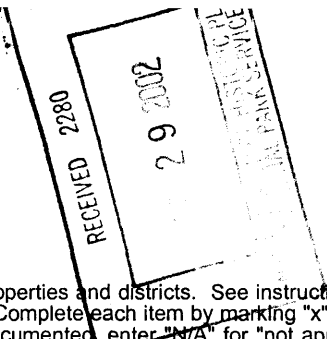


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

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 any 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.



1012

1. Name of Property

historic name Hurricane of 1928 African American Mass Burial Site

other names/site number Pauper's Cemetery/ PB11548

2. Location

street & number SW corner of 25th Street and Tamarind Avenue n/a  not for publication

city or town West Palm Beach n/a  vicinity

state Florida code FL county Palm Beach code 099 zip code 33407

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 forth 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.)

Janet Snyder Matthews 7/23/2002  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources  
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  See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper (for) Arach D. Pope Date of Action 9/12/02

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**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)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

n/a

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions)

Funerary: Graves/Burials

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**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions)

Funerary: Graves/Burials

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions)

n/a

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**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation n/a

walls

---

---

roof

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other

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**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more 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.

**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** a birthplace or grave.
- 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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Archaeology: Historic

**Period of Significance**

1928

**Significant Dates**

September 16-October 1, 1928

**Significant Person**

n/a

**Cultural Affiliation**

African American

**Architect/Builder**

n/a

**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):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) 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**

City of West Palm Beach, Historic Preservation Division

# \_\_\_\_\_

Hurricane of 1928 African American Mass Burial Site  
Name of Property

Palm Beach Co., FL  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** 1.08 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	5 9 3 3 2 0	2 9 5 7 3 7 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

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 Sinks, Sherry Piland, City of West Palm Beach & Barbara E. Mattick, DSHPO for Survey & Registration

organization Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation date July 2002

street & number 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (850) 245-6333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

**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 City of West Palm Beach

street & number 200 2nd Street telephone (561) 659-8031

city or town West Palm Beach state FL zip code 33401

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1

**HURRICANE OF 1928 AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MASS BURIAL SITE**  
West Palm Beach, Palm Beach Co., FL

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**SUMMARY**

The Hurricane of 1928 African American Mass Burial Site is located in the northeast corner of the abandoned City-owned Pauper's Cemetery, established in 1913 at the southwest corner of 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Tamarind Avenue, in West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida. The mass grave, in which an estimated 674 victims of the 1928 hurricane were buried in two layers, is thought to extend under what is now 25th Street. The identification of the location of the burial site is based on a 1939 map of the Pauper's Cemetery that places the location of the mass grave at the east end of the cemetery. This location was confirmed through the use of ground penetrating radar in 2000. The nominated property includes only the area that could be verified by GPR, and does not include the parts of the burial site located under 25<sup>th</sup> Street.

**SETTING and DESCRIPTION**

A mass grave for the Belle Glade victims of the 1928 Hurricane was prepared at the Pauper Cemetery that had been established by the City of West Palm Beach in 1913 at the southwest corner of the intersection of 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Tamarind Avenue (Figure 1, Site Plan). Tamarind Avenue was a primary north/south artery on the west edge of the city limits of West Palm Beach prior to the westward expansion of the City in the late 1950s. Twenty-fifth Street is twenty-five blocks north of the downtown area.

A 1939 site plan prepared by the City shows that the northern boundary of the Pauper's Cemetery, 25th Street, ran at a northwest-southeast diagonal when the cemetery was in use (Figure 2, City Engineer's Map 1939). In the 1950s, a new east-west street was created running west from the intersection of old 25th Street and Tamarind Avenue. This new street ran through the north area and northwest corner of the cemetery. That part of the cemetery is now under the current 25th Street pavement and the triangular area between 25th Street and now designated 25th Court. The area west of the cemetery has been used as a landfill and slopes upward toward the west and southwest. A vent pipe remains in place. Commercial buildings are located to the north and east.

The Hurricane of 1928 African American Mass Burial Site is located in the northeast corner of the now abandoned City Pauper's Cemetery (See Figure 1). The north edge of the parcel is parallel to 25th Street and sits back approximately 145 feet from Tamarind Avenue (Photo 1). The abandoned Pauper Cemetery is a portion of a larger parcel of land still owned by the City of West Palm Beach (See Figures 1 & 2). No structures exist on the property. Several large banyan trees are located at the northeast corner of 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Tamarind Avenue (Photo 2).

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**HURRICANE OF 1928 AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MASS BURIAL SITE  
West Palm Beach, Palm Beach Co., FL**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS**

In order to identify the location of the mass burial, in January 2000, Robert H. Shuler, P.E., P.G., and Marilyn Brown Shuler of RHS Technical Services, Inc., a consulting firm hired by the City of West Palm Beach, performed a ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey at the old City Pauper's Cemetery. They issued a preliminary report on February 10.

They performed a ground penetrating radar survey at the recently mowed unmarked burial site approximately 200 feet by 200 feet in dimension. In preparation for their work, the southeast corner of the original cemetery fence and northeastern-most point of the original cemetery fence located south of the new 25th Street were surveyed and marked with orange poles. They conducted scans of the property for the hurricane mass victims burial to determine the western and southern boundaries of the site.

**Ground Penetrating Radar Survey**

Description of Scan Process

The GPR survey was performed with a Geophysical Survey Systems, Inc. Subsurface Interface Radar (SIR) System-2 utilizing a 400-megahertz antenna and survey wheel. Profiling was done by moving the antenna across the area to be scanned. This system could be considered the electromagnetic equivalent of a sonar submarine bottom profiling system. The radar graphic shows soil strata and other features much as they would appear to an observer looking at a wall of a vertical trench. In general, soils and underlying clays, gravel, and other materials are usually distributed in well-defined horizontal strata. Any trench or excavation in the ground would disturb these well-defined layers. Later, when the excavated material is used to fill the trench, the fill material becomes randomly mixed and distributed. The net result is to create an obvious disruption in local stratigraphy. This disruption of the horizontal layers is known as the "trenching effect," and is normally seen in the radar data wherever there is buried pipe, cable, or other excavation that has been backfilled with randomly mixed materials, including human burials.

