1. **Name of Property**
   - Historic name: Wright-Hunter Cemetery
   - Other names/site number: Hunter Cemetery, Chilson Colored Cemetery, Sylvia Cemetery
   - Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
   (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. **Location**
   - Street & number: The intersection of Antonio Avenue and Lemp Lane
   - City or town: Beckley
   - State: West Virginia
   - County: Raleigh

3. **State/Federal Agency Certification**
   - As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
   - I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
   - In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
     - X national
     - ___ statewide
     - ___ local
   - Applicable National Register Criteria:
     - X A
     - ___ B
     - ___ C
     - ___ D

   Signature of certifying official/Title: __________________________ Date ____________

   State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

   In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

   Signature of commenting official: __________________________ Date ____________

   Title: __________________________ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government
4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

__ entered in the National Register
__ determined eligible for the National Register
__ determined not eligible for the National Register
__ removed from the National Register
__ other (explain:) _____________________

Signature of the Keeper __________________________________________

Date of Action ____________________________________________

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:  

Public – Local  

Public – State  

Public – Federal  

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

Building(s)  

District  

Site  

Structure  

Object  
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Name of Property

Raleigh, West Virginia
County and State

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY/cemetery

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY/cemetery
7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: OTHER: Stone/Concrete

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph
The Wright-Hunter Cemetery is located in the Town District of the City of Beckley in Raleigh County, West Virginia at the intersection of Antonio Avenue and Lemp Lane. The Wright-Hunter Cemetery is approximately two acres in size and is situated on a level, grassed parcel in a residential neighborhood that was historically populated by Black residents. Burial markers are informally and irregularly placed and include upright memorials constructed of concrete, marble and granite while several consist of concrete plaques which lay flush with the ground. Some markers only consist of a natural stone. The cemetery has experienced both natural erosion and some decay of its stones from well-intentioned rehabilitation efforts, however, it retains its integrity of location, setting, feeling, association and materials. The workmanship and design of grave markers are also apparent. This cemetery is the earliest known burial ground in Raleigh County established by a Black resident for use during segregation.
The Wright-Hunter Cemetery is situated on a flat parcel of ground in East Beckley approximately 1.5 miles from the city center. Surrounded by Lemp Lane, Barber Avenue, and Antonio Avenue, the modest cemetery is bordered by a chain link fence with a three-foot gate allowing entry near Antonio Avenue. Thick foliage exists along the southern and eastern perimeter. The cemetery today is approximately 2.2 acres in size. A stately entry was constructed circa 1991 with two, four-foot concrete columns serving as the base of an aluminum arch that identifies the cemetery. It reads: “Gone but not forgotten in the Hunter Cemetery/ Land given by Rev. D.C. Hunter in 1901, A.D./ Restored by Rev. W.H. Law and many supporters in 1993 A.D.”¹ This decorative arch also has a three-sided vinyl fence and two flagpoles.

The cemetery is irregular in its size and shape with irregularly placed burials. Some graves have permanent markers hand-cut from marble or formed from concrete while others were machine-cut polished granite. There also appears to be many additional burials marked only by the depressions left in the grass-covered ground. The grave markers give a brief understanding of the socio-economic status of the decedents. The markers’ iconography also provides a glimpse into the beliefs, fraternal organizations and the grief of loved ones left behind. Small children, like six-year-old Ruby Foster, were remembered with marble lambs while those who were spiritual may have had an image of praying hands or the gates of heaven etched into their stone. Some markers had symbols of the Masons, Odd Fellows and Knights of Pythias including chain links, and the letters F, C and B in a triangle which stood for Friendship, Benevolence and Charity. Several military veterans are also interred in the cemetery with their standardized marble headstones. Approximately 109 graves were located through their markers, and 157 additional burials were identified (but not located) through obituary and newspaper research.

One large maple tree is situated to the southeast of the entry which appears to be at least 100 years old while a new growth beech tree is situated in the center of the cemetery.² A yucca plant is also growing around a headstone toward the west side of the cemetery while an unidentified plant with thorns is growing around a burial on the east side of the cemetery. Yucca and other thorny plants were historically linked to African American funerary culture as there was a belief that these plants prevented the movement of spirits.³ The cemetery is covered with grass which is kept short.

When the initial Beckley Court Addition was laid out in 1919, the plat retained a large right-of-way which was later utilized to install overhead utilities including electric power poles. One power pole is located inside the cemetery boundary.

Originally, only a half-acre parcel was reserved by Reverend Hunter as a burial ground when he sold a portion of the property in 1925, however, in 1936, 1944 and 1952, additional adjacent lots

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¹ D.C. Hunter did not purchase the parcel of land until 1906 according to Raleigh County Deed Book 36, Page 151.
² The species of this tree is based on an educated guess and is not confirmed by a botanist.
were purchased by Black-owned funeral homes and residents to provide additional gravesites for their patrons.

