



Sandwiching in History Tour Fraternal Section of Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park 2101 Barber Street, Little Rock

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Special thanks to: John Rains and Carla Coleman



There are seven sections to the park, which includes, Fraternal, Oakland, National Cemetery, two Confederate cemeteries and two Jewish cemeteries.

Welcome to the Fraternal Section of Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park. If you want to take a look at the individual gravestones after the tour, we have numbered maps matched to these yellow flags so you can walk around and read more about the people interred here.¹

¹ This map is available on [AHPP's website under Publications>Tour Scripts](#) or by contacting AHPP's Preservation Outreach Coordinator. It is included with a handout of biographies of notable individuals—including some not mentioned in this tour—which are borrowed from Lakresha Diaz's 2009 booklet "A Brief History of Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries," and it is coded with numbers to locate their respective graves.

Don't sit or lean on gravestones – watch for ants.

- We'll start with a little background on the history of public cemeteries in Little Rock. From 1820 to 1828 there was a cemetery on the land of Secretary of State, Robert Crittenden, which was situated around 7th, 8th, and Cumberland streets. There were records of other burials being discovered downtown, but no research has emerged that would suggest there were any official cemeteries other than the Crittenden burying ground.

In 1828 US Senator Chester Ashley donated land for a public burying ground at the intersection of Fifth Street - now known as Capitol - and Gaines streets, where the 1961 Federal Building is currently. The Crittenden Cemetery was abandoned by 1834 and in 1839 Ashley provided four blocks of land on Broadway Street for the Mt. Holly Cemetery. The first burial at Mt. Holly was in 1843.

Some graves from the Capitol and Gaines location were moved to Mt. Holly Cemetery in 1860 because they were constructing the Peabody School on the site; however, one marked grave remained as well as some unmarked graves. It is not known what happened to the single marked one, but children who went to school at Peabody remembered sharpening their pencils on the gravestone.

By 1862 the numbers of Civil War dead were rising, which led to the establishment of a new cemetery in Little Rock called Oakland located on the farm of Paul Starbuck. From 1861 to 1869 Union and Confederate soldiers were interred there.

In 1877 Oakland was considered the official city cemetery.²

In 1868 the Odd Fellows, a black fraternal organization requested that the city donate one-half acre in Oakland Cemetery for the burial of poor and indigent members. The next year they requested a second donation bringing the area to three-quarters of an acre.

Section G of Oakland was designated a pauper's burial ground referred to as Stranger's Hallow. Whites and African Americans were buried in this section and the last burial there was in 1986.³

Several black lodges joined to request 14 acres of land for the burial of members of the orders in 1888. This became the Fraternal section of Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park. This is also when the cut stone entry gate was erected. The land was prone to flooding from Fourche Creek, but the members agreed to take on the extra work of preparing it for burials.

² Holly Hope, "Historic Gravestone Iconography or Symbolism in Five Little Rock Cemeteries," (August 20, 2021), found at <https://www.arkansasheritage.com/blog/dah/2021/08/20/historic-gravestone-iconography-or-symbolism-in-five-little-rock-cemeteries>, pp. 3-4.

³ Lakresha Diaz, Callie Williams, Van Zbinden, "Oakland-Fraternal Cemetery," National Register of Historic Places nomination form, on file at Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas, found at https://www.arkansasheritage.com/docs/default-source/national-registry/pu5892-pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=5aac62ef_0, accessed July 29, 2022.

The cemetery caretakers were able to deal with burial issues in a couple of ways: The vicinity of Fraternal was surrounded by farmland. Burials were situated in the high, dry portions of the cemetery and the lower section was farmed. Livestock once grazed in the area of Horace Mann Junior High School.

As late as the 1960s Fraternal's budget was \$4,000. A sexton-caretaker lived on the property and his house stood up to the 1970s when it burned. The house was also featured in the 1972 Burt Reynolds movie *White Lightning*.

