

AFRICAN AMERICAN TRAILBLAZERS / REMEMBERING MARY WOODLAN / A NEW ENTRANCE

The Gate

THE MAGAZINE OF HISTORIC OAKLAND FOUNDATION SUMMER 2020



**HISTORIC
TREASURES**

*An Architectural Gem
Gets a Fresh Coat of Paint
And An Award-Winning Restoration*



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Historic Oakland Foundation partners with the City of Atlanta to preserve, restore, enhance, and share Oakland Cemetery with the public as an important cultural resource and island of tranquility in the heart of the city.

Historic Oakland Cemetery is a division of Atlanta's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs.

Photos courtesy of Historic Oakland Foundation, the Archives Division of the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library, Georgia Women of Achievement, the Digital Public Library of America, Footprints in the Sands of Time by M.H. Parker, and the Library of Congress.

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Opening the Gate

The greatest joy in our work at Historic Oakland Foundation is experiencing and rejoicing in all of the life at historic Oakland Cemetery — a place rightly associated with the dead. In the inaugural issue of *The Gate*, we're thrilled to share with you the many ways that Historic Oakland Foundation's work is bringing new energy and vibrancy to this treasured Atlanta landmark.

The histories present at Oakland in the stories of the Cemetery's residents, its architecture, and its landscape help us to understand how we arrived at the present and to envision possibilities for the future. The recent restorations of the African American Burial Grounds and the 1908 Women's Comfort Station, so eloquently written about by Marcy Breffle and Ashley Shares, remind us how historic preservation can uncover little-told stories and breathe new life into those who may have otherwise been relegated to the margins of history. And certainly, Oakland's beautiful gardens have their own story to tell. As Sara Henderson writes, Oakland's dozens of iris varieties reflect a deep horticultural history that goes back hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

Of course, the Foundation's work moves beyond caring for this special place. David Moore pens a touching tribute to Mary Woodlan, who originated so much of the energetic programming that exists at Oakland today. You'll also read about some of the new ways the Foundation is working to bring new life and vibrancy to these forty-eight acres through programming and widening access, including the introduction of a new East Gate near the intersection of Boulevard and Memorial Drive.

We couldn't do what we do without the encouragement of so many friends and supporters. Thank you for your support of historic Oakland Cemetery. We hope to see you here soon.

Richard J. W. Harker, Co-Executive Director



Richard Harker
Co-Executive Director



African American girl, half-length portrait, with right hand to cheek, with illustrated book on table. Georgia, 1899-1900.



Thomas E. Askew, self-portrait. Georgia, 1899-1900.



Nursing student wearing a fur collar and lace dress, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing left. Georgia, 1899-1900.

Thomas Askew: Portrait of a Trailblazing Artist

Askew's Work Helps Define Black Identity in Post-Civil War Atlanta

BY MARY FERNANDEZ SPECIAL EVENTS AND VOLUNTEER MANAGER

The Great Atlanta Fire of 1917 tore through more than fifty city blocks, destroying homes and businesses and leaving more than 10,000 residents homeless. It devastated the area now known as the Old Fourth Ward, cutting its path directly through what had become the epicenter of Atlanta's thriving black middle-class. One lesser-known casualty of the fire was housed at 114 Summit Avenue: the home, studio, and archives of the artist many consider to be Atlanta's first black photographer, Thomas E. Askew.

Today, you can visit the final resting place of Thomas E. Askew (c. 1847-1914) at Oakland Cemetery in the historic African

American Burial Grounds and pay tribute to the career of one of the most significant photographers in Atlanta at the turn of

the 20th century. While the majority of his photographs were lost to fire, Askew is regarded as an artist who helped shape the trajectory of photography in the United States and influenced the visual representation of Black America during an era of great change.

SURVIVING WORK

The artist's surviving work largely comprises a series of photographs that he created for the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. This series was included in an exhibit curated for the Exposition by W.E.B. Du Bois, and the works were intended to showcase the daily life and advancements of African Americans in the 40 years that had followed Emancipation.

