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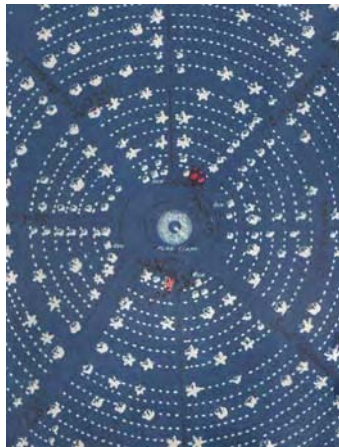
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT FOR POPLAR GROVE NATIONAL CEMETERY

PETERSBURG NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

SITE HISTORY, EXISTING CONDITIONS, ANALYSIS & EVALUATION, TREATMENT

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CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT FOR POPLAR GROVE NATIONAL CEMETERY

PETERSBURG NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD
DINWIDDIE COUNTY, VIRGINIA

95% Draft
October 2006

SITE HISTORY

EXISTING CONDITIONS

ANALYSIS & EVALUATION

TREATMENT

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Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
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This report has been prepared through the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, which promotes the preservation of significant landscapes through research, planning, stewardship, and education. The Center accomplishes its mission in collaboration with a network of partners including national parks, universities, government agencies and private nonprofit organizations. This report was developed through a cooperative agreement with the Faculty of Landscape Architecture at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, New York.

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Cover Photo: Detail, Plan of National Cemetery, Poplar Grove, Virginia. Office of the Quartermaster General, 1892. National Archives, Washington, D. C.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

[Forthcoming]

INTRODUCTION

Poplar Grove National Cemetery, located in Dinwiddie County, Virginia five miles south of downtown Petersburg, was established in 1866 to inter the remains of Union soldiers from Civil War battlefields in southern Virginia, primarily from the Petersburg Campaign (1864-1865). Built on the site of the wartime camp of the 50th New York Volunteer Engineers, the cemetery takes its name from the camp's one-time focal point, Poplar Grove Church. The cemetery was established as one of the original units of the National Cemetery System, developed by the United States War Department to address the unprecedented loss of life during the Civil War. The War Department continued to administer the cemetery until 1933, when Poplar Grove was transferred to the National Park Service as part of Petersburg National Military Park, later renamed Petersburg National Battlefield. Today, the park service continues to administer the cemetery, which is a stop on the park's Siege Line Tour. [Figure 0.1] The cemetery proper is eight acres, with an adjoining buffer parcel bringing the total owned by the National Park Service to twelve acres. The war-time remnant and namesake of the cemetery, Poplar Grove Church, was retained during initial development, but was removed in 1868 prior to completion of the cemetery.

Civil War burials in the cemetery, totaling approximately 6,188, were largely completed in 1869. Approximately thirty-five percent of the burials are known, marked by headstones laid flat on the surface of the ground; the remainder are unknown, marked by simple marble blocks (square posts) sunk flush with the ground. Sixty non-Civil War interments were made between 1897 and the last new burial, in 1957. That year, the cemetery was officially closed to new burials, although there continued to be occasional reinterment of Civil War remains unearthed in the region, the most recent in 2003. The cemetery thus retains its strong association with the Civil War.

Poplar Grove National Cemetery is situated in a transitional rural-suburban setting, surrounded by pine woods, farm fields, and suburban houses. [Figure 0.2] Access is by a tree-lined approach road from Vaughan Road, a minor two-lane state highway that connects with the park's Siege Line Tour (Flank Road) approximately a half mile north of the cemetery. The cemetery occupies a rectangular parcel, but features a circular plan, with graves and drives radiating out from a central point. Historic features, many of which reflect standard War Department plans from the 1870s, include a stone Second Empire-style superintendent's lodge, iron rostrum, Colonial Revival-style restroom building and garage, marble grave markers, iron flagstaff, an upright cannon (gun

monument), granite and iron entrance gates, and a brick perimeter (inclosure) wall. Originally richly planted, today the cemetery has scattered specimen trees and shrubs. All walks and drives are turf, except for the main drive, which is paved in asphalt. The most dramatic change to the cemetery's initial design was the alteration in 1934 of the roughly 5,600 marble headstones and blocks, which were laid flush with the ground. In more recent decades, fields to the west of the cemetery have developed into woods, two houses have been built just outside the east wall of the cemetery, and the park service has constructed a small parking area outside of the main gates.