The sexton Mr. T.T. Thomas had no public utilities in his home and very low cash wages. He supplemented his income and maintained the cemetery by selling eggs and raising hogs. He had a cow and a mule named Son who gained fame by opening a gate latch with his lips and teeth. The land where Kroger is situated was a large sweet potato patch and corn field, which allowed many families to eat during the Great Depression.

During this time the cemetery fell into disrepair. Original lodge members had died off and new ones were not financially able to install large monuments and copings. Fraternal had no land to sell for revenues and the cemetery did not receive any money from leases and sales of surrounding land.

In 1902 part of Section A in Fraternal was taken by the extension of Barber Street, so that section was situated right where Barber Street is now. When Horace Mann School was built graves that were on land originally deeded to Fraternal in 1888 were removed and relocated to the current property. The original fourteen acres shrank to 8 ½.

Increasing pauper burials and regular burials brought in low revenues making it more difficult to do groundskeeping. Into the 1970s graves were dug by hand. Often, families were turned away because they couldn't find anyone to dig a grave. Some interments were placed in the roadways because they couldn't access plots anywhere else. ⁴

At this point the Civil Rights movement brought more African American participation into city government, and concerns about Fraternal Cemetery began to be addressed. A city ordinance was passed in 1974 to assist Fraternal and \$12,000 was allocated to improvement.

Oakland's board took over supervision of Fraternal and provided grave digging, sharing equipment and some of the rental income from leasing city-owned land. Other projects included cataloging headstones after the loss of cemetery records in the fire at the sexton's house, and this effort is ongoing.

⁴ *Ibid*; John Rains, sexton of Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park, Little Rock, interview with author, (August 4, 2022). (Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park possesses a 1902 map in the sexton's office, showing the original layout of Section A).

Gravestones are now being maintained and cleaned on a more regular basis and the roads in Fraternal were paved in 2021.⁵

The area around the Dunbar neighborhood, which is a few blocks west of the cemetery and south of interstate 630, was a center of black settlement after the Civil War. The construction of African American churches and homes led to the growth of the Ninth Street area as a concentration of black-owned and operated economic, social, and cultural enterprises.

By 1900 approximately 14,000 African Americans made their homes in Little Rock. Black businesses, public schools, and higher education institutions were constructed in the area. A number of the state's most prominent black citizens lived in the proximity of the Dunbar neighborhood and Broadway Street. Many of those well-known upper income members of society are interred at Fraternal Cemetery, but it was also the burying ground of the average resident and people categorized as paupers.⁶

- As I said, black fraternal groups were instrumental in the formation of Fraternal Cemetery. You'll see many Mosaic Templars stones, which were provided by the fraternal group begun by **John E. Bush** and **Chester Keatts**.

In 1882 Bush and Keatts, both of whom are buried here at Fraternal co-founded the Mosaic Templars of America in Little Rock. The fraternal organization, which operated from the 1880s to the 1930s, became an international concern, encompassing 26 states and six foreign countries and claiming more than 25,000 members.

Mosaic Templars was considered one of the most successful and largest black-owned businesses in the world. Among the operations of the Mosaic Templars were women's auxiliary branches, an insurance company, building and loan association, hospital, business college, publishing house and a nursing school.⁷

John Bush was orphaned at 7 but he did odd jobs to support himself and attended school at Wesley chapel, the black Methodist Church at 8th and Broadway streets. He graduated from public school in 1876 and took a job as a railway postal clerk at night while he simultaneously worked as a principal at Capitol Hill School in Little Rock and later at the African American school in Hot Springs.

In 1882 Bush recognized the need for life and burial insurance for African Americans and he and friend Chester Keatts formed the Mosaic Templars of America for that purpose. Bush served as Templars National Grand Scribe and treasurer from the organization's inception to his death.

⁵ Diaz, National Register of Historic Places nomination form.

⁶ Cheryl Nichols, "Desegregating History," *Arkansas Times*, (February 12, 1999), p. 16-17.

⁷ Diaz, "Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries: A Brief History and Tour," (2009), pp. 11-12.