The cemetery fell into disarray in the mid 20th century although several efforts were made over the years to clean and organize the cemetery. The chain link fence was also added around the perimeter of the cemetery in 1991.

Rumors persist that a mass burial took place to inter the deceased from the West Virginia Colored Tuberculosis Sanitarium (also known as Denmar Sanitarium), however, only 18 names have been identified thus far as former patient burials. Additional potential unmarked burials, however, appear visible both on the ground and from aerial surveillance. Additional research and archaeological survey are necessary to determine the existence and location of additional burials.

The entry arch, vinyl fence, concrete pillars, power pole and chain link fence are all considered non-contributing features.
8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [x] A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [ ] C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

- [ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [x] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
ETHNIC HERITAGE/ Black
SOCIAL HISTORY

Section 7 page 7
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Name of Property

___________________

Period of Significance
1906-1960

___________________

Significant Dates
1906
1936
1944
1952

___________________

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
N/A

___________________

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

___________________

Architect/Builder
Unknown

___________________

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Wright-Hunter Cemetery is locally significant as a cemetery that was established by an African American for other African Americans to be buried during segregation. For nearly 60 years, the rural cemetery continued to grow and serve as a non-denominational resting place for Black residents. This site is eligible under Criterion A: Social History and Ethnic Heritage (Black) for its association with African American burial practices during segregation. The markers that remain in the cemetery also provide evidence of the community’s cultural/spiritual and political beliefs. This cemetery meets National Register Criteria Consideration D as the cemetery derives its primary significance through its association with a historic event. The
period of significance for this cemetery begins in 1906 when Reverend D.C. Hunter purchased the property through 1960 which is when the last recorded burial took place.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Wright-Hunter Cemetery is reflective of the cultural norms and beliefs of the early 20th century in southern West Virginia. The cemetery itself was the byproduct of systematic racism and Jim Crow laws which encouraged a segregated society while also demonstrating the self-reliance and funerary culture of Black West Virginians in the early 20th century.

Beckley is the county seat of Raleigh County which was formed from Fayette County in 1850.4 The county possessed a varied landscape with fertile soil, large tracts of timber, and coal.5 Named after General Alfred Beckley, a pioneer and early settler of the region, the town is situated on a plateau and the extension of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad to the region in 1901 helped accelerate its development, becoming an incorporated city in 1908.6 The region’s newly found coal deposits also attracted laborers to fuel the area’s population growth. Beckley was known as the “Smokeless Coal Capital of the World,” and the demand for coal during WWI spurred the region’s development with numerous coal mines and related operations.7

Coal companies placed ads in southern newspapers to attract Black workers or sometimes engaged laborers by sending men out to extoll the promise and potential of the West Virginia coal fields.8 Eventually, some Black workers recruited their family and friends to work in the mines, extending kinship networks throughout southern West Virginia and increasing the African American population of southern West Virginia.9

As the region grew, schools, theaters and opera houses brought culture into the community and Beckley sought to improve its municipal standing through beautification programs and street paving.10 As the town grew more prosperous, it also became more segregated.

Segregation was a form of repression that resulted from the Civil War as a way to continue to subjugate the Black populace. Segregation was found in public education, housing developments, entertainment, eating establishments and recreational activities. West Virginia’s

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5 Krebs, 3.
7 Federal Writers Project, 459.
first state constitution made sure to include segregated schools to enforce strict separation of the races.11 Regardless of the obstacles in their way, many Black residents created opportunities for themselves in the mines of southern West Virginia.12

The unincorporated community of Sylvia, later called East Beckley, soon became home to many African American residents. Sylvia was situated along South Kanawha Street and extended southward which appeared as a flourishing community with a church and a school.13 According to the 1910 United States Census, Sylvia was enumerated as an individual district with 452 residents. Interestingly, while Sylvia was populated with miners and was located adjacent to a mine, it was not considered a company town and had a variety of Black, white and foreign-born residents.

