



**DHR** | Virginia Department of Historic Resources

## PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

*Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.*

**DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff)** 201-5004

### 1. General Property Information

Property name: Helping Hand Cemetery

Property address: 21448 Main Street – P.O. Box 612

City or Town: Courtland

Zip code: 23837

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Southampton County

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building ☐ Site ☒ Structure ☐ Object ☐

### 2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 2

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Town ☒ Village ☐ Hamlet ☐ Rural ☒

Briefly describe the property's overall location and setting, including any notable landscape features:

Helping Hand Cemetery is located in Courtland, Southampton County, Virginia; with only half of its property within the town limits. The surrounding community is made up of older houses, some abandoned, as well as newer houses, and an apartment complex located at the rear of the cemetery. The cemetery is situated on flat land approximately 300 yards from the Nottoway River.

Helping Hand Cemetery is located adjacent to Rt. #35, which is the historical Jerusalem Plank Road, and becomes Main Street as it runs directly through Courtland, a designated historic town.

Various species of trees can be found throughout the cemetery, with a couple of oaks estimated by The Department of Forestry to be approximately 300 years old.

### 3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Not applicable.

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: N/A

If the builder is known, please list here: N/A

Date of construction (can be approximate): \*N/A \*Cemetery bought officially in 1897.

**Narrative Description (Please do not exceed one page in describing the ):**

Briefly describe the property's general characteristics, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions or other major alterations.

Helping Hand Cemetery is the first organized African-American cemetery in the Town of Courtland. Research by the current Helping Hand Cemetery Club, descendants of the original trustees of 1897, has revealed through donated family records that prior to the cemetery's official purchase in 1897, the land was used as an unorganized graveyard.

Today, there are over 500 known graves and approximately 175 unknown graves located in the cemetery. These unknown graves were discovered with the use of a GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) machine by a Preservation Virginia technician.

Located in the cemetery is a mixture of individual grave mounds, old headstones, new headstones, and small monuments. The primary and only recently built building is a brick kiosk containing a directory, map and location information to assist the increased number of visitors to the cemetery. An attempt at building a path throughout the cemetery for wheelchair access and walking aids was recently created; however, this needs to be professionally redone. (See accompanying picture.)

Helping Hand Cemetery is also used for ceremonies and educational exhibits. Many of those buried represent the founders and builders of the first African-American community of Courtland, a town noted for its segregated communities. Also buried in the cemetery are Native Americans who lived on the land that was once the site of the Nottoway Indian Reservation.

In a bullet list, include any outbuildings or secondary resources or major landscape features (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

- We recently built a brick kiosk on the cemetery grounds to provide information for the increasing number of visitors.
- The cemetery is located approximately 300 yards from the Nottoway River on the western side and lies adjacent to the main road (#35, Jerusalem Plank Road) on the eastern side.
- On the north side is a driveway from the main road to a house in the rear. This driveway is used by the cemetery as well as the occupants of the house and separates the cemetery from an unused parcel of land owned by a resident of the Town. This arrangement leaves cemetery visitors with no parking space.
- On the roadside (eastern perimeter) there is a ten-year old fence (approximately 5 feet tall) which has now been compromised by deer who have dislodged or bent the rails in several places.
- Surrounding the remaining borders of the cemetery is either a wooden fence owned by the owners of a house located on the south side, or weak wire fencing compromised by the tenants of the houses who cut through the cemetery to reach the main road.

#### 4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property.

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

An historic highway marker has been approved for The Helping Hand Cemetery, located within the Courtland historic district. (Estimated date of arrival is April 2023.) The Cemetery itself is historic having been purchased in 1897 by the ancestors of the current Board of Trustees. (Please see the deed, dated 1897) One of the trustees at that time, Rev. O.G. Jenkins with the help of retired Judge J.B. Prince also founded a boarding school for African-American children in 1903 and established a Courtland bank for Blacks. (This was an extraordinary accomplishment for an African-American in a segregated town.)

Less than half a mile from the Cemetery is the courthouse in which the enslaved Nat Turner was tried and found guilty for his rebellion. Closer than that in the black community of Courtland is where Nat Turner and his followers were hung and the followers thrown into a mass grave. (National Geographic GPR results). This history has increased public interest in our cemetery and has contributed to the increased number of visitors.

