

Few Black Owned Cemeteries In State Of North Carolina

by Teresa Burns
Post Staff Writer

There is only a few, maybe two or three, black owned cemeteries in the entire state of North Carolina. And one is located in Charlotte; Beatties Ford Memorial Gardens.

It's actual development began in 1971, but the purchasing of the land started off as an investment by six men.

It was decided between the six stockholders, Luther Caldwell, Jesse Young, Kenneth Powell, Venton Caldwell, Malachi Green and Romeo Alexander that the community needed another cemetery.

"We felt that the community should have another choice, rather than be buried at city owned cemeteries," Luther Caldwell, president of the Gardens, said.

So today, eleven of the 50 acres have been fully developed into distinct gardens; Garden of Our Savior which has a statue of Christ, and Garden of Our Cross with a cross on the front garden.

The land is located six miles from I-85 toward Lake Norman. But don't let that distance be misleading, Caldwell has explicit references and he knows exactly where each plot is.

"All cemeteries as a rule don't make mistakes because of the system they use. Everytime we bury a person there are cross references to check. When all correspond you know it's right. It's pretty hard to make a mistake because we know what the repercussions will be," Caldwell explained.

Mistakes are usually made by young businesses, but in Beatties Gardens' case many obstacles were avoided.

"A cemetery is one business not discussed very much. There's virtually no information at the County Court House about opening a cemetery. I took my attorney and went to Raleigh to the burial commissioner," Caldwell began. "We asked the questions and the commissioner gave advice." For instance, a perpetual cemetery must have at least 30 acres of land. And since Beatties is a perpetual garden they must keep up the grounds, instead of the state.

There have been two or three instances where someone thought their relative was buried somewhere else. In one particular case the grave was dug up. The efficiency of Beatties Gardens prevailed - that was the correct grave site.

The Gardens has unique



A beautiful scene of the entrance to Beatties Ford Memorial Gardens, which includes more than 50 acres that will eventually be expanded.

qualities also; Caldwell always marks the grave sites; they sell grave markers; and the marked places are on bases.

"The bases make the cemetery uniform and it looks nicer," Caldwell noted.

RIISING COST

"The cost of a plot, in a round figure, has roughly gone up 60 percent since 1971," Caldwell explained.

"The people who don't buy now don't know what they'll be buying 10 years from now," he continued.

According to Caldwell, lots can never go up once you start payment on them because there are no taxes on them. And the cost is not much - if you are on a gradual payment schedule.

"There's a small down payment and the payments are less than a Coke a day," Caldwell said.

But if you wait for someone to die, "You have to pay for it right then," ac-

ording to the president of the Gardens.

A single plot can cost a minimum of \$150 and a maximum of \$200 at Beatties Gardens. And that doesn't include the opening cost.

Presently, over 1,000 people are buried in Beatties Gardens and business is good. Several families, black and white, are buying multiple lots. So what happens to a lot if all six owners of the Gardens die?

The Gardens has an Escrow Fund that guarantees permanent plots. The fund is at First Union National

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Bank and will never be taken out. "It's there to protect all of the people who buy lots and lots deeded to them." Caldwell began, "It assures people who buy, that their lots will always be taken care of."

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