SCOPE, ORGANIZATION, AND METHODOLOGY

A Cultural Landscape Report is the primary document used by the National Park Service for management of its historically significant cultural landscapes. The report provides park managers with a comprehensive site history; documents existing conditions; analyzes the landscape according to its characteristics and features, evaluates the historical significance of the landscape, and provides treatment recommendations to guide short and long-term management to preserve and enhance the historical character of the landscape.

Scope

This report for Poplar Grove National Cemetery has been developed according to the *Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (National Park Service, 1998). It consists of Part I (Site History, Existing Conditions, Analysis & Evaluation) and Part II (Treatment).

The project area for the Poplar Grove Cultural Landscape Report focuses on the 8.3-acre cemetery landscape delineated by the perimeter brick wall (inclosure), and secondarily on the 3.7-acre tract added in 1991 and the cemetery's approach road that crosses private land over a right-of-way. The project also addresses, but in less detail, surrounding private lands that form the larger setting of the cemetery. Within this project area, the Cultural Landscape Report will address the following five primary objectives:

- Document the historic design and evolution of the landscape to inform management decisions regarding the nature and appropriateness of proposed repair and replacement efforts to minimize loss or disturbance of significant characteristics, features, and materials.
- Document the changing historical appearance of character-defining site features, notably vegetation, circulation, grave markers, monuments, perimeter walls, and the drainage system, as well as the broader setting.

- Provide contextual documentation on the history of American cemetery design and in particular on the design of Civil War-era national cemeteries.
- Provide documentation that supports park consultation responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Recommend treatment strategies for the long-term management of the cultural landscape.¹

Many of these objectives will assist in planning for the upcoming line item construction project “Restore Facilities, Resources & Character Defining Elements to National Cemetery Standards.”² The cemetery had lacked any significant enhancements in nearly fifty years. Today, the park recognizes that the condition of the headstones, decline in plant materials, and contemporary alterations detract from the cemetery’s historic character that define it as one of the Civil War-era national cemeteries. The construction project is intended to comprehensively address these deficiencies by restoring the property’s historic character and improving visitor safety, orientation, and interpretation. The construction project is compatible with both the park’s legislative purpose and its recently completed General Management Plan, which calls for the cemetery to be brought up to the standards of the National Cemetery System administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (Poplar Grove is one of fourteen National Cemeteries that were transferred to the National Park Service).

Organization

This report is organized into four chapters corresponding to the components of CLR Parts I and II: site history, existing conditions, analysis & evaluation, and treatment. A resource list and appendix containing important historical documents, graphics, chronology, and list of repositories consulted are included at the back of the report. The following is a summary of the content of each chapter:

Chapter I: Site History

The site history is a narrative that focuses on the physical development of the landscape from pre-history to present, focusing on the time from the establishment of the engineers’ camp in 1864 to the present. The chapter is broken down into four sections, each representing historical periods defined by changes in land-use, development, and ownership: Before the Cemetery, Pre-History to 1866; Establishment and Initial Development of Poplar Grove National Cemetery, 1866-1869; War Department Era, 1869-1933; and National Park Service Administration, 1933-Present. The site history is accompanied by historic photographs, diagrams, and period plans illustrating the detailed condition of the landscape at the end of each era.

Chapter 2: Existing Conditions

The existing conditions chapter details through narrative and graphics the existing landscape character and associated features. It also addresses the regional context, environmental conditions, cemetery setting (immediate environs), and operations pertaining to the landscape.

Chapter 3: Analysis & Evaluation

The analysis & evaluation chapter summarizes the historical significance of the cemetery based on existing National Register documentation; proposes modifications to this existing documentation based on the findings of the site history; and evaluates the landscape to determine which features contribute to the historical character and significance of the cemetery. The evaluation also identifies character-defining features that have been removed since the end of the historic period. The landscape is analyzed according to eight landscape characteristics (natural systems and features, spatial organization, land use, circulation, vegetation, buildings and structures, small-scale features, and archeological sites). Each characteristic and its component features are evaluated by comparing historic and existing conditions. A plan is included to show features dating to the historic period and those that have been introduced or removed since the end of the historic period.

Chapter 4: Treatment

This chapter describes an overall philosophy to guide treatment of the landscape, and recommends in narrative and graphic format specific treatment tasks necessary to enhance the historical character of the landscape, based on the findings of the analysis. Recommendations address the upcoming line-item construction project “Restore Facilities, Resources & Character Defining Elements to National Cemetery Standards.”

