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THE BURNHAM CEMETERY: A BRIEF REVIEW OF SETTLEMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY AT CCAFS

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Introduction

As part of the Cape Canaveral Archaeological Mitigation Project (CCAMP), this literature review will serve as part of a larger archaeological investigation and report of the historical Burnham Cemetery (8BR2352) at the Burns Site (8BR85) CCAFS. The objectives of this investigation are to update and summarize the available information about this historic cemetery on Cape Canaveral before the site is lost to rising sea-levels. This paper will act as a brief review of the history and settlement of Cape Canaveral, the ethnographic research of those buried in the Burnham Cemetery, and the archaeology that has taken place at the Burns site and Burnham Cemetery.

Cape Canaveral

Cape Canaveral Air Force Station is located on the Canaveral Peninsula, across from NASA’s Kennedy Space Center between the Banana River and the Atlantic Ocean. This barrier island is 15,800 acres of land and is found sixty miles (96km) east of Orlando, Florida (Figure 1). Also known as Cape Kennedy, this piece of land is the launch area for the Air Force Eastern Test Range with headquarters at Patrick Air Force Base (Long, X).
Figure 1. Cemeteries located on Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Burnham Cemetery outlined in red. Source, T. Penders 2015.

History of Early Settlement on Cape Canaveral

Paleo-Indian

Over 12,000 years ago, the Florida peninsula was twice as large due to lower sea levels (Deming and Horvath, 1999). The Paleo-Indian people living in Florida would have interacted with a diverse environment with many animal and plant species. Animals include very large
mammals, which are now extinct, as well as common small native mammals, plants, and nuts. They would have relied on subsistence strategies of hunting and gathering to obtain these resources. The earliest Americans were also making pottery and weapons of stone, shell, and animal remains (Long, 1967).

Pre-Columbian

Archaeological evidence has indicated that the Kennedy Space Center terrain has been inhabited for the last 3000 years (Long, 1967). The first individuals were small groups of hunters and gatherers who came to the Indian River region from up the St. Johns River basin. The environment was very humid and hot, with mosquitos abundant in the area. Most of the terrain was scrublands, except in marshy areas. The environment was very hot and humid, like it still is today, with hordes of mosquitos in the area. In areas of higher elevation, cabbage palms, pines, and oak trees grow (Long, 1967). Past and present people living on the Canaveral Peninsula benefited from the abundant marine food resources available from the ocean or the brackish Banana River. Fishing would later prove to have a large impact on the development of Cape Canaveral. During the St. Johns I/Malabar I period (500 B.C. to A.D. 750) the native society practiced burying their dead in mounds. Later, in the St. Johns II/Malabar II period (A.D. 750 to 1565), some geological event occurred, and more people moved towards the coast. Rising sea levels caused the rivers to flood, and more shellfish resources were available (Long, 1967).

Two different tribes formed and occupied the shores of the Indian and Banana River before and during colonization: the Timucuans and the Ais (Long, 1967). The Timucua territory included north Florida but extended down and east into the central Florida region, but they were not the dominate tribe occupying the Cape Canaveral area. The Ais tribe were the main
occupants of the area and had a chief who lived further south on the coast (Long, 1967). The Timucua were known for being agriculturists, while the Ais focused on hunting and gathering.

The Ais hunter and gatherers had fish and marine life as their stable foods but also used spears and flint points to hunt larger game. The tribe collected shells to form middens, which are often found along rivers and lagoons. Shell middens were formed, and the tribe continued the earlier practice of burying their dead in mounds. The most common type of material found in the middens and mounds is coquina (Donax sp.). The Ais lived in wooden-framed dwellings covered in palmetto leaves (Long, 1967).

Spanish Contact

When the Spanish arrived, Juan Ponce de Leon is said to have encountered the Ais tribe in a village near Cape Canaveral in 1513 (Long, 1967). The Ais were often reported as being warlike, savage, and fierce warriors by explorers or colonizers. Due to this, the Spanish often stayed away from Cape Canaveral, until 1565 when St. Augustine, the capital of Spanish Florida, was established. Although resistant to the colonization of their native land, eventually disease and conflict decreased the population of the tribes greatly.

