**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

**Historic name**  
Ritchie Cemetery

**Other names/site number**  
South Topeka Cemetery, Union Burying Grounds, Howard Cemetery, Kansas

**archeological site number**  
14SH396

**Name of related Multiple Property Listing**

### 2. Location

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<tr>
<th>Street &amp; number</th>
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<tr>
<td>City or town</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>Shawnee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zip code</td>
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### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

- **national**
- **statewide**
- **local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:  
- **A**
- **B**
- **C**
- **D**

**Signature of certifying official/Title**  
Patrick Zollner, Deputy SHPO  
Date

**Kansas State Historical Society**  
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**  | **Category of Property**  | **Number of Resources within Property**
---|---|---
(Visit as many boxes as apply.) | (Check only one box.) | (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

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<th>structure</th>
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</table>

**Contributing**  | **Noncontributing**
---|---
1 buildings | 0 sites
Total 1 structures | Total 0 objects

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

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6. **Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- FUNERARY/Cemetery

**Current Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- FUNERARY/Cemetery

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7. **Description**

**Architectural Classification**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- N/A

**Materials**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- foundation: N/A
- walls: N/A
- roof: N/A
- other: N/A
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

Ritchie Cemetery is located at the junction of 27th Street and Boswell Avenue in Topeka. The 3.74-acre parcel is located on is within the SE ¼ of the SW ¼ of the NW ¼ of Section 12, Township 12S, Range 15E (Figure 1). The property is accessed from a non-graveled drive that connects to 27th Street. Ritchie Cemetery was originally created as a rural cemetery in the late 1850s and remained in a rural setting until the area was annexed by the city in 1952 (Figure 2). It is settled on the south side of Shunganunga Creek on a hill. Very few original headstones or memorial stones remain in the cemetery. A list of 302 burials at the cemetery has been created through the work of Jeff Hansen and Jan Johnson (as of January 2021). The oldest stones are on the interior of the property, with other markers at various locations throughout (Figure 3). Located approximately in the middle of the cemetery are four memorials to Spanish-American War veterans (Figure 3). The cemetery is not fenced aside from fencing from the adjoining residential properties. A sign showing the name of the cemetery stands on the south side of the property facing 27th street. No structures remain, but the foundation of what may be a caretaker’s shed is located at the north of the property (Figure 3). An entry drive is located on the western edge of the property’s street frontage.

Elaboration

Setting and Establishment

Ritchie cemetery is situated on a hillside on the south side of Shunganunga Creek. At the time of its creation during the Kansas territorial era, Ritchie Cemetery was located on Orrin Nichols’ 160-acre land grant. The legal description is the SE ¼ of the SW ¼ of the NW ¼ of Section 12, Township 12S, Range 15E. The southern boundary of the current cemetery confines is the south line of the northwest quarter section (Figures 4-9). The boundaries, as defined for the original transfer of the property in 1862, stated that the property commenced “at an oak tree on the south bank of the Shunganunga Creek, thence South two hundred and two feet to the center line of the section, thence East six hundred and forty-two feet thence North four hundred feet thence westerly to a small oak, thence South westerly to the place of commencing, and containing five acres more or less.”

Boundaries and Physical Description

The cemetery was established as a family or neighborhood burial grounds with no set style or organization. When the property was changed in focus to a burial ground for the African American community, there continued to be no definite plan or style. The lack of organization proved to be a detriment in determining burial locations. The first recorded burial was made in 1855, but the first African American burial which would fall in the period of significance for the cemetery was made in 1884. The last burial was made in 1941.

As the cemetery aged, its maintenance of it waned, and there was a loss of visible definition of the boundaries due to the overgrowth of vegetation. In 1912, a cemetery association was created for the care of the cemetery.

grounds by members of the African American community. It was through the efforts of the president of this association, Andrew Jordan, that a road was created for ease of access to the cemetery, as well as preservation of the burials located there.\(^3\) This road was called the “Jordan Road.” It was likely during this time that the caretaker’s shed, located in the rear in the center of the property, was constructed. This structure had a limestone foundation and bears the impression of cinder blocks in the cement, which would date it to this period. The caretaker’s shed was standing until the 1950s (Figure 6).\(^4\)

A decrease in the size of the cemetery occurred in 1952 with the annexation of the cemetery and surrounding area into the City of Topeka in addition to the post-war growth of the city (Figure 7). With the encroachment of subdivisions being developed, the neglected cemetery became the topic of discussion in city affairs. The cemetery had originally been fenced, but it was removed around the time of annexation.\(^5\) The eastern and northern boundaries were clearly defined by surveys done at this time, but because of the encroaching development, the property was modified from its former 5 acres to its current 3.74 acres.\(^6\) In the late 1950s, 27\(^{th}\) Street was widened in preparation for development. When the heavy machinery was removing part of the slope of the cemetery located on its southern side, multiple burials were uncovered, including the coffin of a child, which had a glass panel at the face.\(^7\) The burials uncovered at this time were reinterred at the back of the property near the caretaker’s shed, which was still standing at the time.\(^8\) Also, at this time, a majority of the headstones were removed by a dump truck.\(^9\) One memorial that had been removed was located in 2013 in North Topeka.\(^10\)

Currently, there are 10 memorial markers located at the cemetery, including the original stone of the Garrison family, which is located in the interior of the cemetery (Figure 10). The other existing headstones are scattered throughout the cemetery and vary from hand-etched limestone to more modern granite (post-1900). There are occasional plantings of iris around some of the remaining headstones. Some burial plots have boundaries of cement edging or glacial boulders. Sitting prominently at the center of the cemetery are modern markers commemorating four Spanish American War veterans. Two of the original veterans’ stones, while not standing, are located in the southeast portion of the property.