After its purchase in 1897 the cemetery was called The Courtland Colored Cemetery, which was changed in 1912 to the Helping Hand Cemetery, owned and managed by the Helping Hand Club. The Club also established in 1912 a health and welfare fund and a system of pre-paying for funeral plots. Ledgers beginning in 1912 list the individual names of many of Southampton County's African-Americans who paid into this fund. Names from these ledgers are often requested by visitors who are searching for ancestors and deceased relatives.

Buried in The Helping Hand Cemetery are over 500 Black and Native American citizens of Southampton County, residing in the area in the late 1800's and early 1900's, and who were responsible for building an independent African-American community including a Rosenwald School, stores and shops. Also located in Helping Hand are approximately 175 unknown graves below surface documented by a GPR (ground penetrating radar) machine and technician from Preservation Virginia.

Even the trees located on the cemetery grounds are historic. At least two trees have been described by the Department of Forestry as being approximately 300 years old. Unfortunately, for safety reasons, we were forced to cut one down; however, we have since labeled most of the trees and explained the use of the species during our tours and events.

Buried in Helping Hand are African American and Native American teachers, activists, entrepreneurs, builders, farmers and close to 50 veterans, including a Civil War veteran.

Helping Hand Cemetery, along with its historical exhibits and events, has proven itself to be the only positive historical resource for Courtland's African-American community and its children. Our Helping Hand Board of Trustees (Club), club members, and the descendants and families of those buried in the cemetery meet to share stories and to participate in ancestral events. Thus, the Helping Hand Cemetery is of considerable significant importance to the Courtland community.



Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property, such as deeds, census and tax records, and/or published articles and books. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

- Deed of 1897
- Deed of 1913 (Addition to cemetery)
- HHC Directory and Ledgers
- Survey Maps 1999 and 2019
- DHR Historic Marker Notification Letter

**5. Property Ownership** (Check as many categories as apply):

Private:   X   Public\Local        Public\State        Public\Federal       

**Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property** (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Alton Darden, President

organization: Helping Hand Cemetery Club, Inc.

street & number: 21448 Main St. P.O. Box 612

city or town: Courtland state: Virginia zip code: 23837

e-mail: [helpinghand612@gmail.com](mailto:helpinghand612@gmail.com) telephone: (313) 414-9430

Legal Owner's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 2/7/2023

DocuSigned by:

Alton Darden

603E37DDF25841D...

• • **Signature required for processing all applications.** • •

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Dolores Peterson

Daytime Telephone: 914-714-0867

**Applicant Information** (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: Dolores Peterson

organization: Helping Hand Cemetery Club, Inc.

street & number: 3 E. Minglewood Drive

city or town: Middletown state: DE zip code: 19709

e-mail: [dvlp13@yahoo.com](mailto:dvlp13@yahoo.com) telephone: (914) 714-0867

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE DO NOT ATTACH CONTINUATION SHEETS TO THIS FORM. THANK YOU!**

## Helping Hand Cemetery – 5 Requested Attachments



Helping Hand Cemetery 2022 – Building the kiosk



GIS Map – Helping Hand Cemetery



Tax Parcel 60 A-2-122, Property of the Helping Hand Club.



This Deed made May 27, 1897 between J. B. Prince of  
 one part and A. S. Jenkins, R. M. Warden, J. H. Epps,  
 Walter Hardy, J. R. Blum & Charles Hardy, Trustees of the  
 other part, Sheshawitt, Chap. in consideration of five  
 dollars in hand paid, the said party of the first  
 part do hereby and convey with general warranty  
 unto the said Trustees and their successors in office  
 forever a parcel of land, situated on the left of the  
 Public Road leading from Courtland to the residence  
 of said Prince and nearly opposite the residence of B. S.  
 McLean containing about one acre it being 10 yards  
 square and being designated at the four corners by  
 a piece of rail road iron at each corner in trust to  
 hold said piece of land for a burying ground for the  
 colored people of this immediate vicinity. It is under-  
 stood that no colored people or persons shall be buried