The town of Sylvia, in 1910, had a mix of residents representing an assortment of occupations including miners, breakmen, doctors, gardeners, photographers and an architect.14 The town appeared to be slightly divided by race by street, although, white and Black families were still living amongst each other. Out of the 178 total workers, 91 were miners (with 56 residents of Black or mixed race and 35 were white). Sylvia, at this time, also had a high degree of home ownership among African Americans with 32 Black or mixed-race homeowners compared to 18 white homeowners.15

One of the most influential residents of the Sylvia area was Dr. D.C. Hunter. David C. Hunter was born a slave in 1864 in Forest Depot, Bedford County, Virginia. After emancipation, Hunter attended public schools and worked in the railroad industry, like his father.16 At 23 years of age, he had a religious awakening and began attending Forest Baptist Church.17 Hunter then attended the Richmond Theological Seminary and moved to West Virginia where he ministered while working in the coal mines. Hunter established eight new Baptist churches throughout the New River Region including, in 1908, the Ebenezer Baptist Church which was Beckley’s first established church for Black residents.18

Hunter purchased approximately five and a half acres from Thomas Wickham in 1906 to establish a burial ground for Black Raleigh County residents.19 Although there appeared to be no

11 Trotter, *Coal, Class and Color*, 29 and the Constitution of the State of West Virginia 1872, Article XII, item 8 which expressly forbids white and non-white students from attending the same school as found in https://archive.wvculture.org/history/government/1872constitution.html, accessed August 8, 2023.
17 Caldwell, 122.
19 Raleigh County Deed Book 36, Page 151.
pomp or circumstance relating to this purchase, when he later sold part of the property in 1926, he excepted “one-half acre, more or less, enclosed by a fence and that is now being used by Negros for cemetery purposes…” It is interesting to note that while Rev. Hunter was actively involved with the Baptist Church, the cemetery he established was not formally connected to any churches in the area.

Rose Braxton was the earliest known burial in the new cemetery. Mrs. Braxton died December 1, 1906 and has an ornate and descriptive headstone. Death notices and burials for Black Americans were rarely reported in the newspaper in the early years unless it was someone held in high esteem [generally by the white community] or had a salacious quality to it. The first death notice for a burial in the new cemetery was printed in 1908 for the death of Charles Wright, “one of the oldest and best-known colored men in the section.” Mr. Wright was “buried on Sunday afternoon in the colored cemetery at Sylvia, the funeral being in charge of the Odd Fellows.”

The need for skilled and unskilled laborers in the mines brought European immigrants and Black migrants to the region. Workers began to be separated into segregated neighborhoods, based on race, ethnicity or economic standing. The Lilly Land Company sought to capitalize on the new market of Black homeowners and began running ads in the local newspaper advertising 50 lots in East Beckley “to sell to the colored people.” The advertisement listed the names of men and women and their previous addresses who had already purchased property. It is interesting to note that most buyers were from southern West Virginia mining communities including Logan, Gary, and Matewan.

The Lilly Land Company developed the Beckley Court Addition in 1919 to attract additional residents to the area. Formerly part of Tract 10 of the Beaver Coal Company lands, the approximately 117-acre parcel was subdivided into numerous lots approximately 40 feet wide and 120 feet long. A map of the proposed development shows the first illustration of a “colored cemetery” in the region of the Wright-Hunter Cemetery. There appears to be a discrepancy in the layout of the “colored cemetery” as drawn in 1919 as it more likely extended east-west from Barber Avenue to Antonio Avenue, rather than north to south as depicted, however, it possibly could have been a collaboration between the Lilly Land Company or the Beaver Coal and Coke/Raleigh Coal and Coke Company (previous owners of the land) and the Black community at Sylvia.

By 1929, South Fayette Street extended eastward from Beckley and by 1932, topographic maps show Sylvia and the surrounding region were incorporated into the Beckley City limits and renamed East Beckley. The area between South Fayette Street and Kanawha Boulevard became home to many African Americans with schools, churches and stores catering to Black patrons. Where separation between the races was once an unspoken rule, segregation became codified with Jim Crow laws.

Raleigh County Deed Book 92, Page 278.
The Raleigh Herald, Beckley, West Virginia, Friday, September 28, 1917, Page 5.
Ibid.
Raleigh County Deed Book 66, Page 288.
As the Black population in Beckley grew, so too did the need for additional burial space. James Grey purchased additional lots from the Lilly Land Company in 1936 for ‘the express use as a cemetery or for burial purposes’. Mr. Grey, according to the 1930 US Federal Census, was a Black barber living on South Fayette Street who owned his own shop. Gray purchased four lots abutting the southwest boundary of the cemetery although no evidence has been found that he actually ran any type of funerary establishment. Gray sold his lots to C.D. Trent in 1942 who also ran a funeral home in Beckley.

B.L. Wright also purchased several lots from the Lilly Land Company in 1944 which was utilized for additional burial space. B.L. is short for Mrs. Bessie L. Wright who was listed in the 1934 City Directory as an undertaker in her own right. In the 1940 US Federal Census, Bessie Wright is listed as the owner of a funeral home while her husband was employed as a miner.

Several years later, after Bessie’s passing, R.L. Wright [Bessie Wright’s son, Russell L. Wright, who was listed as an embalmer in the 1950 US Federal Census] purchased additional land on the north side of the property, although it has the fewest extant above ground burial markers.