As tensions rose between the English and Spanish colonizers in the 1700s, Englishmen would raid Spanish missions and enslave/kill tribe members. In 1763, the Spanish gave Florida to Great Britain, who formed many sugar cane plantations in the area (Long, 1967). However, once the revolutionary war ended, Spanish regained Florida in 1783 until it was given to the United States in 1821.

Early American Homesteaders (1822-1865)

Historically, the site is associated back to the mid-19th century, where early American homesteaders began settling and developing the Indian River area, especially after the Armed
Occupation Act of 1842 (Cantley et al., 1994). Due to an increase in settlers, after Florida officially became a state in 1845, and influx of US army occurred in the Merritt Island area to protect Americans during the Seminole Indian Wars.

Douglas Dummitt was one of the first major American homesteaders who settled on Merritt Island in 1828. He was a postmaster and a farmer. Dummitt focused on farming sugar cane and citrus trees on the cape (Penders, 2015). Dummitt was influential in the community due to his work to continue the development of Indian River citrus by selling budwood to other growers to start new groves in the region (Long, 1967).

Between 1843 and 1847, a lighthouse was built to prevent sailors from shipwrecking on the reef or in the dangerous currents around Cape Canaveral. The first permanent residents on CC tended the lighthouse starting in 1847. Other residents in the area were made up of fruit growers, sailors, and fisherman. In the 1950s, two pioneering families (Burnham and Wilson) occupied homesteads in the area near the lighthouse and next to the Banana River. The Burnham and Wilson families were vital contributors to the development of the small frontier community.

Mills Burnham was born in 1817 in Vermont and became a gunsmith (Cantley et al., 1994). Due to health reasons, Mills went to Florida for a year in 1837. After working under the command of Captain J. C. De Lagnel and Lieutenant John F. Metcalf at the Arsenal of the South (Carey’s Ferry, Florida) for a year, Burnham moved his wife (Mary Burnham) and children down to Jacksonville where he became the first sheriff. Later, Burnham and his family were one of the pioneer few families to settle in the Indian River area after the Armed Occupation Act of 1842.

After working as a manager on a sugar plantation, Mills Burnham was appointed to be the lighthouse keeper of Cape Canaveral in 1853 (Cantley et al., 1994). Next to the lighthouse is
the first homestead Burnham established. Mills and Mary had seven kids: Mills and George, Frances, Catherine, Mary, Anna, Louisa (two sons and five daughters) (Cantley et al., 1994).

Frances Burnham was the eldest Burnham daughter, born 1838, and was assigned the post of Assistant Keeper. She would later marry Henry Wilson. Henry Wilson (born 1829) was a soldier brought to Cape Canaveral to protect the lighthouse from the Seminoles in 1849. After marrying Frances Burnham in 1856, he became the Assistant Keeper at the lighthouse with his father-in-law. Over their lives at Cape Canaveral, the couple had three daughters (Henrietta, Florence, and Delia) who later married other settlers who were vital parts of the community on the island.

Frances and Henry set up their household on the Banana River adjacent to a 15-acre grove planted by Mills and Henry (Cantley et al., 1994). Burnham and Wilson were some of the first to establish citrus groves consisting of stock purchased from Douglas Dummett, who was mentioned above. In the Burnham Grove, the two families grew oranges, bananas, and pineapples (Cantley et al., 1994). Today, a large portion of the original Dummitt orange groves are still located on KSC property (Long, 1967).

The Burnham household lived next to lighthouse before the Civil War (1861 to 1865). During the Civil War, Captain Burnham was ordered to shut down and dismantle the lighthouse. It is during this time that the Burnham family combined households with the Wilsons and moved to the Burnham Grove location (Cantley et al., 1994). It is reported that he buried the pieces in an orange grove, but no remnants have been recovered at the Burnham Grove. After the war, a new lighthouse was constructed in 1868 and later moved inland a mile and a half inland in 1892 after a strong hurricane in 1885, and rising sea-levels, discouraged further development on the coast (Cantley et al., 1994; Williams and Duedall, 2002).
Homesteading and Citrus Production (1865-1900s)

In 1868, Merritt Island saw an increase of settlers in the area (Long. 1967). The primary way of life was agriculture; including sugar cane plantations and fruit groves (citrus, pineapple, and avocado) with fruit being their main export. Cattle, horses, and hogs were also raised on the island.

