



WYATT CHAPEL COMMUNITY CEMETERY

THIS CEMETERY IS LOCATED ON LAND THAT WAS ORIGINALLY PART OF JARED E. KIRBY'S ALTA VISTA PLANTATION. ACCORDING TO ORAL TRADITION, THE KIRBY FAMILY SET ASIDE THIS LAND AS A BURIAL SITE FOR THEIR SLAVES, AS WELL AS SLAVES FROM NEARBY LIENDO PLANTATION, OWNED BY KIRBY'S COUSIN, LEONARD WALLER GROCE. THE NUMEROUS UNMARKED GRAVES HERE ARE BELIEVED TO DATE TO THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD, WHEN MOST SLAVES WOULD NOT HAVE HAD THE RESOURCES TO ERECT LASTING GRAVE MARKERS.

THE CEMETERY CONTINUED TO BE USED BY AFRICAN AMERICANS AFTER THE CIVIL WAR AND AFTER KIRBY'S WIDOW, HELEN MARR SWEARINGEN KIRBY, DEEDED THE PLANTATION TO THE STATE IN 1876 FOR THE ALTA VISTA COLLEGE FOR COLORED YOUTH (NOW PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY). LATER, THE CEMETERY BECAME ASSOCIATED WITH AND NAMED FOR WYATT CHAPEL, A NEARBY AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH.

THE OLDEST MARKED GRAVE IS THAT OF MATTIE (WYATT) WELLS (d. 1882), THE DAUGHTER OF A FORMER SLAVE. AREA RELIGIOUS LEADERS, VETERANS OF WORLD WARS I AND II, AND FORMER SLAVES AND THEIR DESCENDANTS ARE ALSO BURIED HERE. USED UNTIL THE 1950s, THE CEMETERY REMAINS A TANGIBLE REMINDER OF AFRICAN AMERICANS' HISTORIC PRESENCE IN THIS AREA.

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