



**Abandoned & Neglected
Cemeteries Commission
Open Forum
Meeting Summary**

November 27, 2007

Steve Rankin
Advocacy Planner
steve@jcci.org

What: Open public forum to solicit citizen input on abandoned and neglected cemeteries in Duval County.

Where: Regency Square Public Library (9900 Regency Square Blvd., Jacksonville)

In attendance: Cemeteries Commission members: Jerry Spinks, Chair. Jon Ferguson, Emily Lisska. Concerned citizens: Carla Sayers, David Sayers. JCCI Staff: Steve Rankin.

Meeting Time: 7:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Discussion: Mr. and Mrs. Sayers expressed concern about preservation of New Berlin Cemetery in North Jacksonville. Family members are buried there, and they intend to be buried there as well. The cemetery is of historical value with Napoleon Broward Bonaparte being the most famous person buried at New Berlin. It is a small, isolated cemetery with strong family ties, though a portion of the facility is owned by nearby churches.

The Sayers are concerned that future development in the area may encroach on cemetery property and on graves just outside the legal boundaries of the cemetery. While the cemetery is in decent condition, there has been some vandalism or other damage. They are also suspicious of the sale of some burial plots where no evidence exists of recorded transactions.

The Sayers are interested in creating a volunteer organization to do regular cleanup and maintenance at New Berlin Cemetery. They envision organizing a handful of prominent families with relatives buried there, provided they are able to locate and make contact with them. The Sayers seek organizational assistance from an existing volunteer organization to guide them in the right direction regarding how to organize, fund-raising techniques, liability issues, etc.

With the interest of the Sayers and their extended relatives, the necessary elements may be present to create another *Gravelly Hill* Friends-type organization at New Berlin Cemetery. Items that would help form an organization include: a model preservation plan; clarification of legal title; and need for plot and property surveys. Perhaps Florida Coastal School of Law could be enlisted to have students, in return for credit, review old deeds and public records to clarify title issues.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.