

February 4, 1933

City of Tampa buys a 40-acre parcel at 56th St. & Robles Ave. (now Sligh Ave.). Three acres on west edge are set aside for 56th St. widening, so parcel is often referred to as 37 or 38 acres. King High's campus is now located on this land. In 1937, City Council directs city engineer to lay out 5 acres in northeast part of land for a "pauper's cemetery" or "Potter's Field" to bury indigent residents, based on city and county records.

1942 to 1954

The City of Tampa names the cemetery at 56th & Sligh "Ridgewood" in 1942. City burial records and news reports from the era indicate 230 or more indigent residents are buried at the cemetery from 1942-1954. Nearly all burials are African-American individuals. A 1950 aerial photo of the land where the King High campus is now located shows no clearly discernable trails, disturbances or activity on the land.

April 24, 1957

The City of Tampa discusses trading or selling the land to the School District of Hillsborough County, based on news coverage at the time. Instead, Mayor Nick Nuccio personally arranges sale of the land to Watmoh, Inc.—a company made up of local investors—for \$55,854 (around \$1,500 per acre, based on the 37 acres of the land not reserved for 56th St. widening). Nuccio notes the land includes a cemetery.

May 29, 1957

Watmoh officially buys the land, with the deed clearly stating the buyer is responsible for the care or disposition of the "pauper cemetery" on the land. News coverage elaborates that the "one-acre Ridgewood Cemetery" is on the land, but is "no longer used" for burials.

1957 to 1959

The School Board remains interested in building a new high school on the land. During the time Watmoh owns it, there is no indication in the historical record that any remains were moved to any other site. An aerial photo from 1957 shows trails in the northeast and southern parts of the property, but no clear signs of previous burials or other identifiable activity.

April 9, 1959

Hired by the School Board, appraiser Roy Yates says a past map & deed show a "Potters Field" starting about "470 [feet] east of the southeast corner of the property" and measuring 165 ft. wide (along the south property line) and 285 ft. deep (going north into the property)—about one acre in all. After walking the area, Yates says the area looks unused, and "there is no indication that an interment has ever been made."

April 9, 1959 (cont.)

As it is written in the appraisal, the cemetery would not be on school property. But, if the appraiser meant to write "east of the southwest corner of the property" or "west of the southeast corner," the cemetery would be located near the center of the southern part of the property. It is notable the appraiser mixes up "Southeast" and "Southwest" in other unrelated sections of the appraisal.

April 20, 1959

In a letter to the School Board, Realtor A.D. Williams says Watmoh is now prepared to sell the land to the school district. The proposal is that the district will pay for 37 acres, but will get a deed from Watmoh to all 40 acres. The letter recommends the district move quickly to purchase the property and that there is a known potter's field about an acre in size in the rear of the property.

April 21, 1959

The School District of Hillsborough County agrees to buy the land from Watmoh at double the price Watmoh paid for it in 1957, paying \$111,000 (\$3,000 per acre for 37 acres). The 1959 deed uses identical language from the 1957 deed to clearly state the buyer is responsible for the care or disposition of the "pauper cemetery" on the land.

1959 to 1960

Construction of King High School takes place, with the school opening in Fall 1960. An aerial photo from 1968 shows the entire parcel was developed or built on, except for a few acres near the central southern edge of the property—the same general area that would have been the location of the cemetery if the appraiser made an error on "east" or "west."

Between 1968 & 1973

Paved basketball courts are added just southeast of the center of the King High campus, based on aerial photos. A few dozen square feet of the courts overlap one of the possible cemetery areas (if the appraiser had meant to write "west of the southeast corner").

Between 1976 & 1980

A clay softball infield, a small permanent workshop, animal enclosures and about one acre of agricultural fields are added in the area that had been left undeveloped when the school was first built, based on aerial photos.

Between 1980 & 1984

The school district purchases an additional 12-acre parcel to the east of King High School to provide room for expansion, based on an appraisal from late 1980 and aerial photos. This additional land currently houses the school's baseball and softball stadiums.

October 17, 2019

Resident Ray Reed shares records with School Board Chair Tamara Shamburger indicating a possible cemetery on the King High campus. After brief preliminary research, the school district announces a plan to hire a geotechnical firm to scan beneath the surface the following week.

October 23, 2019

Ground Penetrating Radar or "GPR" scanning is set to begin in the southern part of the King High campus, in an area surrounded by temporary fencing.

1933-1937 – Origins

In 1933, the City of Tampa buys a 40-acre parcel at 56th St. & Robles Avenue (now Sligh Avenue).

Three acres on west edge set aside for 56th St. widening, so parcel is often referred to as 37 or 38 acres.

King High's campus is now located on this land.

In 1937, part of the land is designated for a "pauper's cemetery" or "Potter's Field" to bury indigent residents, based on city and county records.

Tampa, Florida
February 23rd, 1937

To the Honorable President and
Members of the Board of Representatives,
Tampa, Florida.