What they also showcase is Askew's mastery of the medium of photography and the genre of portraiture.

Askew's photographs reveal not only an expert eye for composition and light, but also a remarkable ability to empathetically capture the likeness of his sitters. In an 1899 work (far left) now referenced as *African American girl, half-length portrait, with right hand to cheek, with illustrated book on table*, the viewer's eye is directed in a frame around the girl, whose pose recalls a Greek philosopher. Askew's portrait makes a bold statement for his young subject, whose intelligence and potential are limited neither by age, nor race, nor gender, all in the midst of the Jim Crow era and the fight for women's suffrage. The artist's dramatic use of light and shadow in another work for the Paris Exposition, *Nursing student wearing a fur collar and lace dress, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing left*, casts an otherworldly glow on the face of his sitter. Although the subject is described as a nursing student, and the portrait was included in an exhibit meant to present daily life, the subject is elevated and transported to something outside of everyday reality entirely.

In his photographs, Thomas Askew does more than merely record the life of African Americans at a particular point in time. He also works to define black identity and assert its value. His extant works represent one artist's answer to a critical question of his generation: What did it mean to be black and American in a new century?



SEE IT

Askew's gravesite is located in the northeast section of Oakland's African American Burial Grounds near Potter's Field.



An Oakland Power Couple

African American Burial Grounds Resident Spotlight

BY MARCY BREFFLE EDUCATION MANAGER

Entrepreneurs, civil servants, physicians, and community leaders rest among the restored monuments and landscaped gardens of Oakland's African American Burial Grounds. Two of my favorite trailblazing residents are buried there: Walter and Lucy Aiken.

Walter "Chief" Aiken (1893-1965) is recognized as one of the nation's greatest African American builders of the 20th century, but his early years were spent coaching football teams to victory at several historically black colleges across the Southeast. Aiken considered coaching football a hobby and always donated his salary to support students in need.

Walter Aiken married into the prominent Rucker family when he wed Lucy Rucker (1893-1992) in 1920. The couple ran their construction company together, building subdivisions and countless residences. One of their Atlanta developments is the Waluhaje Hotel Apartment building that welcomed entertainers such as Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and Ray Charles in its ground floor night club. You can learn more about this power couple in several guided tours of Oakland.



ABOUT OAKLAND

Historic Oakland Cemetery is Atlanta's oldest public park and the final resting place of many of the city's most noted citizens. Less than a mile from downtown, its 48 acres are full of treasures — history and gardens, sculpture and architecture, ancient oaks and magnolias. It's a wedding venue, a green space, an art gallery, a classroom space, and a place to celebrate the city's rich and fascinating past and future.



Women's Comfort Station

Painting the 1908 Architectural Gem

BY ASHLEY SHARES DIRECTOR OF PRESERVATION

After seven months of hard work, Oakland's Women's Comfort Station was restored in 2019 to its original 1908 appearance. Constructed as a restroom and shelter for women to escape inclement weather (and excessive sunlight), the historic structure will now serve as a space for exhibits that change seasonally. Painting the Women's Comfort Station wasn't as simple as heading to the hardware store and choosing a pretty color.

Working on a historic building that exists at a national historic site entails adherence to a strict set of standards from the Secretary of the Interior. These include repairing damaged features rather than replacing them and establishing a "period of significance" that the building will be

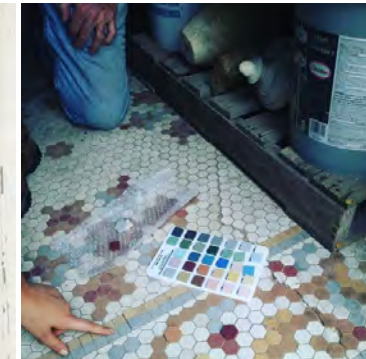
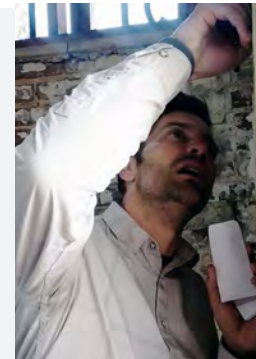
restored to represent. Historic Oakland Foundation adheres to these national standards in its day-to-day grounds work, but we did so to an even more granular degree for our restoration of the Women's Comfort Station. We stabilized and repaired individual roof shingles, and

hired a master carpenter to repair—and sometimes recreate—the damaged wooden elements. Most notably, we contracted with the architectural firm Lord Aeck Sargent to conduct a microscopic analysis of all painted surfaces.

