

History of the Winter Beach Cemetery

After the Civil War two teenage boys set sail from their native countries for America. Charles E. Benedict, 18 years old, immigrated from Austria in 1866 and 17 year old Leopold Furchgott immigrated from Hungary in 1867. Furchgott joined his two brothers in Charleston South Carolina who were established “dry good” merchants. According to the 1870 Federal Census, Benedict was in the household of the Furchgott brothers. By 1871 Benedict and the Furchgott brothers had formed a partnership called Furchgott, Benedict & Co. By 1875 they had stores in Charleston, NYC, Jacksonville and Atlanta.

Charles Benedict and Leopold Furchgott moved to Jacksonville, Florida before 1880, both married, started a family and became prominent citizens of the area. In 1890 together they took advantage of the “Cash Land Grant Act of 1820” and purchased 40 acres of property in section 4, range 32, township 39 in what was then Brevard County. Purchase price was \$1.25 per acre.

On November 6, 1896 Charles Benedict and his wife Hattie deeded to the Trustees of Woodley ½ acre of land in section 4, range 32, township 39. Trustees of Woodley were James T. Gray, John C. Michael and Eli C. Walker. Stipulation in the deed stated: “It is hereby agreed and understood that the above ½ acre of land is given and donated to the said parties of the 2nd part as Trustees to hold and occupy said tract or parcel of land as a burial ground for the dead and to be used for no other purpose whatever”. We may never know the relationship between the Benedict Family and the Trustees of Woodley, but one could assume that they met while peddling their “dry goods” up and down the east coast of Florida.

As the years passed the cemetery became in need of additional property to bury the dead. So, on May 10, 1910 Felix C. Poppell and Wife donated to the Cemetery Trustees 1 ½ acres of property adjoining the current cemetery. The Cemetery Trustees at that time were J.T. Jenkins, J.W. Cochran and D.C. Cox.

In 1936 Felix Poppell went to the Indian River County Commissioners and urged them to help with purchasing additional property. His request was not granted. Since the cemetery’s inception in 1896, local pioneer families and citizens in the county have had a place to bury their family members at no cost to them.

On April 16, 1938 Samuel R. and Martha McCullers Hamilton donated to the Trustees of the Winter Beach Cemetery Association, 10 acres of undeveloped property south of the cemetery. Trustees for the Winter Beach Cemetery Association were L.J. Dukes, G.A. Hamilton and S.R. Hamilton. Once again, Felix Poppell asked the Indian River County Commissioners for help clearing the property donated by the Hamilton’s. At this time the county was able to secure help with workers provided through the WPA program. The property was deeded to the county on August 1, 1938 and work began. Also approved was the WPA’s “Veteran Grave

Registration” program. Work was slow moving because other WPA projects that took priority. Finally, after 2 years, work was completed and on September 14, 1940 the property was deeded back to the cemetery.

Many years passed and the Winter Beach Cemetery needed additional property for burials. Over the years, board members for the cemetery (W.F. Cox, Luke Knight, Lloyd Williams, Gene Roddenberry, C.C. Pippin, Flaverous Hamilton, Mitchell Hampton, Leon Blanton, Eugene Hamilton, Newt Dempsey, to name a few) had asked the Indian River County Commissioners for help securing more property. The county had been allowed to bury a person in need of a plot for years at no cost to them. Finally in March of 2000 property adjacent to the cemetery owned by the Woodley Holding Company became available. The county purchased the 6.45 acres, deeded it over to the cemetery and the Winter Beach Cemetery transferred 2.95 acres of unusable property over to the county. The county can still bury a person in need at the cemetery.

For over a century, early settlers and well-known pioneers of Brevard, St. Lucie and Indian River County have been buried in the cemetery. In newspaper obituaries it has been referred to as The Woodley Cemetery, Quay Cemetery, Poppell Cemetery and Winter Beach Cemetery. In November 2021, a historic marker was placed at the cemetery calling it the “Winter Beach Pioneer Cemetery.” The 15-acre cemetery is situated on a sand ridge and is maintained by the people that have family members buried there. The Winter Beach Cemetery Association, Inc. is a 501c3 and is located at 4535 – 71st Street, Winter Beach, Florida.

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