GPR Survey Performance and Findings

RHS Technical Services established a grid placing surveyor flags at 50-foot increments from the northeast corner orange pipe marker west for 250 feet, and from the northeast marker south for 250 feet. North-to-south scans were performed at 10-foot intervals commencing at the east end of the northern boundary (at the northeast marker) westward to the 150-foot mark. North-to-south scans were also performed at the 200- and 250-foot marks. East-to west scans were performed at ten-foot intervals commencing at the north end of the eastern

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**HURRICANE OF 1928 AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MASS BURIAL SITE  
West Palm Beach, Palm Beach Co., FL**

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boundary (at the northeast marker) southward to the 100-foot mark. East-to-west scans were also performed at the 150- 200-, and 250-foot marks (Figure 3, Results of Ground Penetrating Radar Scans).

On the printout of the GPR scan, the thin white marks along the top of the scan are at five-foot intervals. The small hyperbolas are the indications of burial sites. During their GPR scans, they noted a regular pattern of disturbed soil layers and voids which are probably consistent with individual human burial plots. The 1939 site plan identified the hurricane victims mass grave as being at the eastern boundary of the cemetery. A portion of the mass grave remains in the northeastern area of the property, from the northeast marker southward approximately 75 feet and westward approximately 20 to 30 feet. Near the center of the scan, the large indications at the two depth levels indicate the location of the mass grave. It appears, therefore, that there are two layers of burials in the mass grave. RHS Technical Services, Inc. concluded that the 1939 site plan's identification of the hurricane victims mass grave appears to be correct. They prepared a drawing of the scan locations and mapped out where they believe the location of the mass grave is, based upon their interpretation of the data (Figure 3).

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Section number 8 Page 1 **HURRICANE OF 1928 AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MASS GRAVE**  
**West Palm Beach, Palm Beach Co., FL**

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SUMMARY

The Hurricane of 1928 African American Mass Burial Site is significant under **Criterion A** at the **local and state** levels in the area of **Ethnic Heritage: Black** as the burial site of approximately 674 victims, primarily African American agricultural workers, who were killed in the hurricane of 1928 that devastated South Florida – one of the worst natural disasters in American history. The catastrophe was a major event particularly for the African American community, and was described by noted author Zora Neale Hurston; well known educator Mary McLeod Bethune, along with 3,000 other mourners, attended the memorial service at the mass grave. The site, therefore, meets **Criteria Consideration D** because of its association with this historic event. The burial site also is significant under **Criterion D** for its potential to yield important information about the victims, most of whom were African American farm laborers, a little documented population group.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Pauper's Cemetery

In 1913, the City of West Palm Beach set aside a tract of land in the vicinity of what today is the intersection of 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Tamarind Avenue, to provide three acres each for a city pauper's cemetery, a county pauper's cemetery, and a pest house and pauper's house. An adjoining three-acre field was designated as a refuse disposal site.<sup>1</sup> Existing records do not indicate when actual burials at this site began. Evergreen Cemetery, approximately 750 feet away, was founded in 1916 as a burial ground for black citizens, but did not provide space for pauper burials. Palm Beach County established its own pauper's cemetery in 1917 near what today is 45<sup>th</sup> Street and Australian Avenue. Unofficial burials may have taken place at the 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Tamarind Avenue site as early as 1913-1914.

Accidental exhumations have occurred at the site several times since it became a cemetery. In 1925, over thirty bodies, all black it was thought, were unearthed during grading and excavation in the block formed by what is presently 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Streets, Tamarind Avenue and South Street. The graves were no more than a few months old and were in a "misplaced potter's field," according to a city official. The bodies were to be moved, given proper burials, and markers were to be erected.<sup>2</sup> In late 1927, a pauper's cemetery again was being sought by the city. The last pauper's grave permit had been issued for Woodlawn Cemetery, and no further permits would be available until the city and the county reached agreement on a joint city-county potter's field. The City Manager recommended the city property adjoining the north incinerator dumping ground. In early 1928, thirteen fresh graves were found near the incinerator when land on the site of the new potter's field was being cleared.



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**HURRICANE OF 1928 AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MASS GRAVE**  
**West Palm Beach, Palm Beach Co., FL**

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Hurricane of 1928

Lake Okeechobee, the second largest freshwater lake wholly within the United States, lies forty miles west of West Palm Beach. The lake is a shallow bowl, roughly circular in shape and approximately forty miles in diameter, with a maximum depth of fifteen feet. It is the catch basin and primary water supply for central Florida. In the late 1800s a plan was put into effect to reclaim the Everglades in order to attract settlers. The Kissimmee River was connected to the Gulf of Mexico through Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee River. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Florida State legislature created the Everglades Drainage District. The drainage commission oversaw the majority of the excavation in the region. Reclamation centered around the northern and eastern parts of the Everglades. Canals were dug to control the flow of water in the district and to drain the Everglades for farming. The farmers who moved in and settled around the shores of Lake Okeechobee cleared and burned the jungle on the south side of the lake in order to access the fertile black muck beneath. Settlement grew up around the lake.

In 1922, after ninety-five days of rain, the lake rose four and one half feet, and water seeped over the land. Subsequently, a low muck dike was built around the south rim of the lake to prevent future flooding. Population around the lake continued to increase. Black and white families moved in from elsewhere in Florida as well as from out of state, attracted to the fertile soil, abundant game and fish, and mild climate. Laborers were imported to work the fields. In late September 1926, a hurricane swept over the lake. A flood of wind-driven lake water was pushed toward the southern end of the lake where it breached the low muddy dike at Moore Haven and flooded the town under 15 feet of water. Estimates of the death toll range from 150 to over 500 victims.