Deed of 1897 – Deed Book 44, Page 605. Courtland Colored Cemetery, Courtland, Virginia

March 17, 2022

Dear Ms. Peterson,

I am pleased to send official notification that the Virginia Board of Historic Resources approved the Helping Hand Cemetery highway marker at its meeting on March 17, 2022. The final text is as follows:

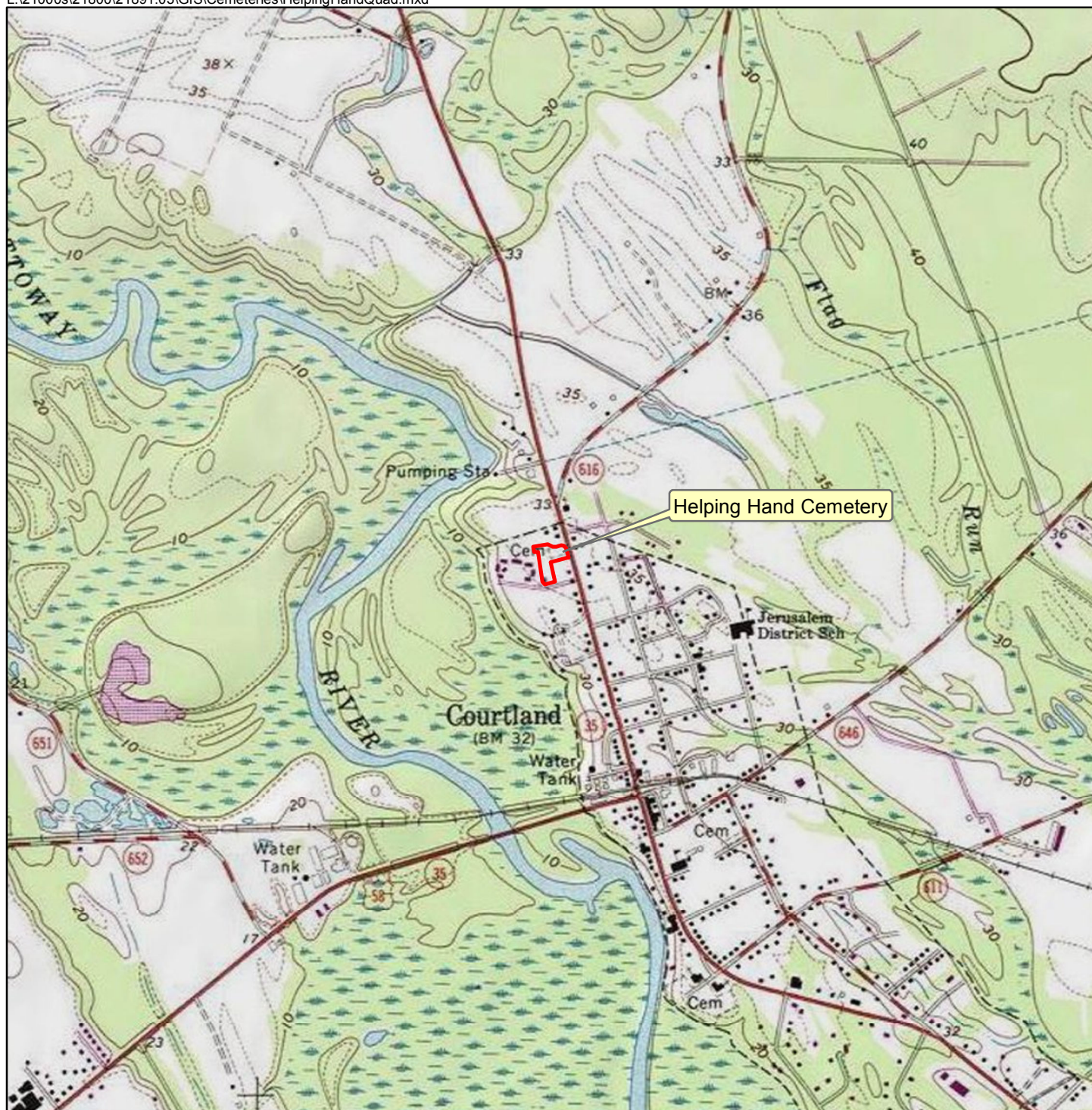
### **Helping Hand Cemetery**


Six African American trustees purchased this land in 1897 and established The Courtland Colored Cemetery, renamed Helping Hand Cemetery in 1912. The Helping Hand Club, a benevolent organization founded by educator Ersulia Wynn Evans, offered health and burial insurance to community members. Among the approximately 650 persons interred here is Pvt. Solomon Stevens, who escaped from slavery in Southampton Co. during the Civil War, served in the Union Army, and in 1913 sold a parcel of land to the Helping Hand trustees to enlarge the cemetery. Also buried here are about 55 other military veterans, Nottoway Indians whose ancestral lands were in this area, and educators, activists, and entrepreneurs.

Thank you again for your interest in educating the public through the state highway marker program, and congratulations!

Sincerely,

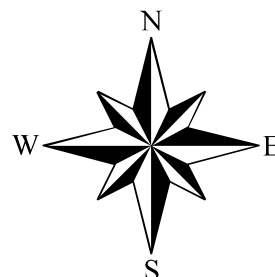
Jennifer R. Loux, Ph.D.  
Highway Marker Program Manager  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
2801 Kensington Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23221



 Approximate Cemetery Boundary

**Helping Hand Cemetery, Courtland, VA**  
**USGS Quad Map**  
**Courtland, VA**  
**Scale: 1" = 2000'**

Latitude: 36°43'29.514" N  
Longitude: 77°4'21.527" W







EST. 1897

# HELPING HAND CEMETERY







William Gray Jr.  
April 2, 1940 - Jan. 8, 2011  
Buried in the  
Graves of the Family





**Dr. Jessie Benjamin Mayo, Jr.**

Born on October 26, 1973. Died on April 16, 2013  
Beloved and Amazing Husband, Father, Son, Brother, Uncle,  
Cousin and Friend

He was a devoted and loving father, husband, and friend. He was a man of faith and a man of integrity. He was a man who was always there for his family and friends. He was a man who was always there for his family and friends.

