

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

John N. Smith Cemetery

Southport, Brunswick County, BW0337, Listed 8/9/2021

Nomination by Heather Fearnbach, Fearnbach History Services, Inc.

Photographs by Heather Fearnbach, November 2019



Looking north from shell-covered graves of Sarah Ann Gillespie Howe (1889-1965) and Wellington C. Howe Jr. (1875-1928)



Headstones of Kittie Smith (1827-1876, left) and John N. Smith (1840-1874)

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 John N. Smith Cemetery
other names/site number Southport Colored Cemetery

2. Location

street & number 225 East Leonard Street **N/A** not for publication
city or town Southport **N/A** vicinity
stat North Carolina code NC county Brunswick code 019 zip code 28461
e _____

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.)

[Signature], Deputy SHPO 7/6/2021
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
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:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	_____	Signature of the Keeper	_____	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	_____			
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____			
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____			
<input type="checkbox"/> other,(explain:)	_____			

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	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
N/A

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 marble
granite
concrete

Narrative Description

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

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 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** a birthplace or grave.
- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethic Heritage: Black
Social History

Period of Significance

1874-1974

Significant Dates

1874

1949

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(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:

Margaret and James Harper Jr. Library, Southport

Fort Johnston –Southport Museum and Visitor Center

John N. Smith Cemetery
Name of Property

Brunswick County, NC
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 4 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

See Latitude/Longitude coordinates continuation sheet.

1
Zone Easting Northing

2

3
Zone Easting Northing

4

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 Heather Fearnbach

organization Fearnbach History Services, Inc. date 5/06/2020

street & number 3334 Nottingham Road telephone 336-765-2661

city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27104

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 John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc., Judy Gordon, chairperson

street & number 400 North Caswell Avenue; P. O. Box 11241 telephone (910) 269-1370

city or town Southport state NC zip code 28461-3404

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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Section 7. Narrative Description

Setting

John N. Smith Cemetery, in use from around 1874 through the present, is located at 225 East Leonard Street approximately one-half mile northeast of Southport's central business district.¹ Southport is about two miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean on the Cape Fear River's northeast bank in southeastern Brunswick County. Marked and unmarked burials fill the roughly rectangular cemetery, which is bounded by fences. Modest residences, most built from the mid- to late-twentieth century, line surrounding streets including Cape Harbor Drive, which is just west of the cemetery. Commercial development flanks Highway 211 two blocks to the west. Brunswick County is located within the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, established in 2006 by the U. S. Congress to recognize the distinctive Gullah Geechee culture in the coastal areas and sea islands of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Description

John N. Smith Cemetery, initially two acres, was expanded to the south by 1.5 acres in 1949 through the collective effort of Southport's five African American churches.² It remained the sole community burial ground for the city's black population until the 7.65-acre Northwood Cemetery established in 1936 two blocks away was integrated in 1974. John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc. owns the 3.54-acre tract that encompasses the vast majority of interments. However, approximately eight unmarked burials are west of the cemetery's 2017 fence in the Cape Harbor Drive right-of-way just south of the northwest entrance. The west fence's south section is black-plastic-coated chain-link, while the north section is four feet tall fence with slender, square, black-powder-coated aluminum posts, railings, and a double-leaf gate at the Cape Harbor Drive entrance. The Southport Historical Society erected around 1990 a sign comprising wood posts spanned by a board carved with the cemetery name that is now within the fence south of that entrance. The burial ground

¹ The primary entrance at the cemetery's south end has a 225 East Leonard Street address, while the secondary address of the northwest corner entrance in property tax records is 704 Cape Harbor Drive. The primary entrance address is utilized by the community and John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc., and is thus employed in National Register documentation.

² The perimeters of the 1949 acreage acquisition are unclear, as it does not appear that a deed and plat were recorded. However, oral tradition, historic maps, and interment dates indicate that the land was south of the original parcel. Mid-twentieth to early-twenty-first-century graves predominate in the cemetery's southern section. Furthermore, the Wilmington, Brunswick, and Southern Railroad Company line from Navassa to Southport, which operated from 1911 until 1943, bounded the cemetery to the west until the tracks were removed in 1944. The line ran through the cemetery's southwest corner and bordered its west edge as the tracks continued north. Cape Harbor Drive occupies the former railroad corridor. Brunswick County Plat Book B1, p. 70A; Bill Reaves, *Southport (Smithville): A Chronology, Volume IV (1941-1970)* (Southport: Southport Historical Society, 1998), 31, 40.

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extends at its southwest end into Kerry J. Gilliland's triangular 0.03 acre-parcel, which contains ten interments as well as the west portion of the cemetery's ornamental aluminum south fence.³ The south fence, which matches the west fence's north section, continues east through the north 0.17-acre portion of a 2.87-acre tract owned by the City of Southport. The wedge-shaped 0.17-acre tract, which is north of East Leonard Street, encompasses an unpaved parking area, sandy grass lawn, a tall wood sign with square posts and a central panel upon which the cemetery's name and brief history are carved and painted, and just west of the south gate, an aluminum-framed interpretive panel summarizing the cemetery's history mounted on aluminum posts.⁴ The Southport Historical Society erected the wood sign around 1990. In 2017, John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc. (JNSRP) installed the ornamental black-powder-coated aluminum and black-plastic-coated chain-link fences that bound most of the cemetery. In 2019, JNSRP, in collaboration with Southport artist Ricky Evans, designed an interpretive sign. The Southport Historical Society subsidized the sign's cost and arranged for its installation at the cemetery entrance.⁵ Residential wood-picket fences border portions of the east and north lot lines.

The unpaved drive extends north from the parking area abutting East Leonard Street through the cemetery's center, turns west in the northwest section, and continues to the Cape Harbor Drive entrance. Deciduous and evergreen vegetation, including shrubs and live oak, pine, magnolia, and cedar trees, punctuates the site and lines its perimeter. Much of the flat site was initially swept sandy soil, but grass has gradually been introduced.

Ground-penetrating radar surveys conducted by New South Associates in 2017 and 2018 indicate that John N. Smith Cemetery contained approximately 1,722 burials as of 2018. Although most (1,243) gravesites are unmarked, shallow depressions indicate some locations. Unmarked burials are located throughout the cemetery, with the greatest density in the cemetery's north section, where they greatly outnumber the earliest marked graves. Some unmarked late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century graves likely had simple wood or uncut fieldstone markers that were inherently ephemeral in nature. Interments flank the unpaved central drive, with flat and upright fieldstone, granite, marble, and concrete headstones arranged in linear north-south rows. The ground-penetrating radar surveys identified unmarked graves beneath the drive that curves and extends to the northwest entrance,

³ Gilliland also owns the parcel west of the city's tract, where a gable-roofed metal garage was erected in 2001. WithersRavenel, "The John Smith Cemetery," maps created January 10, 2019 in conjunction with a Brunswick County Cemetery Survey; Brunswick County Plat Book 118, p. 66; Southport Historical Society correspondence in the "Cemeteries – Other" subject file, Susie Carson Research Room, Fort Johnston – Southport Museum and Visitor Center.

⁴ Wallace C. and Susan Murchinson, James C. and Katharine R. Fox, and Louis K. Newton conveyed a 0.39-acre portion of the 2.87-acre parcel to the City of Southport in 1978. The 0.17-acre tract is part of that parcel. Brunswick County Deed Book 406, p. 908; Deed Book 162, pp. 642 and 648.

⁵ Liz Fuller, Southport Historical Society, email correspondence with Heather Fearnbach, April 26, 2021.

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connoting that the drive's current configuration was created after the mid-twentieth-century cemetery expansion.⁶

Most marked graves are in the cemetery's south section, which contains the most recent burials, and all but two have east-west orientation as typical in the Christian tradition. A few headstones are leaning or broken in the more open north section. Gravemarker types, styles, materials, and sizes reflect the economic means of those interred, cultural practices, and funerary art design trends, resulting in a wide array of grave treatments. In some cases, concrete burial vaults are positioned so that flat or beveled concrete slab tops are slightly above grade and thus function as gravemarkers. Six family plots are fully or partially bordered with formed concrete or concrete block. Approximately 350 of the marked burials occurred in or before 1974, the end of the period of significance for National Register purposes.

Southport's African American residents began utilizing this site for interments around 1874. Only five 1870s burials have headstones. The earliest marks the grave of cemetery namesake John N. Smith (1840-1874). His professionally carved pointed-arch marble marker and that of Kittie Smith (1827-1876), both elevated on marble plinths, are early-twentieth-century replacements of more ephemeral markers.⁷ The other three appear to be original. Reverend J. R. Brown's (1820-1877) tall segmental-arch marble marker features a bas-relief Masonic symbol in a recessed circle. His name is also bas-relief; the rest of the inscription is incised. Nancy Davis's (1839-1878) plain marble headstone with deeply carved inscription and John D. Davis's (1836-1878) marble marker embellished with a Masonic symbol and bas-relief lettering each have segmental-arch tops and repaired breaks.

A wide variety of professionally carved and vernacular markers were erected after trustees of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, which later became St. James African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, acquired a two-acre tract encompassing the cemetery in 1880 to serve as a communal burial ground. Distinctive early examples include Sallie Reeves's (1810-1898) segmental-arch marble marker with a bas-relief flower in recessed circle. The segmental-arch marble markers of Gibb McDonald (1855-1883), Moses Lee (ca. 1858-1894), Gibb Davis Jr. (1842-1896), Hardie Lewis (1813-1889), and Gibb Davis (1817-1903) feature incised or bas-relief Masonic symbols. Maria Davis's (1817-1889) baroque marble headstone and Frank W. Jackson (1868-1903) segmental-arch marble marker, which are taller than most, have central repaired horizontal breaks. The matching heart-shaped headstones of Maggie Lee (1860-1896) and her husband Daniel Lee (1855-1918) are side by side, but face in opposite directions. Decoration includes foliage flanking the heart's pointed base

⁶ Maeve Herrick and Sarah Lowry, "Ground-Penetrating Radar Survey to Prospect for Burials within the John N. Smith Cemetery," New South Associates, November 22, 2017; Maeve Herrick and Sarah Lowry, "Ground-Penetrating Radar Survey to Identify Graves on the Southern Side of the John N. Smith Cemetery," New South Associates, May 30, 2018; WithersRavenel, "The John Smith Cemetery," maps created January 10, 2019 for the Brunswick County Cemetery Survey.