Paint analysis involves the removal of a small flake of paint that includes all layers from the surface down to the substrate. This piece is embedded in an epoxy resin and carefully polished to expose stratified layers. These samples are viewed under a compound microscope and the layers are compared to the Munsell color chart. Based on the comparison, colors are labeled using three numbers to represent hue (principal color), value (lightness), and chroma (saturation). The Munsell system is not commercially used, so these figures

EARLY DISCOVERIES

Lord Aeck Sargent performed a paint analysis on the building so we could restore it precisely to the original colors. We discovered that the interior of the building was primarily "antique white," and while we thought the shingles were originally red, they were actually green.



DECADES OF DETERIORATION

Both comfort stations served the cemetery for several decades before being closed for security reasons in the 1970s. This building sat vacant for roughly 50 years, deteriorating from weather and neglect. It sustained significant damage — a large settlement crack on the south face of the brick exterior, rotting wood rafters, glass missing from windows, a temporary wood roof, and deteriorated plaster.



The paint analysis slide shows historic paint schemes.



AWARDS

Historic Oakland Foundation's Preservation Team won a 2020 Preservation Award for Excellence in Rehabilitation from The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation for the restoration of the Women's Comfort Station.



SEE IT

Located at the intersection of the Jewish Grounds, the Confederate Memorial Grounds, and the African American Burial Grounds. Open Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.



HELP MAINTAIN IT

Donate online at oaklandcemetery.com/womens-comfort-station to contribute to the ongoing maintenance of this historic architectural gem.

were converted to RGB values, a system used by companies like Behr to code their paints.

We discovered that all of the surfaces of the 1908 Women's Comfort Station, except for the plaster walls and galvanized pressed tiles, were originally painted antique white. The structure was repainted with an olive green paint that likely remained for decades. After olive green came lavender, maroon, aqua, and light green.

The historic tiles on the building's skirt roof are galvanized, meaning that the manufacturer dipped them in molten zinc to protect them from rusting. This coating was originally forest green and later red, possibly to hide rust that was forming as

the galvanized coating began to fail. In order to repaint the tiles, the oxidation process first had to be stopped with a rust converter. Rust converters have two active ingredients: tannic acid, which reacts with iron oxide to form iron tannate, and 2-Butoxyethanol, which creates a protective layer that is easily painted.

With regards to historic preservation, a building's period of significance is the year it was constructed. For that reason, we chose to paint the restored 1908 Women's Comfort Station to match the way it would have been seen by visitors when it was new — antique white and forest green.

The Historic Irises of Oakland

Beautiful Spring Blossoms Bring Another Layer of History to a Historic Site

BY SARA HENDERSON DIRECTOR OF GARDENS

Irises burst into bloom at Oakland each spring, and the first to bloom are our beloved Cemetery Whites, properly called *Iris albicans*. According to historians, *Iris albicans* has been in cultivation since ancient times and was included in a wall painting of the botanical garden of Tuthmosis III in the Temple of Amun at Karnak. Used extensively in cemeteries, it made its way from the Middle East and through Africa before reaching Europe and North America.



April brings thousands of iris blossoms to Oakland's grounds.

Cemetery Whites kick off the season, but a parade of colorful flowers follows. We've been collecting other old irises from friends and neighbors who have been delighted to share their parents' and grandparents' cherished flowers for all to enjoy. We've also worked with the Historic Iris Society (HIPS) to build our collection of varieties popular from the Victorian period though the world wars. Many of the irises gifted to us by families came with love but no name (we affectionately call them NOIDs for No ID), and

HIPS is helping us identify them. They're no prettier because they have a name, but it's very rewarding to identify them and learn about their history.

