

Tree Commission
November 10, 2025
T2025-0245
701 Passover Lane

I am writing to express my *opposition* to the requested removal of the two strangler figs in the Historic Key West Cemetery.

These trees have been established, growing old along with the historic graves they shade. They are living monuments, qualifying for historic recognition, and are often the subject of artists and photographers visiting our unique cemetery. Aesthetically they have "taken over"; the fig's natural roots entwining a headstone creates a dramatic, mythical, and visually striking image that many find beautiful and inspiring. This "lost world" aesthetic is a significant draw for visitors to this outdoor museum, enhancing the sense of timelessness and natural history. In various cultures and religions, fig trees hold significant spiritual and symbolic meaning, often representing enlightenment, wisdom, resilience, abundance, and peace. Removing such a tree could be seen as disrespecting these deeply held beliefs. Tree number two is home to one such shrine. The presence of each tree represents a natural process unfolding within a human-made historical context, showcasing the powerful intersection of nature and human history. Furthermore, these *native keystone* trees are some of the few remaining large canopy trees offering shade in the cemetery. They are resilient in storms and provide food and shelter to many species of migrating birds.

Most of the burials beneath these trees are historic, dating back to the 1880's, interred at a time when metal caskets were rare and costly (they were first patented for prevention of graverobbing in the mid-nineteenth century but were very costly and not popularized until after the war in the 1960's). To imply that bodily fluids are now leaking into the ground from these historic graves is inaccurate. Nor is it accurate to imply that it is neglectful or disrespectful to those buried beneath these trees by allowing nature to become a part of this hallowed ground. Current sources of contamination come not just from human remains, but also embalming fluids, coffins, and materials such as varnish, hinges, nails. Never mind the medical devices, implants, and dental work. There are many studies on necroleachate contamination. The multiple wells located throughout the cemetery were capped in the 1970's as a public safety precaution. Fortunately, our water supply comes from the mainland. The bigger threat to public safety is the coconut palms lining many of the avenues.

The best management solution is to allow this intended or accidental, *commemorative* element to remain a part of our historic cemetery. Attempting removal and disrupting those buried beneath will cause irreversible damage from both a practical, archeological, historic, and aesthetic standpoint. *More* damage will result from attempting to remove these trees. Leaving a large stump would be an eyesore. Proper restoration of historic markers is very costly. How will these historic fences, copings, cradles, and markers be properly restored? How will human remains be sorted and reinterred? Who is financing this project? How will the many descendants react to this irreversible disturbance? Have they been notified and granted written approval?

The presence of mature, *long-established* strangler figs in our historic cemetery is viewed by the community as a part of the site's unique character. Yes, this site was designated as a cemetery in 1847, but why would we be in a hurry to erase its 178-year-old history and character? To suggest removing these two trees is unnecessary and unacceptable.