⁷ The nature of the relationship between John N. Smith and Kittie Smith is unknown.

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and above the central inscriptions. The adjacent grave of Erler E. Lee (1889-1893), likely the couple's child, is marked with a small, plain, inscribed headstone. Nannie Walker's (1856-1907) marble marker has incised floral and fleur-de-lis decoration, a slanted top with a central peak, and a plinth. Florence E. Gibbs's (1878-1910) marble obelisk, which has a pointed top and pedestal base, is the cemetery's only marker of that shape. The almost identical richly decorated marble headstones of Allen Clemmons (1853-1922) and his wife Martha (1858-1919) are also unique. Carving includes Masonic symbols framed by a classical arch flanked by urns. A bas-relief open bible rests on the slanted "altar" atop each marker's scrolled upper edge. Rhoda Wortham's (1865-1924) segmental-arch marble marker features a recessed upper panel with a bas-relief ivy vine, which signifies immortality.⁸

Conch and oyster shells ornament some graves, manifesting a West African burial tradition that was disseminated throughout the southern United States. Folklorist John Michael Vlach attributes the custom to the Congolese belief that bleached shells and other white or reflective grave decorations allude to water beneath which the afterworld is located.⁹ The practice is prevalent in North Carolina's coastal plain, where thousands of Africans were enslaved on plantations. Sizable shells, often conch and mollusk, border or cover mounds of sandy soil. Regular maintenance is necessary to combat mound sinking, erosion, and shell displacement. Southport natives Judy Gordon, Emma Myles, and Wendell Watson, who have numerous relatives interred in the cemetery, recall that the labor-intensive process of grave-tending at John N. Smith Cemetery involved removing shells, raking mounds, eliminating grass, and replacing shells.¹⁰

In the Howe family plot, the grave mounds of Sarah Ann Gillespie Howe (1889-1965) and Wellington C. Howe Jr. (1875-1928) are covered with central row of conch shells surrounded by mollusk shells. Two generations of the couple's headstones—small original locally made individual markers and a dual late-twentieth-century granite marker comprising a base and two tablets flanking a central vase—have been installed. Photographs from around 1950 illustrate Ruby Smith Howe and Sarah Howe tending a larger number of shell-covered grave mounds. In the Prim family plot, four flat graves have conch shell borders and mollusk shell rows that leave soil exposed. The graves of Prim Ray (1902-1981) and his wife Marzella Melvin Ray (1911-1998) are marked with small pressed-metal stakes issued by a funeral home. Marzella Ray's grave has a flat rectangular marble footstone. Concrete block lines the plot's north and south edges.

⁸ Ruth M. Little, *Sticks and Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 250.

⁹ John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 163.

¹⁰ Judy Gordon, Emma Myles, and Wendell Watson of John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc., discussion with Heather Fearnbach, at Harper Library, Southport, on November 5, 2019.

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Military veterans are buried throughout the cemetery. Some families applied for government-issued headstones, which were supplied free of cost other than local delivery and installation. Upright segmental-arch marble markers with small Christian crosses, Hebrew Stars of David, or shields were provided for Civil, Spanish-American, and World War veterans. On the headstone of Abram Galloway (1846-1927), a private in the 37th Regiment of the U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War, the bas-relief inscription of his name, rank, and service branch is inset within a recessed pointed shield. The markers of his son, private first class William Oliver Galloway (1891-1924), a World War I veteran, and U. S. Calvary private George A. Galloway (1872-1928), who served in the Spanish-American War of 1898, have incised crosses and inscriptions.¹¹ In all three instances, Abram's widow Celia Galloway applied for and received the markers in late 1930. Beginning in the late 1940s, survivors could also choose flat granite, marble, or bronze plaques. However, upright marble markers with incised crosses and inscriptions remained popular, as evidenced by their ongoing usage in John N. Smith Cemetery through the early twenty-first century. The families of U. S. Coast Guard sailor John Wesley Smith (1850-1929), World War I veteran Sheppard Campbell (1892-1964), and World War II veterans Julius Roosevelt Warnette (1918-1958), Freddie E. Smith Junior (1924-2002), and Carnell Price (1923-2002) selected this option.¹²

Vernacular stone and concrete markers created from the 1920s through the 1940s reflect the economic challenges many families experienced during that period. Amateur makers incised inscriptions, symbols, and floral decoration into rectangular and arched stone tablets and monuments. Concrete markers were inexpensively crafted by pouring concrete into wood molds, smoothing the surface with a trowel, and stamping or hand-lettering wet concrete. To provide structural stability, smooth or twisted rods, pipes, flat bars, or wires were typically added between concrete pours. However, vernacular concrete markers are often without internal reinforcement, resulting in high incidents of breakage. Although many concrete markers are devoid of ornament, colored stones, pebbles, and course rocks could be incorporated into the concrete mix to provide color and texture contrast. Glass, ceramics, metal objects, and hand- or professionally engraved metal plaques were sometimes embedded in marker faces.¹³ The vernacular markers in John N. Smith Cemetery are simply executed. James Lewis's (1865-1948) small marble marker has an octagonal top, curved lower side edges, and a replacement marble base. The round- and pointed-arch concrete markers of J. T. Lee (1876-1928), Maggie Gordon (1900-1939), Maria Nixon (1866-1943), and Amelia C. Swain (1882-1942) are

¹¹ The nature of the relationship between Abram, William, and George Galloway is unknown.

¹² *Applications for Headstones for U.S. Military Veterans, 1925-1941*, microfilm publication M1916, ARC ID: 596118, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92, National Archives at Washington, D.C.

¹³ Little, *Sticks and Stones*, 250; Gordon Bond and Stephanie M. Hoagland, "Made from My Own Hand: An Introduction to Concrete Grave Markers," presentation at the International Cemetery Preservation Summit, April 8-10, 2014, Niagara Falls, New York, <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/blog/made-from-my-own-hand-an-introduction-to-concrete-grave-markers/> (accessed April 2021).

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characterized by uneven lettering. James Green's (1882-1924) tall pointed-arch concrete marker features a lengthy carved inscription beneath a Masonic symbol.

Mass-produced polished-granite markers with incised inscriptions and decoration have dominated from the mid-twentieth century to the present. Size and shape varies widely, from small, flat, rectangular tablets to substantial upright rectangular monuments mounted on matching bases. In some cases, the marker face is slanted to facilitate legibility. In others, marker faces are polished and sides and bases are rusticated. Typical embellishment includes classical borders, vines, flowers, Christian crosses, Masonic symbols, and other motifs reflecting religious, fraternal, or military affiliation. Lois Mae Gore's (1922-1962) segmental-arch pink granite marker is incised with a cross and ivy. The Frink family plot contains nine slanted rectangular granite individual markers installed between 1954 and 1973, a matching marker from 2013, and a large dual 1947 marker with tapered sides and a slightly arched top. All have polished faces and rusticated sides and bases. Five are incised with a candle and scalloped swag border, three have floral decoration, and one features an open bible. Eddie Rendell Bernard's (1940-2013) long, flat, rectangular polished granite marker is incised with a large steel suspension bridge, water, clouds, three doves, a cross, and praying hands. Such markers were made by professional stonecutters in commercial shops. McCoy-Green Funeral Home handled many of the mid- to late-twentieth-century interments.

African American funeral homes sometimes position concrete burial vaults so that the flat or beveled concrete slab tops are slightly above grade and thus function as gravemarkers. This practice became more prevalent during the 1960s and remains popular.¹⁴ In the John N. Smith Cemetery, finish and embellishment varies widely, ranging from smooth to rusticated surfaces with incised or bas relief decoration. Bronze, marble, or granite tablets are affixed directly to some slabs, while others have unattached headstones. The white-painted surface of Lizzie Smith (1924-2018) and John Moore's (1933-2018) molded-edge vault tops are scored with a wavy-line pattern. Mabel Jackson's (1906-1994) vault top is also embellished in this manner. The original mounted marble tablet has been supplemented with a detached flat marble marker incised with a cross and ivy vine. Mary Virginia Parker's (1915-2005) vault top, which features stepped molded edges and a central square plaster plaque with praying hands, is painted white with the exception of the mounted marble tablet. A small square angel plaque is inset at the center Carleen W. Jackson's (1935-2002) molded-edge vault top and a marble tablet is fixed to the head. McCoy-Green Funeral Home supplied vaults embellished with a raised crucifix and a small bronze plaque for individuals including Florence E. Reed (1930-1979), Addie L. Whitehead (1923-1985), and Norman L. Banks (1935-1990). The vault tops of William R. McKenzie (1916-1992) and World War II veteran James R. McKenzie (1926-1985) are ornamented with full-size bas-relief pointed-arch stained-glass windows. Both have detached granite headstones as well. In the McCoy family plot, the graves of Voila Lee McCoy (1889-1947) and Mary M. McCoy

¹⁴ Little, *Sticks and Stones*, 250.

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Gordon (1882-1963) also feature pointed-arch stained-glass-window vault tops supplemented with small, rectangular, flat granite markers.