**Rest In Peace My Love**

"Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints." Psalm 116:15















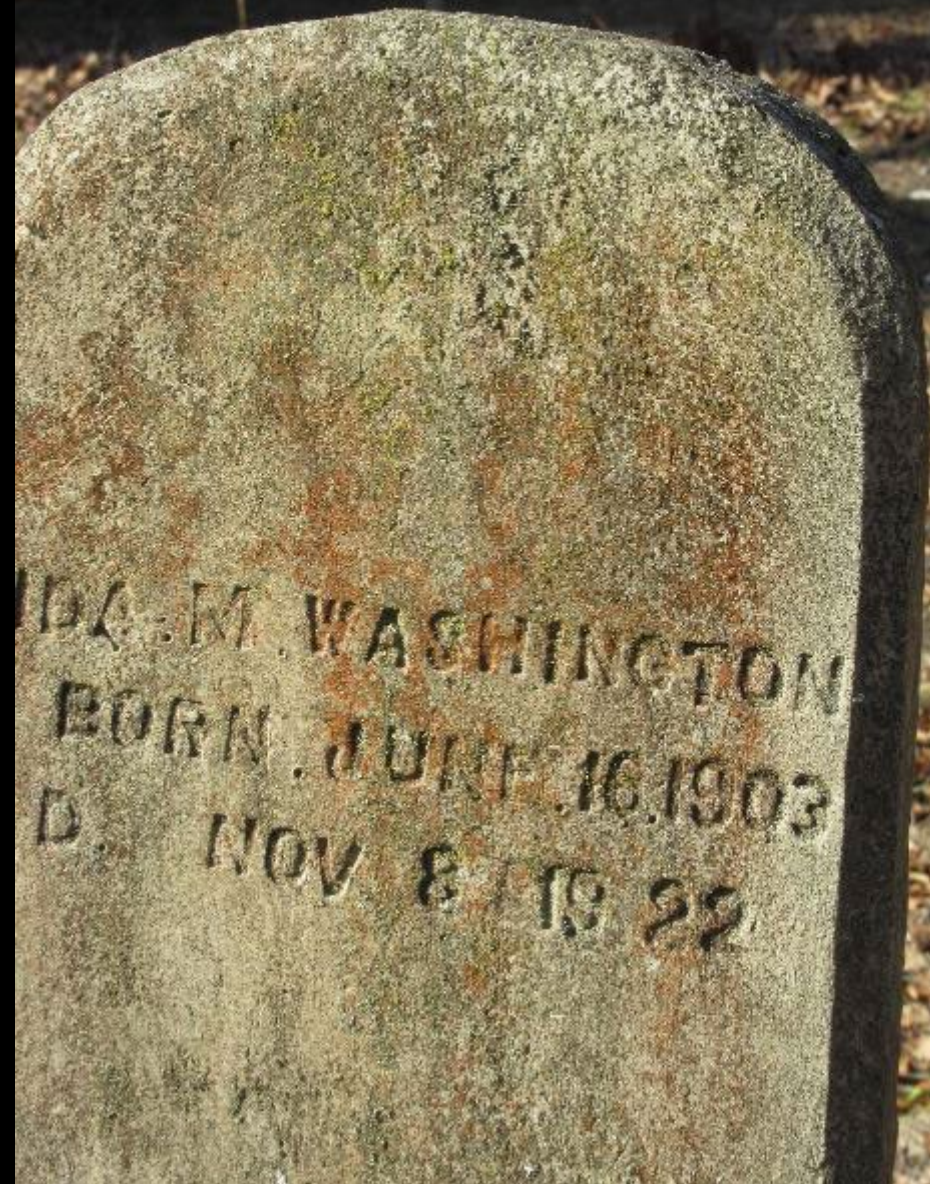


EMMETT. ROUZEAU

DIED DEC. 1

1927





IDA M. WASHINGTON  
BORN JUNE 16 1903  
D. NOV 8 1922



HENRY BLOWE  
AGE 75  
DIED OCT 21 1916



ELIZABETH BROWN  
THE DAUGHTER OF  
OF THE REV. BROWN  
BORN JAN. 23. 1836.









J. S. T. HINES, B. A.

SON OF

J. C. & I. S. HINES

1909 — 1937

HE WAS A MEMBER OF THE  
PLANNING BOARD IN CITY HALL  
OF MOUNT VERNON, N. Y.  
A MEMBER OF THE PLANNING  
BOARD OF GRACE BAPTIST  
CHURCH OF MOUNT VERNON,  
N. Y. AND SUPERINTENDENT OF  
THE SUNDAY SCHOOL HE WAS  
PRESIDENT OF THE NEGRO CIVIC  
LEAGUE OF MOUNT  
AND SE