Decedents from the Denmar Sanitarium (also known as the West Virginia Colored Tuberculosis Asylum) are also buried within the Wright-Hunter Cemetery, although only 18 individuals have been identified thus far. These burials are interspersed among the other decedents; their only identifying feature as former tuberculosis patients is the cause of death written on the death certificate.

The Wright-Hunter Cemetery also is the final resting place for several veterans whose government-issued marble headstones list their name, rank and birthplace. Amous Brown, of East Beckley, was a World War I Veteran who passed in 1953, whose burial is not marked with any headstone.

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25 Raleigh County Deed Book 134, Page 221, June 6, 1936.
27 As evidenced by Beckley City Directory research and newspaper research.
28 Raleigh County Deed Book 186, Page 369. The CD Trent Funeral Home later became the Durgan Funeral Home which continues to provide burial services in Raleigh County (as of 2023).
29 Raleigh County Deed Book 196, Page 30.
30 Beckley City Directory, 1934, 173.
32 Raleigh County Deed Book 337, Page 0071. Russell L. Wright died on January 11, 1958 and the Wright Funeral Home later conducted business as the Wright and Anderson Funeral Home, which appeared to conduct business until 1971, when it was identified in the local newspaper as being delinquent for payment of back taxes (Beckley Post Herald, July 27, 1971).
33 Beckley Post-Herald, “Veteran’s Rites Tuesday,” December 1, 1953. An application for a military headstone exists, however, no marker is visible within the cemetery. National Archives at Washington DC; Washington DC, USA; Applications for Headstones For U.S. Military Veterans, 1925-1941; NAID: 596118; Record Group Number: 92; Record Group Title: Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General as found in ancestry.com.
The most well-known burial in the cemetery was that of Rev. D.C. Hunter, who died in 1944. Buried alongside his wife Eliza (d. 1937) and two sons who pre-deceased him (d. 1910 and d.1915), Rev. Hunter’s simple granite headstone says, “he fought a good fight and kept the faith.”

Celia Williams was the oldest person reportedly buried in the cemetery. Ms. Williams’ obituary stated she was 115-year-old at the time of her death.34

The last burial recorded in the Wright-Hunter Cemetery was William Dangerfield who was buried in 1960. The City took care of part of the cemetery intermittently in the late 20th century, although the cemetery became overgrown and forgotten until several passionate groups, encouraged by Reverend Hall, sought to reclaim the history of the cemetery in the 1990s.35 Today, while the cemetery is under the care of the Durgan Funeral Home, no recent burials have occurred at the site and the cemetery is maintained by the local branch of the NAACP.

**Funerary Practices**

Funerary practices in the United States during the early 20th century transformed from a very intimate experience to professionalized, impersonal system. No longer were loved ones cleaning and preparing the body for burial but instead specialized practitioners were called in to handle arrangements.36

The deceased bodies were first washed, then placed in burial clothes before being laid out in a formal setting for a wake, which was often called, in the Black community, “setting up.”37 The wake was generally held in family homes before formal settings were established and would allow the community an opportunity to celebrate the deceased with food and drink before they were buried.38 Historic African traditions permeated their way into Black American funeral practices as a way to ensure the deceased experienced a successful afterlife.39

The first city directory for Beckley was published in 1921 which listed three embalmers (C.C. Rose, H.T. Caffee and Son, and H.F. Wilfong).40 Calfee and Son and C.C. Rose were also listed as undertakers.41 While in some areas, white funeral homes did embalm minorities, it was not a common practice; as a result, black funeral homes were established to cater to the needs of the

34 *The Raleigh Register*, “Williams Funeral Set,” July 20, 1951.
37 Rainville, 67.
38 Rainville, 68.
39 Rainville, 69.
40 *Directory of Beckley*, 1921, 53.
41 *Directory of Beckley*, 1921, 59.
African American community. Because of this important role in society, Black funeral directors were often considered socially elite.42

Very few obituaries of Black residents before 1920 mentioned the funeral home/undertaker handing the burial, however, two were noted; Lena Harris, an 11-year-old girl, was handled by Caffee and Son while Rufus Lewis was buried by Rose and Turner.43 Harris and Lewis were both buried in the “colored” cemetery near Sylvia.

