition to the inscribed "Rev." before his name.

Shellis Lane, the former treasurer of the cemetery association is buried in Mt. Olivet. He created at least twenty unique markers during the first half of the twentieth century. Most were for members of his family, many of whose graves now also have "bought" markers. His works may have been intended to serve as temporary markers until the family could afford to purchase tombstones. They also evidence the economic difficulties of the black community during the cemetery's period of significance. According to Shellis's daughter, Henrietta Phillips, he was the great-nephew of Bishop Isaac Lane for whom Lane College is named. Shellis Lane worked as a wallpaper hanger during the Great Depression and Jim Crow era. Because they could not afford to buy tombstones, Lane made small concrete markers for his relatives and a few friends. Working with readily available leftover bits of concrete mix, Lane achieved a decorative effect by using red coloring for the center concrete

portion of the markers, leaving the border uncolored. Crude hand lettering also marks his work as folk or vernacular craft rather than professional. Although his method did not require the special skills of stone carving, it served the utilitarian purpose of providing a permanent marker and indicated the importance the African-American community attached to identifying the graves for posterity. His creations are distinctly identifiable as his work. Examples include markers for "Mr. Alfred Shelton" (died 1920) and "Miss Sarah Bell Utley" (death date illegible) (Photographs 11 and 13). Those were the only two located which used the prefix "Mr." or "Miss." It is uncertain if he also made tablet style markers such as the one for Joanna Exum (death date below ground) of poured concrete with hand lettering. His own marker is a military issued stone with the inscription "Shellis F. Lane, Cpl., US Army, Oct. 8, 1888, May 13, 1974" (Photograph 37).

Mt. Olivet Cemetery is a monument to the success of Jackson's post-bellum black community. It is significant because it reflects the history of African Americans in the town as they moved from slavery to freedom, from economic dependence to self-sufficiency, from exclusion by whites to forming their own institutions, as they struggled to overcome white imposed legal and social restrictions, and as they, all the while, supported the United States government with military service. The cemetery's tombstone art depicts the value of religion, education, and social/civic participation. In recognition of the burial ground's importance, Jackson's Historic Zoning Commission recently recommended that the Planning Commission (and, in turn, the City Council) approve a local historic overlay district for Mt. Olivet. Additional acknowledgement is in order to recognize the cemetery's historic and artistic significance. Inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places will heighten awareness of the contributions African Americans have made to the development of Madison County, Tennessee.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal boundary description and boundary justification

The nominated boundaries contain approximately 10 acres, indicated as Parcel 55, Block E, in the attached Madison County Tax Map 65-0. These ten acres represent all of the historic property associated with Mt. Olivet Cemetery during its period of significance.

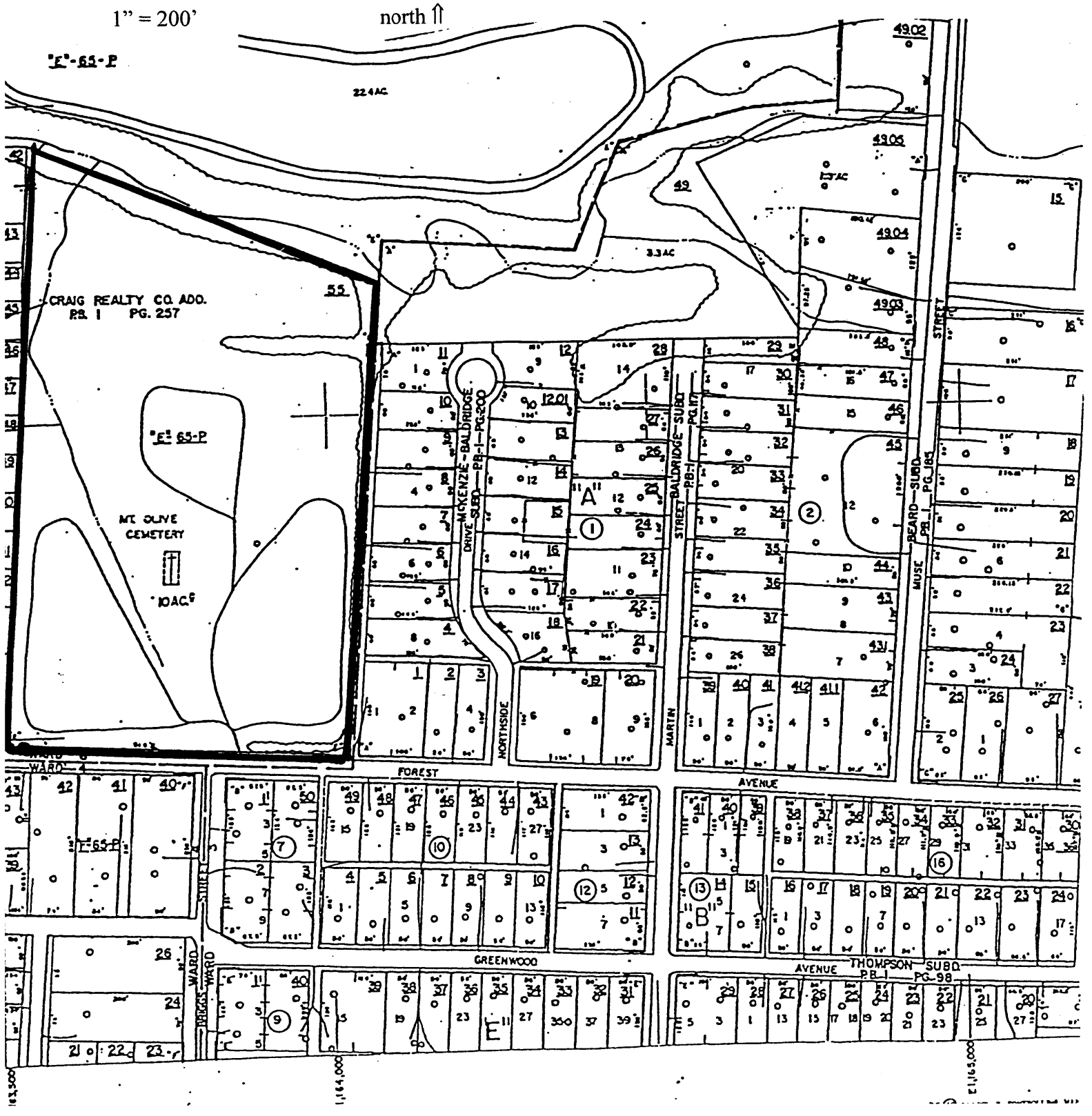
(8-86)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 20 Mt. Olivet Cemetery, Madison Co., TN