Respectfully,

Mary Ann Matter
1309 Elizabeth St
Former Archivist, City of Key West Cemetery

Tract #6 Fourth & Laurel Tree # Two



Thomas (1929) & Romaldo (1903) Russell Lot #265
A Spiritual Tree for Many



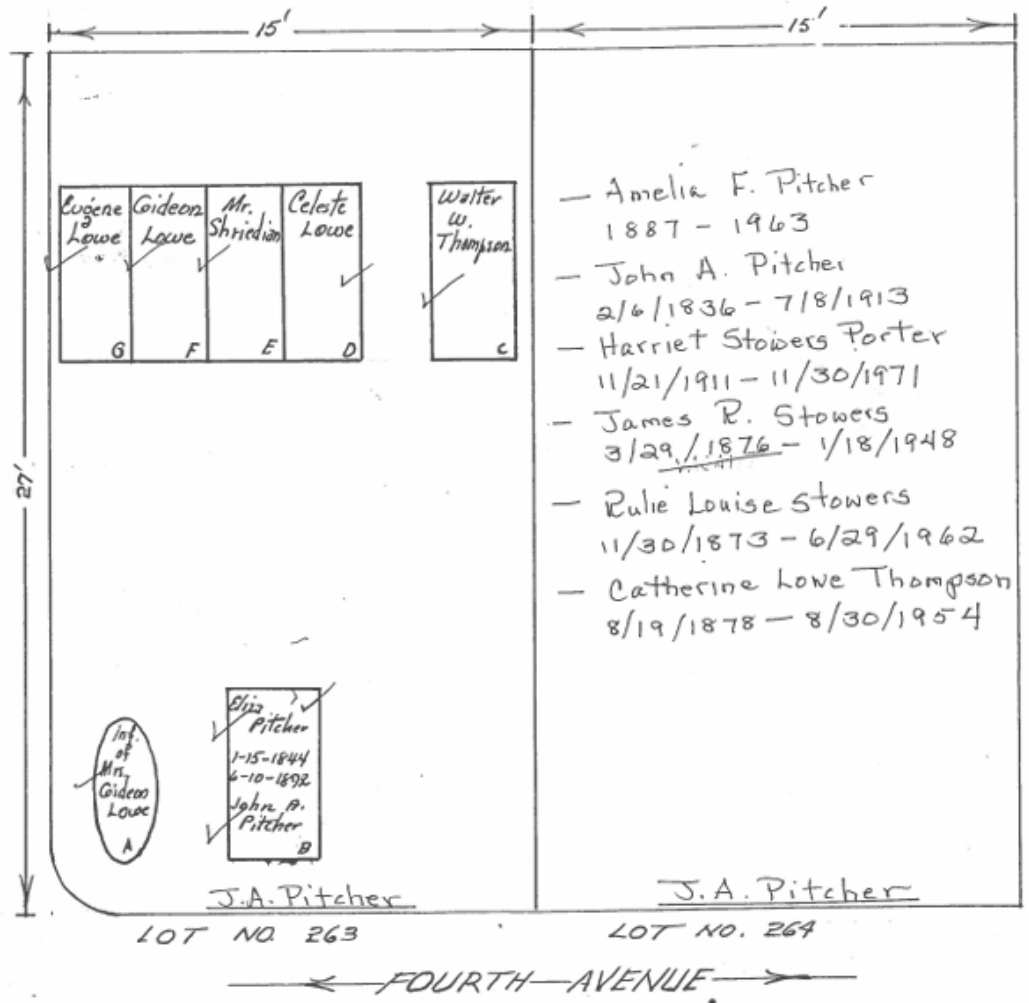
Spiritual Mementos (Crucifix, Charms, Crystals, Elegua, Cane, Stones & Dog Bone)



The following are the six lots affected by tree number two, with a total of 99 burials.

OWNER LOT NO. 263 J. A. Pitcher
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK 5 PAGE 294
 OWNER LOT NO. 264 J. A. Pitcher
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK 1X PAGE 298