Gentlemen:

We, the Parks and Cemeteries Committee, beg to report that we have considered the matter of burial of paupers and find that it is necessary that the Robles cemetery tract be used for this purpose, and it is the recommendation of this Committee that the City Engineer be directed to lay off a suitable plot of approximately five (5) acres in a reasonable and proper arrangement in the Northeast corner of said Robles tract for use as burial place for the pauper dead.

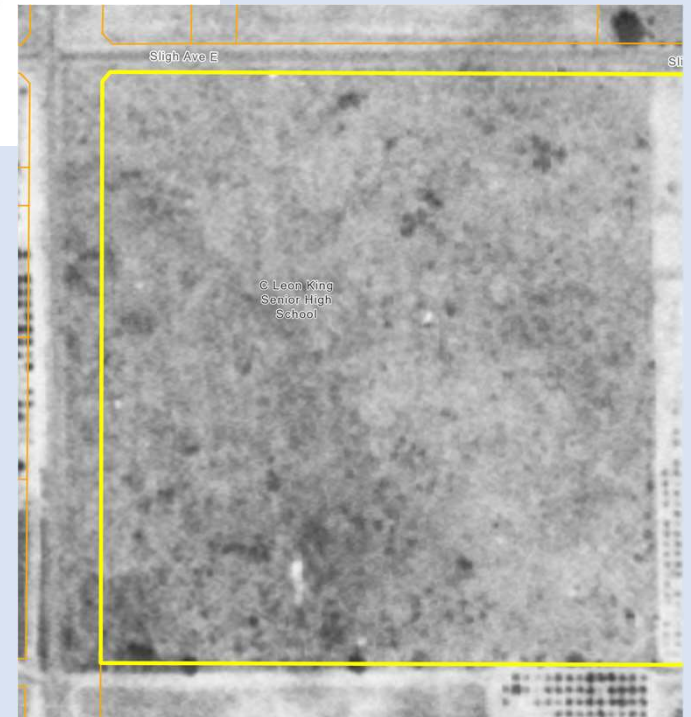
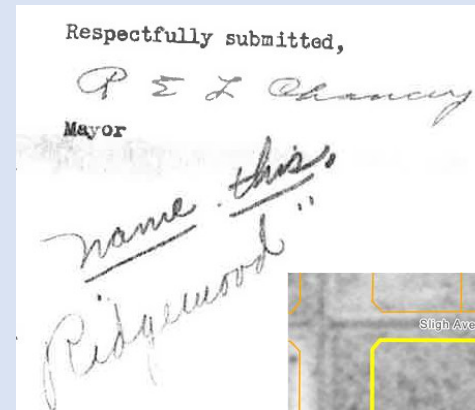
1942-1954 – Burials

In 1942, burials begin and the cemetery is named "Ridgewood."

City burial records and news reports from the era indicate 230 or more indigent residents are buried at the cemetery from 1942-1954.

Nearly all burials are African-American individuals.

A 1950 aerial photo of the land where the King High campus is now located shows no clearly discernable trails, disturbances or activity on the land.

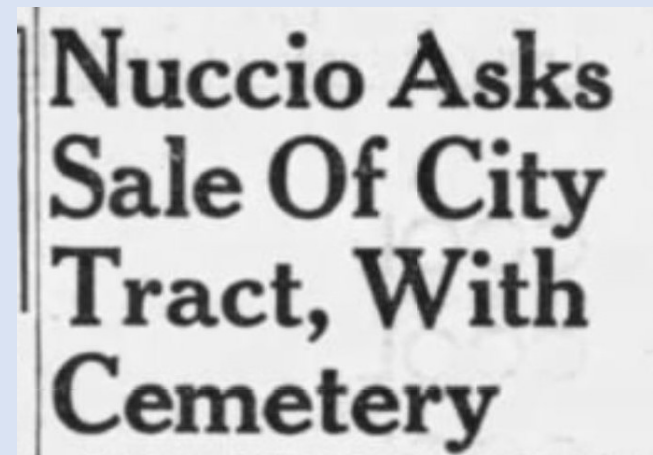


1957-1959 – Land sale

The city sells the land to a group of local investors in 1957, who then sell it to the school district in 1959.

The only sign in the historical record that remains may have been moved are genealogical records showing people buried at Ridgewood later listed as being at Woodlawn Cemetery.

We have found no other records or coverage of what would have been a significant effort to find and remove the remains of more than 200 people.

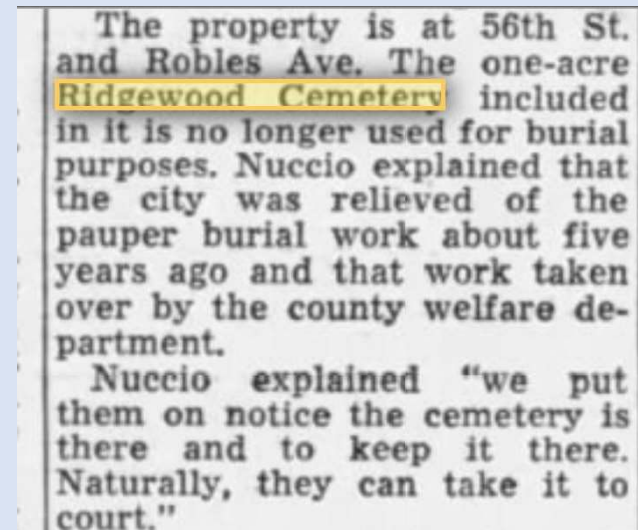


1957-1959 – Cemetery discussed

In news coverage at the time, Mayor Nick Nuccio notes the land includes a cemetery. News coverage elaborates that the “one-acre Ridgewood Cemetery” is on the land, but is “no longer used” for burials.