Along with being the first permanent settlement on the island, the Burnham Grove was the “center of town” for Cape Canaveral Peninsula settlers (Cantley et al., 1994). The post office opened in 1883 and serviced families in the area. According to a US Coast and Geodetic Survey map from 1881, the combined household of Burnham and Wilson included five structures with paths connecting the three. Henry Wilson became the first postmaster at the new post office and ran a small store located on their dock on the Banana River. Mills Burnham didn’t technically own the land until the US granted it (124.12 acres) to him in 1882. Four years later, Mills Burnham died of measles, and his heirs deeded 20 acres including the homestead to Frances Wilson. At the Burnham Grove, the families created two small cemeteries about 100 meters apart from each other to the north and east of the shell mound (Cantley et al., 1994).

20th Century

The Burnham and Wilson houses were habituated by family descendants until the 20th century. The cape continued to be a small country settlement located on the east bank of the Banana River, 30 miles SE of Titusville. Occupants of Cape Canaveral in the 20th century were made up of about 90 individuals who continued to fish, grow citrus, and manage the lighthouse (Cantley et al., 1994). Eventually, Elliot J. Burns purchased the Burnham homestead on the Banana River.
Starting in the 1930s, the government began to take an interest in Cape Canaveral as a location from which to establish a missile test center in 1949 (Cantley et al., 1994). Many of the houses and structures had decayed by the 1940’s, so the area was often referred to by the Robert Burns who owned a homestead nearby. Any remaining structures were destroyed by the government for NASA’s construction purposes in the early 1960’s so the United States could compete in the space race (Cantley et al., 1994).

**Archaeology at Cape Canaveral**

Many reports have reviewed the past archaeological and historical investigations of CCAFS (Rouse, 1950; Long, 1967). Earliest investigations, starting in the 1860s, focus on burial mounds and village middens at sites in the Merritt Island region. Irving Rouse, through the Caribbean Anthropology Program at the Yale Peabody Museum, provided a comprehensive survey of Indian River archaeology from 1944 to 1949. George Long presented results from his two-year study of archaeological sites on KSC and Cape Kennedy, which included details about the site descriptions, artifacts, and location (Cantley et al., 1994). In the 1980s, other archaeological surveys in the area, including the Resource Analysts of Bloomington’s report, created a site location predictive model based on systematic survey results (Cantley et al., 1994). Dense vegetation and swamps inhibited much of the archaeological and historical survey on the Banana river region at this time.

**Archaeology at Burns Site (8BR85)**

The Burns Site, or Burnham’s Grove, is a multicomponent archaeological site containing an aboriginal burial mound and midden complex dating to the St. Johns II period, as well as a historic settlement. It is located on Cape Kenned on a sand ridge west of Samuel C. Phillips Parkway parallel to the Banana River shoreline. The congressional location for the site is SE1/4
SE1/4 R37E Township 23 South, and it is two and a half miles south of the NASA Causeway. The site has an average elevation of 5 feet above sea level (1.5 meters) and is located about 300 meters east of the Banana River.

In the 19th century, the site was visited, described, and mapped with few artifacts being collected. Excavations began in the 1930s and continued periodically to the present day. During Rouse’s survey, he suggested that the Burns site could represent an ancient Ulumay village (a branch of the Ais) (Cantely et al., 1994). The pre-Columbian component of the site is thought to be 910 meters long north/south, and 370 meters east/west (Deming and Horvath, 1999), although recent surveying suggests the site boundaries may be much larger.