After the 1926 hurricane disaster another earthen dike, supposedly stronger, was built around the southern and eastern rim of the lake to prevent farmland from flooding. Farming and settlement resumed around the lake, and migrant workers were again imported to work the fields. Most were black, many Bahamian, and thousands of them lived in shacks and huts jammed along the canals.<sup>3</sup>

During the first fifteen days of September 1928, nearly three feet of rain fell on Lake Okeechobee, the most ever recorded up to that time in a single month.<sup>4</sup> Canals and ditches around the glades were overflowing and the muck was saturated. The level of the lake was normally kept slightly above that of the surrounding land so the water could be drained off for irrigation, but now the water was inching up the dike.

In early September, a hurricane was reported off the Cape Verde Islands by the crew of the SS *Commack*.<sup>5</sup> It was the most easterly report of a hurricane in the Atlantic ever received. The storm hit Guadeloupe first on

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MASS GRAVE**  
**West Palm Beach, Palm Beach Co., FL**

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September 12, 1928, then continued across the Caribbean, leaving hundreds dead and millions of dollars in damage. The hurricane devastated Puerto Rico on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September. Residents along the coast of Florida kept a wary eye on the storm, but the Weather Bureau felt the storm would not hit the mainland.<sup>6</sup> By Sunday, September 16, however, it was clear the storm would hit Palm Beach County.

Residents along the coast had enough warning to make preparations, but word of the hurricane did not reach Lake Okeechobee until near noon on Sunday. From South Bay, on the south side of the lake, men drove along the roads, spreading the warning, but hundreds of people living in isolated farmhouses and shanties spread out across the vast farmlands never got the word.<sup>7</sup>

The hurricane came ashore at Jupiter on September 16, 1928. It was said the lighthouse there swayed several feet in the winds, and mortar was squeezed from between the bricks like toothpaste.<sup>8</sup> The storm continued westward. As it passed over Lake Okeechobee, winds at Canal Point reached 155 miles per hour. Barometric pressure dropped to 27.43, just short of the lowest recorded up to that time (27.31 recorded in 1919).<sup>9</sup> Flooding occurred along ten miles of the north shore, around the town of Okeechobee, reaching as far as twelve miles inland. Winds blew the north end of the lake bottom bare and drove the water, already high from previous rains, toward the south end of the lake. The fifteen- to twenty-foot storm surge hit the south and east rims of the lake, destroying twenty-one miles of muck dikes, and flooding the towns below the dikes. Water rose four to eight feet within the first hour after the flooding began. Belle Glade was soon under ten feet of water. The floodwater carried away buildings and flooded fields along nearly the entire south half of the lake, from Moore Haven to Pahokee, and as far as ten miles inland.

People who took shelter on a barge in the lake and in the Glades Hotel and Belle Glade Hotel in Belle Glade survived. Many who sought refuge in less substantial structures which collapsed, such as homes and packing houses, or who climbed trees, were killed by wind- and water-borne debris. Some died of fatal bites from water moccasins, which swarmed up trees to seek high ground. Others, caught in the open when the storm struck, drowned or were crushed by the debris-laden floodwaters. The wall of water overtook 200 people fleeing along the road between Belle Glade and Pahokee; they died instantly. Buildings were carried off by the floodwaters; terrified people inside scrambled onto rafters to keep from drowning. Alligators and snakes swarmed in the floodwaters. Hundreds of acres of farmland were submerged, and the flood left twenty-five foot high-water marks on trees.<sup>10</sup>

Word of the disaster reached the coast the next day, but the full extent of the devastation became known only gradually as day after day the death toll mounted. The glades were inundated, the roads to the lake were flooded, and access from the east was possible only along one highway, itself under water in many places. Despite the fact that the area lay within a few miles of metropolitan West Palm Beach and the internationally famous resort of Palm Beach, the area around the lake was so isolated that the governor of Florida did not learn

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of the catastrophe until three days later.<sup>11</sup> Relief workers and work crews were pressed into service and began the gruesome task of retrieving the dead. Bodies floated alongside dead livestock and wildlife. Work crews retrieved bodies from muck and piles of debris. Although noted Florida writer Zora Neale Hurston was in New Orleans when the hurricane struck, she used the locale and events surrounding the tragedy in her 1937 novel Their Eyes Were Watching God.<sup>12</sup> She described the retrieval operation as follows: "Bodies were to be searched out, carried to certain gathering places and buried. Corpses were not just found in wrecked houses. They were under houses, tangled in shrubbery, floating in water, hanging in trees, drifting under wreckage."<sup>13</sup> Corpses were tied in long lines and towed behind barges. Rain continued to fall. When the sun finally came out, the intense heat hastened decay of the bodies, and within a couple of days the bodies were so badly decomposed they were beyond recognition. Faces were blackened and bloated, so that the only way to distinguish between blacks and whites was by the hair.

Some of the bodies were buried in the canal banks. Others reportedly were eaten by alligators. Many of the bodies were taken elsewhere for burial because the soil was still saturated. In the first days after the storm 1,600 bodies were hauled in wagons north to Port Mayaca, in Martin County, where they were cremated and the remains placed in a mass grave. A gravestone in the cemetery there memorializes those victims. More than 700 bodies were picked up and loaded on large trucks and taken to West Palm Beach for burial. In some places along the route east, the trucks had to be led through water because the road was still submerged. After the fourth day in the hot sun, fear of an epidemic forced the workers to begin piling up the bodies and cremating them in funeral pyres along the shore of the lake. The Palm Beach Post reported the rising death toll daily, and not until September 25th could it be reported that bodies had finally ceased arriving from the Lake area for burial. The search for the missing continued through October, and was then called off because of a lack of funding.