If there was fencing, historically, none remains. Large tree stumps are located on the eastern boundary of the cemetery. Toward the middle and back of the current cemetery is a former caretaker shed foundation. The foundation is of limestone, topped with cement and impressions of cinder blocks. This would date the structure to the era of the Ritchie Cemetery Association of the 1910s to 1920s.

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\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^6\) City of Topeka, Ordinance 8349.
\(^7\) Young, Dave, interview by Wendi Bevitt, October 7, 2022. This information was relayed to Mr. Young by a man who had been employed by the contractor at the time. This information was given to Mr. Young directly after the newspaper article stating his involvement in the placing of the Spanish American veteran stones at Ritchie Cemetery. The gentleman also directed Young to the location of the reburials.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Sarah Plake (reporter), “Boy Finds Black Soldier’s Tombstone From Spanish American War in Backyard,” WIBW, Topeka, April 22, 2013. It is not known if this was part of the group that was removed via dump truck.
Four Spanish American markers are newer memorials placed near the center of the cemetery through the efforts of Topekan, Dave Young, in 2000 when Young was serving as a public affairs officer for the Kansas Army National Guard. The memorials were placed in the center of the cemetery and honored George Jordan, Sandy Mothell, Robert Ransom, and Walter Rossin, all members of the 23rd Kansas Volunteer Infantry. An article covering the installation of these memorials noted that Ritchie Cemetery had also been known as the Howard Cemetery, although no other mention of this name has been found in relation to this cemetery.

History and Ownership
With the development, determining who was responsible for the care of the cemetery became an issue. It was desired that the cemetery be considered a memorial park, and in November of 1960, Charter Ordinance No. 1 was adopted by the city, which stated that after a notice and hearing process, abandoned cemeteries within the city limits could be deemed a park property and maintained by the city's park department. The Topeka City Commission sought to take control over the grounds of Ritchie Cemetery “if legal details [could] be worked out,” namely whether or not ownership of the cemetery would be transferred to interested heirs of the trustees named on the South Topeka Cemetery deed.

Heirs were sought, which brought about a dispute of ownership of the land. Responding heirs, led by Betty (Slayton) Newton, stated that their ownership rights were “not up for give away” and sought to maintain their legal rights to the land. The heirs, however, had not been involved in the maintenance of the cemetery. In April of 1961, Senate Bill 125 was approved by the Kansas Legislature, which laid out conditions in which a cemetery in a town of a population above 80,000 could be declared abandoned. By early 1962, Ritchie Cemetery was officially declared abandoned, prohibiting any future burials at the location.

Maintenance and Integrity
Ritchie Cemetery is located on a knoll at the end of 27th Street. It had no formal planning and therefore reflects its origins as a rural cemetery. The integrity of the property has been impacted primarily by the removal of earth and graves bordering on 27th Street and the reburial thereof at the rear of the cemetery. The landscape has also been changed by the removal of many of the markers. However, at present, while the cemetery is under the umbrella of the Topeka City Forester, the grounds have been monitored and cared for since 2019 through the efforts of Jeff Hansen and Jan Johnson, and other interested parties. Hansen and Johnson were originally drawn to the cemetery through their interest in native plants. Ritchie cemetery has not been landscaped in the modern era, which preserves its historical significance and allows for the preservation of native plant species. Ritchie Cemetery maintains the original feel of the original setting, which is a rural family or neighborhood cemetery. After the property was established as an African American free cemetery in the 1880s, it also maintained that original structure with no definite landscaping or platting. Burials were made according to the personal recollection of burial location, and early markers were likely predominantly those crafted by the families, government markers (for veterans), or rarer examples of purchased markers. Most of the markers that remain are granite markers which would date to the period of renewed interest and maintenance by the African American community ca. 1900-1920.

12 Ibid.
13 City of Topeka Code, Sections A5-16, A5-17, AF-18, and A5-19.
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.
- [X] 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.)
Property is:

- [ ] 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
ETHNIC HERITAGE: African American

Period of Significance
Ca. 1885 - 1941

Significant Dates
1884 – first known African American burial
1941 – last burial

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

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
N/A

Period of Significance (justification)
The period of significance is after the cemetery is given over to use by the Black community in the mid-1880s until its last burial in 1941. The heaviest use of the cemetery takes place from the late-1880s until the establishment of Mount Auburn Cemetery, another Topeka cemetery open to “all races.” The earliest known burials in the cemetery were in the Kansas territorial era and by Euro-American settlers active in the establishment of Topeka as a free-state colony. Though, it is important to note that the first burial occurred in 1859, prior to Ritchie’s or the Black community’s possession of the property.
Ritchie Cemetery
Name of Property
Shawnee County, Kansas
County and State

Criteria Considerations (justification)

Ritchie Cemetery is significant under Criterion A for its association with early Topeka history and its use as the first solely African American cemetery after the arrival of the Exodusters. It is also eligible as a locally significant archaeological site. The cemetery’s importance to Criterion D is shown by its predominant use for a single inadequately documented ethnic community, providing a unique time capsule of material culture with the potential to yield important information to history.

