

# History of Pinewood (Cocoplum) Cemetery

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Until 1897, a year after the City of Miami was incorporated, there were no official cemeteries in the Miami area. Burials north of the Miami River were usually on the home place. Neighbors helped in laying out the body, building a coffin and burying the body. Due to lack of an undertaker, little time was lost. After the City of Miami Cemetery was opened, most bodies that had been buried north of the Miami River were "removed" to that place.

But south of the Miami River, burials were usually made in the area where Pinewood Cemetery now is. Old timers have said that burials in that area may have been made as early as 1855. The present cemetery comprises only four acres, but a builder to the east, and one to the west, reportedly found bones of humans while digging trenches for house foundations.

Adam C. Richards (1849-1937) born Canton, Ohio, came to this area in 1875 and married Rose Wagner in 1876. Under the Homestead Act of 1862 he received title in 1895 to the west one half of the northwest one quarter of Section 32 of Township 54, which was a tract which had its northwest corner at the present day intersection of the center lines of Sunset Road and Erwin Road (S.W. 47 Avenue). Erwin Road is a mile east of Red Road in South Miami.

In October 1896 Adam Richards and his wife deeded the corner acre to the Dade County School Board and in May 1897 they deeded the next acre south to Wilson A. Larkins, Arthur F. Lang and Arthur E. Kingsley as Trustees of Pinewood Cemetery. A schoolhouse was built on the corner lot but was later moved and a private residence sits there today. The one acre site for the cemetery evidently became inadequate for in June of 1906 Harley Standt, who had acquired property from Adam Richards, deeded three more acres along Erwin Road to the trustees of Pinewood Cemetery. A plat of the four acre cemetery was

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filed at the County Court House September 1, 1911 (a copy of the plat can be seen at the Historical Association). The cemetery is 840 feet north-south and 210 feet east-west as measured from the center line of Erwin Road. A deduction of 15 feet for paving and right of way left a platted width of 195 feet. The cemetery was divided into 268 plots (including those numbered with letters), plus driveways and a large oval area in the center.

The area was chosen, it was said, because it was near the trail that led from the Coconut Grove area through Larkins (now South Miami) to Perrine. The thin soil made it of little use for farming. Burial holes in the limestone had to be dug the hard way, but "labor was cheap." Later, said Mary Dorn, she would sometimes hear a dynamite blast and would know there was going to be another burial. Of the three original trustees, Arthur Kingsley died in 1899 and was buried in Miami City Cemetery. His name does not appear on any of the recorded deeds of Pinewood Cemetery plots.

The names, and sometimes the addresses, of some 109 original purchasers were written on a copy of the cemetery plat, of which we have a duplicate. Many of the purchasers lived in Coconut Grove. Only 31 of the original deeds were recorded. An abstract of the property may be found in the "Pinewood Cemetery" file at the Historical Association of Southern Florida but it does not include all deeds that were recorded. Another 13 deeds of resales were recorded. Deeds of original sales were signed by Arthur F. Lang as Chairman of Trustees as late as June 1925. Arthur Lang died November 23, 1930 and was buried in Pinewood Cemetery according to his only surviving child, James Lang, now aged 87. Wilson A. Larkins died January 19, 1946 aged 85 and was buried in Graceland Cemetery. He served as clerk, secretary and treasurer. He did not sign any deeds that are on file except as witness. We have a copy of a letter which Wilson Larkins wrote December 3, 1908 to the County Commissioners in which he tried to reason with them after their failure to pay for plot number 58 in which paupers had been buried by the county. He argued that the money was needed to keep up the cemetery. We do not know if the county ever paid.

Ernest Laesch signed deeds of sale as Chairman of Trustees in 1925, 1928 and 1930. He died in August of 1956 and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

George Crews, who died from a hunting accident in 1899, is the first person we have been able to list as buried in Pinewood. Grave stones, since removed by vandals, showed dates of deaths as late as 1944. But no one kept a record of burials as such. An unmarked burial

was made in 1961, and a responsible person said he observed a burial party enter the cemetery in 1975. The trustees never did have anything to do with burials. They sold the plots and left it up to the buyers to find grave diggers.

Present law requires cemeteries to be registered at Tallahassee but they have no record of Pinewood Cemetery there.

Most plots are twenty feet square and sold for ten, fifteen or twenty dollars. No financial records are known to be in existence. A state law was passed in 1959 which required operators of cemeteries to set aside ten percent of sales proceeds for perpetual care, but the law does not apply to Pinewood.

