Oakhawn Cemetary

Joan Manlove-Gleason
In 1850, Tampa was a small coastal fishing village with a population of about 500.

Oaklawn Cemetery was created as Tampa’s first public burial ground. The Alachua County Commissioners deeded a plot of ground to the City of Tampa as a final resting place for "white and slave, rich and poor". Soon after the Ladies Memorial Society was given supervision of Oaklawn and promptly purchased additional land.

In 1874, B. C. Leonardi donated one acre of land to the Archbishop of St. Augustine, Florida. The Archbishop designated this land, at the Northwest end as the St. Louis Catholic Cemetery. James T. Magbee deeded a gift of additional land to Oaklawn in 1880—this completed acquisition of land for the cemetery.

The earliest recorded clean-up campaign took place after the Civil War. The Town Improvement Society, a group of Tampa ladies, raised money for restoration of

OAKLAWN CEMETARY

By Joan Manlove-Gleason
A WALKING TOUR GUIDE TO OAKLAWN CEMETERY
Presented by TAMPA HISTORICAL SOCIETY through the assistance of Bob Leonard, Joan Gleason-Manlove, Gail Ortabello, Lilian Wharton, Bettie Nelson, Carmen Toney, Tony Pizzo and Hampton Dunn.

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Oaklawn through raffles and lawn parties. The ladies were also able to employ a caretaker for Oaklawn.

Oaklawn Cemetery contains the graves of one Florida Governor, Henry L. Mitchell, two Supreme Court Justices, the framers of four State Constitutions, and the veterans of eight wars. The cemetery was swept by fire in the early 1800s. Most of the old markers—beautifully carved cypress posts, were destroyed.

Who was the first person buried at Oaklawn? Early reports claimed that a slave of the Rev. L. G. Lesley was the first man buried at Oaklawn in June of 1850. A Cuban pirate, found dead in the woods that same June, is supposed to be the first white man buried there. The Tampa City Directory of 1901 lists Mrs. B. J. Hagler as the first burial at Oaklawn. She was also buried in June of 1850.

The earliest marked gravestone still in existence, is that of the Rev. A. Martin. He was a Methodist circuit rider who owned a plantation on the Alafia River. He died in Tampa and was buried at Oaklawn Cemetery in October of 1850.

A walk through Oaklawn Cemetery can offer the visitor a rare glimpse of the youthful deaths and close family ties that were a part of the lives of the pioneers of the 1800s.