The actual death toll is uncertain. The official body count of the Red Cross was 1,836 dead.<sup>14</sup> Some in Florida said the death toll was over 2,300; others said it may have been as high as 3,500. For years afterward farmers plowing the soil around Lake Okeechobee turned up bodies and skeletons. The deadly hurricane of 1928 ranks among the worst natural disasters in United States history, along with the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 (over 8,000 dead), the Johnstown flood of 1889 (2,200 dead), and the two hurricanes of 1893 (2,000 dead in both Louisiana and South Carolina).<sup>15</sup> It was a category four storm, with winds of 155 miles per hour and one of the lowest barometric pressures recorded up to that the time.

The bodies brought to West Palm Beach for burial were delivered to two cemeteries: sixty-nine bodies were buried in a mass grave intended for white victims at Woodlawn Cemetery, and an additional 674 victims were buried in a mass grave intended or black victims in the City's pauper's cemetery at 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Tamarind Avenue. The burial of victims at the pauper's cemetery took place over a period of a week following the hurricane. After all the mass burials were completed, West Palm Beach Mayor Vincent Oaksmith proclaimed

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an hour of mourning for the victims to be held on October 1, 1928. Simultaneous memorial services were held at both cemeteries two weeks after the hurricane hit. At the Pauper's Cemetery site, approximately 3,000 attended the services which was planned by the pastors of the Payne Chapel A.M.E., Tabernacle Baptist, St. Patrick's Episcopal and Pleasant City Methodist churches. Mourners gathered at the trench graves that stretched more than 100 feet. Dr. J. H. Thompson, a physician, presided over the services. Noted black educator and activist Mary McLeod Bethune was present and read the Mayor's proclamation. The Palm Beach Post reported on October 1, 1928, that "the program included prayer by Reverend Lambright of the Pleasant City Baptist church; delivery of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm by the Reverend Story; an invocation by Father Lewis, of St. Patrick's Episcopal church; an address by the Reverend S. W. Adair, of Payne Chapel A. M. E.; a eulogy of Professor Benjamin F. James, of the Negro public school at South Bay by Dr. J. Harvey Smith; and principal address by Reverend C. Frederick Douglas Hall, pastor of St. Paul's A M. E. church; and benediction by Reverend J. H. Goram of the Pleasant City A. M. E church."

**SUBSEQUENT HISTORY**

President Herbert Hoover toured the Lake Okeechobee area in February 1929. In the same year the Florida State legislature created the Okeechobee Flood Control District, which was authorized to work with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers in flood control operations. Floodway channels and control gates were constructed. A rock levee eighty-five miles long and thirty-six feet high was finished along the southeast, south and southwest rims of the lake in 1937, at a cost twenty-four million dollars. The new dike, called the Hoover Dike, was eighteen to twenty feet above the normal level of the lake. In 1949, a hurricane battered the levee for a period three times longer than any previous storm, and with greater intensity, and the dike held, sustaining only minor erosion damage.<sup>16</sup>

Around 1929, the burial site at Woodlawn Cemetery was identified with a simple grave marker that reads "In memory of these citizens of Palm Beach County who lost their lives in the storm of 1928." A marker was never placed at the Pauper's Cemetery. The Pauper's Cemetery is not identified on the Sanborn Insurance maps of 1934 or 1953. Oral history reveals that occasionally bones surfaced, but the gravesite faded from public memory, and in 1957, the City sold a section of the 15-acre field to the West Palm Beach Sewage Disposal Plant.

In 1964, the cemetery nature of the site returned to public knowledge when human remains were exposed during construction of an extension of 25<sup>th</sup> Street. These remains were reburied at Woodlawn Cemetery, but the site once again faded from the public eye. The property changed ownership in the 1980s. In 1983, the City of West Palm Beach exchanged some of the property at 25<sup>th</sup> and Tamarind, including that containing the mass grave, for property on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, owned by the Union Missionary Baptist Church. The City did not inform the Church of the mass burial on the property, but placed a restriction on the deed stating that the property was

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limited to "church use only." Isaiah Clark, Pastor of Union Missionary Baptist Church, had no idea the mass grave was on the property. In 1985, after the trade, the City removed the deed restriction, making the property easier to sell. In 1987, the church sold the property to Bernard Kolkana, but he too was unaware of the gravesite on the property. In 1991, local community activists organized a memorial and consecration service for the victims of the 1928 hurricane at the mass burial site. A priest from Miami conducted a traditional Yoruba (Nigerian) religious ceremony at the site.<sup>17</sup> Only after this event did Kolkana realize the property contained burials. In 1992, City officials considered building affordable housing on the portion of the 8-acre tract where there were no burials. Excavation was necessary to determine whether the city's maps of the gravesite are accurate. Work crews for the City of West Palm Beach, using a backhoe to try to find the boundaries of the burial site, found human remains.<sup>18</sup>

In 2000, the City of West Palm Beach hired RHS Technical Services, Inc., of Miami, Florida, to conduct a ground penetrating radar survey, to locate the site of the mass burial of the hurricane victims. In its technical report to the City, RHS stated that the radar scan showed that a 70 foot by 30 foot trench lay where a gravesite was shown on a 1939 site plan furnished by the City. It also showed that the 25<sup>th</sup> Street extension "unearthed random bodies from the old pauper's cemetery, and it ran right through the north end of the mass grave trench." It appeared that there are two layers of burials in the mass grave. Some shallow burials were found outside the 1939 site plan burial plots.<sup>19</sup> In December 2000, responding to public pressure, the City of West Palm Beach reacquired the property from Kolkana. The City is now preparing plans to appropriately memorialize this important site in the history of the community.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Hurricane of 1928 African American Mass Burial Site is significant under Criterion D because it has the potential to yield significant information about the victims. Because of the delays in burying the victims, it was sometimes difficult to determine the race of the bodies. Archaeological investigation of the skeletal remains could clarify the racial identities and could provide basic information about the physical attributes of the victims, such as molecular genetics, health, nutrition, stature, gender, and age. Because the victims were primarily poor field workers, such information could provide insight into the daily lives of an under-represented class.

