IPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **Violet Cemetery**

other names/site number **Osceola Grave Yard or God's Acre**

2. Location

street & number **Area bounded by W. Johnson Ave, Semmes Ave, Pecan St.** ☐ not for publication

city or town **Osceola** ☐ vicinity

state **AR** code **AR** county **Mississippi** code **093** zip code **72370**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Cathie Matthews

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
- ☒ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☒ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/Cemetery

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/Cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A
walls N/A
roof N/A
other Granite, marble, concrete, sandstone

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)
See continuation sheet

Violet Cemetery
Name of Property

Mississippi County, AR
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

LOCAL

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

our history.

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C.** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.

☒ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
ART

Period of Significance
1831 to 1954

Significant Dates
1831

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)
N/A

Architect/Builder
N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance- See Continuation Sheet
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography – See Continuation Sheet
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State Agency
☐ Federal Agency
☒ Local Government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.45 Acres

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	231504	3955293	3	16	231621	3955161
2	16	231616	3955288	4	16	231499	3955156

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description—
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title **Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator**
organization **Arkansas Historic Preservation Program** date **January 24, 2004**
street & number **1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street** telephone **(501) 324-9787**
city or town **Little Rock** state **AR** zip code **72201**

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name **City of Osceola**
street & number **316 W. Hale** telephone **870-563-5102**
city or town **Osceola** state **AR** zip code **72370**

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Summary

Violet Cemetery, near the historic Courthouse Square in downtown Osceola, Arkansas, is a rectangular piece of land bounded on the south by Johnson Avenue, on the north by Semmes Avenue, on the west by Pecan Street, and on the east by private property. The 2.45 acre cemetery is the oldest historic landmark in Osceola and the final resting place of some of the earliest settlers and most influential citizens of the area.

Elaboration

Violet Cemetery is a rectangular 2.45 acre property located near the heart of downtown Osceola containing 634 marked graves and 66 unmarked graves, 499 of which are at least fifty years old. The earliest dated gravestone is that of Bladen Williamson, whose date of death was October 9, 1831.

Association

The cemetery was known as Osceola Grave Yard at the beginning of the 20th century and was in a neglected condition. A group of Osceola ladies came together for the purpose of reclaiming and beautifying the cemetery. This group grew into the Cemetery Association with a hundred members and monthly dues of twenty-five cents. The association was responsible for many improvements including resetting tombstones, building fences, planting shrubbery and flowers, and laying out streets, sidewalks, and curbs around the cemetery. The Cemetery Association and the Garden Club joined together in 1916 to form the Progressive Club and assume the care of the grounds. The cemetery is now maintained by the City of Osceola.

Landscape Design

Violet Cemetery takes it name from the violets planted on every grave in the early 1900s by the Cemetery Association. Located in the Eastern Arkansas Mississippi River delta region, terrain of the cemetery is flat. The grounds of the cemetery are open but with numerous large trees flanking each side. There is a "Violet Cemetery" marker placed on the eastern side of the grounds.

Entrance and Fence

Originally the cemetery fronted a dirt lane across from a gin and gristmill, and its entrance was on the north side. In the early 1900s, in response to residential development along what would be Johnson Avenue, the entrance was changed to the south side. Fences were added along the north and east side sometime before 1910 by the Cemetery Association. Currently, the cemetery grounds has chain link fence on the south, north, and west sides.

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Gravestones

The cemetery contains 42 Civil War veterans' graves, as well as graves of veterans of other wars. A Congressman, other statesmen, judges, teachers and a broad range of citizens who settled and developed Mississippi County are buried in Violet Cemetery. Located in the cemetery are many grave markers and monuments that serve as excellent examples of funerary art. The majority (70%) of the grave markers are fifty years old or older and are of modest design utilizing marble, limestone, granite, and concrete. The majority of the headstones are slab markers. Woodman of the World markers, obelisks, and pulpit markers are commonly found in the cemetery. A few graves are marked by statuary. Several graves are denoted by low concrete band enclosures.