A letter at the time says there is a known potter’s field about an acre in size in the rear of the property.

Both the 1957 and 1959 deeds use clearly state the buyer is responsible for the care or disposition of the “pauper cemetery” on the land.



The property is at 56th St. and Robles Ave. The one-acre **Ridgewood Cemetery** included in it is no longer used for burial purposes. Nuccio explained that the city was relieved of the pauper burial work about five years ago and that work taken over by the county welfare department.

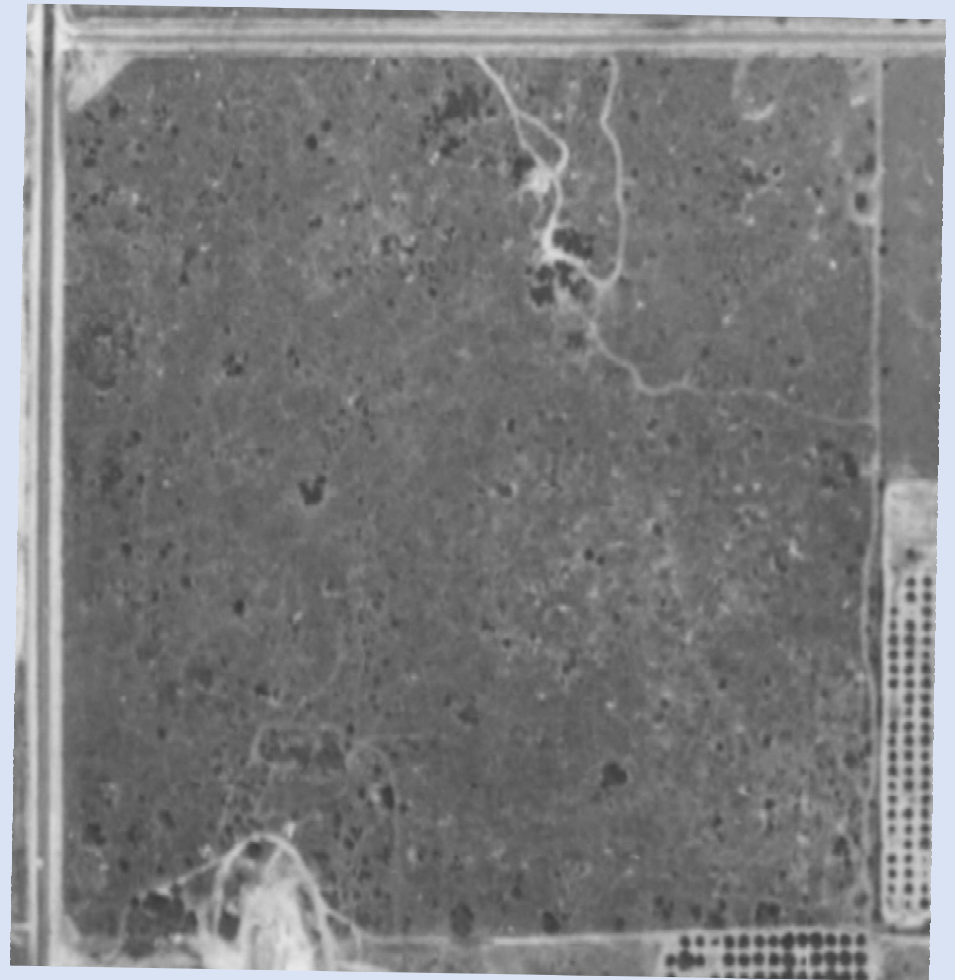
Nuccio explained “we put them on notice the cemetery is there and to keep it there. Naturally, they can take it to court.”

Wording from 1959 deed

successors and assigns, shall and will assume any and all legal responsibility for the care, maintenance or disposition of that certain pauper cemetery located within the above described property as reflected by the records of the City of Tampa, Florida.

1957-1959 – Aerial image

An aerial photo from 1957 shows trails in the northeast and southern parts of the property, but no clear signs of previous burials or other identifiable activity.



1960-Today – School Use and Cemetery Concern

Between 1960 and 1984, King High School was built and grew on the land, plus an additional 12-acre parcel to the east, bought in the 80's.

Between 1976 and 1980, agriculture fields, animal enclosures and a small workshop were added in the undeveloped southern area.

On Oct. 17, 2019, resident Ray Reed shared records with us of a possible cemetery. We promptly fenced off the most likely area and hired a geotechnical firm to scan below the surface.