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

Summary
The Ritchie Cemetery is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance to the earliest history of the city of Topeka, and its relationship to the African American community of the city. This small cemetery is the final resting place to numerous people of color that contributed to the history of Topeka and the surrounding area. Many of the individuals were members of the Exoduster movement and found their home in the city in 1879 or the time immediately following. Individuals include: Scott Smith, a local businessman and inventor; Martha Ransom, an employee of the Sheldon Kindergarten; Spanish American War veterans (George Jordan, Sandy Mothel, Robert Ransom, and Walter Rossin), one of the few Black regiments raised in this period; three Civil War veterans (John Hardison, Charles Pillow, and George Harris); and other individuals who contributed to the rich history of the Black community in Topeka. Because of its use as the sole Black cemetery for the town for many years, and its later abandonment, it is a valuable link to African American funerary practices. The cemetery is named for John Ritchie, one of Topeka’s founding fathers who interweaves himself through the history of the Black community in Topeka, as well as Ritchie Cemetery.

Elaboration

African American History in Topeka
As Topeka grew, the Topeka Town Association sought not only to make Topeka the capital of the territory (and later state) but the largest city in Kansas.17 Early territorial settlement colonies generally consisted of a two square mile area, encouraging 160-acre tracts for settlers.18 Colonies expanded along major travel corridors, and in Topeka these were the Kansas River, the Oregon Trail, and Burlingame Road.19 The Town Association assumed that it would take over $40,000 in order to secure the title of capital city, but the funds raised were a mere fraction of what was needed.20 Because of this shortfall, the Association planned to get subscriptions by the sale of town lots as well as country lands to meet their goal.21 Because of its close proximity to the fledgling city of South Topeka and the cemetery’s location along a major trail, it is likely the Ritchie Cemetery property was also subscribed.

17 Topeka (KS) Daily Capital, January 1883.
18 Phillips 1856:28, Bevitt 2021
19 Bevitt 2021.
21 Ibid.
Shortly after the start of the Spanish American War, plans began to be made to raise a company of Black soldiers. At this time, however, only state militia was eligible for such service, excluding people of color. In a move to bolster his chances in re-election, Governor John Leedy agreed to have Kansas muster an African American regiment, joining four other regular army and a few other state sponsored regiments. This regiment mustered in and was trained in Topeka. Since Kansas was sponsoring the 23rd Infantry, it was able to have not only Black enlisted men but officers as well. The 23rd Infantry was one of three Black regiments sent to Cuba and received commendations from its commanding officers.

The free-state towns of Emporia and Burlingame were also created through emigrant societies’ efforts and lay to the south and west of Topeka. A stage line connecting these free-state communities was surveyed in 1857 and dubbed the “Burlingame Road.” Ritchie and Foster cemeteries were laid out along the Burlingame Road at two-mile increments. Ritchie Cemetery was two miles from the main cemetery near the heart of Topeka, and Foster Cemetery was two miles from Ritchie Cemetery.

There were only eight people of color living in Topeka in 1860. By 1865 as the 1st and 2nd Kansas Colored regiments (79th and 83rd USCT respectively) were mustering out at the end of the war, the number started to increase as soldiers and their families chose Topeka as their home. As a result, the city was considered one of the locations for a freedman’s colony. The ongoing civil war did not slow the advance of the town and members of the Town Association made time to come home from the war front or have others act on their behalf to boost the budding capital city.

After the end of the Civil War, the conditions in the South during Reconstruction deteriorated due to racial violence, creation of the Black Codes, and rampant yellow fever. Seeking better opportunities elsewhere, African Americans looked to Kansas as one of the locations for favorable settlements creating a “Black Exodus” from the South. The initial Exoduster settlement in Kansas was at Nicodemus in 1877. As a wave made its way to the Nicodemus colony, the community of Redmonville (or Redmanville) was created in North Topeka. The earliest settlement in the city proper was not favorable for the exodus immigrants. Gov. Daniel Anthony was preoccupied with the economic troubles of the 1870s and gave no heed for the needs of the incoming refugees. It wasn’t until John St. John took the office of governor in January 1879 that the capital city was a more welcoming place for the newest and largest wave of Black immigrants. Under his direction, St. John created the Freedman’s Relief Association (KFRA) to “aid in caring for the helpless and destitute refugees.” The Freedman’s Association established temporary quarters first at the Shawnee County Fairgrounds at the edge of town to the south, later building a barracks in North Topeka.

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24 Cox 1982:16
26 Nell I. Painter, Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas), 1986.
In 1879 at the start of the Exodus, “emigrating Blacks were arriving in Topeka at the rate of 250 to 300 per month,” similar to other towns on the route.28 During the Exoduster emigration, Black population growth for the city was 323% greater than white immigration.29 At the first part of the year, the immigrants were gathered temporarily at Floral Hall at the Shawnee County fairgrounds, outside of the City of Topeka and to the southwest of Ritchie’s Addition. Later on, when the Freedmen’s Relief Committee made plans to build barracks for the incoming refugees public opinion pushed them to locate the barracks “a respectable distance out of town” so as not to submit Topeka’s citizens to “a lot of human beings, whose removal to a new climate, and the manner in which they would have to live, would tend to create among them, diseases of the most loathsome character.”30 That general feeling, coupled with the large number of emigrants prompted the consideration of removal of Freedman’s headquarters to White Cloud instead of Topeka.31

Expansion in the capital city had stalled in the 1870s due to problems facing the state such as the fallout from the depression of 1873, grasshoppers, and drought. As conditions stabilized, city building projects began again. In early 1883, the members of the Topeka Town Association joined in a gathering to celebrate fellow member Franklin Crane’s 75th birthday. The members of the association had not met for at least a decade.32 A more formal meeting of the Town Association would take place in August of 1883 where the remaining members would discuss “old and unsettled matters.”33 With the hints of a boom for the city, these “old and unsettled matters” possibly were the subscription lands that were offered to the city at the outset of Topeka’s development. The unprecedented boom in the town would occur in the latter part of the 1880s when numerous additions were made to the capital city.