Irises multiply rapidly when they are happy, and our clumps need dividing every two to three years. Many are spread about on the grounds, but each year we have extras that we offer during our summer iris sale. This allows others to enjoy their beauty and provides funds to help us expand and improve our gardens.

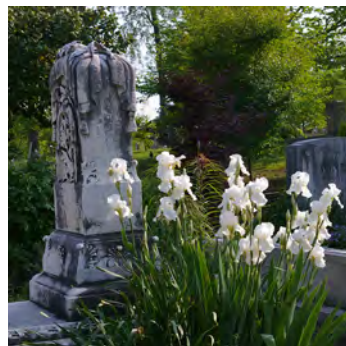
Heirloom Irises



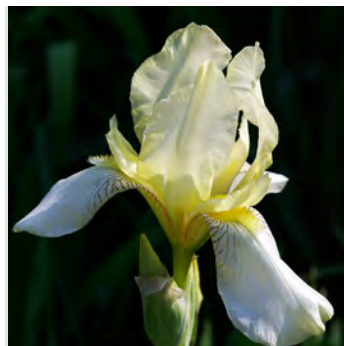
Iris 'Amas' with 'Cheerfulness' daffodils



Iris 'Helen Collingwood'



Iris 'Easter Morn'



Iris 'Flavescens'





African American Tours

Free Tours Honoring Atlanta's Pioneers and Visionaries in Celebration of Black History Month

Throughout February, Oakland welcomed nearly 200 visitors for our free guided walking tours of the historic African American Burial Grounds in celebration of Black History Month. Tourgoers visited the final resting places of pioneers and visionaries like Maynard Jackson, Atlanta's first African American mayor; Carrie Steele Logan, founder of Atlanta's first orphanage for African American children; William Finch, one of Atlanta's first African American city council members; and others

 **ATTENDANCE**
190



FEBRUARY 14

Love Stories: VIP Night

Love Stories, our Valentine's Day tradition, returned for 2020 with a new VIP night. Guests enjoyed sweet treats before a tour recounting the loves of Atlantans of days past.

 **Attendance** 70
 **Revenue** \$2,200



FEBRUARY 29

Daffodil Day

For a fifth year, visitors gathered in celebration of spring's ubiquitous bloom, enjoying a day filled with flower displays, garden experts, and fun activities for all.

 **Attendance** 100+



APRIL 9-10

No-contact Plant Sale

The Foundation "made bloody marys out of tomatoes" during the pandemic with an honor system, no-contact veggie and herb sale at the Beaumont Allen Greenhouse.

 **Attendance** 112
 **Plants Sold** 700+
 **Revenue** \$3,500

See our full calendar at oaklandcemetery.com/calendar.



Oakland Cemetery relies on the incredible energy, dedication, and generosity of more than 300 volunteers, 2,000 members, 3,000 donors plus board and staff. We've asked some of Oakland's supporters to share their stories of how they became involved and their experiences here.

"I love Oakland and all the Foundation has done to preserve and present this treasure to the public."

– HISTORIC OAKLAND FOUNDATION MEMBER

Volunteer Voices

Lindsay McLain

I moved to Atlanta from St. Louis, Missouri, in 2006. While familiarizing myself with the city, I decided to ride my bicycle through Oakland Cemetery. I was immediately enchanted, although it was a few years before I started volunteering. I eventually signed up for the **Second Saturday garden volunteer sessions**. I'm now involved with special events including Illumine, Run like Hell, and Capturing the Spirit of Oakland, and I hope to one day be a tour guide.

Volunteering is a total labor of love. I volunteer to help beautify and maintain the integrity of the city's finest botanical and historical destination. My involvement has been incredibly rewarding.

