

LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

Odd Fellows Cemetery

Local Historic Landmark #120

2881 Shorefair Dr., Winston-Salem

Date: c. 1911

Landmark Designation Date: 02/05/2007

The Odd Fellows Cemetery is reputed to have been started in 1911 by the Twin City Lodge and the Winston Star Lodge, both African-American fraternal organizations. The Odd Fellows Cemetery is significant because it is a rare example (outside the Salem area) of an early African-American graveyard predating the 1913 merger of Winston and Salem. Containing the remains of many individuals who lived during the mid 19th century Civil War period, the cemetery is important to the social and cultural history of the city as the largest African-American graveyard dating from the early 20th century. In fact, historians estimate that as many as 10,000 graves could be located in the cemetery. Some of Winston-Salem's most prominent African-American community members were buried at Odd Fellows Cemetery, including George Hill, a founder of the Winston Mutual Life Insurance Company, and Reverend R.L. File, a longtime pastor at Mt. Zion Baptist Church. The approximately 10-acre cemetery is one of Winston-Salem's most important African-American historic resources.

Odd Fellows Cemetery is additionally important because of its potential archaeological significance. Specifically, the unique physical characteristics of African-American graveyards in general make the Odd Fellows Cemetery one that may provide important archaeological data. For instance, typical African-American cemeteries can feature grave depressions as well as mounded graves. Often



graves were placed without symmetry and in a somewhat random fashion. One significant component of African-American graveyards is the decoration of the graves themselves. Graves were marked in a variety of ways besides traditional markers. Some graves were marked using plants, shells, white quartz, colored glass, etc. Additionally, probably one of the most common African-American burial practices was the use of "offerings" on top of the grave. Such items could include pottery, saucers, bowls, pots, marbles, and the like. Due to the current condition of portions of the graveyard, it is not possible to ascertain if these physical characteristics are present throughout. However, African-American burial traditions would indicate the likely presence of such artifacts.

Over time, Odd Fellows Cemetery's interments diminished and the cemetery fell into disrepair, and became heavily overgrown with vegetation. In 2008, the Friends of Odd Fellows Cemetery Inc. was established to work on the cemetery's restoration. With the help of volunteers and organizations, the group's recent efforts to clear the area have revealed a large number of granite and concrete gravestones in good condition. Additionally, brick and concrete block borders delineate some family plots.

A historic marker was placed at Odd Fellows Cemetery in 2010 as part of the City of Winston-Salem's Historic





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This information is also available
at the Forsyth County
Historic Resources Commission's web site:
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>