Graves by decade

A breakdown of marked graves by decade is as follows:

1830's 1	1920's 69
1840's 1	1930's 47
1850's 8	1940's 55
1860's 12	1950's 68
1870's 18	1960's 56
1880's 25	1970's 36
1890's 33	1980's 33
1900's 83	1990's 8
1910's 81	Unmarked 66

Integrity

Violet Cemetery contains approximately 700 graves of which 634 are marked. Over 70% of the marked graves are over fifty years old and contribute to the significance of the cemetery. Violet Cemetery retains its integrity of setting, design, materials, and workmanship.

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Summary

Violet Cemetery is significant under **Criterion A** for its **local significance** as the burial of place of a broad range of early settlers in the eastern region of Mississippi County. The list of those buried in Violet Cemetery contain the names of early settlers, developers and residents of the area and include war heroes, flood victims, leaders and workers responsible for the growth and development of Osceola, Arkansas. The cemetery is also significant under **Criterion C** for its good collection of nineteenth and early twentieth century funerary art. The Violet Cemetery is also being nominated under **Criteria Consideration D: Cemeteries**.

Elaboration

Osceola is an early settlement in northeastern Arkansas's Mississippi County. Located on a low, heavily wooded ridge on the western bank of the Mississippi River, Osceola was ideally situated as a steamboat landing. In 1875, when the town of Osceola was incorporated, the small Mississippi River community consisted of one hotel, four saloons, two grocery stores, and a few residences built along a main street. River trade continued to thrive and Osceola grew steadily until the 1890s when the Frisco Railroad built a line west of the town. The railroad and the building of improved roadways marked a decline in river commerce, and the end of an era for Osceola.

As commerce on the river declined, to be replaced by rail lines, Osceola re-established itself west of the original town site, nearer the railroad. Captain Samuel Spenser Semmes, a prominent attorney and former county judge, built his home near the railroad line and encouraged other townsfolk to move their homes and businesses closer to the railroad. A town site company was formed in the 1890s and lots were sold.

Development of the town of Osceola on its new site progressed steadily. In 1902 Osceola had around 1000 residents. The City had a municipally owned electric power plant and 28 electric streetlights. Promotional literature billed Osceola as "only 8 hours from St. Louis and 15 hours from Chicago".

A road improvement district was formed around 1918 to facilitate the construction of roads from Osceola to points west in the county and primarily to build a "good" road to Little Rock. The project was heralded as one of the greatest advancements in the county's history. Construction of the new roads provided the surrounding farm community access to the markets all seasons of the year.

Prosperous economic conditions prevailed in Osceola the first two decades of the twentieth century. But in the late 1920s a series of disastrous floods, the most destructive of which was the 1927 flood, rolled over

Eastern Arkansas. Following the floods were years of severe drought. The stock market crash in 1929 only compounded the desperate conditions already existing in Mississippi County. Economic progress in Osceola came to a standstill.

Construction of a Federal Post Office in1936 by the Works Progress Administration of Osceola signified a step toward economic recovery. However a year later in 1937, the worst flood in the history of the town drove thousands of people from their homes and businesses. Farmlands and crops were ruined. This severe flood prompted the government to assist in construction of the St. Francis levee and similar levees along the Mississippi River. The Mississippi River continues to be utilized as a port terminal for both import and export of agricultural products and supplies.

Violet Cemetery was designated a burial place long before the town of Osceola developed in the area. The earliest marked grave from 1831 predates the formation of Mississippi County in 1833 and Arkansas Statehood in 1836. The cemetery remained isolated in Mississippi County for years as Osceola remained a small river town. The cemetery found itself located in the Town site Addition of Osceola after the railroad came to town in the 1890s.

From the time it was begun, care of the cemetery was the responsibility of those who had relatives buried there. But by the early 1900s the cemetery had become neglected and unkempt as the descendents of the majority of those buried there had died or moved away. Then, known only as the "Osceola Grave Yard", it was described as "jungle-like". A group of local ladies contacted living relatives of those who were buried in the cemetery and formed a Cemetery Association of close to 100 members. Monthly dues were twenty-five cents. Mrs. Abner Driver was the first president of the Cemetery Association and during her term tombstones were reset, and the graves filled using some 100 loads of dirt. Subsequent years saw construction of the north and east fences, planting of shrubbery, cleaning and decorating. The Association laid out sidewalks with Cypress curbing and hitching posts in its early years.