Beyond the endless educational and therapeutic aspects it possesses, I'm so proud to walk through Oakland and see flowers, shrubs, or trees I've helped plant and nurture. And, **I have met some of the most incredible friends and mentors through my involvement.**

Oakland has provided many great times, but I can easily say the most memorable experience for me was getting married in North Public grounds. **Oakland is the most magical place Atlanta has to offer**, and I look forward to creating many more memories here.



Donor Spotlight

Stuart and Robyn Jackson

After many years of volunteer support at historic Oakland Cemetery, Stuart and Robyn Jackson decided to help ensure that Oakland's legacy would continue by making it a part of their estate plan.

The Jacksons note that Oakland is often described as "Atlanta's most tangible link to the past," and it truly is. Without this link, so much of Atlanta's history would be gone with the wind (pardon the pun). "Atlanta is known for tearing things down," they said, "so we must be sure that Oakland survives!"

During the COVID-19 crisis, the Jacksons found themselves taking a picnic lunch to Lion Square and simply enjoying the quiet, the birds, the shade, and the flowers. Oakland is in bloom year-round, and they want to make sure the grounds retain their beauty.

"After all," said the Jacksons, "we will be spending eternity there as well."

Become A Part of Oakland

VOLUNTEER

Work in the gardens, give tours, staff the Visitors Center, or serve at special events! Oakland volunteers never fail to amaze with their passion and commitment, and we'd love to have you.

oaklandcemetery.com/volunteer

MEMBERSHIP

Preserve Atlanta's past and celebrate its present by becoming a member or renewing your membership.

oaklandcemetery.com/membership

DONATE

Preserve and restore Oakland for generations to come.

oaklandcemetery.com/donate

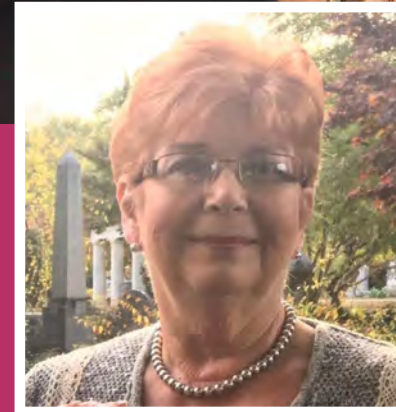
Volunteer Voices Walt Haber

I'm a retiree from The Coca-Cola Company. I'm not from Atlanta, but I got here as soon as I could; I moved here in 1978 right after finishing college.

I started volunteering a few years ago on a Martin Luther King Jr. Day workday with the Gardens team. I also have a little retirement job leading bicycle tours, and one of the stops is Oakland Cemetery. I'm notorious for doing short impromptu tours for visitors to Oakland. I'll say something like "Isn't this a wonderful place?" They'll ask a couple of questions, and that leads me to showing them more.

I have also added working with the preservation team to my repertoire. They've taught me skills like repairing brick walls and grave markers. I enjoy volunteering at special events like Capturing the Spirit of Oakland, Sunday in the Park, and Victorian Holiday. I also serve as a guide for the *Sights, Symbols, and Stories of Oakland* overview tour, and for school groups and other private group tours.

I enjoy making a contribution to preserving and sharing the history and beauty of such a special place. It truly is my favorite place in Atlanta.



Remembering Mary Woodlan

FORMER DIRECTOR OF VOLUNTEERS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

BY DAVID MOORE, CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When I was hired by the Historic Oakland Foundation in 2006, the first person on staff to welcome me was our Volunteer and Special Events Manager Mary Woodlan. Mary began her career at Oakland as a volunteer herself in 2003, and when she retired in 2017 as our Director of Volunteers and Events, she left behind an organization with one of the most dynamic volunteer programs in the city. Not only that, she had built what has become one of the most admired programs in the country for the interpretation and sharing of a Victorian garden cemetery's history.