Six family plots are fully or partially bordered with formed concrete or concrete block; a common characteristic of African American cemeteries. The Mitchell plot in the cemetery's north section is surrounded by a low formed-concrete border. The concrete is cracked and spalling, and a portion of the east side has collapsed. In the southwest section, the central Moore-McCoy plot has a complete low formed-concrete border. The Gordon plot to the west is bordered with concrete block on three sides, while the Hankin-Ray plot to the north adjacent to the west fence has two concrete-block edges. Near the cemetery's south end, concrete block almost completely encloses the Davis-McNeil plot abutting the west fence as well as the central Warnette family plot, which includes World War II veteran Julius Roosevelt Warnette's (1918-1958) upright marble marker.

Integrity Statement

John N. Smith Cemetery possesses a high level of integrity. The cemetery retains integrity of location and setting as the approximately four-acre National Register boundary encompasses all of the property historically associated with the burial ground and the surrounding area remains predominantly residential. Modest houses, most built from the mid- to late-twentieth century, line neighboring streets. The cemetery maintains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship as it displays physical characteristics of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century African American burial grounds, including its layout, landscaping, and types of vernacular and professionally carved grave markers. Interments flank the unpaved central drive, with flat and upright fieldstone, granite, marble, and concrete headstones arranged in linear north-south rows. Most extant markers are intact and in good condition, although some are leaning or broken in the more open north section. Approximately 350 of the marked interments occurred in or before 1974, the end of the period of significance. Unmarked grave locations have been identified and mapped. The loss of ephemeral wood and uncut fieldstone markers, a typical occurrence does not diminish the cemetery's integrity. Large deciduous and evergreen shrubs and trees, including two live oaks, punctuate the site and line its perimeter, creating a peaceful, secluded atmosphere. Much of the site was initially swept sandy soil, but grass has gradually been introduced. These physical features and the cemetery's connection to Southport's black community from Reconstruction through the racially segregated Jim Crow era to the present convey integrity of feeling and association. Post-1974 burials demonstrate the cemetery's enduring importance.

Archaeological Potential Statement

The John N. Smith Cemetery is closely related to the surrounding environment and landscape. Archaeological features produced by former fence lines, paths, and plantings, as well as materials that

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have accumulated through use of the cemetery over time, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the cemetery. Information concerning the evolution of African and African American cultural practices in Brunswick County and the wider southeastern United States can be obtained from the archaeological record. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the cemetery.

Important information may be gained through archaeological analysis of cemetery features. Grave markers and potential grave markers can provide information about the socioeconomic evolution of the Smithfield-Southport African American community. A material culture analysis of the surviving markers, along with archaeological investigations to identify graveside offerings and subsurface features associated with wood- and plant-marked plots and graves, can contribute to the broader understanding of African American funerary traditions over time, consumer behavior, and community networks. These objects and features may possess characteristics that illustrate pre- and post-emancipation African American cultural practices and traditions.

The presence of shells marking grave locations is a significant expression of African American cultural tradition. An archaeological analysis of the cemetery may reveal the existence of other funerary material traditions associated with African, African American, and Gullah Geechee culture, such as the use of personal items and water containers. As has been observed in South Carolina (Ingersall 1894), such objects may have become buried or misplaced over time.¹⁵ Spatial analysis of shells and other identified funerary artifacts can illustrate how members of the Smithfield-Southport African American community expressed their social identity, as well as show how they may have been influenced by other coastal African American communities through maritime networks. The artifacts themselves can be used to determine period of use, consumer habits, and material adaptations for personal, spiritual, and funerary use life. Analyses of specific shell characteristics may demonstrate seasonality of usage or trade networks.

Significant information can also be obtained from an archaeological and anthropological analysis of the location and grouping of graves, especially those that have been identified using ground-penetrating radar. As demonstrated by Jerome Handler (1996) and David Watters (1994), African American communities employed various strategies to group internments, such as segregation by age and social identity, thereby expressing familial and community ties.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ernest Ingersall, "Decoration of Negro Graves," *The Journal of American Folklore* 5, no. 16 (January-March 1892): 68-69.

¹⁶ Jerome S. Handler, "A Prone Burial from a Plantation Slave Cemetery in Barbados, West Indies: Possible Evidence for an African-type Witch or Other Negatively Viewed Person," *Historical Archaeology* 30, no. 3 (1996): 76-86; David R. Watters, "Mortuary Patterns at the Harney Site Slave Cemetery, Montserrat, in Caribbean Perspective," *Historical Archaeology* 28, no. 3 (1994): 56-73.

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In addition to having the potential to yield important information about the past, cemeteries and unmarked graves are protected by North Carolina General Statutes 65 and 70, and this should be considered in any future archaeological research, landscaping, or restoration activities in the cemetery.

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Section 8. Statement of Significance

John N. Smith Cemetery, Southport's only extant African American resource with origins in the Reconstruction era, meets Criteria Consideration D as the burial ground established in 1874 derives its primary significance from its age, manifestation of traditional African American burial practices, and the rarity of tangible resources representing the economic, social, and cultural history of Southport's black community from Reconstruction through the racially segregated Jim Crow era to the present. The cemetery possesses local significance under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Black Ethnic Heritage. John N. Smith Cemetery's creation and ongoing use manifests the perseverance and resilience of Southport's African American population despite the constraints of segregation. The cemetery was acquired in 1880 by trustees of what became St. James African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which was the town's only black congregation at that time. Interments encompass the full spectrum of African American society, from farmers to fishermen, factory workers, domestic servants, laborers, watermen, carpenters, masons, homemakers, funeral directors, pastors, merchants, nurses, midwives, doctors, and teachers. John N. Smith Cemetery is a particularly important tangible element of Southport's rich African American heritage as so many historic resources associated with Southport's black citizenry have been lost to new construction. The two-acre site, expanded by 1.5 acres in 1949 through the collective effort of Southport's five African American churches, served as the black community's sole communal burial ground until Northwood Cemetery, established in 1936 two blocks away, was integrated in 1974. The cemetery displays physical characteristics of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century African American burial grounds, including its layout, landscaping, and types of vernacular and professionally carved grave markers. The period of significance begins in 1874 with the earliest marked burial, that of cemetery namesake John N. Smith, and continues until Northwood Cemetery's 1974 integration. Although interments continue, the period after 1974 is not exceptionally significant.

The following historical background and context narratives reflect the fact that Southport was known as Smithville from 1792 until 1887.

John N. Smith Cemetery History

Southport's African American residents established five congregations—Browns Chapel A. M. E. Zion, Mt. Carmel A. M. E., St. James A. M. E. Zion, First Baptist, and Friendship Missionary Baptist—during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sanctuaries were built on small parcels without room for associated cemeteries. Therefore, many members were interred in

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Southport's communal African American burial ground, which had been in use since around 1874. The cemetery name references the earliest marked grave, that of John N. Smith (1840-1874).¹⁷

In December 1871, black Methodists, who had organized in 1866 the congregation that would later become St. James African Methodist Episcopal (A. M. E.) Zion Church, began erecting a sanctuary on West Street that included structural elements of the federal quarantine hospital at Deep Water Point. Julius Robinson served as pastor. In 1880, church trustees Gibb Davis, Nelson McCoy, Henry McNeal, and Solomon Reaves purchased a two-acre tract on Leonard Street containing Smithville's only communal African American burial ground.¹⁸ The sellers—Whitfield Griffin, his wife, Marietta Smith Griffin, and Henry Hankins—were entrepreneurial formerly enslaved people from Horry County, South Carolina. In addition to piloting a river boat, Whitfield Griffin was the constable of Mosquito Branch, a small community near Shallotte, and a founder of Mt. Carmel A. M. E. Church, organized in early 1890. That summer, he facilitated the acquisition of the white Trinity Methodist congregation's 1814 sanctuary and its move to North Lord Street, where the church, brick-veneered in the mid-twentieth century, remains.¹⁹

Browns Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church, organized in the 1880s, built a frame sanctuary on Jabbertown Road by 1898. A small associated graveyard is in the wooded area east of Leonard Street near its intersection with Jabbertown Road. There are no marked graves. It is likely that the graveyard was only briefly used in the late-nineteenth century.²⁰ A contingent of African American Baptists established First Baptist Church, led by Reverend Castilla Goodman, in 1908. Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, organized in 1921, constructed a frame sanctuary at 620 Clarendon Avenue in 1928.²¹ All five congregations remain active and have either remodeled or replaced their churches.

The congregations collectively subsidized John N. Smith Cemetery's mid-twentieth-century expansion. The committee of church representatives appointed to oversee the cemetery in 1949 added

¹⁷ Although historic deeds, maps, and newspaper accounts denote the burial ground as the "colored cemetery," oral tradition indicates that Southport's African American community has called it John N. Smith Cemetery since the late nineteenth century. Brunswick County Plat Book B1, p70A; Judy Gordon, email correspondence with Heather Fearnbach, April 20, 2021.

¹⁸ Brunswick County Deed Book Z, pp. 250-251; Carson, *Joshua's Dream*, 51; Reaves, *Southport, Volume I*, 58.

¹⁹ "Southport Locals," *Southport Leader*, April 3, 1890, p. 4, May 1, 1890, p.4, and July 31, 1890, p. 4; Bill Reaves, *Southport (Smithville): A Chronology, Volume II* (1887-1920) (Southport: Southport Historical Society, 1990), 25; U. S. Census, population schedule, 1870; John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc., "John N. Smith Cemetery," North Carolina Study List application, 2019.

²⁰ Southport Historical Society, "Browns Chapel A. M. E. Zion," Southport, NC African American Heritage Tour, <https://pocketsights.com/> (accessed May 2020); Brunswick County Geographic Information Systems Department, "Brunswick County Cemetery Map," <https://www.brunswickcountync.gov/gis/cemeteries/> (accessed in May 2020).