The cemetery was cleaned up after the 1926 hurricane then, as time went by, a scattering of trees grew unchecked. Thin brush now grows in the northern third while brush and tall grasses line Erwin Road and fill the southern two thirds. There was a time when the cemetery was burned over from time to time but anti-pollution laws stopped that. Vandalism has been a major problem. Nearly all grave markers have been carried off or broken. Owners of several plots in the northern part marked their plots with little concrete walls or fencing. The Perrys had an engraved marble slab imbedded in a flat concrete slab. It is good as new. There are unmarked slabs which may have been bases for monuments. Most graves are identifiable only by shallow depressions in the ground.

Miss Lulu McClendon of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, now deceased, urged the Coral Gables Commissioners to take action. We have minutes of three meetings held in late 1963 which were chaired by then Commissioner W. L. Philbrick and attended by about a dozen interested persons. Reports from the Fire and Police Departments were submitted which stated that "the grounds are unsafe to walk upon, many tombstones are broken and an unsanitary condition exists at the location." Plans were made to try to locate owners of plots.

After the first meeting, the Commissioners of Coral Gables appropriated \$1575 for clearing. A bulldozer was used to clear and level parts of the cemetery where such work could be done without disturbing existing grave stones. One hundred and fifty Boy Scouts gave their services. The clearing angered one citizen who lived across Erwin Road. He was trying to sell his house and didn't want prospects to know there was a cemetery there.

Coral Gables spent money on legal fees in an effort to find trustees of the cemetery, but to no avail. The cemetery was surveyed and a determination made that it was within the City of Coral Gables.

It was thought that a new Board of Trustees should be established

so, at the third meeting, five members of the group were selected. They were Dorothy Bush, Preston Prevatt, Pearl Brooke (now deceased), Lloyd Brooke and William Laesch.

There was a fourth meeting, again chaired by Commissioner Philbrick, in November 1965. It was noted that Coral Gables had put up another \$3325 to clear some of the larger growth in the cemetery. Mr. Philbrick reported that "all efforts had been made to locate the records of burials and removals, that there is no existing way the Board of Trustees can comply with the State Statutes."

There were two lasting accomplishments of the meetings. A list was made of two dozen people who were buried there. (Not all of the grave markers that were there then are there today). Secondly, survey points were established on the center line of Erwin Road and at the south east corner of the cemetery. Today, owners of plots along Erwin Road could find their plots if they had a plat and understood the survey points on the road. The Perry plot in the northern section is identifiable and, with a plat, those plots near it. That part of the cemetery is relatively free of wild growth.

No doubt there were location markers for the plots originally. The bulldozer would have destroyed some and others are hidden by brush and grass. Some 55 per cent of the plots were sold and must be considered to be privately owned, but very few owners can find their plots today.

Mr. Philbrick had put forth a plan whereby the few remaining grave markers would be removed to the center oval, a new monument would be erected bearing the names of all those known to be buried there, then the rest of the cemetery would be cleared and sodded. Thus a park-like scene would be achieved and maintenance would be reduced to a minimum by the use of power mowers. The plan was never executed.

It is probable that ownership of some of the plots was abandoned by buyers who later moved away. The population of Dade County increased considerably between 1920 and 1930, but the 1926 hurricane and the beginnings of the great depression caused many people to give up and return north. On the other hand, there were cases of people who had no money but were allowed to make burials in plots owned by relatives or friends.

About twenty years ago some individuals advocated removal of all remains so as to make the site available for other purposes. Heated opposition arose, even from people who had no relatives buried there. Several of the latter purchased plots from original owners and recorded

the deeds so they could forestall such a movement. The proposal died but hostilities and suspicions persist to this day.

Vandalism became worse whenever there was publicity about the cemetery. Many believe that, for the present at least, it should remain untouched. Actually, it appears that there is little left to attract vandals.

Philbrick Funeral Homes performed a couple of burials there. The former Combs Funeral Home performed some and Mr. Bess of Bess-Combs has the records but they are not available. The W. D. Thurmond Monument Company of Coral Gables had a map showing perhaps two hundred or more names and places where monuments were placed but the map, if it still exists, is in storage and has not been located.

When Coral Gables was incorporated, it included the area east of Erwin Road where Pinewood Cemetery is located. But the owners of the lots to the north and east of the cemetery had differences with Coral Gables and withdrew from its jurisdiction. So Pinewood Cemetery, though a part of Coral Gables, adjoins it only at the south end. Coral Gables, in 1968, asked Dade County to annex the site, but the County Commissioners declined to do so.

The unkept nature of the cemetery has led to misuse by undesirable persons for drug parties. To control that problem, the City of Coral Gables has put up NO TRESPASSING signs along Erwin Road and nearby residents were asked to call the Coral Gables Police if trespassers were observed. Anyone planning to enter the property should call the Coral Gables Police Department before doing so.

There is no operative state law that permits Coral Gables to act. However, a bill has been filed in each state legislative session since 1968 that would enable governing bodies to deal with abandoned cemeteries. Coral Gables officials consider Pinewood Cemetery an eyesore that must be moved against if and when the bill becomes law.