Methodology

Overall, research for this Cultural Landscape Report has been undertaken at a thorough level of investigation.³ Historical research focused on holdings in the National Archives in Washington, D. C. and College Park, Maryland, and at Petersburg National Battlefield. Research was compared to field observations at Poplar Grove and at its companion Civil War-era national cemeteries in Virginia, including City Point, Cold Harbor, Culpeper, Fort Harrison, Glendale, Richmond, Seven Pines, and Yorktown. A history of Poplar Grove National Cemetery, prepared by National Park Service Historian Herbert Olsen in 1954, provided the basis for the overall history of the site, although it contains limited information on the landscape, and in particular on its development after 1880.

The site history focuses on the development of the physical site through the present, but does not address, except where relevant to understanding of the landscape, the contextual background on the Civil War, post-war search and recovery program, or administrative history of the War Department, National Cemetery System, and Petersburg National Battlefield.

The existing conditions chapter has been developed based on field observations by the author, the most current site surveys and plans (including the park's GIS database), and discussions with park staff about current issues pertaining to maintenance, administration, and interpretation. The analysis and evaluation is based on the findings of the site history; the most current (80%) draft of the National Register documentation for Petersburg National Battlefield and the existing National Register multiple properties documentation for Civil War-era National Cemeteries administered by the Veterans Administration; and the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. The History Program of the Northeast Region of the National Park Service was also consulted on the analysis. Finally, the treatment chapter [to be completed] was developed based on the findings of the analysis, the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, the parameters of the line-item construction project, and discussions with park staff [forthcoming December meeting/charette].

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Before the Cemetery: Pre-1866

The site of Poplar Grove National Cemetery, situated south of the Appomattox River near the Fall Line dividing the plateau uplands and the tidewater lowlands of Virginia, was part of a region referred to by European explorers as the "Apamatica Country." At the time of European contact in the seventeenth century, the region was a border area for several Native peoples, including the Eastern Siouian, Southern Iroquois, and the Appomattox. European settlement in the region began in the late eighteenth century based on the plantation system with a central commercial and industrial center, Petersburg. On the eve of the Civil War, the site of the cemetery, covered in second-growth loblolly pine forest, was part of a ninety-acre farm owned by the Flower family.

In 1864 during the closing years of the Civil War, the Union Army built an extensive line of earthen fortifications as part of its siege on the city of Petersburg. In late October 1864 following Union victory at the nearby Battle of Peeble's Farm or Poplar Springs Church, the 50th New York Volunteer Engineers, who were responsible for construction of the fortifications, established a camp on the Flower farm. Here at the future site of the cemetery, the engineers cleared the loblolly woods to build an elaborate camp organized around a central parade

grounds that included rustic-style wooden officers' quarters, barracks, and a chapel/meeting hall named Poplar Grove Church in honor of the church lost in the Battle of Peeble's Farm. The engineers occupied the camp until March 29, 1865. The camp buildings remained on the site for at least a year following the end of the Civil War on April 9, 1865.

Establishment and Initial Development of Poplar Grove

National Cemetery, 1866-1869

In May 1866, Lieutenant Colonel James Moore in the Office of the Quartermaster General, U. S. Army, selected the engineers' camp on the Flower farm as the site for a national cemetery. This cemetery was to be part of a new system of national cemeteries being developed for the unprecedented number of fallen soldiers from the Civil War. It was one of eleven being established in the Virginia district, along with City Point, Cold Harbor, Culpeper, Fredericksburg, Glendale, Hampton, Richmond, Staunton, Winchester, and Yorktown National Cemeteries. The cemetery was named Poplar Grove after the engineers' Poplar Grove Church, which initially served as the focal point of the cemetery. The plan for the seven-acre cemetery, connected to the public highway (Vaughan Road) by a 1,052-foot long approach road through the fields of the Flower farm, consisted of graves in concentric circles around a central flagstaff, positioned on axis with Poplar Grove Church. Most of the old camp buildings were removed with the beginning of the reinterment process on June 1, 1866. Bodies were recovered from battlefields in the region by a force of upwards of one hundred men who were together known as the burial corps. By June 1867, most of the grave sites in the cemetery had been filled with total reinterments numbering 5,196.