In 1927, four undertakers were listed in the City Directory of Beckley, two of which were listed as “colored:” Armstead and Co. located on Neville Street with L.E. Armstead, manager and The Funeral Home located in East Beckley.44 L.E. Armstead was later featured in an article claiming to be the “First Negro Mortician” in Beckley, establishing his business in 1923.45

In 1929, the Rose Funeral Home was the only listed embalmer and funeral director in Beckley while four businesses were listed as undertakers, Armstead and Co., Caffee and Son and Early and Jackson (in addition to Rose Funeral Home).46 The Rose Funeral Home served as the only listed embalmer and funeral director in 1932.47 Additional undertakers were listed in the 1932 Directory including Armstead and Co, Caffee and Co, Foster Undertaking, Jackson and Johnson, Jackson and Son, Lee W. Henry and the Rose Funeral Home.48 None of these establishments were identified by race, however, in the 1934 City Directory, Jackson and Son, Inc. Funeral Directors and Embalmers were listed as “colored.”49 Jackson and Son saw competition from Willfong-NE Smith Inc. who were also listed as embalmers and funeral directors.50 The competition of undertakers increased in 1934 with the addition of C.D. Trent Undertaking Co., and Mrs. Bessie L. Wright. Although race was not identified in the directory that year, the location of several establishments on South Kanawha hinted that these businesses were located in the predominantly Black section of Beckley.

The term “embalmers” began to phase out of funerary terminology and was replaced with “undertakers” and “funeral directors.” By 1937, the City Directory listed Wrights Funeral Home at “227 (341) South Kanawha.”51 In 1942, Beckley had nine funeral directors listed including Jackson and Sons, C.D. Trent Funeral Home, and Wrights Funeral Home which was listed at “F St, New Raleigh, East Beckley, W Va.”52 C.D. Trent and the Wright Funeral Home continued to be listed in 1952 but saw increased competition from new businesses.53

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42 Rainville, 70.
44 Directory of Beckley, 1927, Page 95.
45 Beckley Post Herald, August 26, 1950, Page 86.
46 City Directory of Beckley, 1929: 222, 224 and 247.
48 Beckley City Directory, 1932: 218.
49 Beckley City Directory, 1934: 23.
50 Ibid., 217, 219.
51 Beckley City Directory, 1939: 261.
52 Beckley City Directory, 1942.
53 Beckley City Directory, 1952: 76.
Beginning in the 1930s, the names of funeral homes became more pronounced in obituary listings than they were in the early 20th century. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Wright Funeral Home and the C.D. Trent Funeral Home appeared to provide the most popular burial services to the Wright-Hunter Cemetery.

Another aspect of death among Black Americans was the mutual aid societies and insurance agencies which helped usher the deceased into the next realm. Historian Carter G. Woodson argued that “the African penchant for burial pomp and secret societies have been developed mainly around the idea of taking care of the sick and dead; and from this as a nucleus these orders have become mainly insurance companies.”54 The Black-based insurance companies also led to social organizations which filled a void in Black life. W.E.B. Du Bois stated that:

> No complete account of Negro beneficial societies is possible, so large is their number and so wide is their ramification. Nor can any hard and fast line between them and industrial insurance societies be drawn some in membership and extent of business. These societies are also difficult to separate from the secret societies; many have more or less ritual work, and the regular secret societies do much fraternal insurance business.55

Within the Wright-Hunter Cemetery, the Knights of Pythias were represented through the burial statuary. The Knights of Pythias was a fraternal organization originally developed by white government workers in Washington DC in 1864 to promote philanthropy.56 Because the organization would not accept Black members, a separate organization was formed in 1880 called the Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia and Africa which was colloquially called the Colored Knights of Pythias.57 The Colored Knights had an active membership in Southern West Virginia in which they assisted members with social services such as mutual aid and insurance plans. The Knights influence can be seen in the iconography on some of the headstones, bearing the K of P insignia.

The Odd Fellows, another fraternal organization, were also important in Beckley during the early 20th century, assisting in the burials at the Wright-Hunter Cemetery, especially prior to the establishment of professional funeral homes. The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows (GUOOF) in America were distinct from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) as their origin is traced to England, as the American IOOF would not recognize or consider Black membership. This benevolent organization also provided sick and death benefits as well as ensured members visited the unwell to promote fraternity. GUOOF members took an oath to remain “sober, honest, industrious and benevolent, a good husband, a kind father and a loyal and


57 Ibid.
virtuous citizen.” Members’ headstones also contained the interlocking chains iconography of their membership which signify Friendship, Love and Truth.

The Knights and other fraternal organizations gave peace of mind to Black residents working dangerous jobs to protect their families and their hard-earned assets in the event of their demise.  

Early 20th Century Beckley Cemeteries

The Wright-Hunter Cemetery differs from other cemeteries in Beckley as it was developed as a community-based burial place for people of color in the early 20th century. According to the 1932 City Directories, only three cemeteries were listed as established in Beckley: the St. Francis De Sales Roman Catholic Cemetery, the Sunset Memorial Park and the Wildwood Cemetery. The two primarily black cemeteries, the Wright-Hunter Cemetery and the Greenwood Memorial Park Cemetery, were not listed.