Cross checked
 with the
 field and
 entered in
 the computer
 5/16/2007
 JN



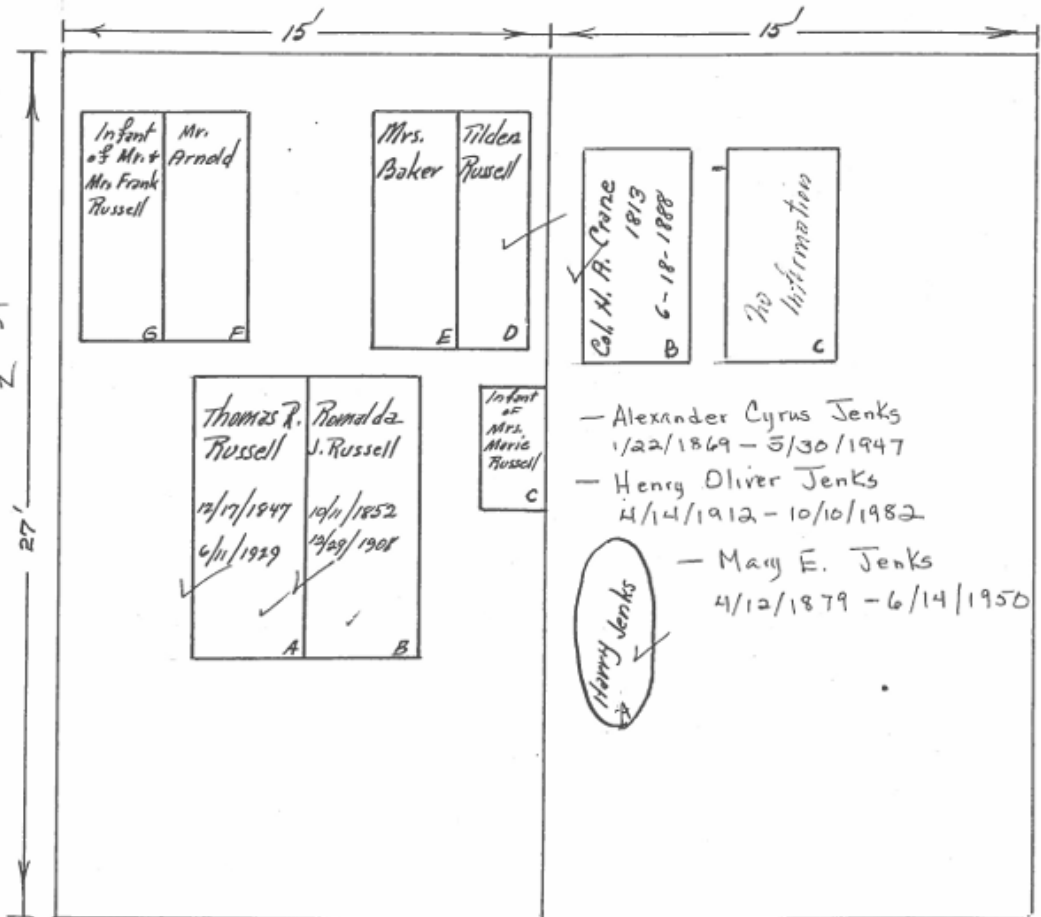
LOTS 263
 264

BOUNDARY SCALE
 1" = 4'

TRACT NO. 6

OWNER LOT NO. 265 Thomas Russell
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK _____ PAGE _____
 OWNER LOT NO. 266 _____
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK _____ PAGE _____

Cross checked
 with the field
 and entered in
 the computer.
 5/17/2007. JN



LOT NO. 265

LOT NO. 266

← FOURTH AVENUE →

LOTS

265

266

BOUNDARY SCALE
 1" = 4'

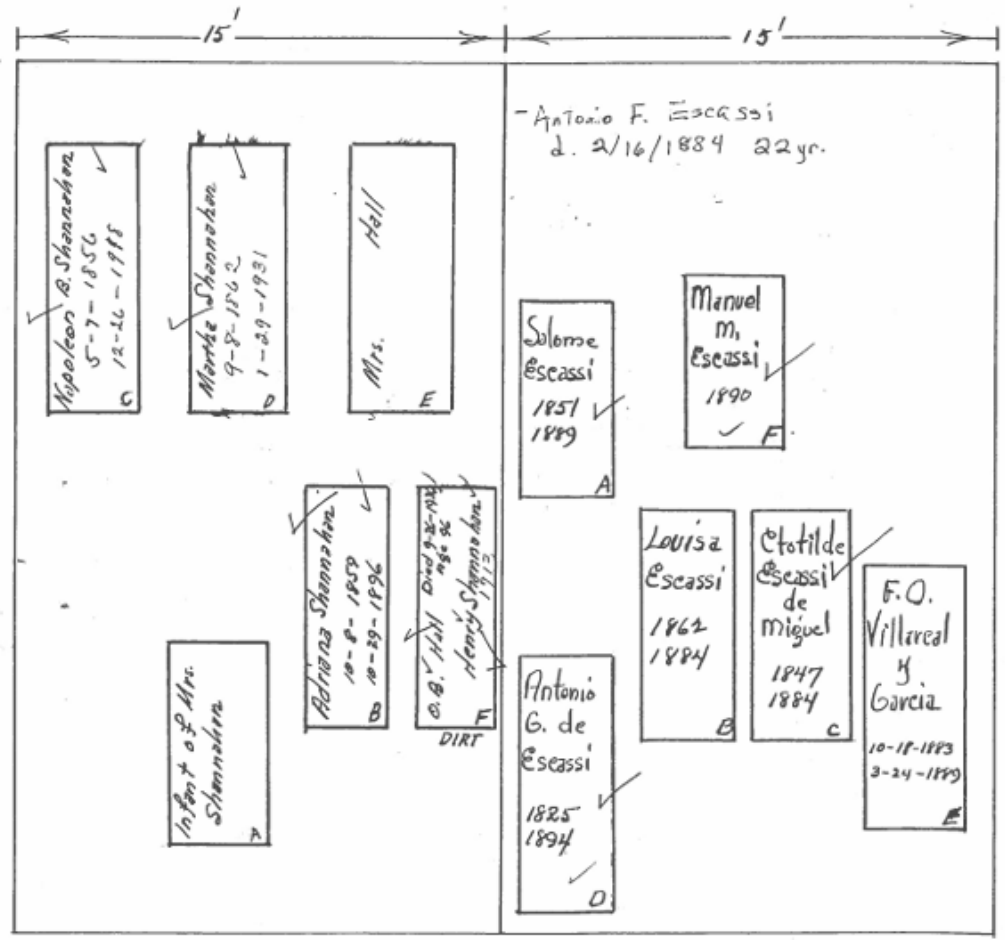
TRACT NO. 6

OWNER LOT NO. 267 H. Shannon
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK _____ PAGE _____
 OWNER LOT NO. 268 Napoleon Shannon
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK "D" PAGE 210
 Mix. Rec.