John Ritchie

John Ritchie moved in 1855 to Kansas in support of a state free of slavery and was allowed to join the Topeka Town Association shortly thereafter. At the time of his arrival, there were only six frame houses and several sod houses at the Topeka townsite.34 With his position on the Topeka Town Association, John Ritchie became part of the core group that could allocate lots held by shareholders to make improvements for the town.35 Ritchie was involved in the land purchase of Isaac Walker’s Wyandotte float, a large parcel of land allotted to Wyandotte tribe members individually which supplemented the lack of land they received from the US Federal government.36 Walker’s float was the primary location for Topeka. Improvements Ritchie personally made for the benefit of the town included construction of a business block in the core of the city that also housed the first state executive offices and State Senate; the creation of the earliest cemetery near modern-day 10th and Kansas Avenue; and the establishment of what would become Washburn University.37 The land for Washburn

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28 Cox 1982:42.
29 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
35 King 1904:127.
University was deeded with understanding that all could attend regardless of race or sex, and free tuition would be available for veterans. 38

Ritchie’s progressive ideas about African Americans went beyond freeing individuals; he also believed in civil liberty and racial equality. Ritchie was dubbed a radical for his beliefs on social issues as well as the way to achieve those means. He was an active participant in Underground Railroad operations, noted in Kansas as early as 1856. 39 He was a compatriot of the infamous John Brown, assisting in the fight for freedom and equality in Kansas Territory. Ritchie was one of 16 men to support Brown at the Battle of the Spurs, an incident where Brown with two groups of formerly enslaved individuals was surrounded by a U. S. Marshal and company at a house north of Holton. As a Topeka delegate to the Wyandotte convention in 1858-1859, Ritchie voted against all resolutions that would negatively impact people of color. 40 In 1867, during a push for suffrage for disenfranchised voters, he took part in the Impartial Suffrage League which not only promoted women’s suffrage but also Black suffrage. His involvement prompted one commentator to call Ritchie “discolored” claiming he didn’t know which color he was. 41

As the Black population was increasing, Ritchie created an addition to the city on his land which adjoined the city to the southeast of Topeka in June 1864 and welcomed people of all races. Ritchie’s Addition was created to support the “free-soil principle,” following the precepts of the Free Soil Party, “free soil, free speech, free labor, and free men.” While the Free Soil Party nationally avoided the question of equal rights, catering to a broader sense of abolitionism, local instances of fights for equality backed by Free Soil supporters did occur. 42 Within his town addition, John Ritchie gave away so many lots to African Americans that it “militated against the sale of lots to white people.” 43 Ritchie protected the free lots from being snapped up by land speculators by refusing to sell more than one lot to any single person. 44 Deeds for the lots were given as soon as improvements were made on the tract.

Ritchie buffered against any outside influences into the community he was building by refusing to plat his lands and denying annexation of the Ritchie Addition, although multiple attempts were made to draw it into the city. 45 By 1869, his community was commonly known as “Ritchie Town,” and this part of Topeka was a distinct entity. 46 Improvements for the citizens of the area included walkways, streets, and a school for Black children. 47 Ritchie would continually both defend the independence of his land, and toy with annexation if it

40 Jarboe 1991:34.
43 “Editorial Correspondence – From the Capitol,” White Cloud Kansas Chief, February 1, 1866, page 2; Frye W. Giles, Thirty Years in Topeka, A Historical Sketch. (George W. Crane & Co., Topeka), 1886, page 131.
44 Topeka Weekly Leader 1867:2
45 Weekly Commonwealth (Topeka, KS), April 22, 1868, page 4.
would benefit the inhabitants thereof. He also was reluctant to plat his lands, which ultimately gave him a firmer control of his lands in the expanding community.

In Topeka about one-third of the Black population was living in the Third Ward by 1870, which at the time encompassed Ritchie’s Addition. The Third Ward would become the location of much of the refugee settlement during the Black Exodus of 1879-1880 and eventually include Tennessee Town an Exoduster neighborhood. Despite Topeka’s status as a free-state city, minorities were predominantly pushed to the edge of the main city.

The Ritchie Addition joined with the Keith and Walnut Grove additions and sought to become a city of the third class, but would go on to incorporate as a city of the second class in 1886. Incorporation would avail the new city of the benefits of a government and therefore improvements such as sidewalks, schools, sanitation, utilities, and the authority to fully enforce laws in the city. Law enforcement in South Topeka was not limited to the norms of other cities and reflected the high standards of morality held by its mayor. For example, Ritchie encouraged his city marshal, E. B. Lull, to forcibly remove individuals that dared to cohabit if they were not married.

John Ritchie’s policing of morality would eventually lead to his separation from the South Topeka enterprise, stemming from problems with officer Lull. In early 1886 Ritchie’s sons came upon Lull in what they said was a compromising position in a hotel known for its association with prostitution. Ritchie immediately condemned Officer Lull and dismissed him promptly from his duties as officer. The dismissal, however, was not supported by the rest of the city council and caused such a response as to have an “anti-Ritchie” ticket in the next city officer election.

