



LANNIS WATERS/Staff Photographer

Gregory Mount pushes a ground-penetrating radar device over land at Barton Memorial Park Cemetery, looking for anomalies that could lead him to long-lost graves.

City using radar device to find lost graves, bodies

By ELIOT KLEINBERG
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Connie Jones, who's 77, remembers Will Light (1886-1946), who lies at the foot of a massive banyan tree just a few hundred feet from her driveway.

Well, a marker's there. His body? Maybe.

Barton Memorial Park Cemetery is a historical mystery. But now the city knows where at least some of the bodies are buried.

The city-owned cemetery — in a half-acre corner of a historically black neighborhood — was in private hands for decades.

When Warren Adams became the city's historic preservation planner in August, he began looking up historical sites. The file on Barton Memorial, at Northwest 12th Avenue and Northwest Fifth Street, said it contained about 60 graves.

Half had corresponding names of the dead as well as their relatives. The rest were marked "unknown." And no map. Just a list.

At the cemetery, there's evidence of graves — dark grass, indentations. But only about 20 markers.

"I'm hoping somewhere there's a hand-drawn sketch showing where these graves are," Adams said.

Adams had called county archaeologists, who led him to Florida

Atlantic University's Gregory Mount, an archaeologist by training who's seeking a Ph.D. in geophysics.

In February, Mount came out with three graduate students in geosciences and anthropology.

"We found 30 to 35 anomalies that might be graves," Mounts said.

The team had brought a ground-penetrating radar. Mount showed off the radar device, which looks a bit

like a lawnmower. It's so sophisticated it can discern not just between metal and wood but soil and sand.

"The computer does all the work. We're just pushing it," he said Friday.

The oldest recorded burial is 1913; the oldest legible marker says 1926.

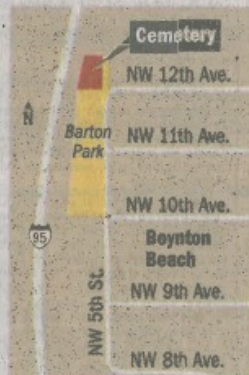
Little Alton Barton (1944-1950), who died of asthma, is — according to his marker — "at rest."

It was his mother, Mary, a domestic worker, who got fed up in the 1970s and pressured city officials to clean up the cemetery. In 1979, they named it and the adjacent playground for her. She died in 2004.

Adams said the radar is the most intrusive act the city will conduct. No one will be digging.

"We have a historic cemetery here," he said. "It has a right to be preserved."

● eliot_kleinberg@pbpost.com



STEVE LOPEZ/Staff Artist