Cross checked
 with the field
 and entered in
 the computer
 5/17/2007 JN

- Lot 267
- Doris Vivian Roberts
12/12/1907 -
3/31/2003
 - Grace Roberts
9/8/1883 -
10/27/1961
 - John G. Roberts
7/25/1911 -
1/17/1985
 - John W. Roberts
7/5/1881 -
10/8/1959
 - Thelma Sweeting
4/2/1905 -
9/1/1982
 - Helena I. Thompson
11/23/1916 -
8/10/1996
 - Ira B. Thompson
12/2/1910 -
4/22/1995
 - John Zinn Roberts
5/17/1938
5/29/2009

- James P. Heffernan
10/17/1937 - 12/24/2010



← FOURTH AVENUE →

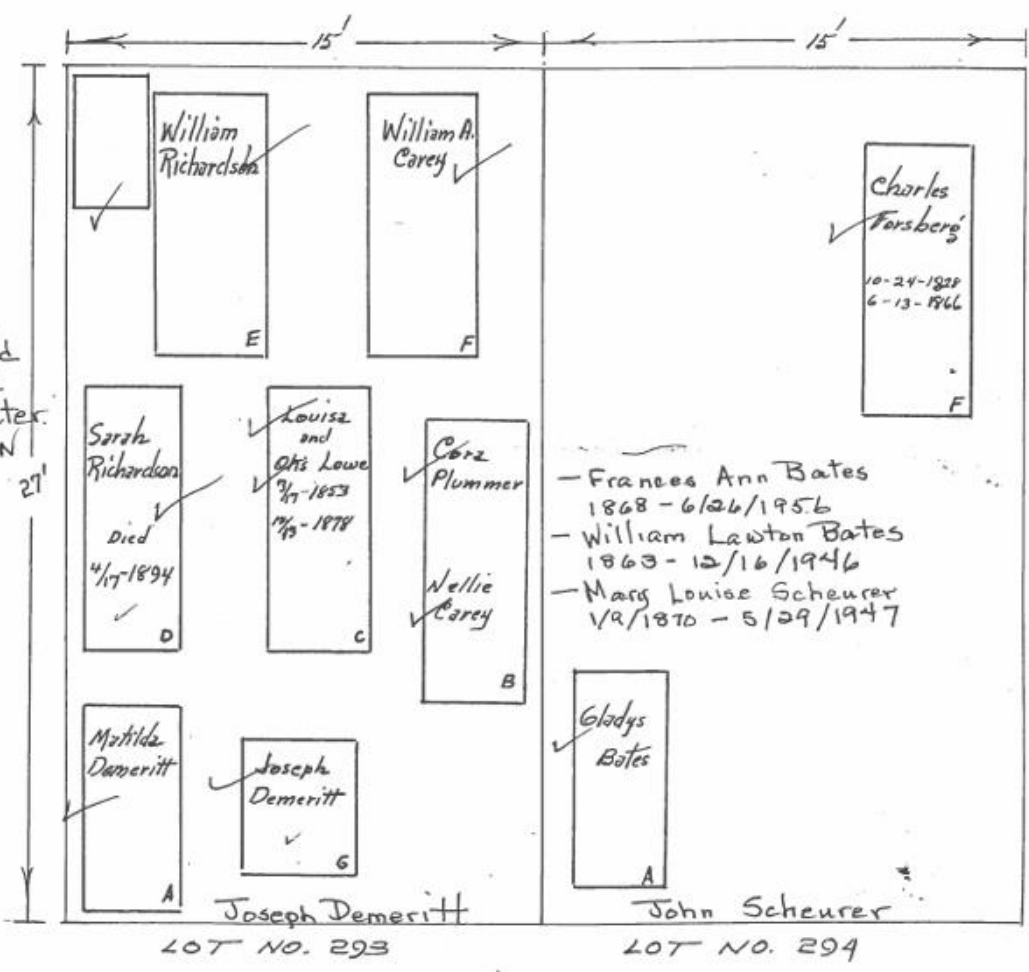
LOTS 267
 268

BOUNDARY SCALE
 1" = 4'