The development of cemeteries in the Beckley area followed national trends which began with a small, family plot located on private land. Sometimes these burials were fenced in or marked with stones or wooden tablets marking the names of the deceased. As the population grew, so too did the need for an established burial location. Church grounds were the initial choice for burials, but, especially in populous areas, they quickly became overcrowded and, when epidemics occurred, were seen as disease centers. Cemeteries were moved out of the cities into the rural areas and were transformed by landscape architects such as Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmstead. These cemeteries were designed with curvilinear drives and bucolic landscapes. Cemetery markers were often made up of statuary or markers to symbolize death.

Wildwood Cemetery, located on South Kanawha Street may be the first burial place in Beckley established as a rural cemetery. The cemetery was the original burial place for Amelia Beckley, but soon became home to others in the area. The cemetery has numerous monuments, mature trees and a rolling landscape.

St. Sebastian Cemetery was established in 1909 as a burial location for the region’s Catholic patrons. Although not much research has been centered on it, St. Sebastian Cemetery appeared to be a rural cemetery as well. The entry is marked by a stone end-gate which appeared to

59 Trotter, 47.
60 Beckley City Directory, 1932, 192
originally be connected to a wrought iron fence but has since been replaced by chain link fencing. A large wooden cross is centrally located upon entry into the cemetery.

Rural cemeteries fell out of fashion as “lawn-park” cemeteries became more popular with their standardized plot sizes, and orderly rows with a perpetual care fund to ensure the cemetery was maintained.62

Sunset Memorial Park was established in December 1925 and consisted of several sections of ground with approximately 900 burials per section. The Roselawn section of the Sunset Memorial Park is laid out with a perimeter roadway and plots measuring 10.5 feet in length and 5 feet in width.63 The Locust Vale Section of Sunset Memorial Park was added in July 1928 and consists of regularly spaced lots 5 x 11 feet. The section has a two-foot walkway between sections with a four-foot walk down the center.64 The following year, the Hillcrest Section was added with a mausoleum and alternating two foot and four-foot walkways (Figure 11). Accessed via Harper Road, this memorial park is set outside of the city center and is devoid of ornamentation. The cemetery expanded over the 20th century and continued to organize its burials in an orderly fashion.

Greenwood Memorial Park was also established to provide Beckley’s Black population with a more fashionable, yet still segregated, eternal address. Purchased by Greenwood Memorial Park from the Beaver Coal Company and the Raleigh Coal and Coke Company on July 27, 1928, the surface acreage would be utilized “only as a cemetery for the purpose of burying the dead of the colored race.”65 The 11.65 acres of land was purchased for $2,330.

Unlike the Wright-Hunter Cemetery, the Greenwood Memorial Park Cemetery was established as a perpetual care cemetery with a defined set of rules and regulations.66 In its original deed, the Greenwood Memorial Cemetery Association agreed to set 10% of the purchase price for each lot into a perpetual maintenance fund to which the Bank of Raleigh would provide 4% interest annually.67 The Greenwood Cemetery was laid out with regular plots, lots, and sections with a similar appearance to the Sunset Memorial Park (Figure 12).68

62 McGhee, 12
63 “Roselawn Section of Sunset Memorial Park,” Raleigh County Map Book 6, Page 45 (also digital book 5072, page 4319).
64 “Map of a Part of Locust Vale Section of Sunset Memorial Park,” Raleigh County Map Book 6, Page 45 (also digital book 5074, page 3934). Sunset Memorial Park has additional sections named Hillcrest, Calvary, Buena Vista, Hill View, Maplelawn, Greenlawn, Ridgelawn, Restvale, Highlawn, West View, Crestlawn and Beth-El.
65 Raleigh County Deed Book 100, Page 150.
66 While Greenwood Cemetery was established as a perpetual care cemetery, it no longer is and is soliciting funds for its maintenance. https://www.register-herald.com/archives/greenwood-memorial-park-still-needs-help/article_135d9e1d-6640-5638-8c02-1a9000c7b58e3.html. In addition, the West Virginia Secretary of State’s Office shows that the Greenwood Memorial Park Corporation was dissolved by order of the court on May 6, 1969.
67 Raleigh County Deed Book 100, Page 256.
Wright-Hunter Cemetery

Name of Property

Raleigh, West Virginia

County and State

Within the deed providing ownership over each lot, the “Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Cemetery of Greenwood Memorial Park” were included. The 10 pages of regulations provide guidance on how to visit the cemetery including restrictions on dogs and firearms. Visitors were also not allowed to pluck flowers or shrubbery. The Greenwood Cemetery also had strict rules governing the erection of monuments, requiring each to have a suitable foundation and be of “marble, granite or other cut stone.”