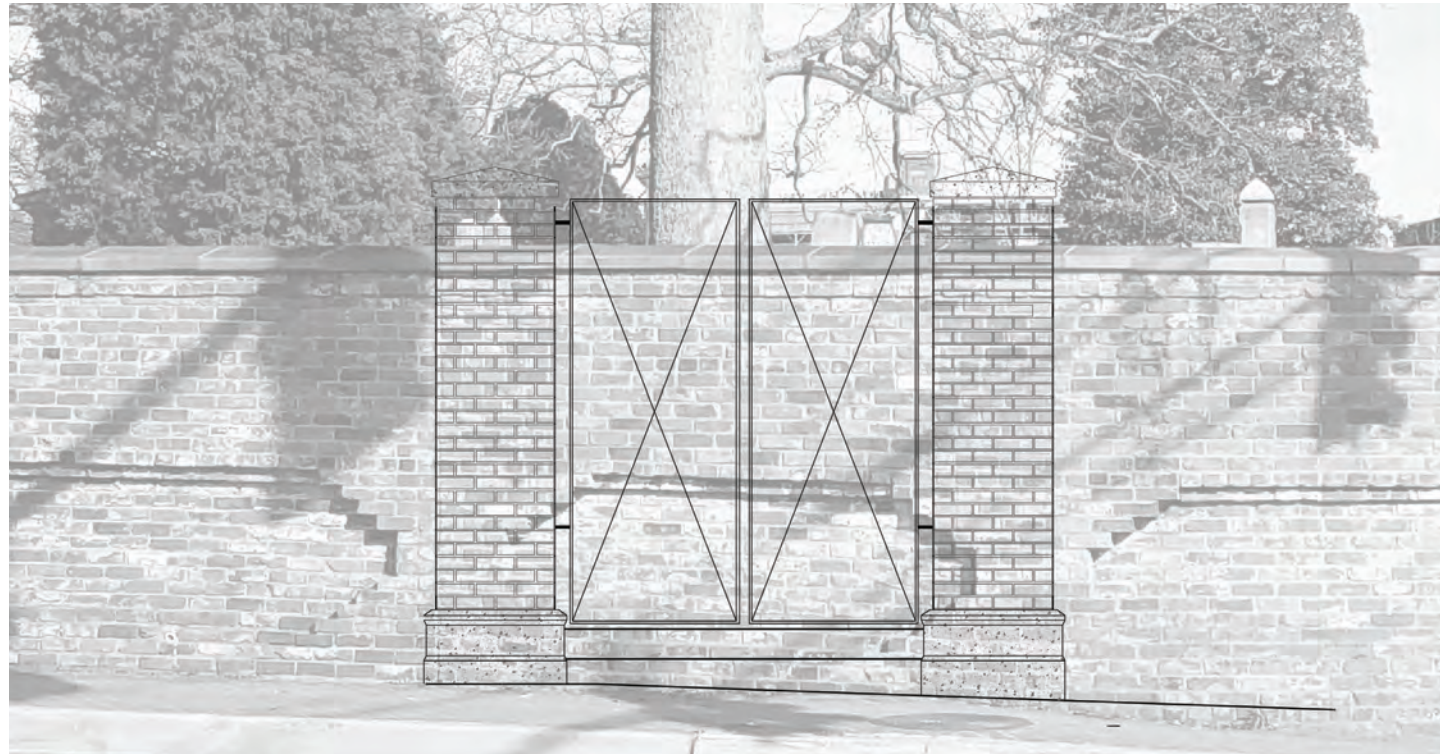
Fifteen years ago, the Foundation had fewer than 75 volunteers, one special event and only a handful of tours to offer the public. Today, we have more than 300 volunteers, six major special events, and more than 20 tours and programs that

welcome more than 30,000 attendees and earn the Foundation more than \$400,000 annually. Quite an accomplishment! It took a unique personality to guide, nurture, and grow such a program: one who was highly organized, extremely detailed, and who loved people. But most of all, Mary loved Oakland. She was the consummate ambassador, attending hundreds of conferences and seminars and participating in countless speaking engagements with me over the ten years we worked together.