TRACT NO. 6

OWNER LOT NO. 293 Joseph Demeritt
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK Fr. E
 OWNER LOT NO. 294 John Scheurer
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK PAGE

Cross checked
 with the Field
 and entered
 in the computer.
 7/12/2007 JN



LOTS 293
 294

BOUNDARY SCALE 1" = 4' TRACT NO. 6

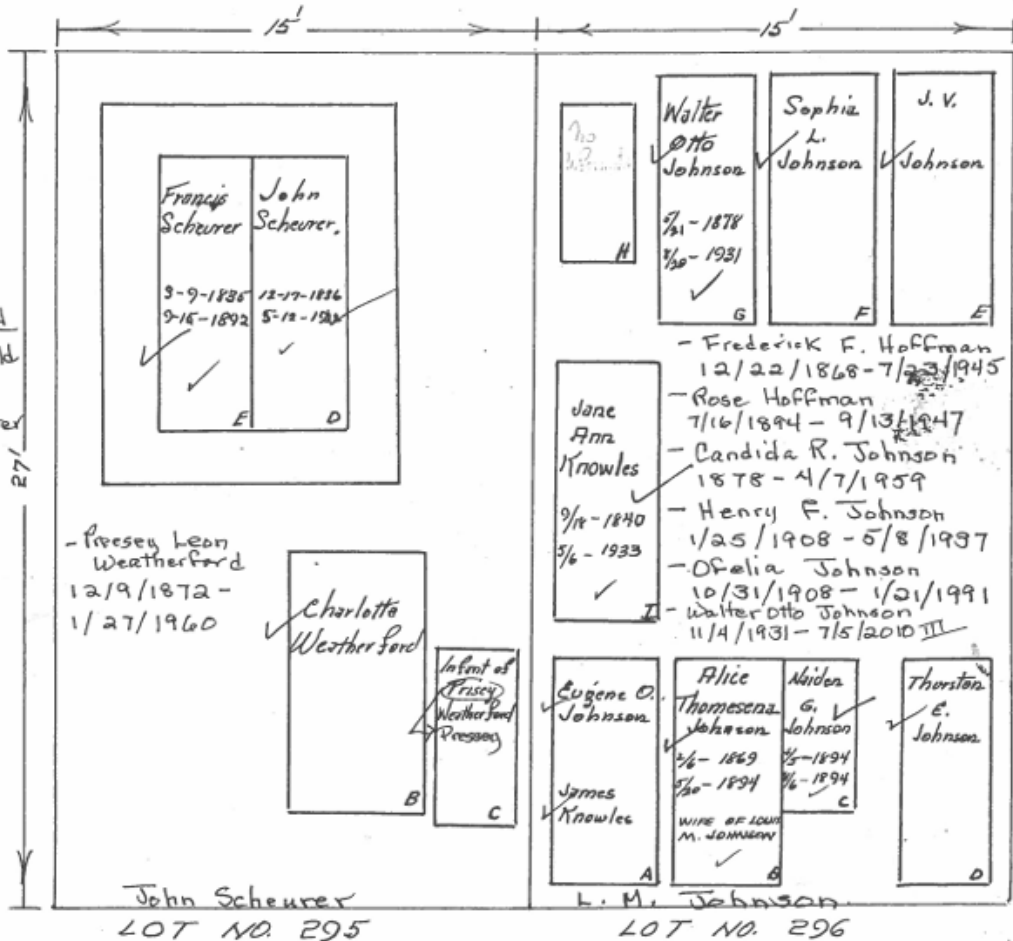
OWNER LOT NO. 295 John Scheuer

MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK _____ PAGE _____

OWNER LOT NO. 296 L. M. Johnson

MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK _____ PAGE _____

Cross checked with the field and entered in the computer 1/18/2007 JN



