

# BY THESE HANDS



VERNACULAR MARKERS OF PENSACOLA'S  
HISTORIC AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES

## ***Historic John the Baptist Church Established 1846***



**African American Heritage Society**  
"Celebrating Diversity"

**Project Name:** *By These Hands: Vernacular Markers of Pensacola's Historic African American Cemeteries*

A note on vernacular markers: Vernacular markers are constructed by hand by local artisans, craftsmen, family members, or friends of the family. Locally available materials are generally used. Design motifs can be elaborate or simple and often incorporate personal expressions of life and death. Marker text is generally hand-inscribed or created by impressing commercially produced letters and numbers into still-damp cement. Vernacular markers connect individuals, artisans, and ideologies to the cultural and physical landscapes of the community in very personal ways - they represent love, thoughtfulness, respect, and the bond of brotherhood/sisterhood/community. They are works of art.

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\*The grant was awarded to John the Baptist Church (<http://historicjohnthebaptist.blogspot.com/p/church-history.html>)

\*John the Baptist Church is partnering with UWF (all UWF support to the project is in-kind)

\*Lead UWF partner is the UWF Archaeology Institute (<http://uwf.edu/cassh/departments/anthropology-and-archaeology/archaeology-institute/overview/>)

\*Other UWF partners:

- Division of Anthropology and Archaeology, Department of Anthropology (<http://uwf.edu/cassh/departments/anthropology-and-archaeology/>)
- Florida Public Archaeology Network (<http://www.flpublicarchaeology.org/>)
- UWF Historic Trust (<http://uwf.edu/offices/historic-trust/>)
- Department of History (<http://uwf.edu/cassh/departments/history/>)
- Department of Chemistry (<http://uwf.edu/cseh/departments/chemistry/>)
- University Archives and West Florida History Center (<http://libguides.uwf.edu/universityarchives> )

### **Project abstract:**

Like all historic cemeteries, Pensacola's historic African American burial grounds are outdoor museums that reflect cultural attitudes and adaptations. The vernacular markers that dot early 20<sup>th</sup>-century African American cemeteries in Pensacola are not merely physical marks on the landscape - they have a powerful story to tell about the African American community as a whole. The story of Pensacola's vernacular cemetery markers encompasses individuals, occupations, ideologies, and expressions. Through a series of professional talks and tours and the development of interpretative materials, the story of Pensacola's African American cemeteries will begin to emerge. By bringing this story forward we will be sharing the story of Pensacola's historic African American cemeteries and we will also be weaving the threads of

our story into an expanding tapestry that tells the story of Florida's historic African American burial grounds. Looking beyond local significance, Florida's historic African American cemeteries are threads in the greater story that link us, as Floridians, to a regional, national, and world tapestry.

### **Project components:**

**Research:** UWF History and Archaeology graduate students are researching individuals and their markers. Other students are involved as well. For example, to learn more about how 3D scanning is helping to uncover the past visit <https://virtebra.wordpress.com/2014/12/18/the-story-of-spencer-bibbs-and-the-vernacular-markers-of-pensacolas-historic-african-american-cemeteries/>. Chemistry student Dylan Kelly is analyzing marker construction material from several individual markers in an effort to link one artisan to a number of markers.

**Web site:** The Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) is designing (and will host) a web site devoted to materials and products associated with the project. Examples of materials that will be available on line include biographies, research papers, photographs, bibliographies, African American genealogy resources, blogs, etc. The web site will also link to a special support component associated with the project.

**Special component:** University Archives and West Florida History Center are making their collections of the *Colored Citizen* (published from 1914-1958) available on line. As part of this project, the public is being asked to look in their attics and scrapbooks for any copies or clippings that can be scanned (at no charge) and added to the online collection. Dean DeBolt at University Archives and West Florida History Center ([ddebolt@uwf.edu](mailto:ddebolt@uwf.edu), 850.474.2213) is coordinating the *Colored Citizen* scanning project. To see the progress of the *Colored Citizen* project go to <http://ir.uwf.edu>. Watch the collection grow!

**Interpretative materials:** An interpretative kiosk and bench will be installed at John the Baptist (Montgomery) Cemetery. Interpretative materials will focus on the role African American Burial Societies and fraternal orders played in uniting communities. In addition, Spencer Bibb and his impact on early African American education in Pensacola will be highlighted as will the contributions of other individuals in John the Baptist (Montgomery). The Spencer Bibb monument (slated for conservation treatment) was made by an (as yet) un-identified artisan who also made markers in AME Zion and Magnolia Cemetery ca 1910-1925. Additional interpretative material will include information on other African American cemeteries in Pensacola. These cemeteries are outdoor museums that chronicle the rich African American heritage of our community. Each has an important story to tell.

**Public talks and tours: September 17-19, 2015,** John the Baptist Church (and its UWF partners) will host a weekend workshop on the Vernacular Markers of Pensacola's Historic African American Cemeteries. National Park Service architectural historian Dr. Dennis Montagna will open the public workshop with a keynote lecture focusing on the African Burial Ground National Monument (New York) and the intrinsic value of our historic African American cemetery resources. The weekend event will include talks and demonstrations by scholars in the fields of cemetery studies and Pensacola's African American heritage. Tours will be offered at three cemeteries over the weekend: John the Baptist (Montgomery), AME Zion, and Magnolia. UWF students will be at their research sites to share their findings.

**Changes to the physical landscape:**

Although not part of the *By These Hands* grant-funded project, much is happening on the physical landscapes of our community cemeteries. Volunteers can be seen working at AME Zion and Magnolia on a regular basis. The Escambia County Board of County Commissioners is helping with landscape needs as well as supporting some marker repair. The City of Pensacola is also lending substantial resources to support volunteer efforts at the two sites. Keep Pensacola Beautiful has gone above and beyond in their volunteer efforts. The UWF Archaeology Institute is also lending a hand by providing volunteer service on a temporary basis and supporting repairs to markers at three cemeteries. The UWF Historic Trust is providing temporary financial oversight for County funds allotted to help with the physical needs of several cemeteries.



The historic cemeteries of our community are invaluable cultural resources – they tell our story in a way that cannot be told by any other means.

Stand by for further information! If you have a specific question, contact the UWF Archaeology Institute at 850.474.3015.

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