Overseeing an organization with so many volunteers and events with multiple moving parts, Mary was the most caring task master you ever met. She demanded excellence but always led the way by example. There was not a table or chair she would not carry nor a trash can she would not empty. She set the tone for every event being conducted with respect for these hallowed grounds.

Mary died last year on December 23 after a battle with pancreatic cancer. Throughout her illness, she still volunteered at Oakland as a member of our board of directors, showing the way even in the face of adversity. She is resting now just outside the door of the iconic Bell Tower Building where she spent so much time. As one of our long-time volunteers remarked, "Well, the boss is here 24/7 now so we always have to be on our best behavior!"

Mary will be missed, but her legacy lives on with our staff and volunteers. She would be so pleased to see the plans we have for our future, plans she helped forge by her hard work, devotion, and leadership.



A New East Gate

AFTER MORE THAN 100 YEARS, VISITORS WILL BE ABLE TO ENTER FROM THE EAST SIDE

BY RICHARD HARKER CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The new East Gate will provide direct access to the East Hill area of Oakland (shown above).

Access and security have always been top-of-mind for the City of Atlanta and for Historic Oakland Foundation. Since 1976, we have worked hard to balance Oakland’s function as a burial ground, a historic site, and a public city park. The Foundation is pleased to announce that after more than a hundred years, visitors will once again be able to enter from the east side of the cemetery.

This summer, construction of an east gate near the corner of Boulevard and Memorial Drive will help reestablish the Cemetery’s connections with the historic Cabbagetown and Reynoldstown neighborhoods.

Once finished, the new East Gate will offer easier access to the cemetery for residents of Cabbagetown and Grant Park as well as for folks coming from the BeltLine. It will also make visiting the East Hill (currently being restored), Jewish Hill, the African American Burial Grounds, and Potter’s Field more convenient. Wayfinding signage will help orient visitors coming through the gate. We anticipate that the gate will be completed this summer. Stay tuned to our website for details.



Site of the new East Gate.



Potter’s Field, a popular gathering place for visitors on weekends, will be easily accessible from the new East Gate.



View of the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills (now the Stacks at Fulton Cotton Mill lofts) from the site of the former Boulevard Gate.