After Richie was ousted, he again entertained and pursued the idea of annexing his addition into the main city of Topeka. E. B. Lull was reinstated into the city government as a councilman proving obvious insult to Ritchie. As his grip was slipping on personally fulfilling his dream of his community, Ritchie again toyed with annexing his land to the city. While Ritchie attempted to remain in control of the destiny of his land while maintaining a distance from South Topeka, the city pushed forward with advances. Plans were made for street improvements and a waterworks. By the end of 1886, John Ritchie sued South Topeka and by 1887, the town was annexed into the main city of Topeka. The cutting of ties by the Ritchie family from the cemetery may be due to the separation of the family from the South Topeka enterprise.

For permanent settlement, in addition to Redmanville, John Ritchie also welcomed the immigrants to his land. However, some of Ritchie’s lots were not quickly occupied, while others were bursting at the seams. One house at 11th and Monroe had 36 individuals living in it, which in part exemplifies the strong bonds of

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49 Cox 1982: 33.
50 “The City of South Topeka,” The Daily Commonwealth (Topeka, KS), May 30, 1885, page 4; Kansas Secretary of State, Governor’s Proclamation Declaring South Topeka a city of the Second Class, on file at the Kansas Historical Society, accessed online: www.kansasmemory.org, 1886.
52 City of South Topeka, South Topeka Minutes, manuscript on file at the Kansas Historical Society, February 3, 1886.
53 Ibid.
55 “An Important Decision,” The Citizen (Topeka, KS), March 17, 1886, page 2.
relationship among African Americans. Ritchie acknowledged that the living conditions within his addition were a problem, but asserted that the laws of the city did not apply to the property since it was not within its boundaries. The principal settlement for the Exoduster emigrants though was in Tennessee Town, a location in the western part of Topeka that had been set up as what was called King’s Addition, but previously closed to settlement due to legal matters. The KFRA selected lots in King’s Addition and secured them at a very low price for the refugees. The area was renamed Tennessee Town (Tennessee Town) for the high number of immigrants that were from the state of Tennessee. The Tennessee Town neighborhood offered potential for growth and self-governance that Ritchie’s Addition did not.

A significant number of the interments at Ritchie Cemetery were residents of Tennessee Town. The Sheldon Kindergarten was created in 1893 and provided schooling for the children of Tennessee Town, as well as parenting classes for the families. Martha Ransom was employed as a janitor for the kindergarten for many years. Ransom’s grandson, John J. Scott (also buried in Ritchie Cemetery), was a lawyer in the Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka supreme court case.

The Ritchie Cemetery History
Ritchie Cemetery is historically significant to the city of Topeka for its use as the earliest principal burial location for African Americans in the period following the arrival of the Exodusters to Topeka. More than 90% of the over 300 burials in Ritchie Cemetery are African American, representing the rich history surrounding the Black community in Topeka. The cemetery is named for John Ritchie, a man who contributed greatly to the history of the city and is credited with giving the land for this cemetery to Topeka’s Black community. While its significance lies with both the early history of the capital city and its importance to African American history thereof, John Ritchie weaves himself through the history relating to this cemetery.

The first interments at the location were by the Garrison and Ritchie families in the 1850s. At that time, the land was owned by a man named Orrin Nichols. Orrin Nichols came to Kansas in 1855 from Crawford County, Pennsylvania. He was a first cousin, once removed, to radical abolitionist John Brown, which hints at his intentions to move to Kansas during this time. The first confirmed individuals buried were siblings Caroline and Hinkley Garrison in 1859. Daughters of John and Mary Ritchie, Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) and Mary, are also believed to be interred at the cemetery in 1859 and 1861, respectively. The earliest names given to the cemetery at this location were “the cemetery on the Burlingame Road” (there were two cemeteries with this designation, the other is Foster Cemetery, established in the same period) and Union Burying Ground. During the early years, the cemetery was merely a small burying ground, but would eventually become much more.

The Garrison and Ritchie families had come to Kansas from Franklin, Indiana, where they had more than a connection based on location. Both families were instrumental in the establishment of Franklin and its college, the Indiana Baptist Manual-Labor Institute (later Franklin College). Isaac Garrison assisted in the construction

57 Ibid.
59 Topeka (KS) Plaindealer, August 11, 1911, page 5.
60 Hansen and Johnson 2021.
61 Ibid.
of buildings at Franklin College; John Ritchie’s step-father-in-law, George King, was on the first board of directors of the institution, and James Ritchie (a brother of John) was also involved in activities pertaining to the school.63

In later newspaper accounts, it was noted that John Ritchie “laid out a cemetery on the banks of the Shunganunga southwest of Topeka and then gave it to the colored people of the city” ca. 1882-83, which would coincide with the Town Association’s dealing with “old business and unsettled matters.”64 The timing of this “gift” and the lack of paperwork showing that John Ritchie owned title to the land would indicate that Ritchie did not “gift” this tract in the traditional sense, but if, in fact, the land was one that Orrin Nichols had subscribed in support of the capital city in the early part of city planning, Ritchie’s position on the Topeka Town Association would have given him the authority to allocate that parcel for the benefit of the city, specifically the Black community.

The agreement for Ritchie Cemetery had originally been drawn up in 1862 under the name South Topeka Cemetery, and why the document was filed over 20 years later in 1883 with the Recorder of Deeds is shrouded in mystery. At the time of the filing, Topeka had just six months previously been named the capital of the state. The South Topeka name at this time seems to reflect its location relative to the town and its main cemetery. The 1862 deed transferred ownership to the South Topeka Cemetery trustees from the original land patent owner, Orrin Nichols. The trustees named for the South Topeka cemetery were Harvey D. Rice, Azel Slayton, and William Jordan, nearby landowners.65 The early efforts towards building up the city of Topeka that were occurring at that time could indicate the possibility of this property being subscribed towards that purpose. At the time of the deed and from what documents can be found, the land was solely a Euro-American cemetery, although none of the families of the trustees themselves were buried there.

