

East End Cemetery - Brief History and Enrichmond's Role

The land that is now part of East End Cemetery originally belonged to a man named Samuel Bridgewater, who was presented with a 333 acre parcel in 1686. Though Samuel wanted to plant tobacco and wheat, the land's mixed soil quality and ravines made it difficult.

In 1891, William Manning T. Forrester, founder of the Independent Order of St. Luke, chartered the Greenwood Memorial Association. The association purchased 12 acres of land for African American burials from its owner, Bernard Andrew Braver. In 1897, the cemetery - up until then called Greenwood - became East End Cemetery.

The sixteen-acre forested cemetery, located across Stony Run Creek from Oakwood Cemetery, is mainly within Henrico County with a small portion in the City of Richmond. With African Americans barred from burying their dead in white cemeteries, many African American Richmonders were buried in East End and its neighboring cemetery, Evergreen. The cemetery is estimated to have between 13,000 and 17,500 people interred.

In 1959, the Greenwood charter lapsed and a new group took ownership. Perpetual care was not provided for by the cemetery itself -- instead, families were expected to perform their own upkeep for their loved ones' gravesites. East End, like its neighbor Evergreen, became heavily overgrown.

In the late 90s, Virginia Roots was established by Veronica Davis to reclaim and protect both Evergreen and East End cemeteries. Since 2013, a group of regular volunteers, Friends of East End, has been working to uncover and research more of the cemetery.

In late 2018, Enrichmond, supported by the recently formed Executive Planning and Review Team (ExPRTs), County of Henrico, and City of Richmond, petitioned the State of Virginia to assume ownership and stewardship of the abandoned cemetery and was awarded both responsibilities in early 2019. Enrichmond soon amended the already implemented Evergreen open space conservation easement through the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) to include East End.

Sources:

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