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Unknown but soon to be honored

Marker offered for graves where county buried poor

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The hundreds of people who lie buried in a Five Points-area cemetery will gain a dignified memorial if Wake County decides to accept Jodie Dupree's offer.

Dupree, manager of Raleigh Memorial Park and Mitchell Funeral Home, is extending an offer to Wake County officials to donate a polished granite marker to the cemetery of the former Wake County Home for the Aged and Infirm.

A recent News & Observer account got Dupree interested in the graveyard behind Emmanuel Baptist Church on Noble Road, which has no markers even though the county used it as a pauper's field for decades and still owns it.

"It's a shame, first of all, for anyone to be in an unmarked grave," Dupree said Tuesday. "The community burial area needs to be marked for what it is."

The outline of the old cemetery emerged as Raleigh Parks and Recreation staff checked out the county land as a site for a new city senior center, a project that will not affect the nearby cemetery.

County attorney Scott Warren said Dupree will need to work with Wake County property officer Mike Aull to come up with information about the proposed marker and a planned inscription. That material will be included in an agenda item for county commissioners.

"It makes sense, if somebody wants to do it," Harold Webb, chairman of the Wake board of commissioners, said Tuesday of Dupree's offer.

The marker, about the size of a single headstone, would cost a customer a couple of thousand dollars, said Dupree, who's a fan of cemeteries.

"When we were on family vacations and would see an old church cemetery, we would stop and explore it," he said.

Dupree has not come up with suggested language to commemorate those buried by the county home, which operated from 1915 until 1979. Karen-Marie Allen, who heads a Wake County cemetery survey, called placement of the stone "an absolutely wonderful idea" and suggested that the inscription should honor the unknown men and women who died in straitened circumstances.

"I think we would want to recognize that they were under hard times," she said.

"You don't even know that these were people that were here for a long time -- this could have been their last stop."

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