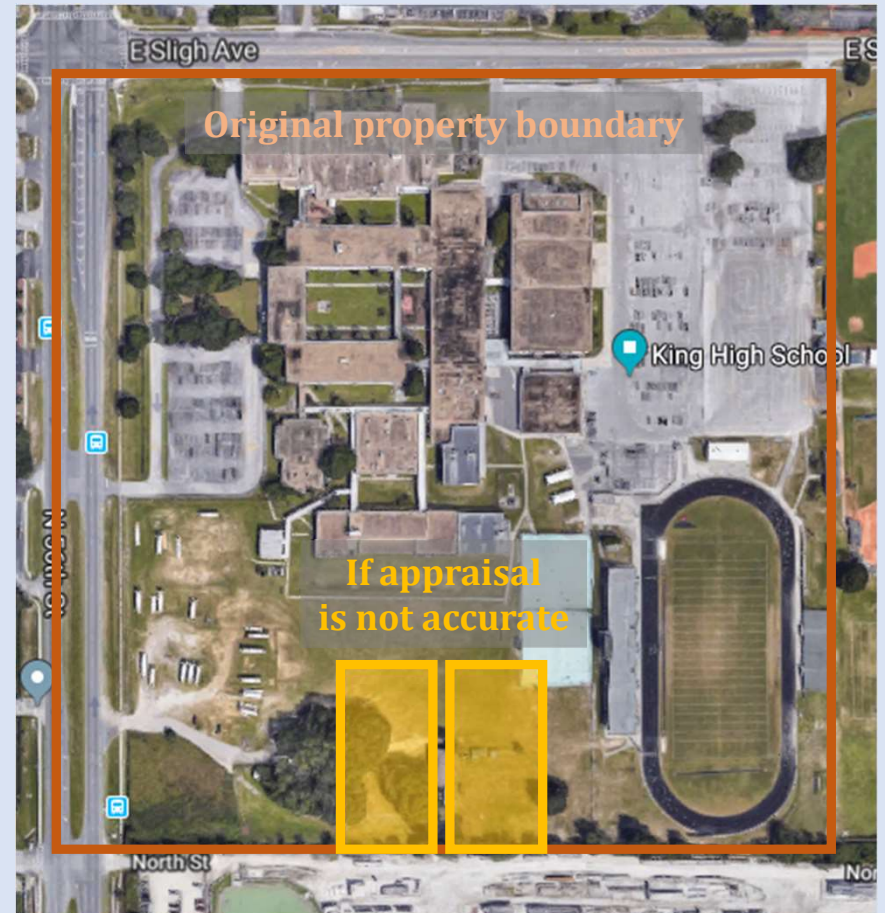


Area of Interest 1 – Central Southern Area

Hired by the School Board, appraiser Roy Yates says a past map & deed show a “Potters Field” starting about “470 [feet] east of the southeast corner of the property” and measuring 165 ft. wide (along the south property line) and 285 ft. deep (going north into the property)

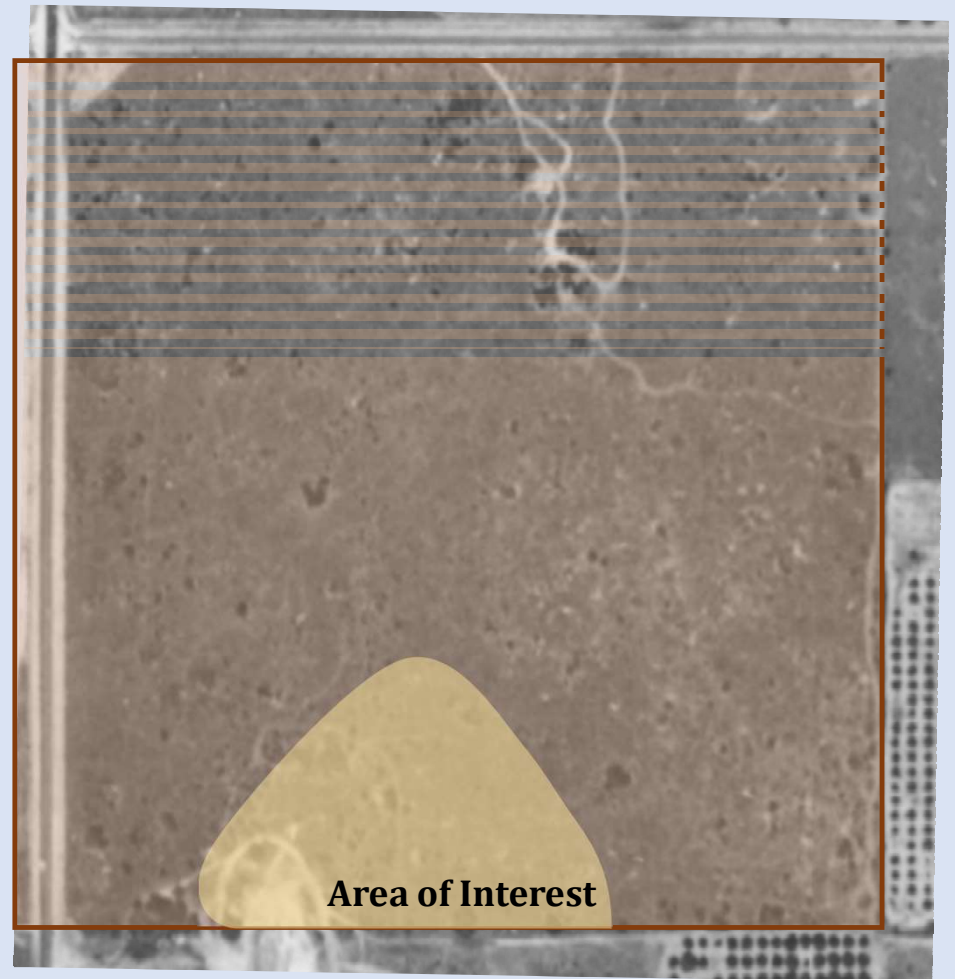
This area is about one acre in all.