It is noted that, under state law, land once used as a cemetery may not be used for any other purpose. The law prohibits a part of a cemetery, even though it be sold, to be used in a way that would desecrate the remainder. The "integrity" of the cemetery must be preserved.

State Representative Tom Gallagher has filed a bill at Tallahassee—559.515 Political subdivisions; unmaintained cemeteries.—

(1) Notwithstanding any laws to the contrary, any political subdivision within this state in which an unmaintained cemetery is located may, after diligent search to locate the owners has failed, maintain said cemetery and charge the true owners for such services, when found.

(2) If any political subdivision has exercised the authority granted

under subsection (1) above, and said exercise of authority has been ongoing for more than one year, said political subdivision shall have an action at law to foreclose on the property for services rendered.

Charles H. Spooner, City Attorney for Coral Gables, stated in a letter to the City Commission that the major problem is that the entire grounds are an eyesore within the city. He said:

“I would presume from the proposed legislation that another concerted effort could be made to locate the ownership of the individual plots where people are buried and, after certain newspaper advertising, that the City could maintain the cemetery. Then after one year of still being unable to locate the ownership of the property, the city could foreclose and, if someone else didn't buy it, the City could buy it at the foreclosure sale and be in the cemetery business.”

Should the City gain control of the cemetery there would still be much to be done. Estimates were made in 1972 of these expenses – hand clearing of underbrush \$9,750, leveling and solid sodding \$17,000. Since some of today's youths have a propensity for driving autos on private property, further estimates were made as to security – for 2066 lineal feet of chain link fence \$5,165. Or, for a 4 foot CBS wall and cap of the same distance \$28,924. Then there would be continuing expenses for mowing.

We might speculate that some responsible person or society might become intersted in the cemetery if a foreclosure comes about. If so, Coral Gables would be relieved of continuing expenses. Pinewood has 4 acres as compared to 11 acres in the Miami City Cemetery, where over 8,000 burials have been made. Could Pinewood become an active cemetery again? There are interesting possibilities for Pinewood's future.

As of this printing no legislative action has been taken in Tallahassee.

### **List of Burials at Pinewood Cemetery**

This list is the result of months of effort, of checking names in the phone book and following a variety of leads. Twenty odd names had been copied from grave stones in the past. The rest of the list was supplied by persons who had records or were related to the deceased to such a degree that their statements were credible. Some leads did not check out and were not included in this list. Only one case was found of a body being dug up and reburied in another cemetery. This list is far short of the estimated two hundred burials in Pinewood Cemetery, but was the best that could be done.

1. Addison, John A., born ca 1830 in Florida, was here in 1870 census.
2. Addison, Mary, wife of John, born ca 1832 in Florida.
3. Anderson, Sgt. Lemuel O. (18--/1934), was in Spanish American War, Co. D, 1st Tennessee Infantry.
4. Barnett, Jeremiah C. (1/22/1869-5/1/1925), born Georgia, in S. A. War.
5. Barnett, Allan Boring (1906-1911), son of Jeremiah and wife Hasen.
6. Barnett, Welburn (1912-1913), son of Jeremiah and Hasen (Roberts).
7. Barnett, Ralph Newton (10/23/1927-1/30/1928), of Coconut Grove.
8. Barnett, Allen, died young ca 1926, son of Newton and Louise.
9. Barnett, Thelma, died 1908, infant of Harry and Rose Barnett.
10. Barrs, William Taylor (1850-3/22/1935), came Aug 10, 1910 from Lake City, Florida.
11. Mrs. W. T. Barrs (1865-11/15/1929), from Lake City Florida. She was born Feareby Jane Hodge.
12. Barrs, Mable Viola, died 1911.
13. Barrs, two year old child of Henry and Merial Barrs, of diptheria.
14. Beckham, Franklin (1908-1931), from marker in cemetery.
15. Brady, Tillman, buried twin babies in Anita Pent plot.
16. Branam, Mrs. R. L. (Delia Blythe), died 1908, from marker in cemetery.
17. Brinson, Mattie (1854-9/18/1926), unmarried. Dates from marker.
18. Brooke, Dillion Duncan Sr. (1875-1924), came 1913 from Oak Hill, Fla. Was husband of Jesse Pearl Brooke.
19. Brooke, Virginia (1919-1921), daughter of Dillion and Pearl Brooke.
20. Brown, Lila, died age ca 23, wife of W. A. Brown, dau. of A. Lang.
21. Burtshaw, James C., his remains were removed from Pinewood.
22. Bush, Dorothy Steele.
23. Carters were buried in plots 10 and 11.
24. Crew, George T. (1864-1899) from marker. Had hunting accident.
25. Crews, Martha, died ca 1924, came from North Florida.
26. Crocket, Agnes MacGuffy (1876-1909) wife of Charles D. Crocket Jr.
27. Crofts, Charles Archibald died ca 1911, born Sheffield, England.
28. Crofts, Arthur McDougal (1908-1910) a son of Walter Crofts.