²¹ Carson, *Joshua's Dream*, 87; Southport Historical Society, "Friendship Missionary Baptist Church," Southport, NC African American Heritage Tour.

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1.5 acres to the property that year. Twenty-foot-square family plots were available for five dollars. John N. Smith Cemetery remained the sole burial ground for Southport's African American citizenry until Northwood Cemetery, established in 1936 two blocks away, was integrated in 1974. The grounds also served as a venue for Memorial Day and May Day commemorations. Southport's Memorial Day parade ends at John N. Smith Cemetery. American Legion members preside over Memorial Day ceremonies honoring veterans that draw large crowds. May Day, which involved dancing around a tall Maypole while wrapping it with colorful ribbons, is no longer observed.²²

John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc., established in 2011, has utilized grants, donations, and volunteer labor to subsidize research including oral history and historic photograph collection, maintenance and site improvements such as gravemarker repair and fence and signage installation, and ground-penetrating radar surveys conducted by New South Associates in 2017 and 2018.

Social History and Black Ethnic Heritage Context

Smithville, established in 1792 near Fort Johnston on the Cape Fear River, was named in honor of Revolutionary War general Benjamin Smith, who served as North Carolina's governor from 1810 until 1811. The village grew at a slow but steady pace after streets and half-acre lots were laid out in 1793. Escalating commerce, tourism, and the fort's expansion fueled economic development and population growth. Smithville was incorporated in 1805 and became Brunswick County's seat in 1808. Residency vacillated seasonally, encompassing by 1820 approximately three hundred year-round inhabitants and almost as many vacationers drawn by the pleasant climate.²³

Smithville was Brunswick County's principal nineteenth-century economic and social hub. The town's population grew to approximately 708 black (686 enslaved) and 717 white residents by 1850 and rose to around 972 black (956 enslaved) and 818 white inhabitants by 1860. The African American populace of three plantations and eighty-eight smaller farms near town was also sizable, as owners depended upon the labor of enslaved people, day laborers, and family members to facilitate the relentless cycle of tasks related to planting and harvesting fields, tending livestock, and erecting and maintaining farm buildings and structures.²⁴

²² ²² Judy Gordon, Emma Myles, and Wendell Watson of John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc., discussion with Heather Fearnbach, at Harper Library, Southport, on November 5, 2019.

²³ Susan S. Carson, *Joshua's Dream: The Story of Old Southport, a Town with Two Names* (Southport: Southport Historical Society, 1992), 26-34.

²⁴ Carson, *Joshua's Dream*, 38; U. S. Census, population and slave schedules, 1850 and 1860 (demographics calculated by Liz Fuller, Southport Historical Society, 2019).

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Rural dwellers, most of whom operated subsistence farms, frequented the town to socialize, address business matters, purchase locally made and imported commodities, and sell or trade surplus crops, agricultural products, and livestock that were shipped to markets in Wilmington and Fayetteville via the Cape Fear River. Rice was the primary cash crop and turpentine distillation the most lucrative industry through the mid-nineteenth century. Sweet potatoes and corn were grown in large quantities, while grain production was minimal. Manufacturing endeavors included processing corn, wheat, and logs to produce meal, flour, and lumber.²⁵

The great economic and social challenges wrought by the Civil War dramatically impacted the lives of North Carolinians and others throughout the divided nation. Smithville was blockaded by Union forces in 1861, but was not occupied until January 1865, when Confederates surrendered Fort Johnston to U. S. S. Monticello commander W. B. Cushing following the fall of Fort Fisher. Cushing's emancipation announcement inspired formerly enslaved residents to march through town. Federal troops remained for about four months, residing in the garrison and utilizing St. Philip's Chapel as a hospital.²⁶

In July 1865, black North Carolinians began receiving assistance from the newly created Freedmen's Bureau, which provided food, clothing, health care, education, and legal guidance during the early Reconstruction era. The bureau's Smithville office advised many formerly enslaved people as they sought employment in the town's fisheries, sawmills, and as carpenters, sailors, and domestic servants. St. Philip's Chapel briefly served as a freedmen's school. Smithville's population comprised 943 white and 640 black residents in 1870. African Americans built homes, churches, and businesses in the sparsely populated area north of downtown, where land farther from the river was more readily available and affordable, and established civic organizations such as Pythagoras Lodge #6 of the Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masons, which was constituted in September 1871. Two distinct black neighborhoods developed. The most sizable was west of North Howe Street, while a small number of dwellings flanked Jabbertown Road.²⁷ The high level of social and civic engagement demonstrated by neighborhood residents facilitated the 1880 creation and ongoing maintenance of the communal African American burial ground.

²⁵ J. D. B. Debow, superintendent, *The Seventh Census of the United States* (Washington; Robert Armstrong, 1853), 319, 321, Jennifer F. Martin and Cynthia de Miranda, *The Historic Architecture of Brunswick County, North Carolina* (Bolivia, North Carolina: Brunswick County Planning Department, 2014), 17.

²⁶ Carson, *Joshua's Dream*, 43, 49-50; Bill Reaves, *Southport (Smithville): A Chronology, Volume I (1520-1887)* (Wilmington: Barefoot Publishing Company, 1978), 47.

²⁷ Carson, *Joshua's Dream*, 51; Reaves, *Southport, Volume I*, 58; Carl Lounsbury, *The Architecture of Southport* (Southport: Southport Historical Society, 1979), 4; Martin and de Miranda, *Historic Architecture of Brunswick County*, 27; Donnie Joyner, Jabbertown Road resident, 2016 presentation at Southport Historical Society event.

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Smithville was a bustling town of 1,025 residents in 1880. Maritime occupations including fishing, shrimping, canning, boat building, and river navigation continued to employ much of the populace. Lumber and turpentine production rose in response to increased demand. Although labor-intensive rice cultivation declined, cotton, corn, and sweet potatoes were lucrative cash crops. Due to poor road conditions and the absence of railroad connectivity, the Cape Fear River and its tributaries remained the primary means of transporting people and goods. Smithville's function as North Carolina's southernmost port inspired its name change to Southport in 1887. Following the town's 1889 incorporation, the population burgeoned from 1,207 inhabitants in 1890 to 1,836 in 1900, fueling speculative construction. Southport Brick and Tile Company and Southport Lumber Company, both established in 1890, supplied building materials. Travelers and transient workers were accommodated at boarding houses, Hotel Brunswick, and the Smithville Hotel. Public schools enrolled 218 white and 140 black students in 1890. The small number of African American teachers included Franklin H. Gordon.²⁸

The dawn of the twentieth century heralded the beginning of an era of sweeping social and economic change. Southport flourished during the century's first decades. Black entrepreneurs Willie and Anna Lee McKenzie commissioned carpenter John Smith to construct two buildings, a refreshment parlor with a soda fountain and a dance hall (later a billiard room), in 1910. In addition to assisting with the confectionary's operation, Anna was a laundress.²⁹ The November 1911 completion of the twenty-eight-mile long portion of Wilmington, Brunswick, and Southern Railroad Company line from Navassa to Southport encouraged commercial and industrial expansion as well as tourism, especially after regular passenger service commenced the following year. Businesses including the Southport Ice Manufacturing Company, the Cape Fear Laundry and Manufacturing Company, and Carolina Coast Products opened in the early 1910s. Many African American residents were fishermen and factory workers, catching and processing menhaden, shrimp, clams, and oysters. At the Southport Fish Scrap and Oil Company factory, which began operating in spring 1915, menhaden were reduced to oil used in fabric waterproofing, linoleum, paint, soap, and tanning solution production, as well as dried scrap that became fertilizer and livestock feed. Also that spring, Doshier Brothers and William St. George erected a factory where almost one hundred men canned shrimp, fish, clams, and oysters. The 1915 construction boom included numerous dwellings throughout town as well as a new sanctuary for St. James A. M. E. Zion Church. During World War I, black and white citizens organized two Red Cross

²⁸ *Southport Leader*, April 17, 1890, October 30, 1890, June 25, 1891; William R. Merriam, director, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Population, Part I* (Washington, D. C.: United States Census Office, 1901), 467; Levi Branson, *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory 1890* (Raleigh: Levi Branson, 1889), 114; Reaves, *Southport, Volume II*, 32; Susan S. Carson and Jon C. Lewis, *Joshua's Legacy: Dream Makers of Old Southport* (Southport, N. C.: Southport Historical Society, 2003), 110-112.

²⁹ Carson, *Joshua's Dream*, 87; Southport Historical Society, "Mr. Willie's Ice Cream Parlor and Pool Hall," Southport, NC African American Heritage Tour; *State Port Pilot*, September 22, 1962.

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chapters and supported endeavors including bond drives, military registration, gardening, and resource conservation.³⁰

Southport's population dropped slightly to 1,664 in 1920. However, the town's thriving industry and commerce during the 1920s attracted new residents, resulting in a population increase to 1,760 by 1930. African American citizens continued to purchase property and erect modest dwellings in the town's north section. The cohesive neighborhood centered around North Howe Street included several churches, a small number of stores, and Brunswick County Training School, which was headed by J. H. Floyd beginning in August 1920.³¹ As the facility was by that time inadequate in size and condition, a one-story, weatherboarded, four-classroom school was erected on Lord Street in late 1921 at a cost of \$8,920, subsidized by the Brunswick County Board of Education (\$4,420), black (\$2,000) and white (\$1,300) donors, and the Rosenwald Fund (\$1,200). However, the newly finished building burned on January 24, 1922. The replacement one-story, weatherboarded, six classroom, \$11,374 structure completed in 1924 and one-classroom 1928 and two-classroom 1930 additions were also funded by state, local, and Rosenwald contributions.³² When Brunswick County Training School began offering a high school curriculum in August 1925, it became the county's only African American institution to enroll all eleven grades. Most other schools served first- through seventh-grade students. Bertha Bryant was the first high school graduate in May 1929. Prior to countywide busing, rural youth often boarded with Southport families.³³

In addition to their primary functions, Brunswick County Training School and neighborhood churches served as social venues, hosting a wide variety of civic events. Friendship Missionary Baptist Church,

³⁰ Merriam, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 467; Carson, *Joshua's Dream*, 95-96; Reaves, *Southport, Volume II*, 205, 238-239, 261; "Southport Daily," *Wilmington Morning Star*, March 31, 1915, p. 3; "Activity on Lower Cape Fear," *Fayetteville Weekly Observer*, April 14, 1915, p. 3; "Southport Factory Sells Many Shrimps," *News and Observer* (Raleigh), October 10, 1915, p. 19; Carson, *Joshua's Dream*, 101-103.