After walking the area, Yates says the area looks unused, and “there is no indication that an interment has ever been made.”



Area of Interest 1 – Central Southern Area

- 1) If the appraiser meant to write “east of the southwest corner of the property” or “west of the southeast corner,” the cemetery would be located near the center of the southern part of the property.
- 2) When King High School is built in 1960, only one area is left undeveloped: the central southern area.
- 3) A member of the public came forward who hunted on the land as a youth in the 1950s—he remembers signs of burials in this area.

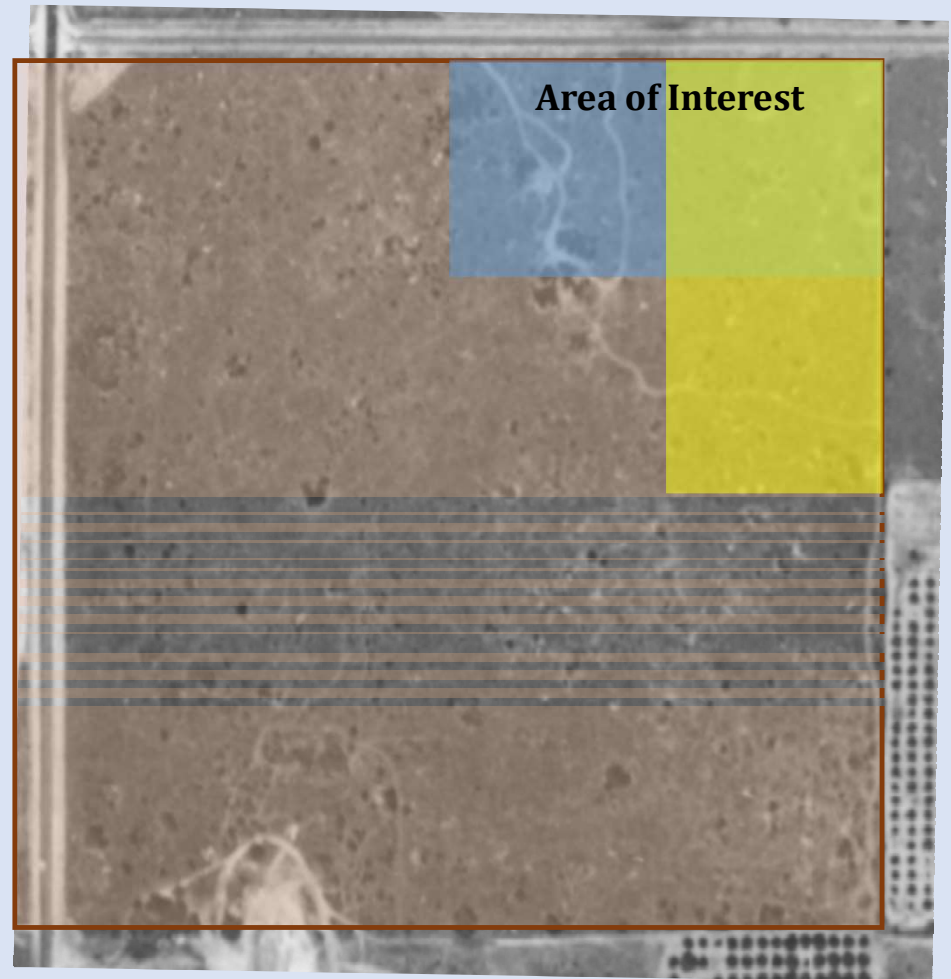


Area of Interest 2 – Northeast Area

In 1937, the Tampa City Council directs the city engineer to lay out 5 acres in the northeast part of the land for a “pauper’s cemetery” or “Potter’s Field” to bury indigent residents, based on city and county records.