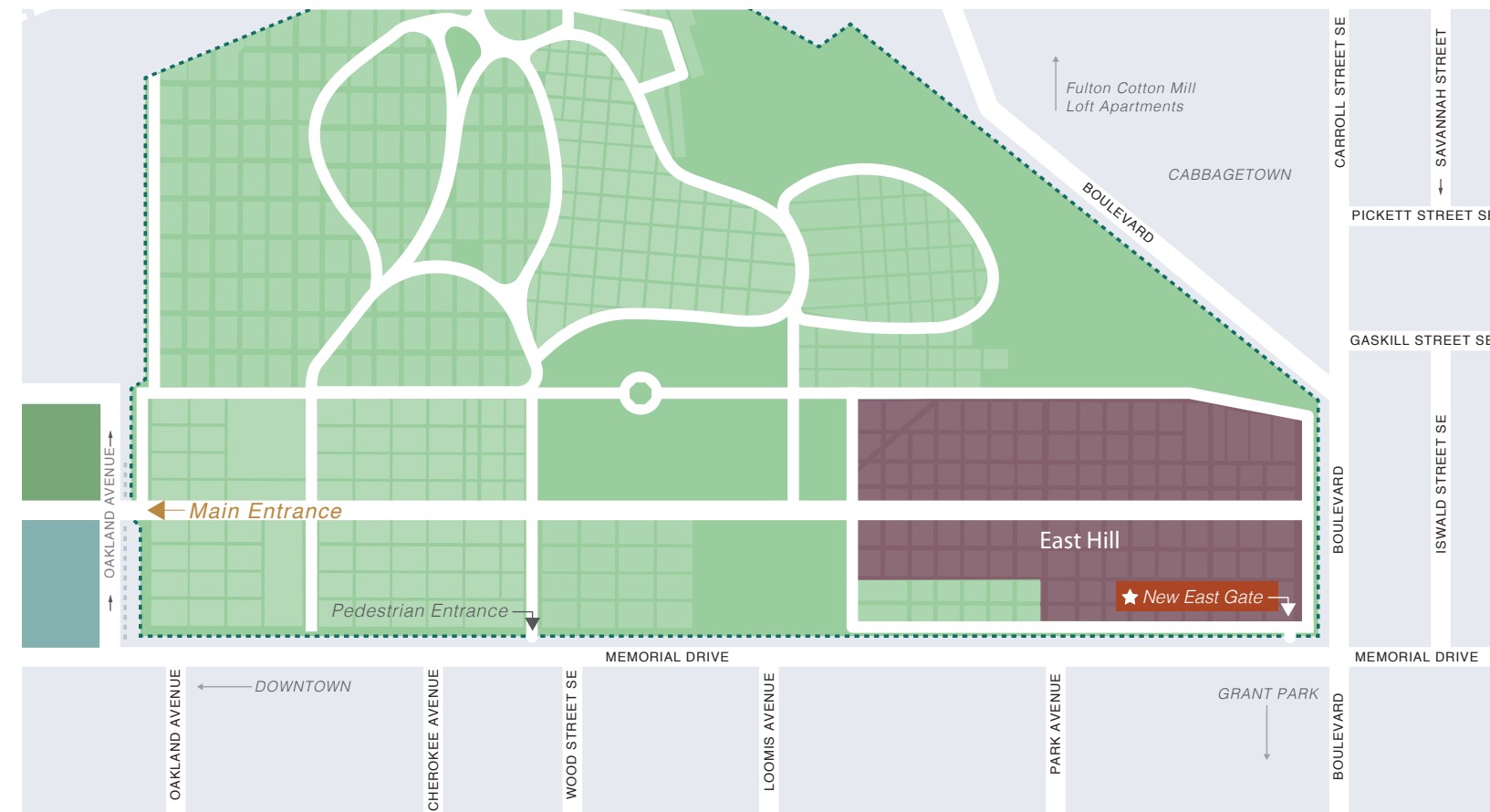
HISTORY OF ACCESS TO OAKLAND FROM THE EAST

In the first decade of the 1900s, the stone wall along the Cemetery’s eastern border (along Boulevard) was heightened, and the city reconstructed an “unscalable” gate to be kept locked “for the protection of the cemetery.” “This was an absolute necessity in view of the distance and the inadequacy of police protection,” reported *The Atlanta Constitution* on August 5, 1908.

Reflecting modern concerns, citizens complained that it was not right that they were “forced to walk anywhere from half a mile to a mile around to reach the Hunter Street gate [the current main gate at Oakland Avenue and MLK].” One group even threatened to break down the gate at night if it wasn’t opened.

Later that same year, the city council

relented somewhat. They decided that the Boulevard gate would not be reopened, but the small locked gates on Fair Street and Decatur Street along the railroad tracks would be kept open. The gate on Boulevard, however, would remain closed and was later removed. Public access to Oakland for visitors coming from the east was permanently reduced.





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Upcoming Events for 2020

September 27

SUNDAY IN THE PARK

Returning for its 43rd year, Oakland's longest-running event offers new and exciting experiences as it merges with our popular music festival, Tunes from the Tombs. Enjoy live music from nationally known artists, local craft beer, tours, kid's entertainment, and more!

October 10

RUN LIKE HELL

Ghosts, goblins, and ghouls are all training for the country's largest cemetery 5K! Don your spookiest costume and get ready to sweat out those bad spirits at Oakland's Run Like Hell 5K. Special awards go to the humans (and dogs!) with the fastest times and the best outfits.

October 15-November 1

CAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF OAKLAND®

Capturing the Spirit is the Cemetery's most anticipated annual event, with this year offering additional dates! Each October, Oakland welcomes thousands of visitors eager to attend this one-of-a-kind experience that "enlightens, not frightens."

See our full calendar at oaklandcemetery.com/calendar.