³¹ "Personals," *Rockingham Post-Dispatch*, August 5, 1920, p. 11; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Volume I* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1942), 775; Bill Reaves, *Southport (Smithville): A Chronology, Volume III (1920-1940)* (Southport: Southport Historical Society, 1996), 28.

³² The Rosenwald Fund, an organization devoted to improving educational venues for southern African American children, provided critical assistance to Brunswick County's black school construction initiative. The fund, in collaboration with local and state boards of education and private citizens, facilitated the completion of 813 North Carolina buildings, including schools, teachers' residences, and industrial education shops, between 1915 and 1932, more than in any other state. Eleven schools, all of which were one-story and weatherboarded, were erected in Brunswick County between 1921 and 1928. None are extant. "Brunswick County Schools," Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card File Database, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, 1917-1948, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections, Fisk University, <http://rosenwald.fisk.edu> (accessed in May 2020); "North Carolina Rosenwald Schools," <https://www.historysouth.org/rosenwaldhome/> (accessed May 2020).

³³ Reaves, *Southport, Volume III*, 77; Donnie Joyner, "Rosenwald Schools & It's Impact on the Education of Blacks in Brunswick County North Carolina in 1922 thru 1950," PowerPoint presentation for a Southport Historical Society meeting, 2015.

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organized in 1921, constructed a frame sanctuary at 620 Clarendon Avenue in 1928. New businesses in the late 1920s included U. S. Navy veteran E. E. “Bud” McCoy’s mortuary service. McCoy built lined pine coffins that were conveyed in a horse-drawn carriage until he acquired a hearse.³⁴

Southport’s growth slowed with the Great Depression’s early 1930s onset. Many businesses did not survive the economic downturn, and residents struggled to find work. The North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration (NCERA), the state’s first New Deal program that created jobs for unemployed citizens, attempted to mitigate the impact of economic hardship in Brunswick County by funding civic projects from 1932 to 1935 such as road and drainage improvements, mosquito control, garden and pasture creation, privy construction, erection of a Southport fish processing factory, oyster planting, surplus commodity distribution, jail repair, school additions and maintenance, and school lunchroom and library operation. The agency contributed \$287 toward the Brunswick County Training School expansion that involved moving two wings of the vacant white high school fronting Franklin Square to Lord Street in 1935 and 1936 to serve as agriculture and home economics classrooms. The Parent-Teacher Association also raised funds for that project. The Southport Colored Citizens League, established by William H. Brown, the proprietor of Brown’s Café on Leonard Street, and other African American activists in 1937, continued to advocate for school improvements.³⁵

The fishing industry experienced significant hardship in the early 1930s due to a dramatic decline in demand that triggered closure of two of Southport’s three fish processing plants, but employment opportunities improved as the decade progressed. In addition to fishing, shrimping, and other maritime occupations, Southport’s black residents worked in the building trades, and as barbers, beauticians, domestic servants, merchants, midwives, restaurant owners, and teachers. Entrepreneur Dollie Evans grew vegetables and cut firewood to sell at her North Howe Street grocery store, which served as a community gathering place.³⁶ The NCERA and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) reduced food preservation costs by building facilities where residents could bring their own food and tins and collaborate on the canning process.³⁷

³⁴ *State Port Pilot*, September 22, 1962; Southport Historical Society, “Friendship Missionary Baptist Church,” and “McCoy-Green Funeral Home,” Southport, NC African American Heritage Tour.

³⁵ J. S. Kirk, Walter A. Cutter and Thomas W. Morse, eds. *Emergency Relief in North Carolina: A Record of the Development and Activities of the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, 1932-1935* (Raleigh: North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, 1936), 456; “There at Last,” *State Port Pilot*, April 1, 1935; “Moving Two Wings Old School Building,” *State Port Pilot*, April 24, 1935; Reaves, *Southport, Volume III*, 185; Southport Historical Society, “Advocating for Change,” African American Heritage Exhibit, Fort Johnston – Southport Museum and Visitor Center, 2019.

³⁶ “Menhaden Fishing to Open Up Soon,” *News and Observer*, April 28, 1936, p. 12; Southport Historical Society. “Miss Dollie’s Store/Dance Hall/Wood Yard,” Southport, NC African American Heritage Tour; Carson and Lewis, *Joshua’s Legacy*, 170-172, 176-179.

³⁷ Anita Price Davis; *North Carolina During the Great Depression: A Documentary Portrait of a Decade* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2003), 104.

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Federal census records indicate that Southport had the same number of residents—1,760—in 1930 and 1940, reflecting the economy’s stagnation.³⁸ As North Carolinians rose to the challenges of World War II in the early 1940s, Southport’s black and white citizens were among the approximately 110 Brunswick County residents who served in the military.³⁹ Those left behind were occupied with the war effort in a variety of ways, from rationing and participating in bond and salvage drives to filling positions at factories. The North Carolina Shipbuilding Company’s Wilmington shipyard, constructed in 1941 to fulfill orders for the Maritime Commission and U.S. Navy, provided employment for many Southport residents, as did Fort Caswell’s development to serve as a naval training facility and submarine tracking station. Elias G. “Nehi” Gore, known as the gentle giant due to his seven-foot-eleven-inch height, was a menhaden fisherman until becoming a driller at the Wilmington shipyard in February 1943. Wilmington, Brunswick, and Southern Bus Lines, incorporated in September 1943, supplied transportation to area factories and military installations.⁴⁰ Worker demographics changed as industrial jobs rose by seventy-five percent in the South over the course of World War II, with traditionally underemployed groups such as women, African Americans, and the elderly receiving invaluable education, training, and experience. Output soared after May 1943, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Office of War Mobilization to coordinate a diverse array of support endeavors including manufacturing, scientific research, and agricultural production.⁴¹

Following the war, more efficient equipment and mechanization boosted fish and shrimp processing factory production. The economy remained strong until a short recession in 1948-1949 that was counteracted by the Korean War’s onset in 1950. The United States Army began planning the construction of a munitions transfer facility adjacent to the Cape Fear River north of Southport in 1951. Now called Military Ocean Terminal at Sunny Point, the installation has been an economic boon for Brunswick County since its October 1955 opening. The terminal serves as the primary Atlantic coast ammunition, supply, equipment, and personnel transfer point for United States forces worldwide. Lucrative jobs at the facility significantly improved the economic security of many Southport residents. African American employees of the Sunny Point terminal and the State Port in Wilmington chartered the International Longshoreman’s Association of Southport in 1956.⁴²

³⁸ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Volume I*, 775.

³⁹ Spencer B. King Jr., *Selective Service in North Carolina in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1949), 321.

⁴⁰ Carson, *Joshua’s Dream*, 125-129; Carson and Lewis, *Joshua’s Legacy*, 199-201; Reaves, *Volume IV*, 33; “Big Un’ and Little Un’,” *North Carolina Shipbuilder*, May 1, 1943, p. 6.

⁴¹ Marilyn M. Harper, et. al. *World War II and the American Home Front* (Washington, D. C.: The National Historic Landmarks Program, October 2007), 3, 13-16.

⁴² Reaves, *Southport, Volume IV*, 114, 151; Carson, *Joshua’s Dream*, 136; Southport Historical Society, “International Longshoreman’s Association,” Southport, NC African American Heritage Tour.

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Opportunities for steady employment were particularly important in the 1950s as the area recovered from the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Hazel on October 15, 1954, and Hurricane Helene, on September 27, 1958. Both decimated the east coast. Southport's docks, waterfront seafood packing houses, numerous restaurants and stores, and approximately half of the town's dwellings were obliterated during Hurricane Hazel. The damage wrought by Hurricane Helene was even more severe. Some important buildings within the African American neighborhood, such as the 1950 First Baptist Church at 619 North Lord Street, weathered both storms. The St. James A. M. E. Zion congregation was not as fortunate. Although an almost-finished annex encompassing Sunday school classrooms, a fellowship hall, and a kitchen survived Hurricane Helene, the sanctuary was destroyed. The congregation held services in Brunswick County Training School's auditorium until a new sanctuary was completed. Reverend G. F. Burney presided at the reconstituted building's 1960 dedication.⁴³

Despite sustaining storm damage, black-owned businesses prospered in the 1950s. Many establishments were clustered near the intersection of Howe and St. George streets and served as gathering places. Hi-Way Dry Cleaners, opened by Dexter Clemmons during World War II and known as the "pressing club," replaced its frame North Howe Street building with a brick structure in 1956.⁴⁴

Southport's population rose from 1,748 in 1950 to 2,034 in 1960. In order to accommodate growing numbers of youth at Brunswick County Training School, the Brunswick County Board of Education utilized state appropriations and funds from school bond issuance to erect a brick classroom building and a gymnasium in 1957.⁴⁵ The institution offered a wide range of academic and vocational courses to a large student body and enjoyed high graduation rates. Principal A. C. Caviness and his faculty promoted scholastic excellence and encouraged participation in extracurricular activities that provided much more than recreation. Such activities built leadership and teamwork skills and exposed students to opportunities beyond their rural community. Youth participated in band, chorus, drill team, student government, and honor society; literary, journalism, drama, science, math, and history clubs; future farmers, homemakers, and teachers associations; and published a newspaper. Cheerleaders encouraged the basketball and baseball teams. The agriculture and industrial arts departments taught subjects including farm administration, crop cultivation, fertilization, erosion control, livestock care, and

⁴³ Reaves, *Southport, Volume IV*, 142-143, 156, 170; "Carolina Ripped Beneath Helene's Destructive Blow," *Victoria Advocate* (Texas), September 28, 1958, pp. 1A, BA; "St. James A. M. E. Zion Church," *The Whittlers Bench* (Southport Historical Society newsletter), September 1990, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁴ Southport Historical Society, "Dexter Clemmon's Hi-Way Cleaners," "First Baptist Church," Southport, NC African American Heritage Tour.