The Burns Mound is one of the earliest recorded sites on the cape (Cantley et al., 1994). There is a discrepancy in the literature as to the actual size of the original mound and the extent to which it has been excavated. The early literature about the site describes the mound at six meters high and 27 meters in diameter, yet later accounts state it is somewhat smaller (not as tall) (Deming and Horvath, 1999). It is thought that G. Woodbury completely excavated the mound at the Burns site in 1933 and 1934. A.T. Anderson investigated the village mound (after human bone remains were reportedly found) and stated that using Woodbury’s notes, the mound was only partially excavated (Cantely et al., 1994). Once the U.S. Government purchased the land in the late 1940s, the mound was bulldozed to make room for development needed to compete in the space race. It was also reported that the government removed about half of the mound to use it for fill (Deming and Horvath, 1999:45; Penders, 2015). Tex Williams, in the 1950s, “reshaped” the mound and put a fence around it (Figure 2).
It is not known how much of the present mound retains its original context and from what context the excavated artifacts were truly in. Based on the ceramic analysis, the prehistoric pottery types are diagnostic of the St. Johns II/Malabar II period (Cantley et al., 1994; Deming and Horvath, 1999; Penders, 2015). The ceramic types included St. Johns Plain, Check-Stamped, and Belle Glade plain. Other pre-Columbian artifacts recovered/excavated from domestic refuse or as grave objects including animal (deer, alligator, turtle, fish, and bird), human bones, shell tools, and stone tools. These tools include bone and shell picks, hammers, gauges, and other modified bone. European trade goods such as glass beads and iron implements appear in indigenous contexts dating back to the late St. Augustine Period, (but can appear earlier than this time).
The historic component of the Burns Site was defined by New South Associates (NSA) to be 600 meters north/south by 250 meters east/west, with the Burnham cemetery marking the eastern boundary. No structures remained from the homestead, but historic debris found includes metal, brick, vessel and pane glass, ceramics (spongeware, redware, and whiteware), nails, a shoe eyelet, clothing rivet, spark plug cover, and a clay pipe stem have been recovered at the site. Dumping locations, domestic refuse, ornamental plants, and the ruins of a firebox have all also been found at the site (Penders, 2015). Glass and ceramic diagnostic recovery place the historical remains in the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century (Cantley et al., 1994).

**Burnham Family Cemetery (8BR2352) on Cape Canaveral**

This small family cemetery contains multiple generations of the first permanent homesteaders (Burnham and Wilson) of Cape Canaveral. This site does meet the historic cemetery requirements (NRHP) due to its historical significance on the cape. Located on the eastern boarder of the Burns Site, the Burnham Cemetery is enclosed by a 3.5 meter tall chain link fence that is not a perfect rectangle (Figure 3). The dimensions of the fence are as follows: west side = 44.7 meters, north side = 15.3, east side = 43.5, and south side = 11.6 meters. The only entrance to the cemetery is a gate on the northern half of the western fence line. There is a small clearing around the fence (averaging about 4 meters), but dense native and exotic vegetation surrounds the area. On the west side, a larger grass clearing opens up to the Burns Mound and the rest of the archaeological site. In the cemetery clearing, large oak trees, patchy grass, coquina black earth midden are present, reminding us of the long occupation at this site (Penders, 2015).

In 1994, Cantley and colleagues stated that the Burnham plot contains at least ten burials (including Anna Burnham, Mills O. Burnham, Frances A. Burnham Wilson, Henry Wilson, and
Elliott J. Burns, as well as three infant burials belonging to the Butler, Honeywell, and Thompson families). Our current investigation did not corroborate this statement. Only eight burials are confirmed with this report, with some locations in the family cemetery likely to contain unmarked burials. Further analysis is needed to determine if there are more burials in the area.

The next section of this paper will describe the headstones and features present during the spring 2018 CCAMP survey of the cemetery. Eight headstones are present inside the chain link fence. Of these eight, one is presenting a footstone, and three are accompanied by a grave curb surrounding the burial. All the known graves with headstones are buried with their feet to the east and their heads to the west. The cemetery was first established in 1866 by the Burnham family, and later the Burns family. The last known use of the cemetery was in 1929, with the burial of Henrietta Wilson. See the Table 1 below for a summary of the names and year of interment of the eight individuals with headstones at the Burnham Cemetery.