For the following three years that it worked at Poplar Grove, the burial corps continued to reinter a small number of remains while developing the cemetery landscape. This work included building a wood perimeter fence, sodding grave mounds, putting up wooden headboards, erecting a central flagstaff on a six-foot high mound encircled by four gun monuments, planting red cedar trees, and building drives, walks, drains, and a frame lodge for the superintendent. In the spring of 1868, the burial corps removed the namesake of the cemetery, Poplar Grove Church, which had become deteriorated beyond repair. One acre was added to the cemetery at its southwest corner, and on December 15, 1868, the government's acquisition of the 8.13-acre parcel from the Flower family was completed. On June 30, 1869, the burial corps at Poplar Grove National Cemetery was officially disbanded, having interred a total of 6,178 Union soldiers and five civilians; only thirty-five percent of the remains were positively identified.

War Department Era, 1869-1933

After the burial corps was disbanded, the War Department continued to develop the cemetery landscape through the Office of the Quartermaster General and on-site supervision of a cemetery superintendent. The development of the landscape and buildings was standardized throughout the national cemetery system and adapted to local conditions as necessary. Standard improvements at Poplar Grove included a stone Second Empire-style lodge (1871-72) based on a prototype designed by Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs; specimen trees and sylvan hall of elms (1871), perimeter hedge of Osage orange and boxwood hedge in the shape of a Maltese cross (1871), brick inclosure wall with granite and iron gateway (1876), marble headstones for known graves and marble blocks for unknown graves (1877), settees (c.1878), approach road allee (1878), brick toolshed-stable and kitchen buildings (1879), and iron tablets/signs (c.1881). By 1881, the program of major improvements had been completed. Some changes were also made during this time to the landscape that had been built by the burial corps, including moving of the frame lodge to the rear of the new lodge in 1872, changing the surface of the drives and walks from gravel to turf in c.1872-74, and filling of the brick gutters in 1877.

For the following four decades, the War Department made few improvements to the landscape, with the exception of an iron rostrum added in 1897. Some landscape features were changed during this time, including removal of the Osage orange hedge in c.1888 and replacement with English ivy, graveling of the main drive in c.1900, and installation of an iron flagstaff and removal of the flagstaff mound in 1913. In 1915, a tornado swept across the cemetery and resulted in the loss of 139 trees. With the establishment of Petersburg National Military Park in 1926, the War Department began to plan for a series of improvements at Poplar Grove. This program resulted in the building of a Colonial Revival-style stucco-faced public restroom building (utility building) and new garage in 1929; and in 1931, modernization of the lodge with a metal roof and a concrete floor on the porch, planting of 101 trees, paving of the approach road and main drive, and installation of a new iron flagstaff.

National Park Service Administration, 1933-Present

On August 10, 1933, administration of Poplar Grove together with Petersburg National Battlefield was transferred from the Quartermaster Corps in the War Department to the National Park Service in the Interior Department.

Administration was initially carried out through the Superintendent of Colonial National Monument until December 1935, when the cemetery was placed under the newly appointed Superintendent of Petersburg National Military Park. From 1933 through c.1942, maintenance and improvement of the cemetery was aided by labor from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). During this time, the

landscape was radically changed when, in February and March 1934, the grave markers were set flush the ground in an effort to facilitate mowing and to enhance the appearance of the cemetery. The park received public criticism over the change, which did not ease maintenance as anticipated. In 1937, CCC crews planted 115 red cedars, mostly as screening along the perimeter of the cemetery, and repaired the inclosure wall. In c.1941, the National Park Service completed a master plan for the park that included graphic documentation of existing conditions at Poplar Grove with a complete tree inventory.

Following World War II, the position of cemetery superintendent was abolished in 1949 and maintenance of the cemetery fell to the small staff of Petersburg National Battlefield. Without an onsite superintendent and CCC laborers, the condition of the cemetery deteriorated, and by the 1950s the park was again facing public criticism, especially over the fact that many of the grave markers were not visible because they had sunken and become covered with grass. In 1957, as part of its MISSION 66 program, the park made modest improvements to the cemetery, primarily by raising the headstones above grade and installing two new signs to either side of the flagstaff that showed the burial register and the plan of the cemetery. The iron tablets were probably removed at this time. That same year, the last new burial was made and the cemetery was official closed. No additional improvements were made to the landscape, which continued to erode through the loss of small scale features and vegetation. In c.1974, the park removed the settees, boxwood Maltese cross hedge, and three of the four gun monuments, and cut the height of the flagstaff in half.