⁴⁵ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *U. S. Census of Population: 1960, Volume I, Characteristics of the Population, Part A, Number of Inhabitants* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 35-15; Martin and de Miranda, *Historic Architecture of Brunswick County*, 16; "State Education Board Allocates Funds," *News and Observer*, May 5, 1950, p. 32.

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building maintenance and construction that were critically important in a rural county. The home economics department equipped young women with household management skills. Community adults benefited from agricultural extension service programs, veterans training, and farm mechanics classes. The campus was renamed Brunswick County High School in July 1963.⁴⁶

The Southport chapter of the National Association for Colored People, established in November 1962, demanded desegregation of the city's departments, programs, and venues including hospitals, schools, recreational facilities, and privately-owned concerns such as stores, restaurants, and hotels/motels.⁴⁷ The chapter was successful in many instances as they encouraged local business owners and service providers to integrate facilities and hire African American employees. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 codified these mandates at the federal level. Although the act mandated school integration as a prerequisite for federal funding eligibility, it was not until the late 1960s that the Brunswick County Board of Education, like most North Carolina school systems, completely integrated school districts. Brunswick County's freedom-of-choice plan, enacted in 1967 as an attempt to allow parents to choose which schools their children would attend, was ineffective. Furthermore, a federal court judge ruled such plans unconstitutional and an invalid means of desegregating schools in 1968.⁴⁸ Brunswick County High School's August 1969 integration was precipitated by a fire that rendered the white Southport High School uninhabitable. The school names were combined to foster solidarity, but the transition was fraught with tension. Dissension regarding the graduation ceremony's location led to a decision to cancel the formal event. Diplomas were distributed individually. Principal A. C. Caviness retired in June 1970. Brunswick County Southport High School's last class graduated in June 1972, after which the campus served as Brunswick County Middle School until a new building was erected. Brunswick Community College's Southport Center has occupied the campus since 1979, offering arts, crafts, and cultural heritage courses and workshops.⁴⁹

Integration victories had social, economic, and political repercussions that reshaped Southport's African American community. As public and private establishments were desegregated, patronage of black businesses declined and the once vibrant North Howe Street commercial district began to deteriorate. Historic buildings in that area and throughout town have been lost to new construction, especially after Southport became a retirement destination in the late twentieth century. The African American population has dwindled; comprising only 368 of the city's estimated 3,183 residents in

⁴⁶Judy Gordon, Emma Myles, and Wendell Watson of John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc., discussion with Heather Fearnbach, at Harper Library, Southport, on November 5, 2019.

⁴⁷ Reaves, *Southport, Volume IV*, 183.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1992), 171-173; Anne Silverstein, "'Everybody pulled together' at blacks' Brunswick County School," *Wilmington Star*, July 22, 1985, p. 1D.

⁴⁹ Reaves, *Southport, Volume IV*, 186, 198, 244; "No Graduation Exercises Set for Southport," *News and Observer*, June 4, 1970, p. 27.

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2018.⁵⁰ John N. Smith Cemetery, Southport's only extant African American resource with origins in the Reconstruction era, is thus a particularly significant tangible resource representing the economic, social, and cultural history of Southport's black community from Reconstruction through the racially segregated Jim Crow era to the present. The burial ground's creation and ongoing use manifests the perseverance and resilience of Southport's African American population despite the constraints of segregation.

African American Burial Ground Context

In antebellum rural North Carolina, free blacks and enslaved people were typically buried in segregated cemeteries in small towns and on farms and plantations. Graves often had ephemeral wood or uncut fieldstone markers that do not survive. Brunswick County's 2010 cemetery survey indicates that English Field, a site north of Ninth Avenue at its junction with Maple Street in Southport, served as a black burial ground through the mid-nineteenth century. The number of burials is unknown, as graves are unmarked and archaeological investigation has not been undertaken. Southport's oldest cemetery, Old Smithville Burying Grounds on Rhett Street, created soon after the town's 1792 founding, was utilized only for white interments. The Morse Plantation cemetery (also called Davis Cemetery) on Claredon Avenue contains twenty-two white and no known African American burials.⁵¹

After the Civil War, deceased African Americans were interred in family cemeteries, graveyards associated with newly erected churches, or community burial grounds. The small abandoned graveyard in the wooded area east of Leonard Street near its intersection with Jabbertown Road, established by members of the Browns Chapel A. M. E. Zion congregation, organized in the 1880s, is one example of this trend. There are no marked graves. It is likely that the graveyard was only briefly used in the late-nineteenth century.⁵² The front-gable brick mid-twentieth-century Browns Chapel A. M. E. Zion Church, which replaced a frame 1898 sanctuary, is located three-quarters-of-a-mile to the west at 745 Jabbertown Road.

John N. Smith Cemetery exemplifies the newfound agency of Southport's African American residents during Reconstruction. The burial ground, in use since around 1874, was acquired in 1880 by trustees of what became St. James African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, then the town's only black congregation. Interments encompass the full spectrum of African American society, from farmers to fishermen, factory workers, domestic servants, laborers, watermen, carpenters, masons, homemakers,

⁵⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2018.

⁵¹ Brunswick County Geographic Information Systems Department, "Brunswick County Cemetery Map," <https://www.brunswickcountync.gov/gis/cemeteries/> (accessed in May 2020); Brunswick County Planning and Development and Geographic Information Systems Departments, "Unincorporated Communities and Cemeteries, Brunswick County, North Carolina," September 2010, appendix 3, pp. 6-7.

⁵² Ibid.

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funeral directors, pastors, merchants, nurses, midwives, doctors, and teachers. John N. Smith Cemetery thus represents the black community's economic, social, and cultural development from Reconstruction through the racially segregated Jim Crow era to the present. The two-acre site, expanded by 1.5 acres in 1949 through the collective effort of Southport's five African American churches, remained the sole community burial ground for the black population until Northwood Cemetery established in 1936 two blocks away, was integrated in 1974.

Ground-penetrating radar surveys conducted by New South Associates in 2017 and 2018 indicate that John N. Smith Cemetery contained approximately 1,722 burials as of 2018. Although most (1,243) gravesites are unmarked, shallow depressions indicate some locations. Some unmarked late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century graves likely had simple wood or uncut fieldstone markers that are ephemeral in nature. Marked interments flank the unpaved central drive, with flat and upright fieldstone, granite, marble, and concrete headstones arranged in linear north-south rows. Most marked graves are in the cemetery's south section, which was acquired in 1949 and therefore contains the most recent burials, and all but two have east-west orientation as typical in the Christian tradition. A few headstones are leaning or broken in the more open north section. Marker type, style, material, and size reflects the economic means of those interred, cultural practices, and funerary art design trends, resulting in an eclectic array of grave treatments. In many cases, modest markers have been replaced or supplemented with more elaborate headstones.

Conch and oyster shells ornament some graves, manifesting a West African burial tradition that was disseminated throughout the southern United States. Folklorist John Michael Vlach attributes the custom to the Congolese belief that bleached shells and other white or reflective grave decorations allude to water beneath which the afterworld is located.⁵³ The practice is prevalent in North Carolina's coastal plain, where thousands of Africans were enslaved on plantations. Other Brunswick County cemeteries with shell-embellished grave mounds include Pleasant View Cemetery on Old Georgetown Road in Sunset Beach, Mears Cemetery on Davis Creek Drive in Navassa, Riley Hewett Cemetery, Turkey Trap Road SW in Cedar Grove, and St. Thomas Cemetery on Chappell Loop in the Belville vicinity.⁵⁴ Brunswick County is located within the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, established in 2006 by the U. S. Congress to recognize the distinctive Gullah Geechee culture in the coastal areas and sea islands of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. African Americans throughout the corridor continue to perpetuate African-influenced grave decoration traditions.

⁵³ John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 163.

⁵⁴ Martin and de Miranda, *Historic Architecture of Brunswick County*, 99, 107, 119, 130.

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Section 10. Geographical Data

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Latitude: 33.925813 / Longitude: -78.018554

Verbal Boundary Description

John N. Smith Cemetery's approximately four-acre National Register boundary encompasses all of 3.54-acre Brunswick County tax parcel pin number 209612757473 as well as the triangular 0.03 acre-parcel (PIN # 209612757155) at its southwest end, which contains ten interments and the west section of the south cemetery fence; the adjacent wedge-shaped north 0.17-acre portion of the City of Southport's 2.87 acre tract (PIN# 209616841605) that spans East Leonard Street (the 0.17-acre portion contains the east section of the south cemetery fence, the entrance drive, cemetery signage, and parking); the City of Southport's 0.08-acre right-of-way between the wedge-shaped parcel's south edge and the street pavement; and the City of Southport's Cape Harbor Drive right-of-way between the cemetery's west fence and the street pavement, a long, narrow, rectangular, approximately 0.22-acre area. Eight unmarked burials are in the right-of-way just south of the northwest entrance. The boundary is shown with a bold line on the enclosed map. Scale 1" = 100'

Boundary Justification

The National Register boundary contains all of the acreage and identified interments historically associated with John N. Smith Cemetery, as well as access to the cemetery from East Leonard Street and Cape Harbor Drive.