The Lord is my light and  
my salvation, whom shall I fear

WYATT MEADE  
RUFFIN

MAR 8, 1912  
OCT 27, 1999

GLADYS T. RUFFIN  
PAYTON

FEB 14, 1927  
AUG 1, 2000

WYATT  
MEADE  
RUFFIN

MAR 8, 1912  
OCT 27, 1999

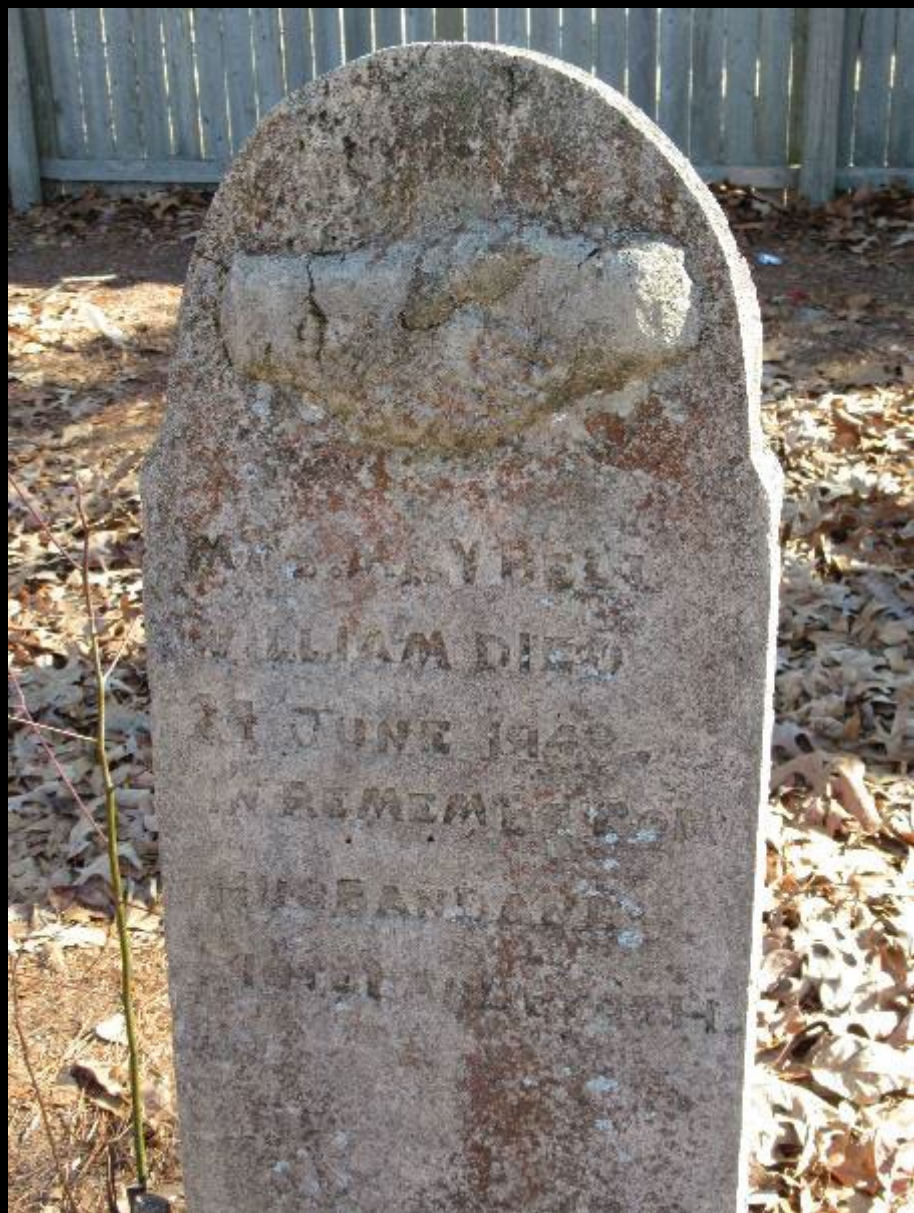
GLADYS T.  
RUFFIN  
PAYTON

FEB 14, 1927  
AUG 1, 2000



















ise beyond  
s, his humor will  
d and his love of family  
**Rest In Peace My Love**  
s in the sight of the Lord, is the death  
His Saints." Psalms 116:15

Dr. Jessie B. Mayo, Jr.  
October 26, 1973  
April 16, 2013  
Engram Funeral Home





✠  
JOHN L  
BAILEY  
AN  
US NAVY  
AUG 13 1936  
MAR 20 2016

✠  
RD GEORGE D  
STMB  
W

Rev. John L. Bailey  
August 13, 1936  
March 20, 2016  
Buried in the  
Cemetery of the  
United States Navy





A rectangular, light-colored gravestone with a white plaque. The plaque contains the name 'Corey L. Britt', the dates 'Sept. 4, 1969 - June 9, 2017', a small decorative flourish, and the words 'Rest in Peace'. The stone is set in a grassy area with scattered brown leaves. To the left of the stone is a black, cylindrical garden light. To the right is a small, white, cross-shaped marker on a thin metal rod. In the background, there is a larger, dark-colored floral arrangement with yellow and blue flowers.

**Corey L. Britt**  
Sept. 4, 1969 - June 9, 2017  
*Rest in Peace*



A photograph of a grave marker for Catherine Marable. The marker is a light-colored, rectangular stone with a recessed area containing the name and dates. To the left of the marker, several pink lilies are placed on the ground. The background shows a grassy area with some fallen leaves.

CATHERINE  
MARABLE

FEB. 9, 1934  
JAN. 26, 2018