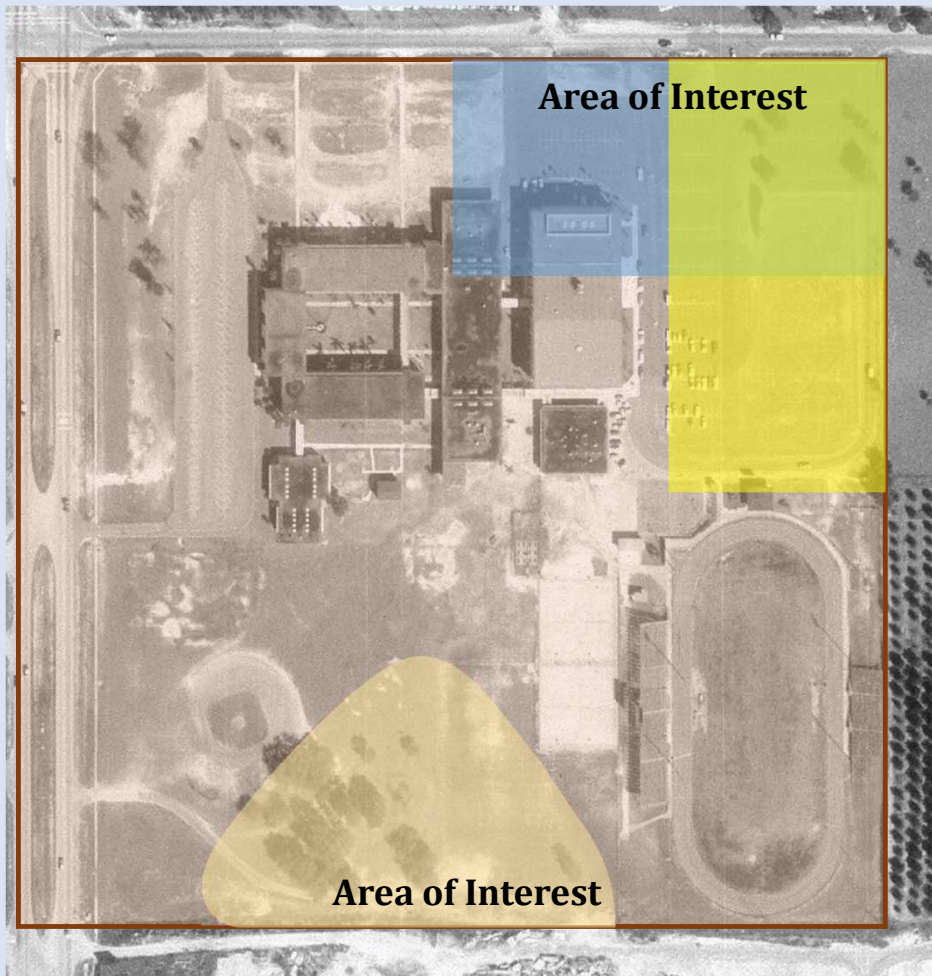
We have found no further documents showing that instruction was ever carried out. If it were, two 5-acre options are likely.

All sources consistently indicate only about one acre of the land was actually used for burials.