The Wright-Hunter Cemetery was not laid out in previously determined plots available for purchase like the Greenwood Memorial Park Cemetery, nor did it have established regulations overseeing the construction of monuments or a perpetual care fund established for its maintenance. The Wright-Hunter Cemetery historically appeared to have been maintained through the efforts of the community. In 1936, an effort to solicit volunteers to clean the cemetery resulted in a notice in the newspaper requested “men and boys…come for work. The ladies are requested to bring dinner for the workers.”

Nearly forty years later, members of the Young Black Veterans Association assisted members of the Pinnette Homemakers Club in cleaning the cemetery in 1974. This group cut underbrush, filled sunken graves and reset headstones.

Reverend H. Law spearheaded another movement in 1993 to clean the cemetery and as a result of his efforts, a new chain link fence was installed around the perimeter of the cemetery as well as the creation of the concrete and metal arch entry. In 2003, a group again gathered to join efforts to maintain the cemetery as part of the Join Hands Day sponsored America’s Fraternal Benefits Societies in sponsorship with the GFWC Beckley Woman’s Club where volunteers mowed the grass and cut weeds.

The Hunter Cemetery is currently maintained through the volunteer efforts of the local branch of the NAACP and no longer accepts new burials while the Greenwood Cemetery is still available for burials coordinated through the Ritchie and Johnson Funeral Home.

---

69 Raleigh County Deed Book 100, Page 257.
70 Raleigh County Deed Book 100, Page 259.
73 Ibid.
9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)


Wright-Hunter Cemetery  Raleigh, West Virginia

Name of Property                   County and State


“Veteran’s Rites Tuesday.” December 1, 1953.


Raleigh County Map Book 6, Page 45 (also digital book 5072, page 4319).


Raleigh County Map Book 6, Page 45 (also digital book 5074, page 3934).

Raleigh County Deed Book 66, Page 288.

Raleigh County Deed Book 100, Page 150.

Raleigh County Deed Book 100, Page 256.
Wright-Hunter Cemetery

Raleigh County Deed Book 100, Page 257.
Raleigh County Deed Book 100, Page 259.
Raleigh County Deed Book 134, Page 221.
Raleigh County Deed Book 196, Page 30.
Raleigh County Deed Book 36, Page 151.
Raleigh County Deed Book 91, Page 278.
Raleigh County Deed Book 92, Page 278.
Raleigh County Deed Book 186, Page 369.
Raleigh County Deed Book 337, Page 71.


“Well Known Colored Man Died.” September 4, 1914.
September 28, 1917.
“Death of Charles Wright.” December 10, 1908.

“Pinnette Homemakers Club Clearing Hunter’s Cemetery.” May 1, 1974.


Wright-Hunter Cemetery  
Raleigh, West Virginia

Name of Property  
County and State

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
____ previously listed in the National Register
____ previously determined eligible by the National Register
____ designated a National Historic Landmark
____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  #________
____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # ________
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # ________

Primary location of additional data:

____ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other

Name of repository: _____________________________________

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): ____________

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.2 acres +/-

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: __________

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
Wright-Hunter Cemetery

Name of Property

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

- [ ] NAD 1927  or  [x] NAD 1983

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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the Wright-Hunter Cemetery begins at a point on Antonio Avenue, thence diagonally follows the western edge of the “Colored Cemetery” Tax Parcel 564 to a point on Lemp Lane, then continues east to the western corner of tax parcel 542, then north along Lemp Lane to the northwestern corner of tax parcel 543, then following the northern boundary east, then travels south along the property line and Barber Avenue to a point where it travels westerly for approximately 50 feet, then south approximately 50 feet and east approximately 50 feet to the border with Barber Avenue. This notch specifically excludes parcel 39-541 which was not historically associated with the cemetery. From Barber Avenue, the boundary extends south to the southeastern point on parcel 367, thence westward to the southwestern-most point on tax parcel 362 on Antonio Avenue, then north to a point at the corner of Antonio Avenue and thence west to the beginning. The boundary includes all the land inclusive of Raleigh County Tax Parcel 543, 542, 564, 363, 364, 362, 367 and existing utility Right of Way within the proposed boundary.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries represent the initial cemetery as established by Dr. Hunter as well as the parcels that were purchased by other Raleigh County African Americans to expand the cemetery during the period of significance. These parcels were historically associated with the Wright-Hunter Cemetery.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Sandra Scaffidi and John Pitman  
organization: Practical Preservation  
street & number: 1 Avalon Road  
city or town: Fairmont state: West Virginia zip code:26554  
e-mail: sandra@practical-preservation.com  
telephone: 304-314-3773  
date: August 8, 2023

---

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)
Figure 1
Resource Location Map
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Scale: 1 in = 2,000 ft