Through Bush's fraternal organization members could receive insurance policies and a marble gravestone. In 1908 the Mosaic Templars of America Headquarters – now the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center – was built at 9th and Broadway streets.⁸

After Reconstruction Bush embraced local politics serving in 1883 as representative of the majority black Sixth Ward of Pulaski County at the Republican State Convention. This led to his work as secretary of the convention and election to five subsequent at-large positions with the Pulaski County Republican Central Committee.

Patronage positions that Bush held included a position as Governor Powell Clayton's chief black lieutenant, temporary chairman of the Pulaski County Republican Convention in 1892, delegate to the Republican National Convention, and secretary of the county convention.

In 1892 President William McKinley appointed him Receiver of United States Lands in Little Rock.

He also led peaceful protests against disenfranchisement laws and the state Streetcar Segregation Act as well as being a charter member of the National Negro Business League.

With the election of Democratic president Woodrow Wilson Bush decided to cut down on his political activities and devote his time to the Mosaic Templars. He worked to improve the standing and holdings of the fraternal organization, going to work in his later years in a buggy, practically doing business in the buggy. His son Aldridge Bush made sure his orders were carried out.⁹

John Bush's son **Chester Bush** served as editor and manager of the *Mosaic Guide* and was the youngest African American editor in the United States as well as youngest life member of the National Negro Business League.¹⁰

John Bush's sons, wife and several other members of his family are interred in the mausoleum.

- John Bush's partner **Chester Keatts** was born into slavery in 1854. After the Civil War he was a sharecropper. In 1875 he served as a clerk for the U.S. Railway Mail Service. Keatts was elected Pulaski County Circuit Clerk but was prevented from serving by the opposing party. He was appointed crier and messenger of the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit and as receiver of the Little Rock Traction and Electric Company.

⁸ Blake Wintory, "Mosaic Templars Cultural Center," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, found at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/mosaic-templars-of-america-1186/>, last updated 12/16/19.

⁹ Holly Hope, "For the Memorable Fight: Mosaic Templars of America Building," Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, (2004), pp. 25-26, 29, 31-32.

¹⁰ Diaz, "Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries," p.11.

In 1896 he served as U.S. deputy marshall of the Eastern District of Arkansas and was deputy constable of Big Rock Township. He also ran for Little Rock police court judge, but again, was counted out. ¹¹

- **Mifflin Gibbs** was recognized as a businessman, politician, and first African American municipal judge in the United States.

Gibbs was asked by Frederick Douglass in the 1840s to assist him with an abolitionist lecture tour.

After the gold rush of 1849 he became a retail merchant in California and founded the first black newspaper west of the Mississippi.

Facing racial prejudice in California he moved to Victoria, British Columbia. He was the first black man elected to the Victoria City Council.

By 1871 he moved south, becoming acquainted with William H. Grey, Arkansas's state commissioner of immigration and lands. Grey persuaded him to move to Arkansas where he passed the bar exam in 1872.

Gibbs started a law partnership in Little Rock and was elected Little Rock police judge in 1874. For a decade he was secretary of the state GOP central committee and served several times as a delegate to national conventions.

President Rutherford B. Hayes named Gibbs registrar of the Little Rock district land office in 1877 and in 1889 President Benjamin Harrison named him receiver of public monies in Little Rock. In 1897 President William McKinley named him U.S. consul to Tamatave, Madagascar. Gibbs was 80 years old when he created the Capital City Savings Bank, the second black-owned bank in the state. ¹²

- **Isaac Gillam, Jr.**, was the son of Isaac Gillam, Sr., who served in the Arkansas General Assembly and is buried at the National Cemetery across the road.

Isaac, Jr., attended school at Howard University in Washington D.C. He took graduate courses in educational administration at Yale University, University of Chicago, and University of Cincinnati.

His educational career began as a high school principal in Fort Smith and later he worked as principal of Gibbs High School, where he served for 50 years.

¹¹ A.E. Bush, P.E. Dorman, "History of the Mosaic Templars of America – Its Founders and Officials," 1924, found at <https://cupdf.com/document/mosaic-templars-of-america-and-that-its.html?page=1>, pp. 15-16, accessed 08/18/ 2022; "Prominent Negro Politician Dies," *The Arkansas Gazette*, (January 18, 1908), p. 7.