<sup>1</sup> "Pauper Burial Ground." Tropical Sun, 28 August 1913

<sup>2</sup> "Steam Shovels Find Lost Burial Ground." Palm Beach Post, 29 May 1925.

<sup>3</sup> "1928 Florida hurricane USA's second deadliest." USA Today, 23 September 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas, Marjorie Stoneman. Hurricane. New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc. 1958.

<sup>5</sup> Barnes, Jay. Florida's Hurricane History. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas, Marjorie Stoneman.

<sup>7</sup> Barnes, Jay.

<sup>8</sup> Barnes, Jay.

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<sup>9</sup> Barnes, Jay.

<sup>10</sup> Longshore, David. Encyclopedia of Hurricanes, Typhoons, and Cyclones. New York: Facts on File, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Barnes, Jay.

<sup>12</sup> Hemenway, Robert E. Zora Neale Hurston. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Hurston, Zora Neale. Their Eyes Were Watching God. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1937.

<sup>14</sup> Doehring, Frad, Iver W. Duedall, and John M. Williams. Florida Hurricanes and Tropical Storms, 1971- 1993: An Historical Survey. Melbourne: Division of Marine and Environmental Systems, Florida Institute of Technology, Technical Paper – 71, June 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Barnes, Jay.

<sup>16</sup> Barnes, Jay

<sup>17</sup> "Victims of 1928 Hurricane in Mass Grave Consecrated." Palm Beach Post, 21 October 1991.

<sup>18</sup> "Crews Dig to Find '28 Mass Grave." Palm Beach Post, 18 January 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Schuler, Robert H., "Ground Penetrating Radar Survey of West Palm Beach Cemetery." Miami: RHS Technical Services, Inc., 2000.

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The 1928 African American Mass Burial Site, located in the northeast corner of the abandoned City Pauper's Cemetery, is encompassed by a rectangle measuring approximately 40 feet (east-west) by 80 feet (north-south). The site boundary is an irregular shape as shown on Figure 3, "Results of Ground Penetrating Radar Scans."

The larger property in which the Pauper's Cemetery lies is defined as:

A parcel of land lying in Section 9, Township 43 South, Range 43 East, Palm Beach County, Florida and being more particularly described as follows:

9-43-43, NLY 245 FT OF SLY 669.3 FT OF ELY 290 FT OF GOV LT 4 LYG W OF TAMARIND AVE EXT

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The nominated property includes the area of the City's abandoned Pauper's Cemetery that includes the Mass Burial Site as confirmed by ground penetrating radar scans conducted by RHS Technical Services in January 2000. Portions that may exist under the pavement of the current 25<sup>th</sup> Street are not included.

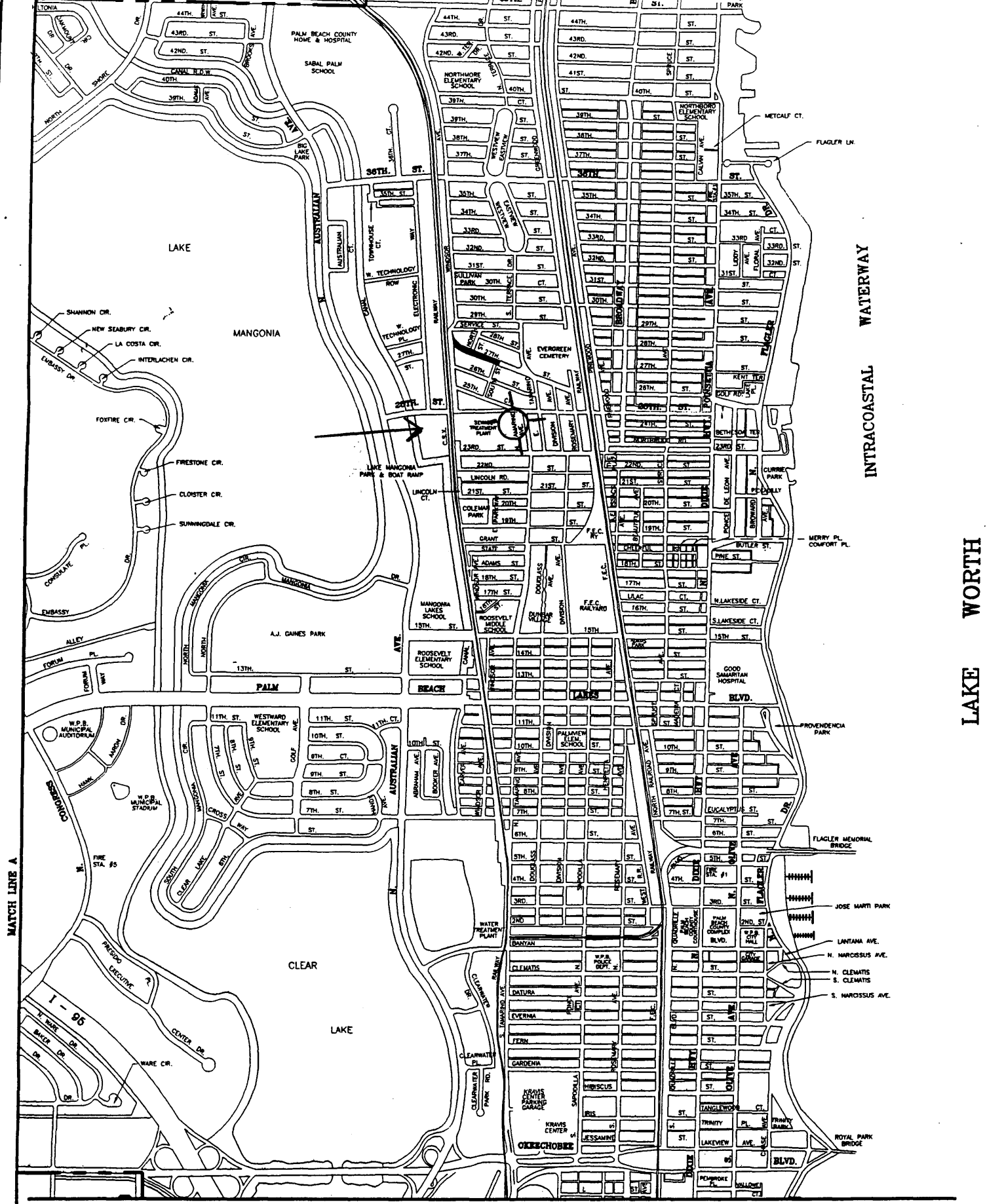
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1. Hurricane of 1928 African American Mass Burial Site, southwest corner of 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Tamarind Avenue
2. West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida
3. Sherry Piland
4. October 2001
5. Historic Preservation Division, 200 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, West Palm Beach, Florida
6. Looking northeast, across Burial Site, toward Tamarind Avenue
7. Photograph 1 of 1.