By the early 1970s, suburban development had begun to encroach on the setting of Poplar Grove. In c.1972, a drive was built from the approach road along the northern boundary of the cemetery to two houses constructed within seventy-five feet of the east wall. Four years later, the park began to plan for a comprehensive plan of improvements to the buildings and landscape, including the acquisition of eighteen surrounding acres to protect the setting of the cemetery and place the approach road in federal ownership. Apparently due to lack of funds, these plans were not implemented, although the property acquisition was eventually advanced. In 1987, a plan for acquiring a smaller amount of land—3.7 wooded acres to the west of the cemetery along with a section of the approach road—was proposed by the park. The National Park Service acquired this land in 1991 through donation by Mrs. Roberta Odom (owner of the former Flower farm). In c.1995, the park built a visitor parking area on a portion of the land adjoining the approach road and cemetery entrance gates. In recent years, the park has repaved the main drive and approach road using a sand and gravel top coat, removed hazard trees, and cleaned headstones.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

[forthcoming summary of analysis & evaluation and treatment recommendations]]

ENDNOTES

¹ Project Agreement, Poplar Grove National Cemetery Cultural Landscape Report, 3 June 2005.

² PMIS 89424.

³ As defined in the Cultural Resource Management Guideline (DO-28, 1998), “thorough” means research in selected published and documentary sources of known or presumed relevance that are readily accessible without extensive travel and that promise expeditious extraction of relevant data; interviewing all knowledgeable persons who are readily available, non-destructive investigation, and presenting findings in no greater detail than required by the task directive. National Park Service, Cultural Resource Management Guideline, NPS-28, web edition, 11 June 1998, http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/nps28/28contents.htm, 17-19.