29. Dean, Dewitt C. (1826-1904) from marker in cemetery.
30. Dean, Fidelia L. (1829-1905) from marker in cemetery.
31. Dean, Charles. This could be Dewitt C. Dean.
32. Dowling, Daniel Drew (ca 1880-5/22/1912) born Live Oak, Florida.
33. Dowling, Mary (ca 1886-8/ /1913) 1st wife of John Perry Dowling.
34. Dowling, Corrine died ca 1932, daughter of John Perry and Mary.
35. Edwards, Hiram (ca 1866-1916) came from Key West.
36. Edwards, Leona (ca 1905-1917) daughter of Hiram Edwards.
37. Felkner, Araminta (4/17/1851-4/22/1924) mother of Mrs. Walter Crofts.
38. Herndon, Lanta B.
39. Hinson, Mrs. J. J. , first wife of county commissioner.
40. Hodge, Ellen (ca 1837-1911).
41. Holland, James Shepard died ca 1910 of injuries from a street car.
42. Laesch, Wm L. (1846-1904) came from Michigan in 1899.
43. Laesch, Katherine (1846-1915) wife of Wm L.
44. Lang, Arthur died 11/23/1930. Was a trustee of Pinewood.
45. Lang, Esther A., wife of Arthur.
46. Larkins, Marshall, son of Wilson Larkins, trustee.
47. McDaniels, Mrs. Docia Williams (ca 1860-ca 1924) from Georgia 1923.
48. Medders, Mrs. B. S. (1854-1920) from marker in cemetery.
49. Melton, Everet S. (ca 1891-1938) came from Citra, Florida in 1916.
50. Mundy, Charles.
51. O'Brien, a twin baby boy died in Sept. 1925, son of J. E. O'Brien.
52. Parker, Alvin M (2/12/1881-8/20/1934) was a bachelor.
53. Parker, Margaret (ca 1931-ca 1934)
54. Patrick, a week old baby girl died 1927, a daughter of Dan and Lena Patrick of Statesboro, Georgia.
55. Patrick, a still born boy died 3/30/1934, a son of Dan G. Patrick.
56. Paupers were buried by the county in 1908 in plot 58.
57. Perkins, Katherine died 3/6/1943. Was daughter of George and Harriet Richardson.
58. Perkins, Hattie E. (1/31/1894-9/8/1944) unmarried dau. of Katherine.
59. Perry, George Lafayette (10/11/1862-5/15/1911), from Georgia.
60. Perry, Molly E. McWilliams (1/20/1862-12/27/1942), wife of George. They were parents of Grover C. J. Perry, born Feb. 7, 1893. (Gesu)
61. Perry, George W. died in 1914, father of G. L. Perry. He was a private in Co. H, 64th Georgia Regiment.
62. Raulerson, Lillian Eva (11/29/1889-8/27/1904), daughter of W. T. Raulerson.
63. Richards, Nelson N. (1885-1906), from marker in cemetery.
64. Richardson, George (ca 1842-10/10/1900), from marker in cemetery.
65. Richardson, Harriet E. or F. (5/24/1850-2/13/1937), wife of George.



66. Roberts, George Livingston (12/9/1855-12/16/1921), came here in 1887. He was born at Manatee, lived Key West, husband of Catherine S. Frow.
67. Roberts, Mary Louise (1908-1908), daughter of George and Catherine.
68. Roberts, Allen died 6/13/1918 as infant, born Coconut Grove.
69. Scott, boy stillborn 1928 to Edgar and Mildred Scott.
70. Steed, baby girl died age 2, daughter of C. D. Steed.
71. Steele, Richard F. (1848-1920).
72. Steele, Carrie, died 10/21/1934, wife of Richard.
73. Sweeting, a young boy buried ca 1934.
74. Thorpe, Thomas A. (12/1/1861-12/22/1927) from marker.
75. Walker, Addie died 12/12/1927 age 2, daughter of J. W. and Alethia Walker.
76. Walker, Alethia died when 5 days old, daughter J. W. and Alethia Walker.
77. Walker, Anneta (1923-1924), daughter J. W. and Alethia Pent Walker.
78. Walls, Ethel Vivian Bailey (ca 1894-9/18/1926), died in hurricane.
79. Walls, Dorothy (ca 1916-9/18/1926), daughter of Alexander and Ethel.
80. Walls, Roy (ca 1915-9/10/1926), son of Alexander and Ethel Walls.