In 1883, the year that the South Topeka Cemetery paperwork was filed, multiple things were happening that may have contributed to the timing. The main cemetery servicing the city of Topeka at that time was Topeka Cemetery. Topeka Cemetery was created in 1859 under the Topeka Cemetery Association, which included Franklin L. Crane. Crane gave the land and platted it for the cemetery. Topeka Cemetery received burials of individuals of all races, however, as a paying cemetery, the cost could be prohibitive for some. Crane took responsibility for beautifying the grounds himself, but as he reached his mid-70s the cemetery began to become less manicured.66 Complaints that Topeka Cemetery was lacking the necessary maintenance spurred discussion that city governance would be beneficial. Calls were made for a cemetery association separate from Crane’s own cemetery association that would either purchase Topeka Cemetery or open additional burying grounds, ones that would not be nearly as close to the main portion of town.67

Within a month of a newspaper article calling for a change to the status quo for interments for the area, papers were filed with the Shawnee County Recorder of Deeds for the “South Topeka Cemetery.” While the South Topeka name could just be directional from the main city cemetery, as previously mentioned, it could also hint

64 “To Improve Colored Cemetery,” Topeka (KS) State Journal, June 10, 1897, page 5.
65 Hansen and Johnson 2021.
at an association with the establishment of a city of the same name.\textsuperscript{68} Not long after the cemetery paperwork
was filed, Ritchie’s plan for a distinct community separate from Topeka started coming to fruition in the summer
of 1885. For this enterprise, the Ritchie Addition was joined with the Keith and Walnut Grove additions to form
what was called “South Topeka,” building upon the commonly used name for the southern portion of the
town.\textsuperscript{69} John Ritchie was the nominated mayor of his own town, a point of pride for him to serve the people that
“he had lived among for 30 years.”\textsuperscript{70} The name “Ritchie Cemetery” appears after Ritchie’s nomination as
mayor of South Topeka.

Any mention of care for the cemetery historically is solely of the Black community’s involvement. In 1912, a
Ritchie Cemetery Association was created for the maintenance of the neglected cemetery.\textsuperscript{71} Andrew Jordan
was acting president, and Spencer Hall was the secretary of the association, both men that had emigrated with
the Exoduster movement.\textsuperscript{72} The following year, Andrew Jordan petitioned for a road to be created to the
cemetery to prevent graves from being crossed by visiting vehicles.\textsuperscript{73} As time passed, the cemetery became
neglected once again and saw limited use until its last burial in 1941.

The City of Topeka annexed 15.8 square miles into the city in 1952, which included the cemetery tract. Plans
for the Indian Knob subdivision were filed the following year. As development for the area loomed, discussions
on how to handle Ritchie Cemetery increased. In 1957, one of the ideas was to make the cemetery into a
memorial park, a move that would provide the necessary maintenance of the site that had been neglected for
about 30 years, approximately the time that would have passed since Jordan and Hall had become aged or
died.\textsuperscript{74} At this time, the cemetery was referenced as the Howard Cemetery (although the origins of this name
are uncertain).\textsuperscript{75} In December of 1957, the cemetery acreage reduced the area “as it is used and occupied,”
diminishing it from 5 acres to 3.7 acres.\textsuperscript{76} During this period of development of the area, heirs of the original
trustees emerged in 1961, stating that their property rights were “not up for give away.”\textsuperscript{77} But the heirs, as had
historically been the case, had not maintained the cemetery, and the only care was done by the African
American community. The cemetery was officially declared abandoned in 1962.\textsuperscript{78} The City of Topeka took on
ownership of the cemetery ca. 2000 in accordance with a law that directed that all maintenance would fall to
the nearest governing body. The cemetery is currently maintained by the City Forester.

\textit{Brief History of Internments}

Most Ritchie Cemetery interments occur after the dissolution of the city of South Topeka and the death of John
Ritchie in 1887. Despite the original use of the cemetery by the Ritchie family, John Ritchie himself was not
buried at the site; he was instead buried at Topeka Cemetery. Ritchie’s wife Mary and their two daughters were
later moved to Topeka Cemetery in 1888.\textsuperscript{79}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[68] \textit{Topeka (KS) State Journal}, March 30, 1883, page 2.
\item[70] “South Topeka,” \textit{The Citizen} (Topeka, KS), July 22, 1885, page 4.
\item[71] \textit{Topeka (KS) State Journal}, May 25, 1912, page 7.
\item[72] Hansen and Johnson 2021
\item[73] \textit{Topeka (KS) Daily Capital} June 5, 1913, page 7.
\item[74] “City Asked to Take Over Cemetery,” \textit{Topeka (KS) State Journal}, September 15, 1961, page 2.
\item[76] Shawnee County Surveyor’s Office, “City Memorial Park,” Plat of Survey No. 4421 and related drawings, accessed
    online: \url{https://gis.snco.us/publicgiss/}, 1957.
\item[78] Hansen and Johnson 2021.
\item[79] Hansen and Johnson 2021.
\end{footnotes}
Ritchie’s designation as “a last resting place free to all desiring to avail themselves of its benefits” and its location on the outskirts of the town, away from the segregation on the interior, gave ease of access to the Black community, although that location would also create problems of access for its maintenance. “Free to all” allowed many who would not have the funds to provide a respectful burial for family members instead of resorting to the use of paupers plots or other means, such as allowing the bodies to be used as cadavers. Because of its distance, lack of upkeep, a growing population, and an increasing lack of space, a need arose for burial alternatives leading to the creation of Mount Auburn, another Topeka cemetery open to all, regardless of race. However, with the inclusion of Mount Auburn as a burial place, burials still frequently occurred at the Ritchie Cemetery because of its establishment as a free cemetery, while Mount Auburn, while reasonable in cost, was paying a cemetery.