¹² Tom Dillard, "Mifflin Wistar Gibbs (1823-1915), *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, found at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/mifflin-wistar-gibbs-1657/>, last updated 09/16/2019; Nichols, p. 18.

He also taught at Shorter College in North Little Rock and assisted in establishing the Arkansas Negro Democratic Voters Association.

Gillam Park and Gillam School, which is now an annex to Granite Mountain School, are named for the family.¹³

- So, we have highlighted black politicians and educators, but there were many black physicians and medical institutions that served the city of Little Rock.

A report in 1930 stated that African Americans were admitted to seven hospitals in Pulaski County. Two were black hospitals, three provided 111 beds total for blacks, and one railroad hospital included a facility for black patients. There was also one black tuberculosis treatment center.

By 1950 it was reported that there was a shortage of hospital beds for the black population of Little Rock. There were still only two black hospitals at the time that included black doctors on the staff.

A few hospitals in Pulaski County that were instituted for the African American population included:

- Little Rock Colored Infirmary and nursing school in 1913-1918
- J.E. Bush Memorial Hospital 1918-1927
- Great Southern Fraternal Hospital 1919-1929
- Mosaic State Hospital 1927-1931
- Royal Circle of Friends Hospital 1921-1934
- United Friends of America Hospital 1922-1975
- Lena Jordan Hospital 1932-1953
- And the Thomas C. McRae Memorial Sanitorium 1932-1967, in Alexander – it still stands but has been damaged by fire and is now privately owned.

Federal legislation such as the Hill-Burton Act of 1946, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Social Security Amendments of 1965 played a role in the closing of exclusively African American hospitals.

The abolition of segregation meant black hospitals across the nation were consolidated or closed between 1960 and 1980.¹⁴

¹³ Diaz, "Oakland -Fraternal Cemeteries," p. 15; Little Rock School District, "Gillam," found at <https://www.lrsd.org/Page/2965>, accessed 08/03/2022.

¹⁴ Edwina Walls, "Some Extinct Black Hospitals of Little Rock and Pulaski County," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 34, (Spring 1986), pp, 2-11.

Some physicians interred at Fraternal that provided services before and after the era of integration included:

- **Dr. George Washington Hayman** put himself through college by teaching and selling cotton. Hayman attended Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Philander Smith College in Little Rock, and Chicago Clinical School of Physicians and Surgeons.

The eight-bed Little Rock Colored Infirmary was in Hayman's home on High Street – now Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. He also served at the Fraternal Hospital on 9th Street.

Dr. Hayman was nominated to a federal pension examining board, but the Grand Army of the Republic objected, and he was rejected for the position.

Civically, he led protests against segregated streetcar laws and organized a streetcar boycott in 1903.¹⁵

- His fellow physician **Dr. D.B. Gaines** – whose first name was legally Doctor – joined Hayman in the protests.

Gaines was born into slavery in South Carolina. He graduated from Philander Smith College in 1891 and became assistant principal at Union High School in Little Rock. In 1893 he pastored the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church.

Gaines went on to attend Meharry Medical College, graduating in 1896. He was a practicing physician in Little Rock for five years until he joined the ministry again in 1900 pastoring at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church for over 39 years.

His 1898 book "Racial Possibilities as Indicated by the Negroes of Arkansas," was the first to be published by an African American.¹⁶

- **Dr. John Marshall Robinson** was a doctor, and civic leader. He worked to assist the state's black residents with their medical needs and was very active in achieving equal black participation in the voting process.

Robinson practiced medicine in Newport, Arkansas, until 1904 when he completed his medical studies at Knoxville Medical College in Tennessee.

In 1905 Robinson joined Dr. John G. Thornton in founding the Pulaski County Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association.