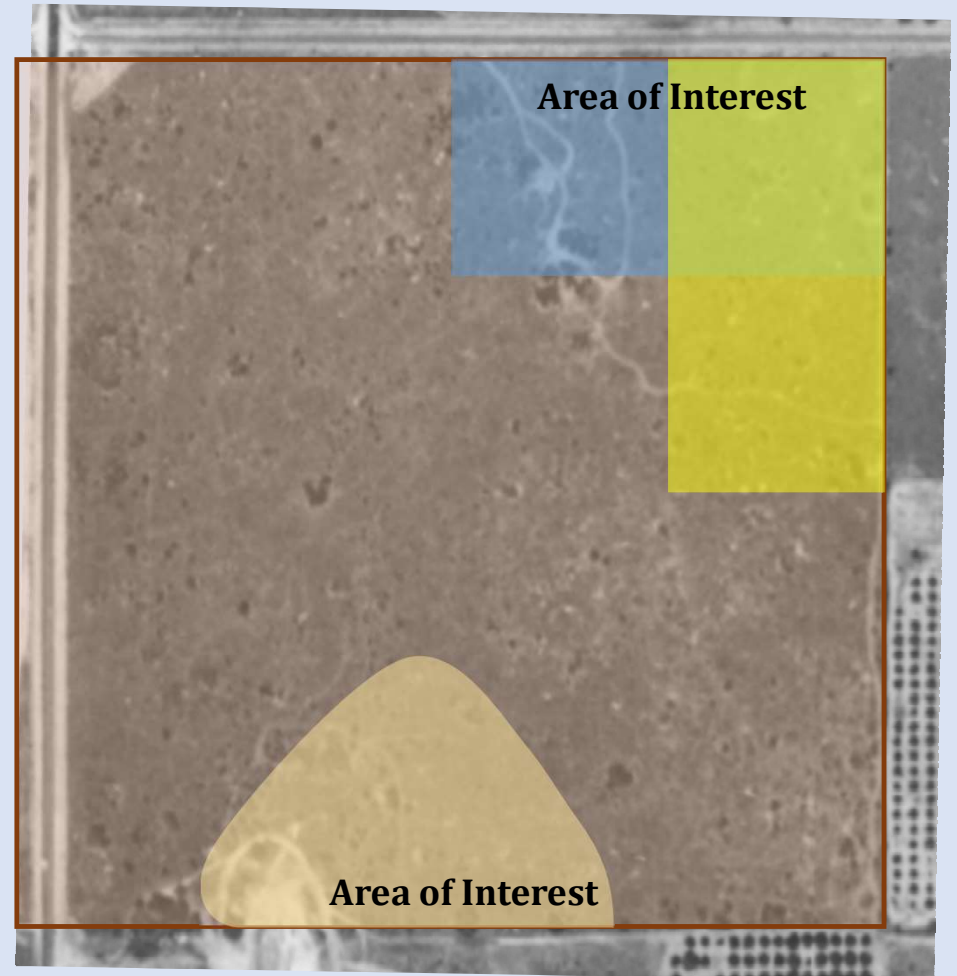


Areas of Interest

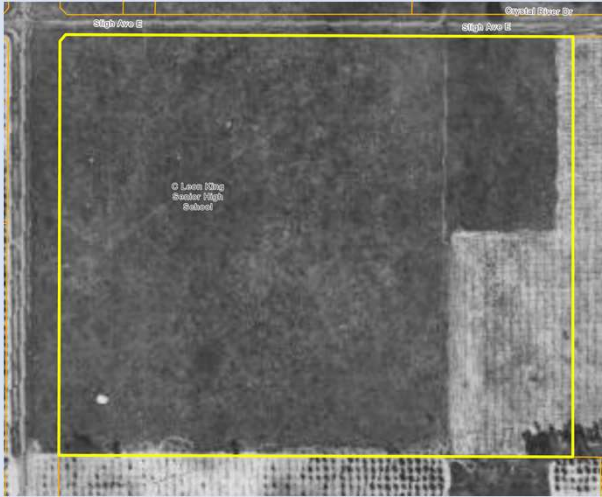
1973



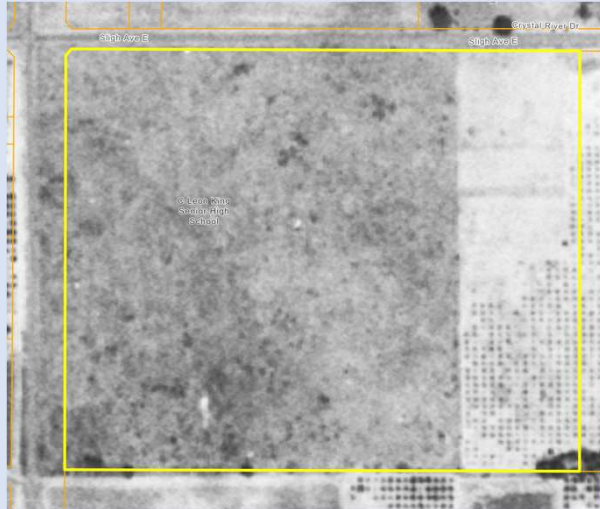
1957



1938



1950



1957



1965



1968



1973



1975



1976



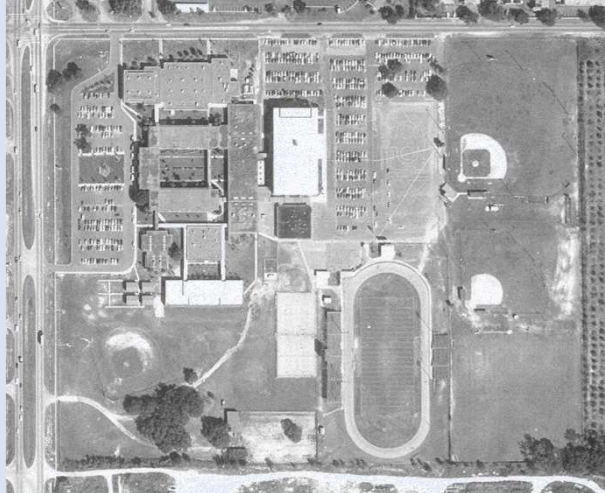
1980



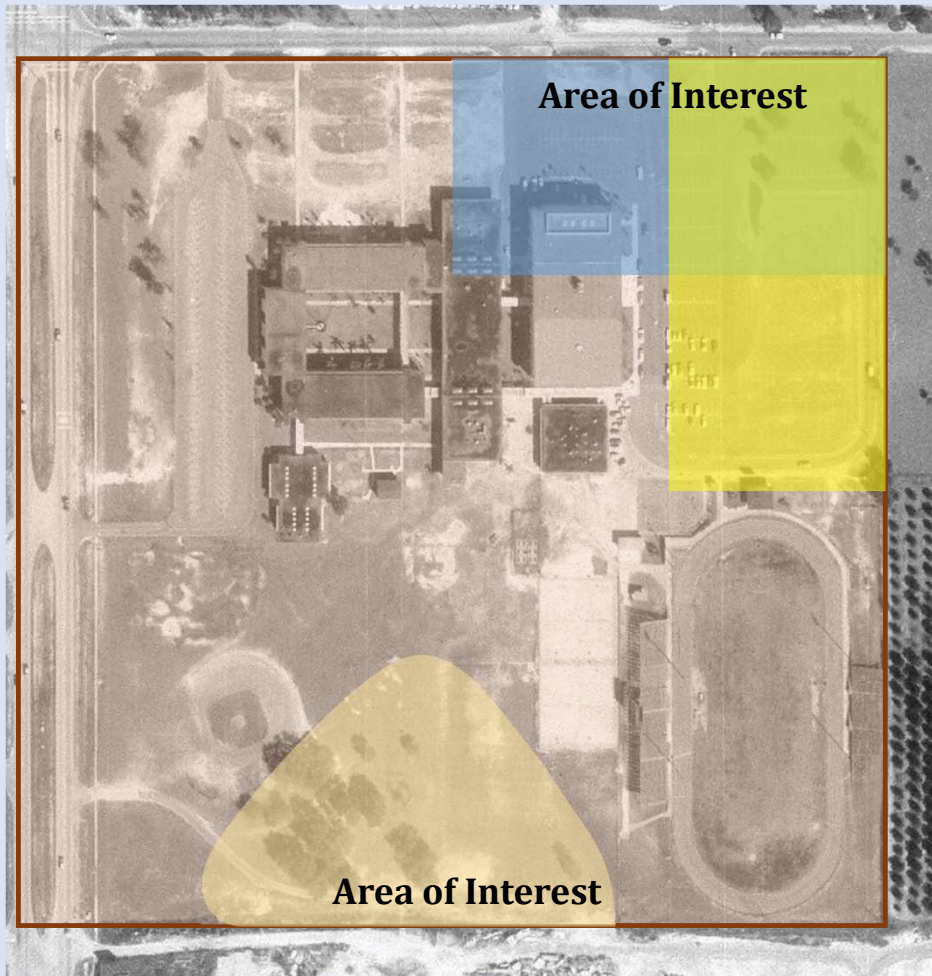
1984



1987