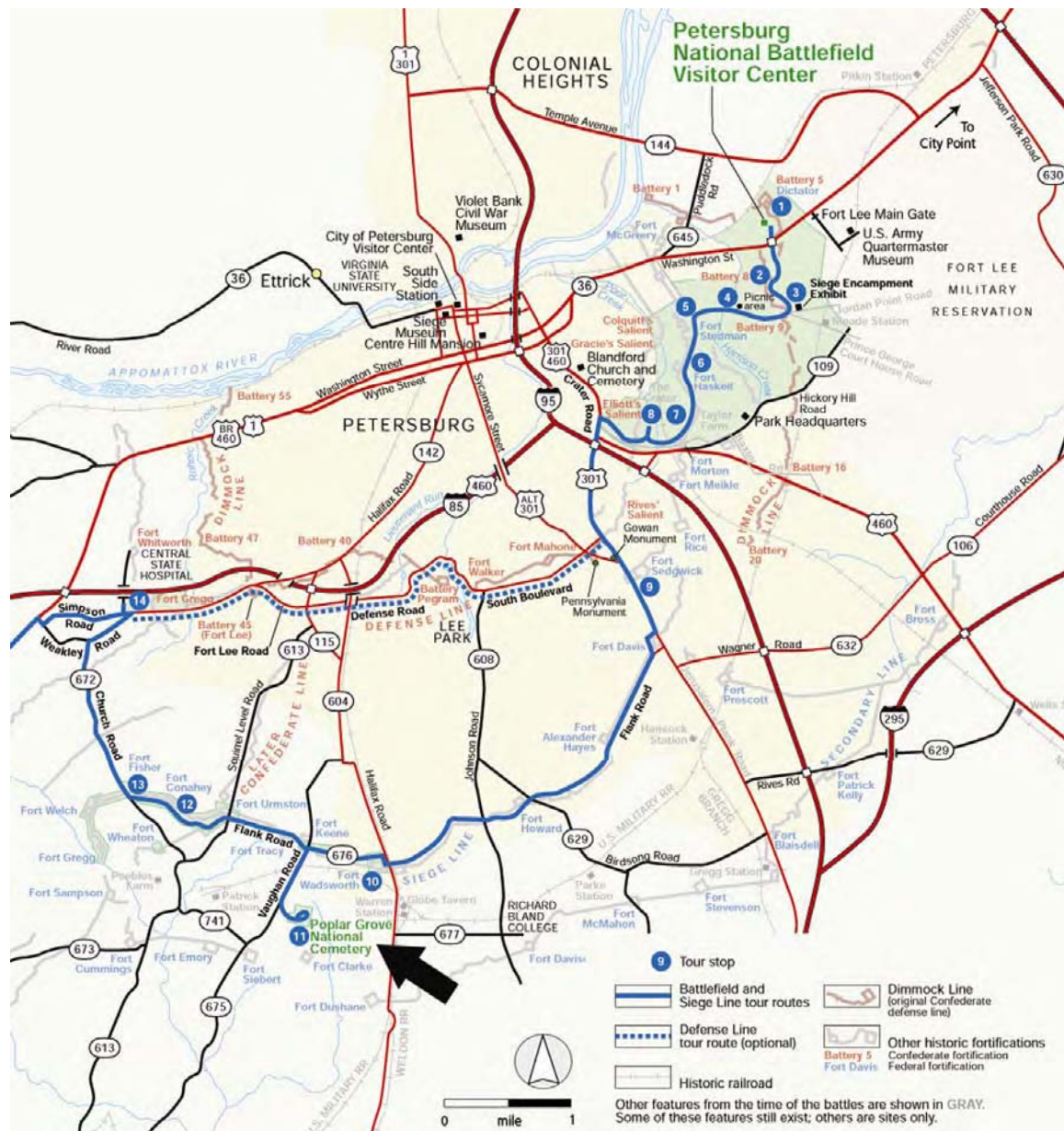


Figure 0.1: Current map of Petersburg showing the location of Poplar Grove National Cemetery (stop #11 on the Siege Line Tour) and other components of Petersburg National Battlefield. Detail, Petersburg National Battlefield park brochure (National Park Service, 1996).

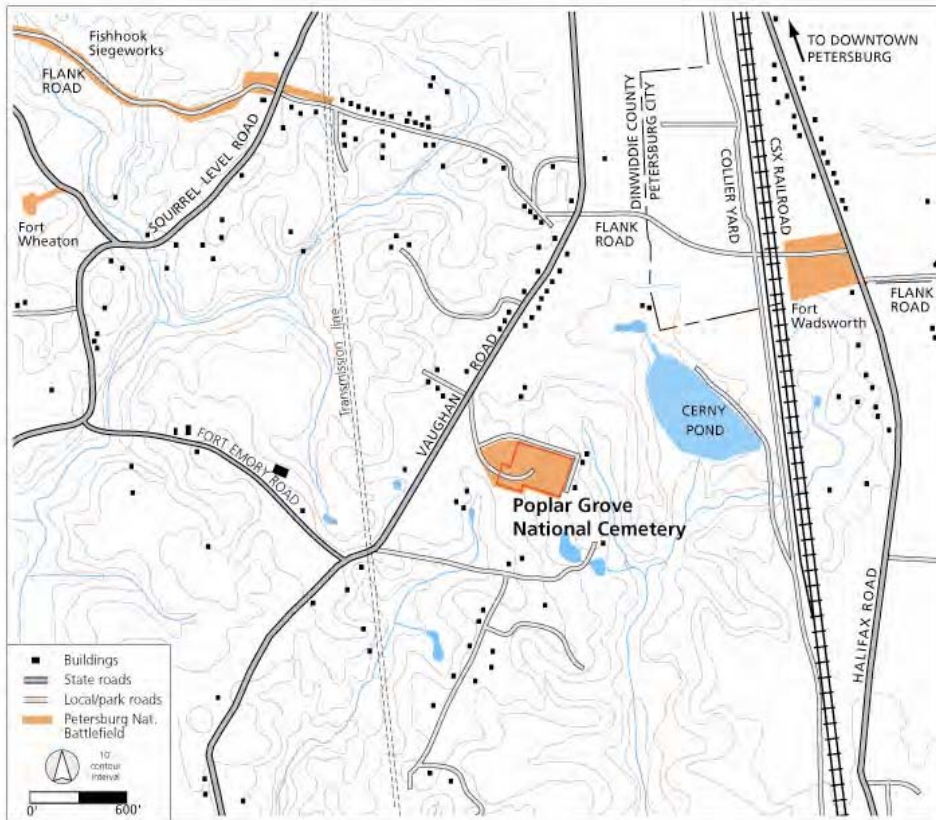


Figure 0.2: The existing setting of Poplar Grove National Cemetery. The red line indicates the cemetery inclosure wall. SUNY ESF, based on 1994 USGS Petersburg quadrangle map.



Figure 0.3: Aerial photograph of Poplar Grove National Cemetery illustrating setting, 1994. Detail, USGS aerial photograph of Petersburg quadrangle, annotated by SUNY ESF.