By the fifth year the Cemetery Association existed, violets were planted on every grave and the cemetery began to be known as Violet Cemetery. The Cemetery Association was one of the most popular civic social groups in Osceola in the early decades of the twentieth century. The Association maintained the cemetery for over forty years until the City of Osceola took over its care.

Violet Cemetery contains 634 marked graves and about 65 unmarked graves. Of the total number of graves, 499 (70%) are at least fifty years old.

Family names on the markers in Violet Cemetery are a compendium of those who developed the area. Burials in the cemetery include Dr. Henry Clay Dunnivant, a local doctor who was in the Confederate Army,

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42 Confederate soldiers, W. J. Driver, a Congressman who in 1939 sponsored legislation to control the Mississippi River, and Thomas Craighead, namesake of Craighead County. Also buried in Violet Cemetery are veterans from the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Several former mayors of Osceola, sheriff, state Legislators, founder of the Osceola Times, doctors, lawyers judges, teachers are among the many former citizens of Mississippi County.

Statement of Significance

Violet Cemetery is a significant representation of the history of Osceola and that region of Mississippi County, Arkansas. Its prominent location in downtown Osceola is a visual reminder of the people who settled and developed the area . For these reasons Violet Cemetery is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criteria A and C** with **local significance** and under **Criteria Consideration D: Cemeteries**.

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Bibliography

Edrington, Mable F. *History of Mississippi County*, Osceola, AR, 1962.

Fairley, Dr. Eldon, Interview

Goodspeed's Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas, 1889.

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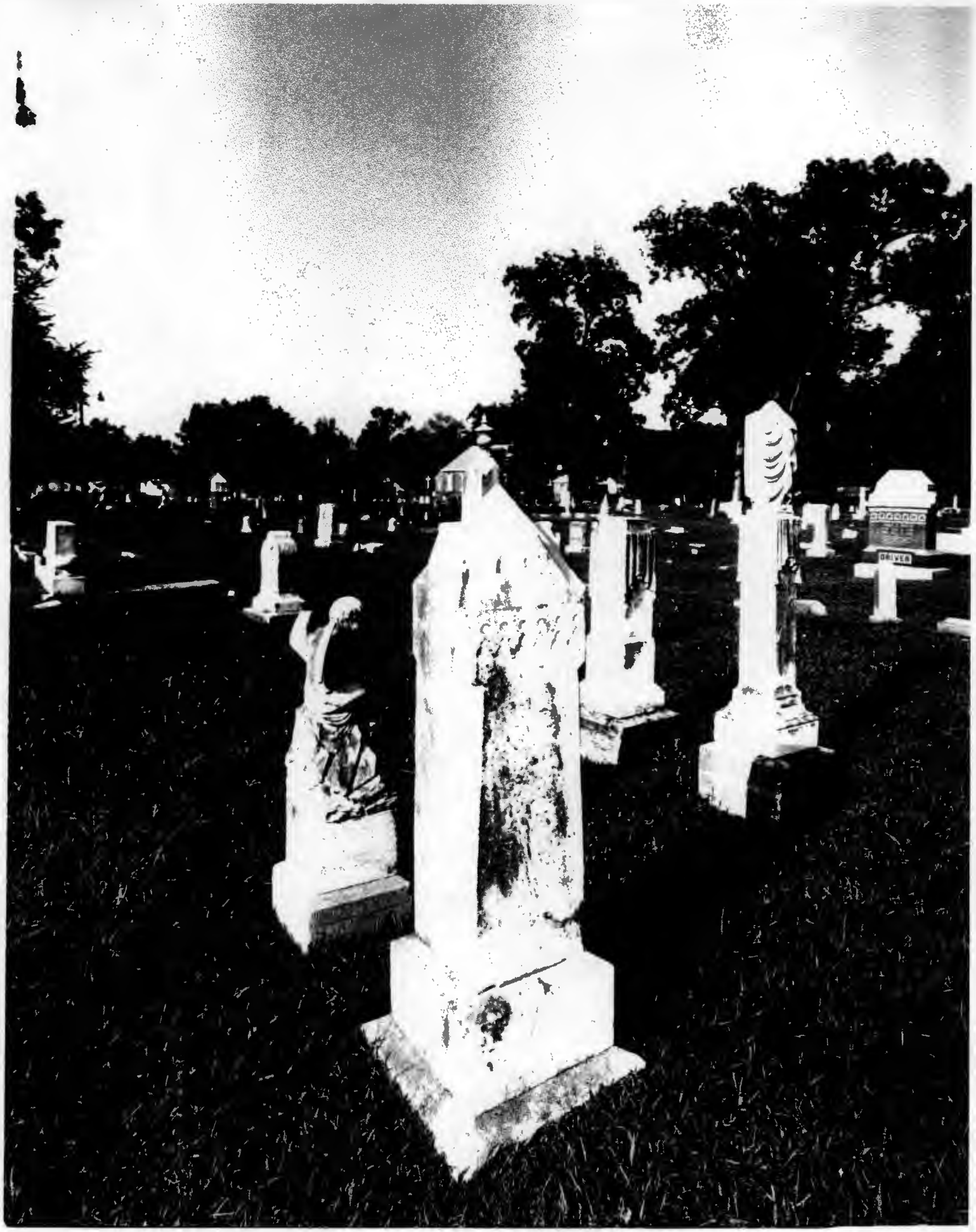
Verbal Boundary Description:

A 2.45 acre cemetery lying in the Northeast Quarter (NE1/4) Southeast Quarter (SE1/4) of Section 36, Township Thirteen North (T-13-N), Range Ten East (R-10-E), within the city limits of Osceola, Arkansas and being more particularly described as:

Commencing at the Northeast corner of the SE1/2 (East ¼ corner) of Section 36, T-13-N, R-10-E, Mississippi County, Arkansas, Osceola District, thence West along the centerline of Semmes Avenue 634.2 feet, thence south 20.0 feet to the South right-of-way line of Semmes Avenue to a point which is the point of beginning, thence West 276.9 feet along the South right-of-way line of Semmes Avenue to the East right-of-way line of Pecan Street, thence South 395.4 feet along the East right-of-way line of Pecan Street to the North right-of-way line of Johnson Avenue, thence East 263.5 feet along the North right-of-way line of Johnson Avenue to a point on the fence line extended, thence North 01 degree 56 minutes East 395.63 feet to the point of beginning, containing 2.45 acres more or less, and subject to all easements, rights-of-way, and restrictions of record.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary contains all the property historically and currently associated with Violet Cemetery.


DRIVER

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty., AR
Photo By John Warriner
9-4-02
negative At AHPP
View Looking southwest

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty., AR
photo By John Warriner
9-4-02
negative # AHPP
View Looking North West

BRIDGE

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty., AR
photo By John Warriner
9-402
NEGATIVE AT AHPP
view Looking West

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty., AR
photo By John Warriner
9-402
Negative At AHPP
View Looking east

DRIVER

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty., AR
photo By John Warriner
9-4-02
negative At ATLPP
View Looking Southeast