LOTS 295 296

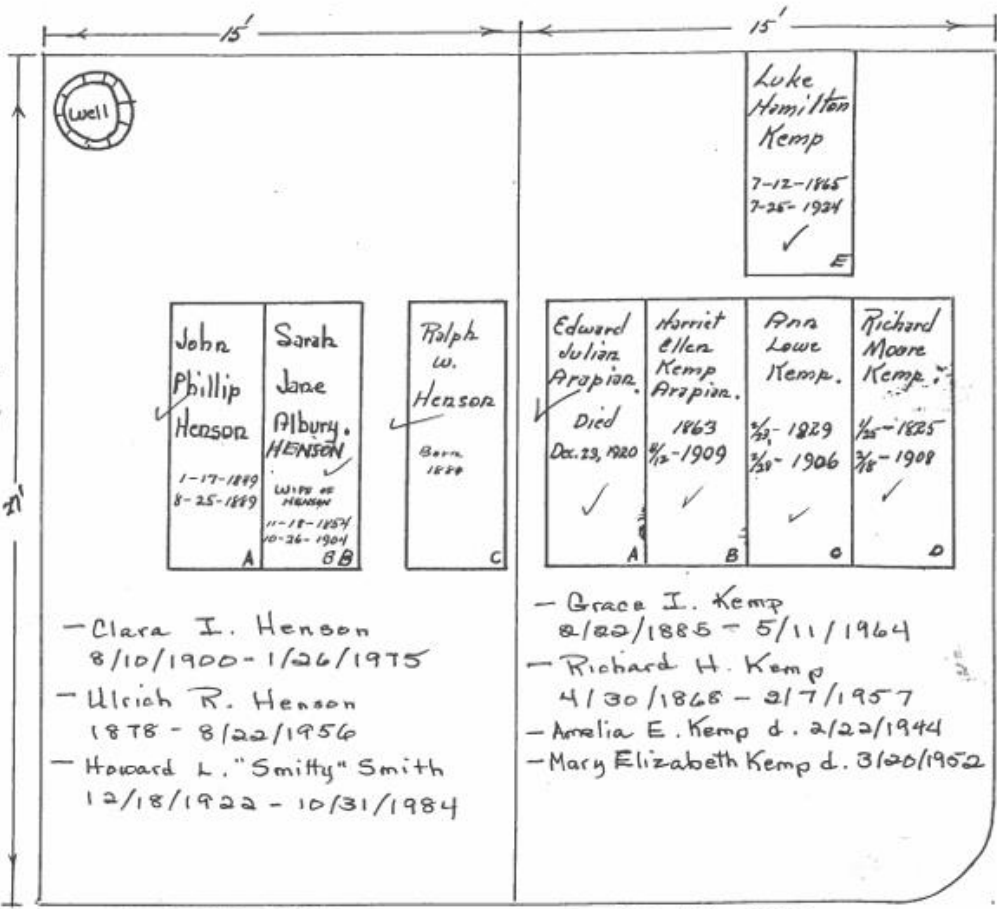
BOUNDARY SCALE

1" = 1'

TRACT NO. 6

OWNER LOT NO. 297 Mrs. M.W. Curr
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK 16E
 OWNER LOT NO. 298 R. M. Kemp
 MONROE COUNTY RECORDS BOOK XA PAGE 72

Cross checked with the field and entered in the computer. 7/19/2007 JN



LOT NO. 297

LOT NO. 298

← THIRD AVENUE →

LOTS 297
298

BOUNDARY SCALE
1" = 4'

TRACT NO. 6

Two Largest Canopies



Tract #7 Lots 113 – 118 Tree # 1



Cross checked with the field; entered in the computer
12/3/2009 JN

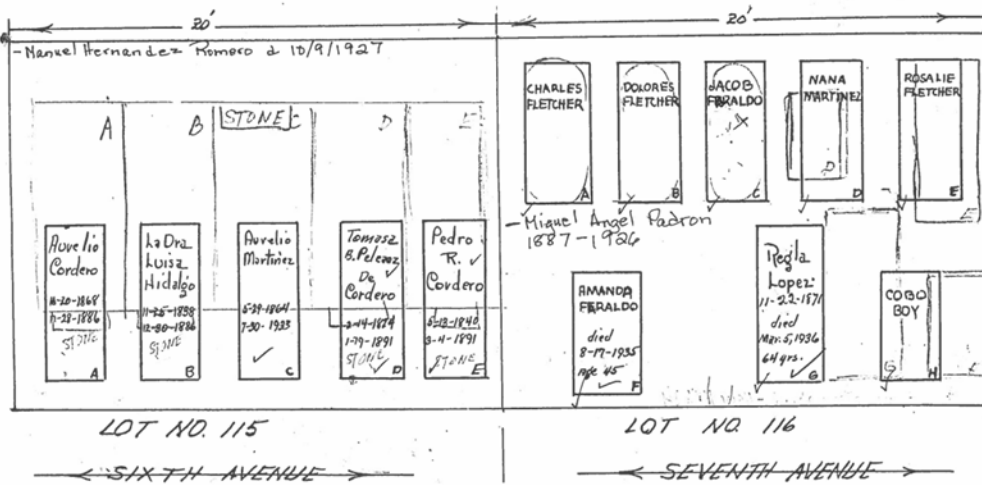
BOUNDARY SCALE
1" = 4'