HURRICANE OF 1928 MASS BURIAL SITE - LOCATOR MAP

# HURRICANE OF 1928 AFRICAN AMERICAN MASS BURIAL SITE

West Palm Beach, Palm Beach Co., FL

SITE PLAN



Photograph with direction of camera



Area (40' x 80') in the Pauper Cemetery in which the mass burial is located.

Scale: 1 inch = 128 feet  
1/16 inch = 8 feet

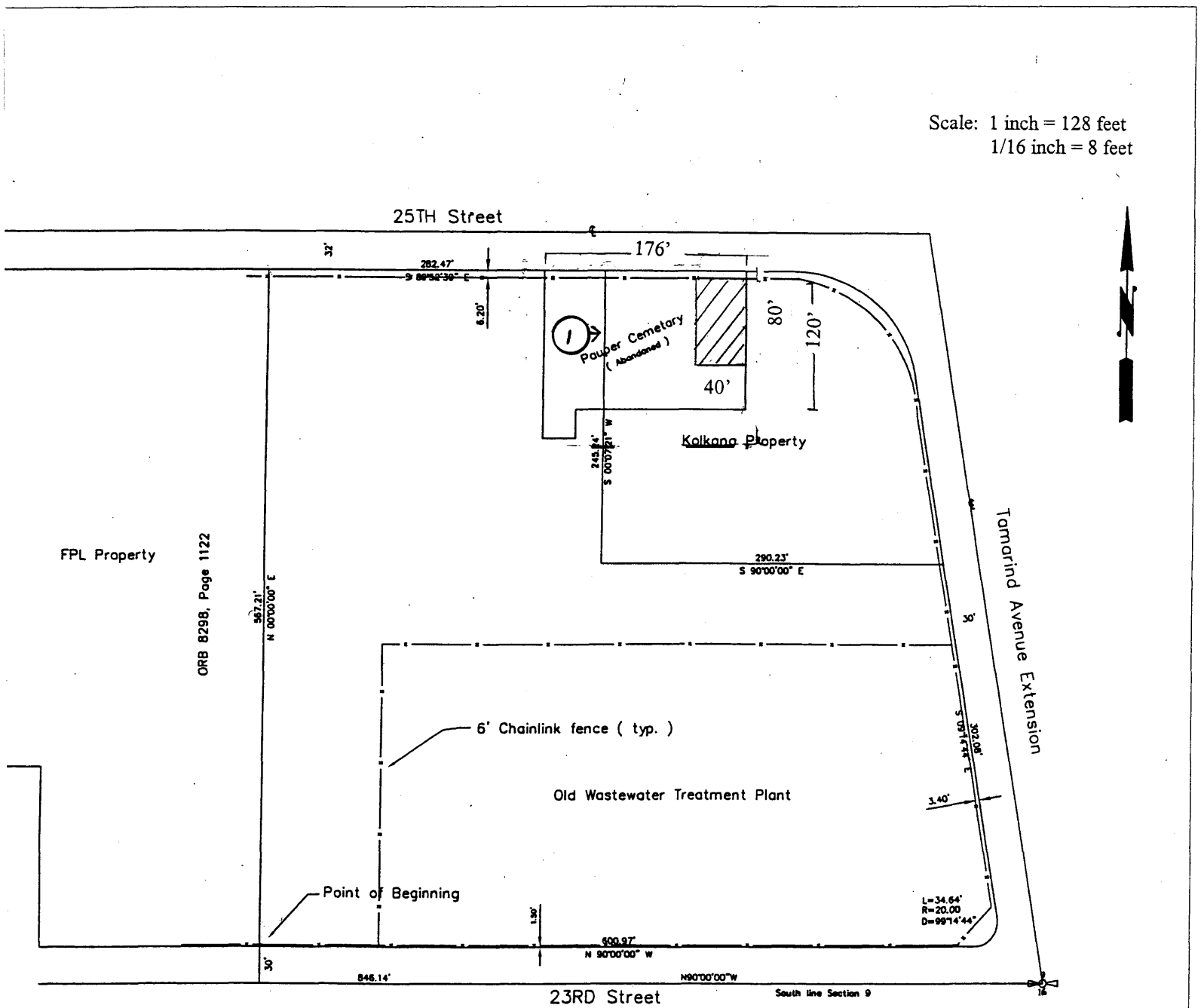
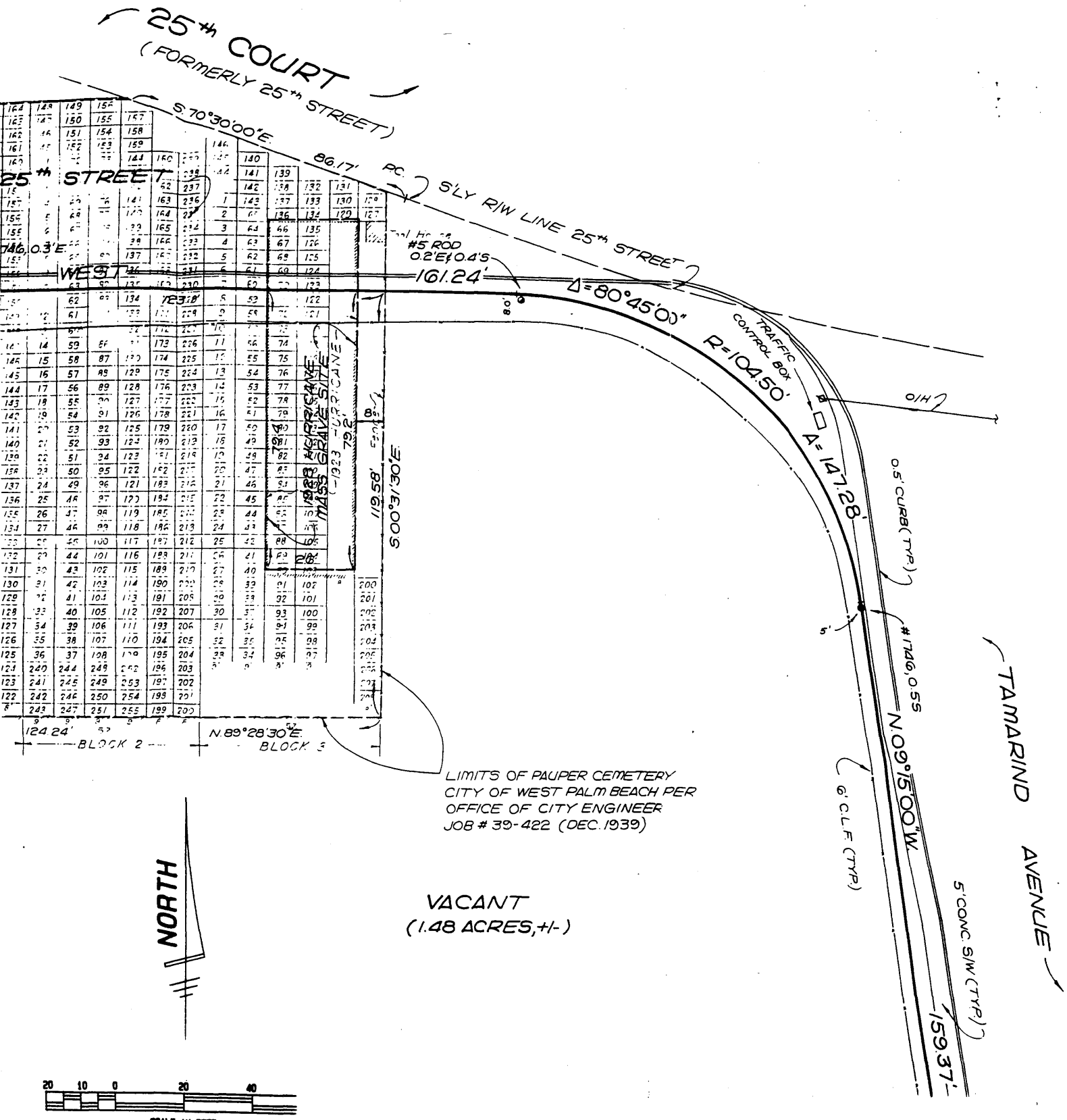


Figure 1.