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Historic Photographs



**Ruby Smith Howe (at left, above, and below) and Sarah Howe tending graves at
John N. Smith Cemetery circa 1950**

Photograph from the collection of John N. Smith Cemetery Restoration and Preservation, Inc.



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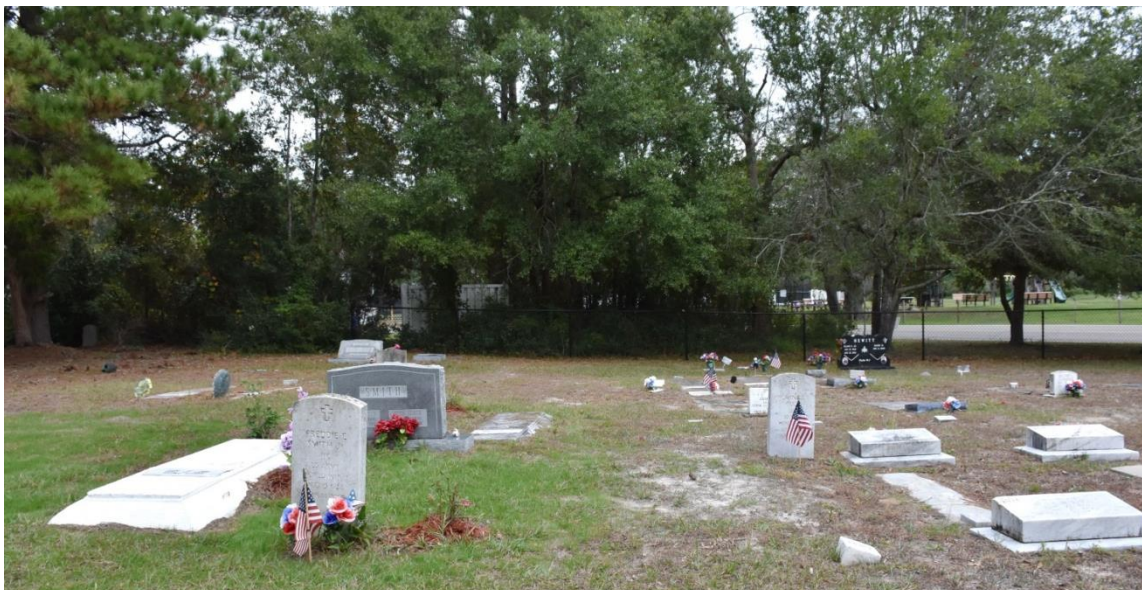
Section number Photos Page 29 John N. Smith Cemetery
Brunswick County, NC

Current Photographs

All current photographs by Heather Fearnbach, Fearnbach History Services, Inc., 3334 Nottingham Road, Winston-Salem, NC, on November 5, 2019. Digital images located at the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office in Raleigh.



1. Looking north at John N. Smith Cemetery entrance (above) 2. Looking east in southeast section (below)



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3. Looking west in southwest section (above) and 4. Looking west in central east section (below)



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5. Looking east in north section (above)

6. Headstones of Kittie Smith (1827-1876, left) and John N. Smith (1840-1874) (below)



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**7. Looking west from Frink family plot in southwest section (above)
8. Looking south from central drive (below)**



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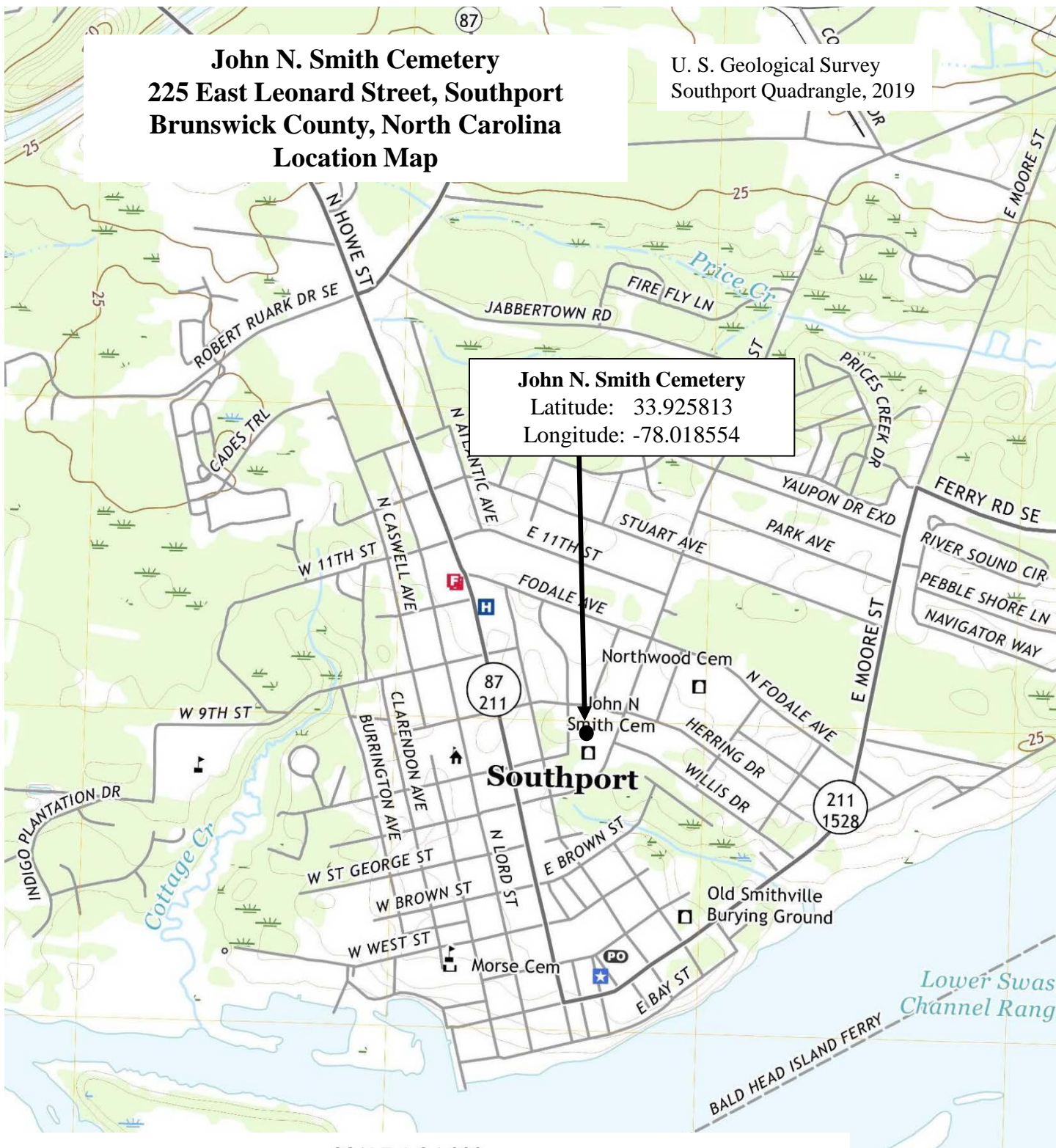


9. Looking north from shell-covered graves of Sarah Ann Gillespie Howe (1889-1965) and Wellington C. Howe Jr. (1875-1928)

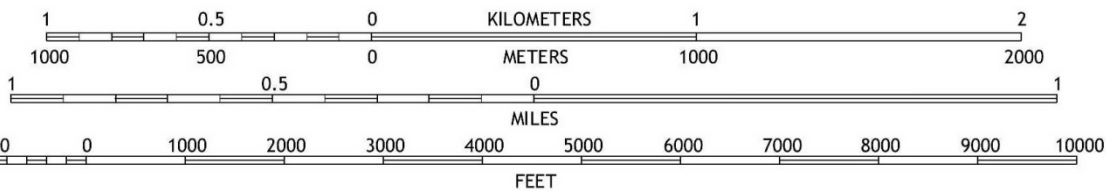
John N. Smith Cemetery
225 East Leonard Street, Southport
Brunswick County, North Carolina
Location Map

U. S. Geological Survey
Southport Quadrangle, 2019

John N. Smith Cemetery
Latitude: 33.925813
Longitude: -78.018554



SCALE 1:24 000



John N. Smith Cemetery
225 East Leonard Street
Southport, Brunswick County, North Carolina
National Register Boundary Map and Photograph Key