1" = 200' north



PHOTOGRAPHS
Mt. Olivet Cemetery
Jackson, Madison County, Tennessee

Photographs by: Carroll Van West
Middle Tennessee State University, Center for Historic Preservation
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
Date: August 21, 2001

Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission
2941 Lebanon Road
Nashville, TN 37243

John Cary gravemarker, facing east
1 of 44

Willie Boyd grave marker
2 of 44

Caleb Cunningham grave marker
3 of 44

Martha Bennett grave marker
4 of 44

Alford Williams grave marker, facing southwest
5 of 44

Oscar Eavens grave marker
6 of 44

Stinson and Kin and Friend and Pets grave and plot marker, facing west
7 of 44

I. and C. Shelton grave marker, facing west
8 of 44

Joe Goodrich grave marker
9 of 44

Sarah Devene grave marker
10 of 44

Mr. Alfred Shelton grave marker
11 of 44

Nettie Cator grave marker
12 of 44

Miss Sarah Bell Utley grave marker
13 of 44

J. H. and Lula McKee grave marker
14 of 44

Clarence Tyson grave marker
15 of 44

Lucy Bond grave marker, facing east
16 of 44

Julia Blakemore grave marker
17 of 44

Ellen Kay Alston grave marker
18 of 44

Dora Turner grave marker
19 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing east
20 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing northeast
21 of 44

Hollis Person grave marker
22 of 44

Hubert Cook grave marker
23 of 44

Fred Louis Julian grave marker
24 of 44

Trench, facing north
25 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing northwest, with trench on left
26 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing southwest, with trench on left
27 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing south, with trench in center
28 of 44

South boundary along East Forest Avenue, facing east
29 of 44

South boundary along East Forest Avenue, facing west
30 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing northeast
31 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing southeast
32 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing southwest
33 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing west
34 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing east
35 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing southwest
36 of 44

Shellis Lane grave marker
37 of 44

Rev. A. D. Merriwether grave marker
38 of 44

Henry Walker grave marker
39 of 44

Ella Banks grave marker
40 of 44

Henry Kinney grave marker
41 of 44

Cemetery overview, facing south
42 of 44

Austin Merry, Sr. grave marker
43 of 44

Rev. L. W. Bowers grave marker
44 of 44

ENDNOTES

[1] Emma Inman Williams, *Historic Madison: The Story of Jackson & Madison County Tennessee From the Prehistoric Moundbuilders to 1917* (Jackson, TN: Madison County Historical Society), 1946, 165.

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[3] Steve Baker, "Jackson," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*, Carroll Van West, ed. (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society), 1998: 467; Harbert Alexander, "Madison County," In *Tennessee Encyclopedia:* 566.

[4] Jerry Lessenberry, Jackson Sons of Confederate Veterans, telephone conversation with Nancy Morgan, 24 July 2001, notes in possession of Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN.

[5] Williams, 165.

[6] Jonathan K. T. Smith, comp., *Tombstone Inscriptions from Black Cemeteries in Madison County, Tennessee* (Jackson, TN: p.p.), 4 (Supplement).

[7] Ten acres is shown on the tax map; therefore, this figure is used when referring to the cemetery's area despite the discrepancy when the four acres per the City Council minutes is added to the original deed's 7.83 acres.

[8] Jonathan K. T. Smith, "Eastside Cemetery and Mt. Olivet Cemetery," *Tombstone Inscriptions from Black Cemeteries in Madison County, Tennessee,* < http://web.utk.edu/~ddonahue/madison/bcme-01.htm> (6 July 2001).

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[18] Phillips, 29-30, 62.

[19] Ibid., 32-3.

[20] Ibid., 240, 107, 119, 146, 168, 176, 192; Taylor conversation.

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