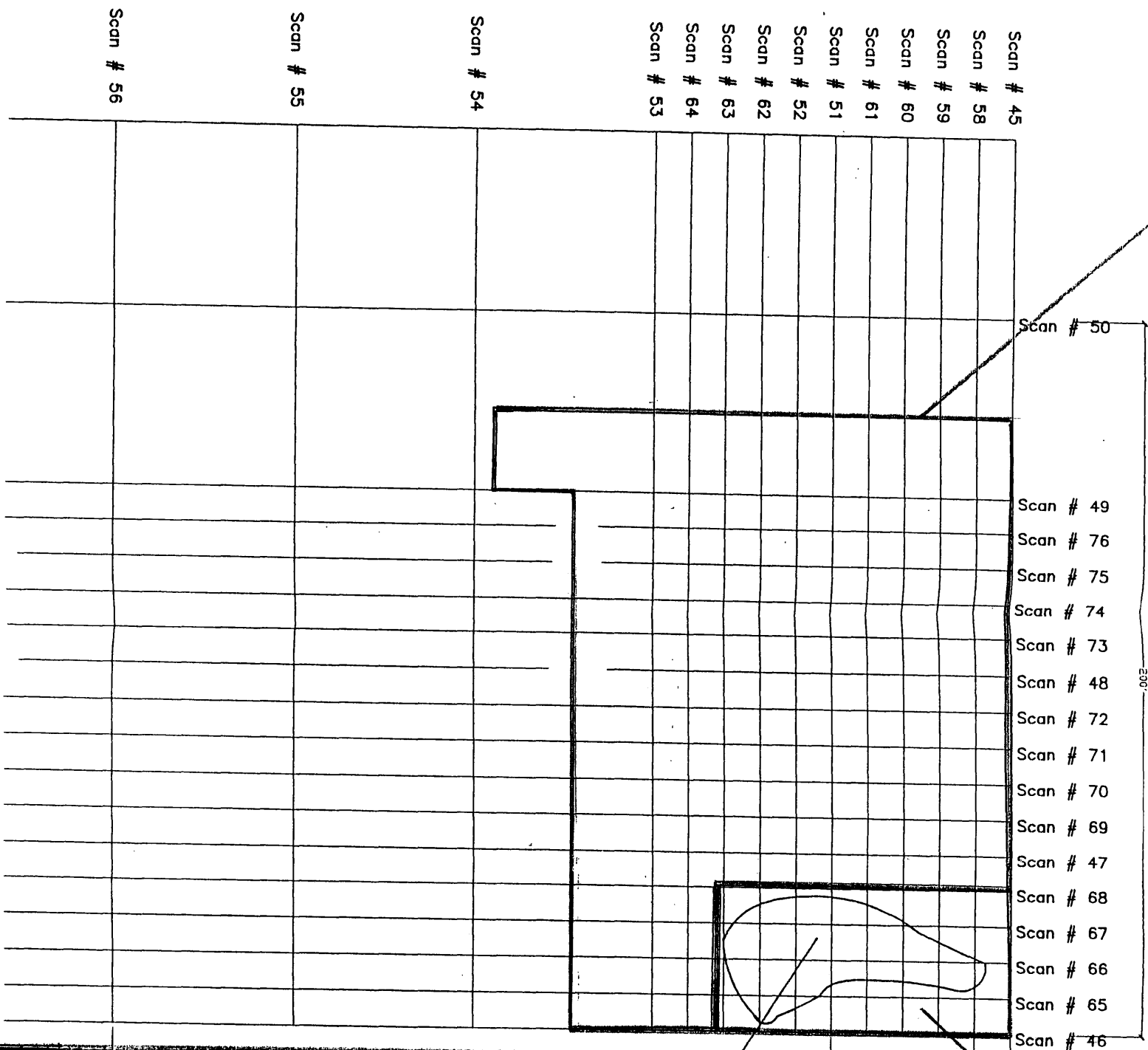
**HURRICANE OF 1928 AFRICAN AMERICAN MASS BURIAL SITE**  
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City Engineer's Map, 1939

Figure 2.

Pauper Cemetery Boundary

HURRICANE OF 1928 AFRICAN AMERICAN MASS BURIAL SITE  
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Coincides with hatched area on inset

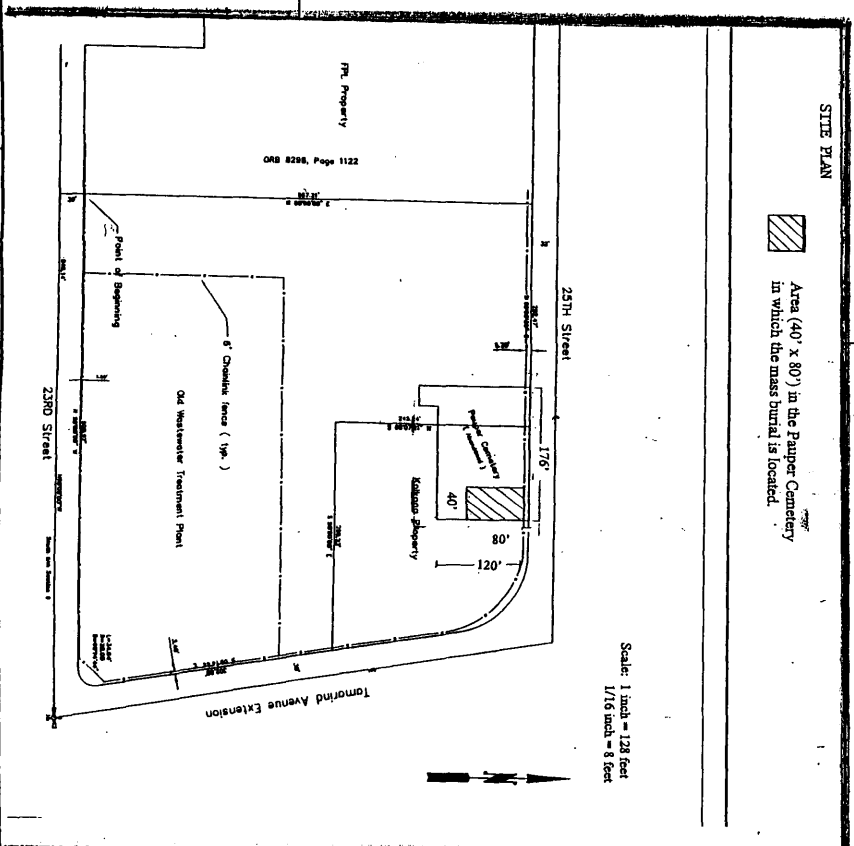
Area of apparent mass grave; indications are that two layers of burials were performed

- Scan # 45
- Scan # 58
- Scan # 59
- Scan # 60
- Scan # 61
- Scan # 51
- Scan # 52
- Scan # 62
- Scan # 63
- Scan # 64
- Scan # 53

- Scan # 55
- Scan # 56

Figure 3.

RESULTS OF GROUND PENETRATING RADAR SCANS



Scale: 1 inch = 128 feet  
1/16 inch = 8 feet

<p>ISSUE No</p> <p>DATE</p> <p>ISSUED FOR</p>	<p>West Palm Beach Cemetery Survey</p>	<p><b>RHS TECHNICAL SERVICES, INC.</b> 278 North East 125 Street North Miami, Florida 33161 (305) 686-6022</p>	<p>DATE</p> <p>ISSUED FOR</p> <p>SCALE: 1" = 128'</p> <p>DATE: 8/10/98</p> <p>PROJECT: GPR-1</p>
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