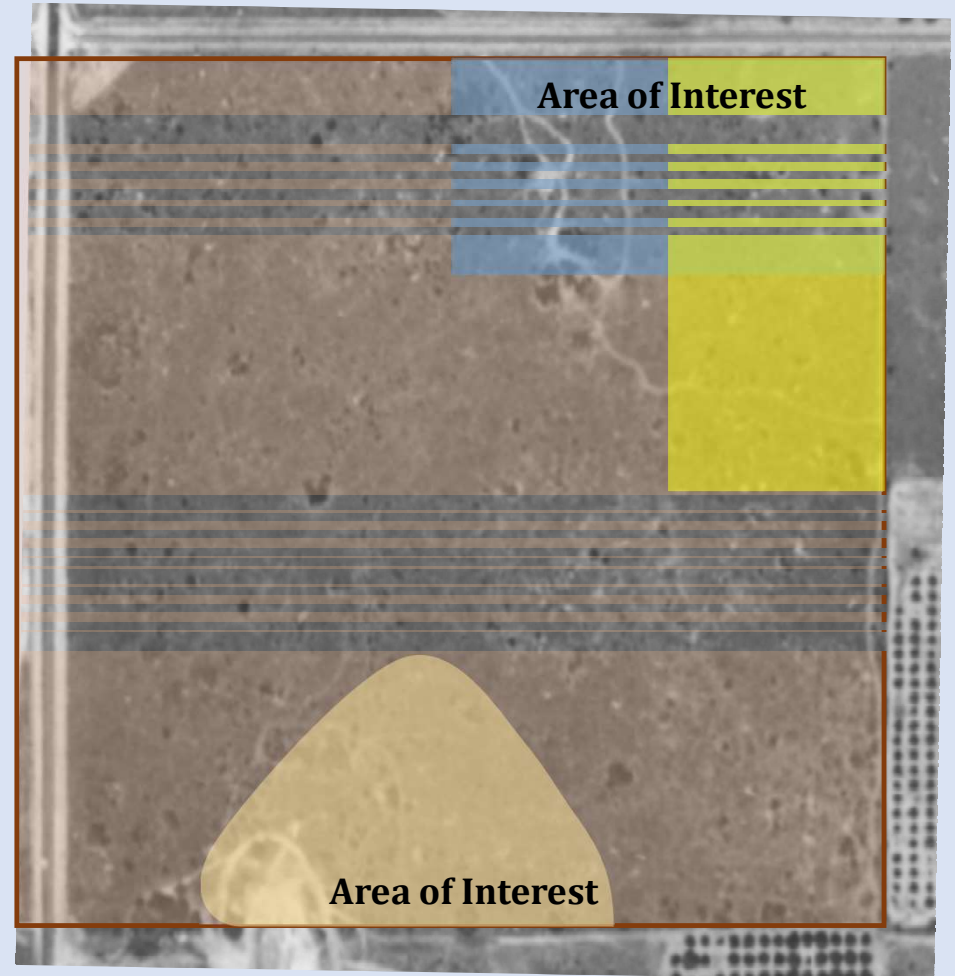
1973



This general area in the south was left undeveloped when the school was built

Tampa City Council directed the city engineer to lay out 5 acres in the northeast of the land for a cemetery (records at the time show the cemetery only occupied about 1 acre)

1957



Actual layout of the 5 acres is unknown