This brochure is to familiarize you with a few of the highlights of the Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, a historic African-American cemetery located at Fourth and Bray Streets in Athens, Georgia. We touch only a few features of a truly magnificent cemetery which is currently being restored after decades of abandonment and neglect. Inside you will find a rough map with points of interest marked for a brief walking tour which should take between 30 and 45 minutes.

Please use care and stick to the main roads, as much of the cemetery has not been cleared.

Founding of Cemetery: In 1882, the cemetery was founded by the Gospel Pilgrim Society, a fraternal, insurance and burial society for African-Americans. For about a dime a week, black citizens could assure themselves of burial insurance and a fitting burial ceremony in Gospel Pilgrim.

Size: The cemetery encompasses some 9 acres of beautiful woodland in East Athens. Preliminary archeological surveys indicate approximately 3,000 graves are there. Perhaps 500 or so have inscribed tomstones. More than 300 burials have been identified so far. Approximately 15 per cent of these identified are the graves of ex-slaves.
Importance of Cemetery: Gospel Pilgrim was the first major cemetery to be developed to give a dignified and beautiful final resting place to black citizens in Athens. Prior to Gospel Pilgrim, African-Americans were buried in small segregated cemeteries, or placed in second-rate areas of predominantly white cemeteries.

Many black educators, doctors, businessmen, politicians and other leaders are buried in Gospel Pilgrim, but so are hundreds of persons who lived unremarkable lives. Yet each made a real contribution to Athens from the 1880's until recent times. Officially an abandoned cemetery, it is under the non-profit care of the East Athens Development Corporation, Inc. Donations are badly needed for the cemetery's restoration and upkeep and can be sent to the EADC.
TOUR SITES

Instructions: Park in the Springfield Baptist Church parking lot. Walk to your right along Fourth St., about halfway to the cemetery gate.

1--Note the well-kept lot of John Allen Mann and his wife, Lula. John was a locomotive fireman. Several lots, including this one, have been well-kept, even after the last cemetery superintendent died in 1977 and no upkeep was provided by the Gospel Pilgrim Society.

Proceed along Fourth to the cemetery gate and turn in on the main roadway running roughly north-south.

2--The grave of William A. Pledger. He was born in 1840 and took an active part in the Republican Party following the Civil War. He was co-editor of Athens' first black newspaper, The Blade, which spoke up for fairness to African-Americans. He was noted for his eloquence in speaking.

William A. Pledger, editor and political leader

Monroe B. Morton, entrepreneur

3--Family lot of Monroe B. Morton. M. B. Morton was considered to be one of wealthiest African-Americans in the south during his lifetime. He was Athens' second black postmaster, and built the Morton Theater for black entertainment performances. He was a well-known civic and business leader.

4--Grave of Madison Davis, one of Clarke County's first two black legislators. This ex-slave was elected during Reconstruction after the Civil War, and was active in the Republican Party throughout the 19th Century. He was appointed Athens' first black postmaster and was well-liked by both blacks and whites. The other early black legislator was Alfred Richardson, who fought off Klan-like attacks and whose house was burned by whites. He is rumored to be buried in Gospel Pilgrim, but his grave has not been found.
5—Grave of Mrs. Minnie Davis, one of Athens' most respected African-American teachers. She taught 40 years, even when in severe pain from health problems. An ex-slave, Mrs. Davis was interviewed for the Federal Writers' Project Slave Narratives in 1938.

6—Bacon family plot. Note the beautifully carved tombstone for Edward, head of the family (1854-1906).

7—Grave of Camilla Brydie. This grave marker with its open Bible top is a good example of stone carving. Camilla was one of several teachers in the Brydie family.

8—Nearly hidden grave of Ray Hatton McGinthey, almost in a tunnel of underbrush. This grave is in an area not yet cleared of heavy undergrowth.

9—Grave of Georgia Johnson. This well-executed tombstone marks the grave of Georgia Johnson, who may have been a Federal Writers' Project Slave Narrative interviewee, although her birthdate indicates she was born after the Civil War. Many African-Americans could only guess at their birthdates.

10—Samuel E. Harris family lot. Lying broken on the ground is the marker for this pioneer Clarke County educator, who began vocational education and was principal of the state's first accredited black high school.

11—Lorenzo Reid family plot. Lorenzo Reid was a well-known barber in Athens. His wife, Laura, was a daughter of Alfred Richardson, one of Clarke County's first two black legislators.

12—Lot of the Jackson family. This family may have contributed more to African-American medical care in Athens than any others. Five sons became doctors and two other sons became dentists.

—Al Hester, Ph.D.

For additional information, see Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery: an American Historic Site, by Al Hester, and available from the East Athens Development Corp. (Price $6.95 plus postage, with all profits going to cemetery restoration). Also most useful for local African-American history is Michael L. Thurmond's A Story Untold: Black Men & Women in Athens History (2nd ed.), available at local book stores.

EADC: 410 McKinley Dr., Athens, GA, 30608: Email: wheard0828@aol.com