¹⁵ Elias McSails Woods, "Blue Book of Little Rock and Argenta, Arkansas," (Little Rock: Central Publishing Company, 1907), p.74; Tom Dillard, "Pioneering Black Physicians," *Pulaski County Medical Society News*, (October 2022), found at https://pulaskicms.org/site/assets/files/1017/106864_pcms_octnews_proof3.pdf, accessed August 18, 2022.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 76; "Dr. D.B. Gaines," Image 7 of Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 2, Arkansas, Part 3, Gadson-Isom, found at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mesn.023/?sp=7&st=text>, accessed 08/18/2022.

By 1906 he had opened a medical practice at 7th and Main streets where he performed surgery in his office.

Robinson went to jail for murder in 1911, but he was released after two years because he removed a bullet from a fellow inmate's heart, using a ground-breaking technique. He was pardoned for his crime in 1944.

Robinson founded Bush Memorial Hospital in Little Rock in 1918.

By 1925 there were 85 beds at the hospital, up from 35 and by 1927 Dr. Robinson held the position of chief surgeon. He was also chief surgeon of the Royal Circle of Friends Hospital and Lena Jordan Hospital, all in Little Rock.

Robinson was very politically active in the fight for African American rights. In 1919 he became a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Little Rock.

He co-founded and served as president of the Arkansas Negro Democratic Association in 1928 but retired from politics by the early 1950s. Robinson continued to work in the medical field and civic endeavors, being recognized by state and national medical associations and being named Little Rock's negro man of the year in 1949.¹⁷

- His partner in the institution of the Pulaski County Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association, Dr. **John G. Thornton** attended Meharry Medical College.

Thornton had an office in the Mosaic Templars Headquarters Building at 9th and Broadway and served as National Grand Medical Examiner. He was a physician for Shorter College in North Little Rock and was the medical director for the Peoples Mutual Aid Association and Insurance Company.

Thornton was also vice-president of the National Medical Association, which was formed as a professional association for black physicians.

Politically he worked to re-establish African American participation in the Republican party by attempting to force recognition of black delegates to the 1920 Pulaski County Republican Convention.¹⁸

Dr. Thornton's home still stands at 1420 W. 15th Street if you feel like checking it out.

¹⁷ John A. Kirk, "John Marshall Robinson (1879-1970), *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, found at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/john-marshall-robinson-1751/>, last updated 09/16/2019, accessed 08/02/2022.

¹⁸ Arkansas Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association, Inc., found at https://m.facebook.com/amdpa.org/posts/5255845344439344?locale=hi_IN&_rd=1, accessed 08/02/2022; Woods, pp. 61-62.

- **Dr. Raymond James Meaddough** opened his dental practice at Ninth and Gaines Streets in the early 1900s. Prior to moving to Arkansas he worked as a cigar maker, owning his own cigar factory in Georgia. This paid for his tuition at Meharry Medical College in Tennessee.

Meaddough had a dental practice at Ninth and Gaines and served as a trustee at Philander Smith College.¹⁹

- So, today we have touched on the more prominent members of African American society represented here at Fraternal, but most of the interments at the cemetery are everyday working people. The story of the cemetery is also the story of segregation and the lives of those who were born into slavery.

They had to make their way in life by working and working hard. In looking at the census records people buried here were primarily employed in service work or hard labor. Many were porters, laborers, cooks, or maids. They often worked those jobs up to the year of their deaths. Can you imagine being 70 years old working as a brick layer, or cooking meals and ironing?

Death certificates chronicle heart disease, cancer, strokes, pneumonia, and other debilitating diseases as cause of death. Not many died a peaceful death in bed. Fraternal also included pauper burials.

In looking at the gravestones in the cemetery you can also see these divisions in society by the forms of the stones themselves. For instance, the Classical granite mausoleum for the Bush family or the large marble upright stone with elaborate cap for Chester Keatts can be contrasted with simple vernacular concrete markers created by impressing letters into the surface or incorporating molded funerary symbols like doves or angels. These differences detail the economic levels of those interred in Fraternal and tell the story of the African American community of Little Rock across the board.

¹⁹ Woods, pp. 60-61.