DEMOSS

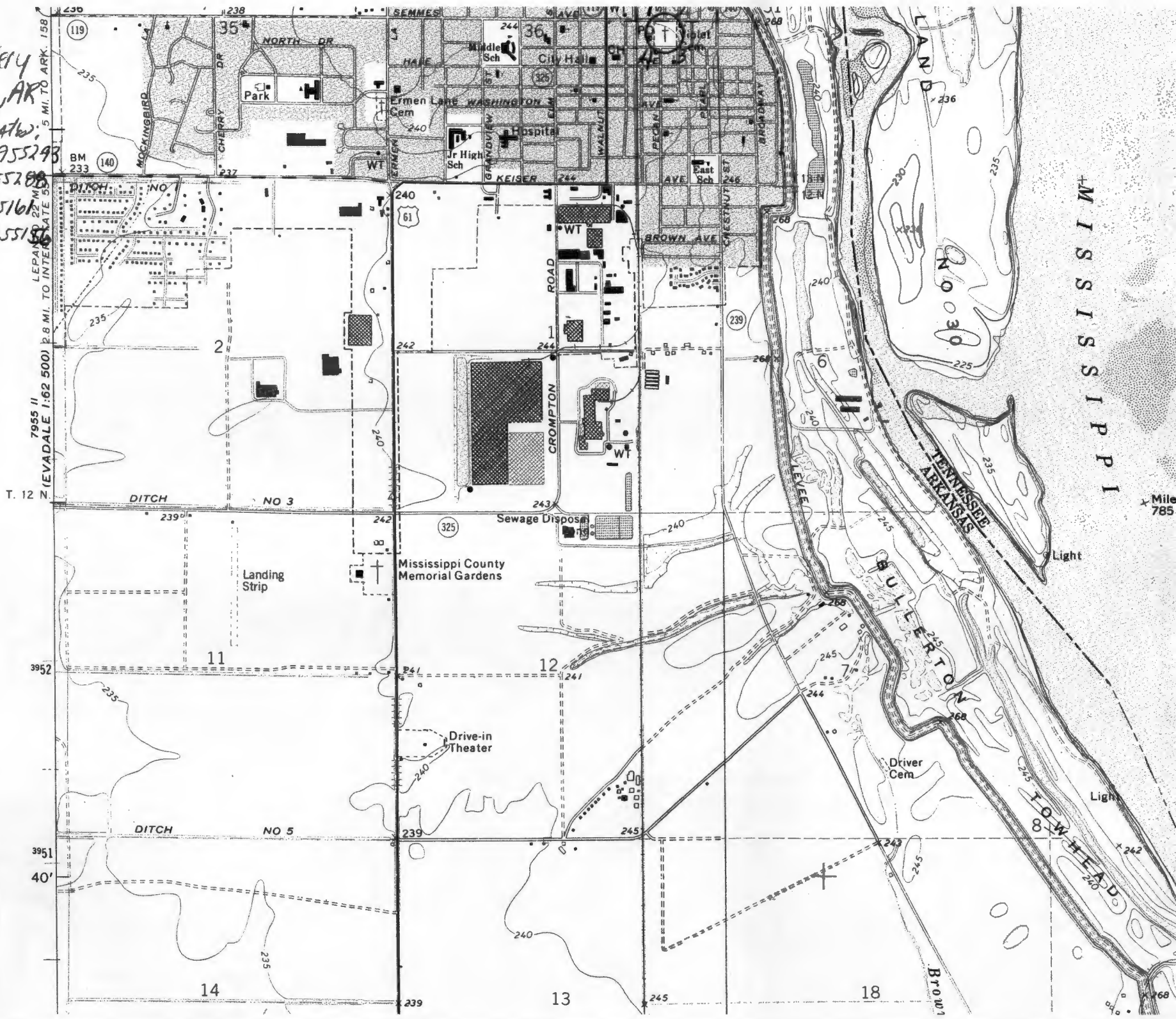
Violet Cemetery
Mississippi County, AR
photo By John Warriner
9-4-02
NEGATIVE At AHPP
View Looking Northwest

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty., AR
photo By John Warriner
9-4-82
negative At AHPP
View Looking East

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty. AR
photo By John Warriner
9-4-02
negative at AHPP
View Looking Southeast

HANORA
WIFE OF
JAMES LISTON

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi County, AR
Photo By John Whitmer
9-4-02
negative At AHPP
View looking west

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty., AR
photo By John Warriner
9-4-02
negative At AHPP
View Looking east

Violet Cemetery
Mississippi Cty., AR
UTM Coordinates:
1. 16 231504 3955293
2. 16 231616 3955208
3. 16 231621 3955161
4. 16 231499 3955158