Claimed by
OWNER LOT NO. 115 V. CORDERO BROS
MONROE COUNTY RECORDS
BOOK _____ PAGE _____

Claimed by
OWNER LOT NO. 116 FLETCHER
MONROE COUNTY RECORDS
BOOK _____ PAGE _____

Note Avenue Numbers

TRACT NO. 7
LOTS NO. 115
NO. 116



Cross checked with the Field & entered in the computer
12/3/2009 JN

BOUNDARY SCALE
1" = 4'

- Jose Cabaleiro 12/26/1936 - 4/27/2004
- Gonzalo "Ramon" Benitez 1/10/1920 - 9/22/1993
- Evangelista Benitez 4/25/1919 - 4/29/1978
- Rafael "Tin" Fernandez 1905 - 1988
- Valentin Gonzalez 2/14/1903 - 9/22/1944
- Armando Hernandez 8/28/1905 - 10/27/1967

Claimed by
OWNER LOT NO 117 O.C.D. La. LUZ No. 3

MONROE COUNTY RECORDS

BOOK _____ PAGE _____

- Luciana Calderin Leal 6/30/1937 - 6/20/2009
- Teodoro Luis Leal 4/1/1933 - 1/27/1983
- Maria Regla Lopez 3/8/1943 - 11/29/2006 *Note Avenue Numbers*
- Miguel A. Perez 8/24/1906 - 7/11/1969
- Angel Manuel Rivas 3/29/1915 - 3/17/1981
- Hortencia Vazquez 1/11/1929 - 8/12/2001
- Diana Fernandez 20 1912 - 1991

- Urania Herrera Vidal 12/10/1907 - 6/1/1988
- Francisco Dominguez 2/13/1931 - 6/9/2010

- George B. Cathey 7/7/1889 - 12/15/1944
- Letta E. Herrick Cathey 5/26/1894 - 2/1/1981
- Alice E. Herrick 1907 - 4/30/1908
- Amanda Blanche Herrick 1869 - 2/10/1954
- Dorothy L. Park Herrick 10/10/1911 - 2/16/1990
- Homer B. Herrick 2/12/1904 - 12/29/1977

Claimed by
OWNER LOT NO 118 H.W. Herrick

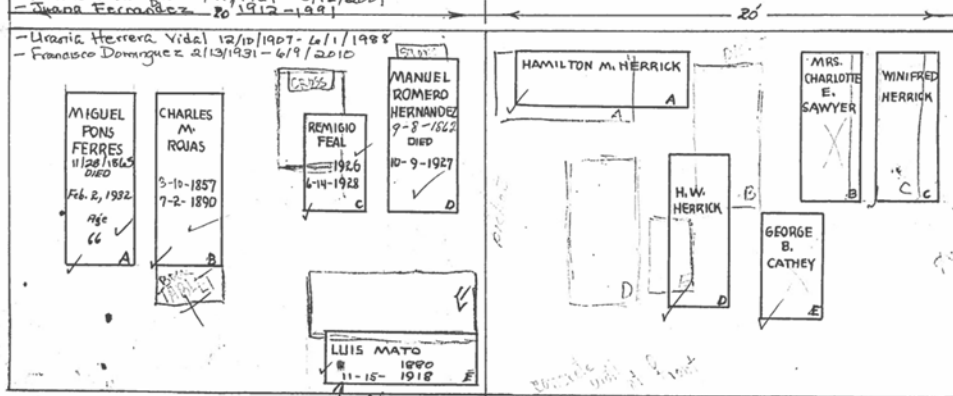
MONROE COUNTY RECORDS

BOOK _____ PAGE _____

TRACT NO. 7

LOTS

117
118



LOT NO. 117
SIXTH AVENUE

LOT NO. 118

SEVENTH AVENUE

Nature Intersecting with Human History