Wright-Hunter Cemetery
UTM: 17N 484894E, 4179758N
NAD 83
Notes
1. Background aerial image is from WVGISTC best leaf off mixed resolution imagery.
2. Overlaid aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
3. Property lines shown in white are from Raleigh County digital tax maps.
Figure 3
Photo Location Map 1
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Match Figure 4
Match Figure 5

Notes
1. Aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
Figure 4
Photo Location Map 2
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Scale: 1 in = 20 ft

Notes
1. Aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
Figure 5
Photo Location Map 3
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Notes
1. Aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
Figure 6
Photo Location Map 4
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Notes
1. Aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
Figure 7
Photo Location Map 5
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Notes
1. Aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
1. Background aerial image is from WVGISTC best leaf off mixed resolution imagery.
2. Overlaid aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
3. Property lines shown in white are from Raleigh County digital tax maps.

Figure 8
NRHP Boundary Map
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia
Notes
1. Background aerial image is from WVGISTC best leaf off mixed resolution imagery.
2. Property lines shown in white are from Raleigh County digital tax maps.
3. Lot lines shown in black are from Deedbook 66, page 288, Map of Beckley Court Addition.

Figure 9
Historic Overlay Map
Beckley Court Addition
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Scale: 1 in = 150 ft
Figure 10
Chronological Timeline Map
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Notes
1. Background aerial image is from WVGISTC best leaf off mixed resolution imagery.
2. Overlaid aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
3. Property lines shown in white are from Raleigh County digital tax maps.
Notes
1. Background aerial image is from WVGISTC best leaf off mixed resolution imagery.
2. Cemetery plot lines shown in black are from Raleigh County Digital Deed Book 5072, Page 4319, Map of Hill-Crest Section of Sunset Memorial Park, September 23, 1927.

Figure 11
Example Cemetery Plot Layout
Hill-Crest Section of Sunset Memorial Park
Wright-Hunter Cemetery National Register Nomination
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia
Figure 12

Example Cemetery Plot Layout
Greenwood Memorial Park
Wright-Hunter Cemetery National Register Nomination
Beckley, Raleigh County, West Virginia

Notes
1. Cemetery plot lines shown are from Raleigh County Digital Deed Book 5074, Page 3823, Map of Greenwood Memorial Park, No date.
Notes:
1. Background aerial image is from WVGIS TC best leaf off mixed resolution imagery.
2. Overlaid aerial photo was captured by mini drone in 2023.
3. Property lines shown in white are from Raleigh County digital tax maps.
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1. The above listed names and dates were acquired through obituary and death record research. This list is not intended to be exhaustive and may grow with additional research.
Unmarked Burial Identification Tables

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Notes:
1. The above listed names and dates were acquired through obituary and death record research. This list is not intended to be exhaustive and may grow with additional research.
Wright-Hunter Cemetery
Name of Property

Raleigh, West Virginia
County and State

Photographs
Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn’t need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Wright-Hunter Cemetery

City or Vicinity: Beckley

County: Raleigh

State: West Virginia

Photographer: Sandra Scaffidi/John Pitman

Date Photographed: June 28, 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 15. Decorative gated arch entry, facing southeast.
Photo 2 of 15. View, facing north
Photo 3 of 15. Facing northeast
Photo 4 of 15. Facing west
Photo 5 of 15. Initial stone, facing west.
Photo 6 of 15. Olive Sandidge burial marker, facing west
Photo 7 of 15. Ruby Foster burial marker, facing west.
Photo 8 of 15. Concrete marker for Clark, facing east.
Photo 9 of 15. Larnie Goodwin marker, facing west.
Photo 10 of 15. Ralph E. Biggers marker, facing east.
Photo 11 of 15. Moody Farmer marker, facing west.
Photo 12 of 15. John Jackson marker, facing east.
Photo 13 of 15. Bennie N. Sutton, facing east.
Photo 14 of 15. Reverend David C. Hunter marker, facing west.
Photo 15 of 15. View of cemetery, facing southeast.
Photo 1. Decorative gated arch entry, facing southeast.

Photo 2. View, facing north.
Photo 3. Facing northeast.

Photo 4. Facing west.
Photo 5. Initial stone, facing west.

Photo 6. Olive Sandidge Stone, facing west.
Photo 7. Ruby Foster Burial Marker, facing west.
Photo 8. Concrete marker for Clark, facing east.
Photo 9. Larnie Goodwin marker, facing west.
Photo 10. Ralph E. Biggers marker, facing east.
Photo 11. Moody Farmer marker, facing west.
Photo 12. John Jackson marker, facing east.
Photo 13. Bennie N. Sutton marker, facing east.
Photo 15. View of cemetery, facing southeast.