

## **Bones Found Unearthed at Cemetery**

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DAYTONA BEACH -- Though she's been cleaning and maintaining the gnarled grounds of Mount Ararat Cemetery on Bellevue Avenue for three years, Dusty Smith was not prepared for what she saw protruding from the sand.

There in broad daylight were human bones -- including someone's teeth -- and pieces of a steel casket. It's the oldest black cemetery in the city near Daytona Beach International Airport, the same place Mayor Yvonne Scarlett-Golden was buried months ago, alongside her relatives.

And, of course, plenty of human bones are there. But they're not supposed to be above ground, an annoyed Smith said earlier this week.

"One of my volunteers turned 15 shades of green when he saw what was out there," Smith said.

Now the state -- though it does not regulate Mount Ararat -- is investigating to determine why human remains were unearthed and whether a woman named Edith Hankerson was buried in the wrong place. According to a Daytona Beach police report, Smith and volunteer Frank Perrick had gone to Mount Ararat at 1427 Bellevue on Sunday afternoon to lock the gate and make sure everything was in order. As Smith drove around the poorly kept graveyard with its tall weeds, fallen branches and mean prickly pears, she noticed a fresh grave on the east side of the cemetery near the entrance on Bellevue. Upon closer inspection she and Perrick were aghast, especially when they spotted what appeared to be someone's teeth in the sand.

Both told police the spot where the new grave had been dug appeared to be a family burial site. They also said there were several pots of flowers; one had a card with the name "Edith Hankerson" on it. However, just west of this grave was another that also appeared to have been dug very recently, Smith told investigators.

Perrick pushed a shovel into the sand at the eastern grave where the bones and teeth were found and struck something hard below. When he dug a bit more, he discovered a concrete crypt buried about a foot deep. Then Perrick did the same thing at the fresh grave on the western side of the cemetery. Nothing was buried there, the police report shows.

Smith said she called cemetery secretary Gussie Sampson, a petite nonagenarian with flowing white hair whose husband Alonzo White, who died in the 1950s, was one of the original stockholders of Mount Ararat.

According to Smith, Sampson had no idea there were fresh graves and said none had been authorized. But Daytona Beach Lt. Gorgi Colon said investigators checked with Herbert Thompson Funeral Home -- one of two funeral homes authorized to bury at Mount Ararat -- and manager Kevin Richardson told detectives that he was permitted to bury Hankerson there.

"They did have permission to dig there; they had all the paperwork," Colon said.

The cemetery is about 100 years old, Sampson said. With record-keeping shaky through the years, the earliest-known entry at the cemetery is from 1908. Family members of the deceased are expected to keep up the grounds.

Scarlett-Golden's grave site is not much better kept than the others. Her gleaming gravestone, complete with a color photo of the mayor, is surrounded by foot-high weeds and yellow wildflowers. A blue-ribbon flower arrangement on a metal pedestal, bent from the elements, is toppled at the foot of her final resting place.

Meanwhile, questions remain in the current case: Was Hankerson buried at the right spot? And shouldn't Herbert Thompson Funeral home, if its workers disturbed other graves, have notified someone that human remains were no longer interred?

Thompson officials did not return phone messages left this week.

"One would think that, if that happened, it should be reported and (someone would) try to make it whole again," said Richard Brinkley, assistant director of the state Division of Funeral, Cemetery and Consumer Affairs, which is investigating the issue.

Brinkley said he could not elaborate on the Mount Ararat case but said there are several issues to be looked at in the matter, including why human remains were left lying about for all to see.

"Everyone involved in this directly and indirectly will be interviewed to see if any laws were broken," Brinkley said Thursday.

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