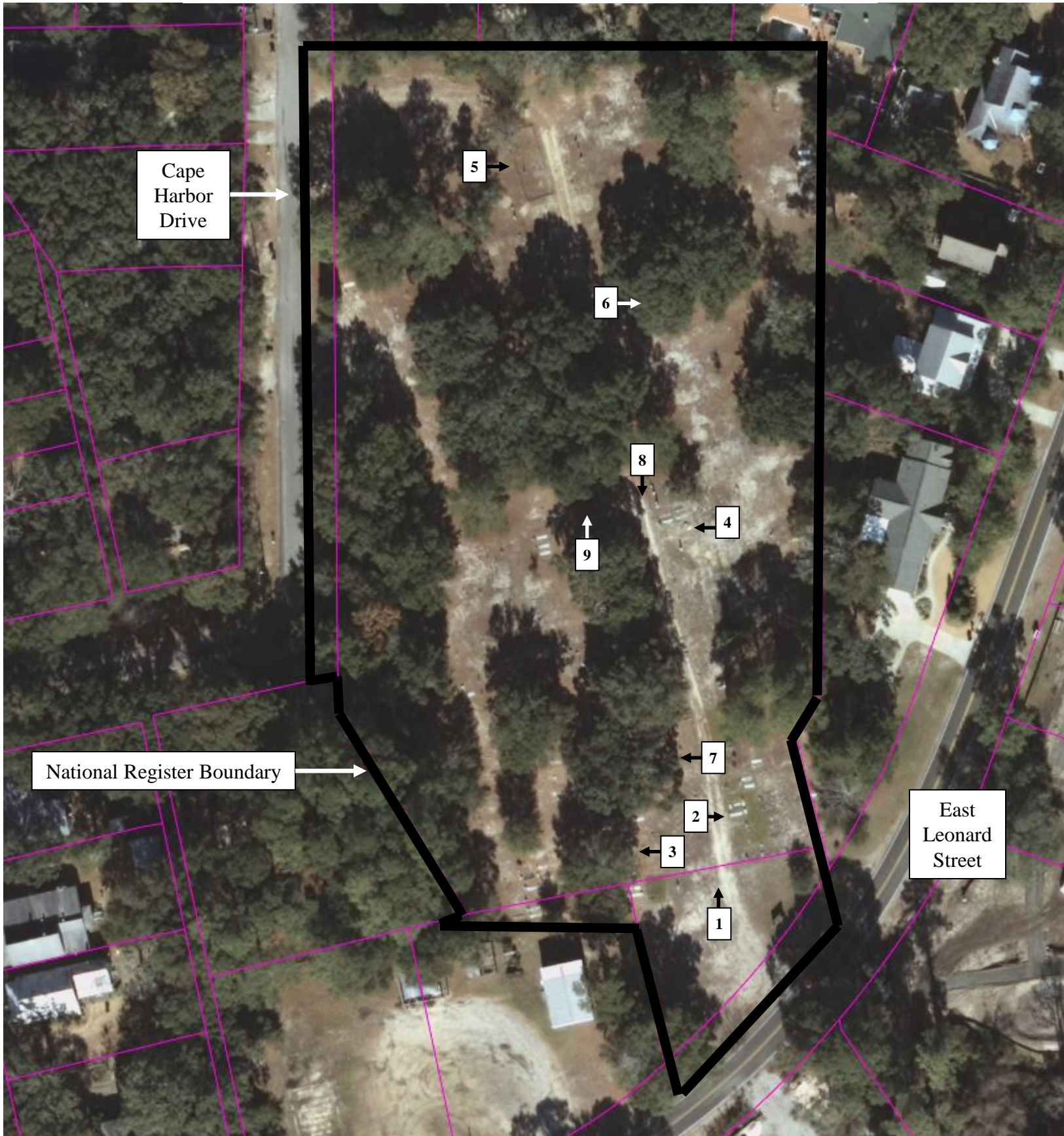
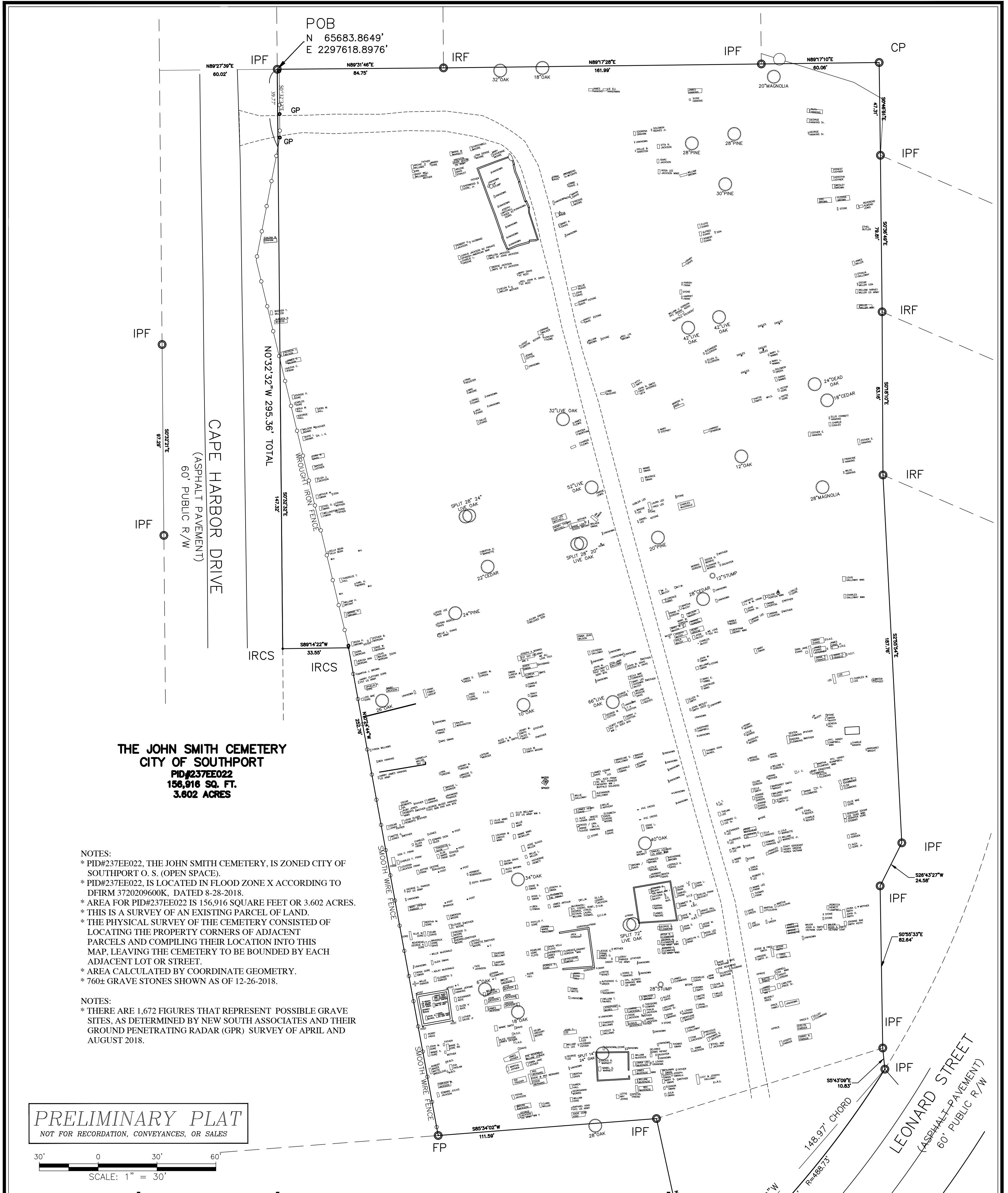


Exhibit 1

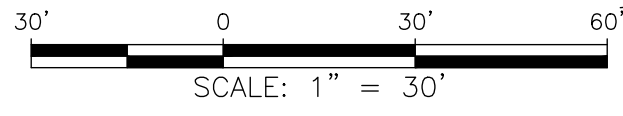


THE JOHN SMITH CEMETERY
CITY OF SOUTHPORT
PID#237EE022
156,916 SQ. FT.
3.602 ACRES

- NOTES:
- * PID#237EE022, THE JOHN SMITH CEMETERY, IS ZONED CITY OF SOUTHPORT O. S. (OPEN SPACE).
 - * PID#237EE022, IS LOCATED IN FLOOD ZONE X ACCORDING TO DFIRM 3720209600K, DATED 8-28-2018.
 - * AREA FOR PID#237EE022 IS 156,916 SQUARE FEET OR 3.602 ACRES.
 - * THIS IS A SURVEY OF AN EXISTING PARCEL OF LAND.
 - * THE PHYSICAL SURVEY OF THE CEMETERY CONSISTED OF LOCATING THE PROPERTY CORNERS OF ADJACENT PARCELS AND COMPILING THEIR LOCATION INTO THIS MAP, LEAVING THE CEMETERY TO BE BOUNDED BY EACH ADJACENT LOT OR STREET.
 - * AREA CALCULATED BY COORDINATE GEOMETRY.
 - * 760± GRAVE STONES SHOWN AS OF 12-26-2018.

- NOTES:
- * THERE ARE 1,672 FIGURES THAT REPRESENT POSSIBLE GRAVE SITES, AS DETERMINED BY NEW SOUTH ASSOCIATES AND THEIR GROUND PENETRATING RADAR (GPR) SURVEY OF APRIL AND AUGUST 2018.

PRELIMINARY PLAT
 NOT FOR RECORDATION, CONVEYANCES, OR SALES



NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION	BY

The John Smith Cemetery
 CITY OF SOUTHPORT
 SMITHVILLE TOWNSHIP BRUNSWICK COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA
CEMETERY SURVEY

WithersRavenel
 Engineers | Planners | Surveyors
 115 MacKenan Drive | Cary, NC 27511 | t: 919.469.3340
 license #: C-0832 | www.withersravenel.com

Exhibit 2

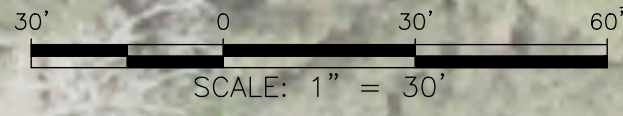


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PRELIMINARY PLAT
 NOT FOR RECORDATION, CONVEYANCES, OR SALES



NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION	BY

The John Smith Cemetery
 CITY OF SOUTHPORT

SMITHVILLE TOWNSHIP BRUNSWICK COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA

CEMETERY SURVEY



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