Of the remaining memorial stones located at the site, six are veterans of the Spanish American War. Four Spanish American markers are newer memorials placed near the center of the cemetery in 2000. One of the original headstones at the site belongs to Martha “Granny” Ransom (1827-1917). Martha Ransom is significant to the history of the city of Topeka for her involvement at the Sheldon Kindergarten. In addition to the original Ransom headstone, a memorial stone for Martha Ransom at the cemetery lists Granny Ransom and her grandson John J. Scott (1919-1984). Although John Scott is not buried at Ritchie Cemetery, he is significant to Topeka because of his involvement as a lawyer in the landmark Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka supreme court case.

Also buried at the cemetery, but with no remaining headstone, is Scott Smith, who was one of the first people buried shortly after the designation of the property as Ritchie Cemetery (the first would be George Manier in 1886). Smith was a barber, entrepreneur, real estate investor, and inventor in Topeka. Smith patented an adjustable wash-bowl for use in barber shops in 1879. Scott Smith’s barber shop was “the largest and most elegantly and conveniently furnished barber shop between St. Louis and the Rockies.” Smith was married to Ogeal, the daughter of Ann Davis Shattio, who was the earliest woman of color known to live in Shawnee County, and an early businesswoman. Ann’s daughter Elizabeth Holmes is also buried at Ritchie Cemetery. Ann’s burial place is unknown, although it is speculated that she could be buried at Ritchie Cemetery herself.

**Archaeological Significance**

As an archaeological site and the cemetery’s importance to Criteria D is shown by its predominant use for one ethnic community and provides a unique time capsule of material culture with the potential to yield important information to history. Diane Jones, in her 2011 article for *Landscape Journal*, posits that, “the lack of structures and undisturbed ground not only assists in the preservation of culture but also in environmental

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80 Polk-Radges, Directory of the City of Topeka (Polk-Radges, Topeka), 1888.
84 Ibid.
Cemeteries provide a glimpse into both the cultural characteristics of the dead as well as those that mourn them. The gravesite offers an atmosphere of free cultural expression away from the confines of the outside world and allows the mourner to participate freely in their own history and traditions.

Historically for African Americans, the burial grounds were the domain of the dead and provided a link to African mortuary traditions while also being uniquely merged with Euro-American traditions. M. Ruth Little stated in her book on North Carolina gravemarkers that “graveyards speak with the accents of the homeland,” indicating that specialized cemeteries (particularly Ritchie was used for a limited amount of time) offer a distinct cultural setting. Aside from the burials themselves, artifact assemblages for African American cemeteries include subsurface and surface materials that were specifically tied to the individuals buried in the graves (Figure 11). These items include household items that would have been handled by the person immediately prior to death or shells, which are common items at African American graves. At Ritchie Cemetery, this has been evidenced by surface collections of glass and ceramic houseware fragments and shells. Remnants of handcrafted stones also remain but are rare (Figure 12).

Because of its status as a predominantly African American cemetery and to the early history of the capital city, Ritchie Cemetery should be considered a worthy addition to the National Register of Historic Places. Since 2019, the cemetery has received additional attention through the efforts of Jeff Hansen and Jan Johnson. Hansen and Johnson are avocational naturalists that originally took an interest in the cemetery for the unique native plants that can be found there. Hansen and Johnson have conducted extensive research on the individuals buried at Ritchie Cemetery and maintain a website that contains their findings.

90 Jones 2011:237.
91 King 2010:125.
94 Ibid.
9. Major Bibliographical References

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1888 *Directory of the City of Topeka.* Topeka, Kansas.

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1903 “Paper on the Life of John Ritchie.” April 27, 1903.

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1957 Plat of Survey No. 4421 and related drawings. “City Memorial Park,” Parcel ID 1411202018016000, Quick ReID R47739. Accessed online: [https://gis.snco.us/publicgis/](https://gis.snco.us/publicgis/)

Topeka Capital Journal

Topeka Daily Capital
1883 *Topeka Daily Capital* (newspaper), Topeka, KS. January 1883.

Topeka Mail
1883 “Our Silent City,” *Topeka Mail* (newspaper), Topeka, KS. March 22, 1883, page 1.

Topeka Plaindealer
1911 *Topeka Plaindealer* (newspaper), Topeka, KS. August 11, 1911, page 5.

Topeka Mail & Kansas Breeze

Topeka State Journal
Ritchie Cemetery

Topeka Tribune

Topeka Weekly Leader

Topeka Weekly Times

Weekly Commonwealth

White Cloud Kansas Chief
1866  “Editorial Correspondence – From the Capitol,” White Cloud Kansas Chief (newspaper), White Cloud, Kansas. February 1, 1866, page 2.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property  3.74 acres

Provide latitude/longitude coordinates OR UTM coordinates.
(Place additional coordinates on a continuation page.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84: ____________
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

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Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)
The Ritchie Cemetery is a 3.74-acre polygon and is described as follows: Beginning at the southwest corner of Lot 57 of the Indian Knob Subdivision, W 230 (S) S 30, W 315 (S), N 185.3 NE 56.05 NE 18.2, NE 219.94, NE 25 .81 NE, 62.6, NE
Ritchie Cemetery
Name of Property

Shawnee County, Kansas
County and State

34.19, SE 173.18. The southern side is bounded by 27th Street. The eastern side is demarcated by a residential wire fence, with remnants of a former tree line.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The nominated boundary encompasses the land associated with Ritchie Cemetery after its annexation into the city of Topeka and the final plat of the Indian Woods Subdivision in 1981 (Figure 9).

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Wendi M. Bevitt
organization Buried Past Consulting, LLC
date
street & number 12265 Holiday Hills Rd.
telephone (785) 633-4781
city or town Oskaloosa
state KS
zip code 66066
e-mail bevitt@buriedpast.com

Property Owner: (complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name City of Topeka
street & number 215 SE 7th St., Suite #166
telephone (785) 368-3940
city or town Topeka
state KS
zip code 66603

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Photographs
Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each digital image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to a sketch map or aerial 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.

Photograph Log

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<tr>
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<td>Shawnee</td>
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<td>Wendi M. Bevitt</td>
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<td>Date Photographed:</td>
<td>September 3, 2021, October 13, 2021</td>
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Description of Photograph(s) and number, include a description of view indicating the direction of camera:

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<td>Ritchie Cemetery sign (taken September 3, 2021)</td>
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<td>#2</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td>View showing the drive in the foreground and veterans stones in the background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>View from northwest corner of the cemetery property.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Foundation stones of possible caretaker shed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Imprint of a cinder block on the foundation stones of possible former caretaker shed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Glacial boulders at the rear of the cemetery.</td>
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<td>#7</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Martha Ransom stone.</td>
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<td>W</td>
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<td>NW</td>
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<tr>
<td>#11</td>
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<td>One of the original Spanish American veteran gravestones.</td>
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<td>#12</td>
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<td>Gravestones on the southeast portion of the property.</td>
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<td>Burial plot edged in cement, with a decorative finial at the southwestern corner, gravestone in background.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#14</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td>Stumps of a former tree line on the east property line.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#15</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Slope on the south side of the cemetery where burials were uncovered during the late 1950s.</td>
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**Figures**

Include GIS maps, figures, scanned images below.
Figure 1: Map showing the location of Ritchie Cemetery within the city of Topeka on a current highway map.
Figure 2: Map showing the location of Ritchie Cemetery on topographic maps from 1950 and 1983. Note the city boundary on the 1950 map.
Figure 3: Sketch map showing Ritchie Cemetery and its significant features. Latitude and longitude point correspond in number to those listed on page 18 of this report.


Caretaker shed indicated by a solid rectangle.

Slope removal indicates the area where graves were discovered during earth moving activities in the late 1950s. An oval with dotted lines near the caretaker shed shows the reported area of reburial of those graves.
Figure 4: 1873 Shawnee County Atlas. South Topeka Cemetery shown in red. O. C. Nichols property shown to the north.
Figure 5: 1898 Shawnee County Atlas, Section 12, Township 12S, Range 15E. Ritchie Cemetery shown in red.
Figure 6: 1913 map showing the Jordan Road. Shawnee County Surveyor's Office*

Figure 7: 1953 plat for the Indian Knob Subdivision. Accessed online: 
https://gis.snco.us *
*these maps were located through the efforts of Jeff Hansen and Jan Johnson.
Ritchie Cemetery
Name of Property

Shawnee County, Kansas
County and State

Figure 10: 1961 newspaper photo of the Garrison stone. Topeka State Journal, September 15, 1961.

Figure 11. Artifacts collected from the ground surface at Ritchie Cemetery. Photo provided by Jan Johnson.
Figure 12. Fragment of a handmade grave marker discovered at Ritchie Cemetery with the partial inscription of age at death, “8 mo. 28 dy.” Photo provided by Jan Johnson.
Ritchie Cemetery
Name of Property

Shawnee County, Kansas
County and State

Photo log photo #1. Ritchie Cemetery sign.

Photo log photo #2. View taken showing the drive in the foreground and Spanish American war veterans stones in the background.
Photo log photo #3. View from the northwest corner of the cemetery property facing southeast.
Ritchie Cemetery
Shawnee County, Kansas

Name of Property
County and State

Photo log photo #4. Foundation stones of possible caretaker shed.

Photo log photo #5. Imprint of cinder block on the foundation stones of possible former caretaker shed.
Photo log photo #6. Glacial boulders at the rear of the cemetery.

Photo log photo #7. Martha Ransom stone.
Photo log photo #8. Grouping of fieldstones at the north central portion of the property.

Ritchie Cemetery
Name of Property

Shawnee County, Kansas
County and State

Photo log photo #10. Spanish American War veteran memorials.

Photo log photo #11. One of the original Spanish American veteran gravestones.
Ritchie Cemetery
Name of Property

Shawnee County, Kansas
County and State

Photo log photo #12. Gravestones on the southeast portion of the property.

Photo log photo #13. Burial plot edged in cement, with a decorative finial (left) at the southwestern corner, gravestone in background.
Ritchie Cemetery  
Shawnee County, Kansas

Name of Property  
County and State

Photo log photo #14. Stumps of a former tree line on the east property line.

Photo log photo #15. Slope on the south side of the cemetery bordering 27th Street where burials were uncovered during excavation in the late 1950s.