Table 1. Named individuals known to be buried at Burnham Cemetery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>YEAR OF DEATH/INTERMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MILLS O. BURNHAM</td>
<td>1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARY A. BURNHAM</td>
<td>1888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELLIOT J. BURNS</td>
<td>1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAROLD W. BUTLER</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HENRY WILSON</td>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THOMAS THOMPSON</td>
<td>1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCES A. WILSON</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HENRIETTA W. WILSON</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Upon survey, it was first noted that all of the headstones seemed situated slightly west to the center of the cemetery (Figure 3). There are two graves (buried in 1922 and 1929), located in an enclosure on the northwest corner. The enclosure has a 4.5 meters by 4.5 meters perimeter, with some damage on the extended features (Figure 4). The rest of the headstones fall into line on the western center of the cemetery as seen in Figure 5.
The square concrete enclosure on the north end of the cemetery containing two graves: Henrietta Wilson and Thomas Thompson (Figure 3 and 4). Henrietta W. Wilson was the granddaughter of Mills and Mary Burnham, and the daughter of Henry and Frances Wilson. Henrietta Wilson’s grave is marked with a modern granite headstone (dimensions are 20 cm in length, 40 cm in width, and 12 cm thick). There is a cement grave curb 2.45 meters in length and 0.82 meters in width, with the southwest portion being overgrown in vegetation. There are some pieces of brick at the head and the foot of the grave. There is also a piece of a brick section inside the concrete enclosure with the two graves. The epitaph on her plaque marker reads:

Henrietta W. Wilson  
Mar 21, 1855 – Jan 18, 1929

In her second marriage, Henrietta Wilson married Thomas Thompson, who was an engineer and influential individual on the cape. Thompson’s grave is marked by a white marble military issued headstone that has a semicircular arch on the top. The headstone is 50 cm tall, 35
cm wide, and 10 cm thick. There is a cement grave curb 2 meters in length and 0.82 meters width, with the western half being overgrown in vegetation. The epitaph is worn but still in good condition and reads:

*Thomas Thompson*
*Maryland*
*1st SGT 4 U.S. CAV*
*January 13, 1922*

In the western center of the cemetery, the first headstone to the south of the concrete enclosure belongs to Harold W. Butler. This grave is noticeably smaller and not aligned with the other graves next to it (*Figure 3 and 6*). It is likely that this is the grave of the infant son of one of Mills Burnham’s lighthouse assistants, John Butler (Penders, 2015). The grave is 0.80 meters long and 0.40 meters wide. The headstone is weathered white marble with the dimensions of 50 cm tall, 35 cm wide, and 15 cm thick. The tablet section of the headstone is loose, yet it is still sitting upright in the base (repairs may be needed soon). This is the only grave that has a footstone (dimensions: 22 cm tall, 12 cm wide, and 6 cm thick) with the initials “H.W.B.” inscribed on the east side the small white marble (*Figure 6*). The epitaph is in good condition and clearly reads:

*Harold W.*
*Butler*
*Born*
*June 8, 1914*
*Died Aug 13, 1914*
*Gone But not Forgotten*
The next headstone is to the south and slightly west of the infant grave (Figure 3). This headstone belongs to Mary A. Burnham, the wife of Mills O. Burnham. Her grave is marked with a modern granite headstone. Since the headstone is newer, it is in great condition. Its dimensions are 20 cm in length, 40 cm in width, and 12 cm thick. There is no grave curb or footstone to determine the length and width of the grave. The epitaph on the plaque marker reads:

Mary A. Burnham
Aug 17, 1819 – Jan 25, 1888
To the south, or on his wife’s right side, lies Mills. O. Burnham (Figure 7). His grave is also marked with a modern granite headstone (dimensions: 20 cm in length, 40 cm in width, and 12 cm thick). Since the headstone is newer, it is also in great condition. There is a brick grave curb 2.50 meters in length and 1.10 meters in width which encloses the headstone, with the east and west sides stacked like a head and footboard enclosing the headstone and grave. There is also concrete paving covering the surface inside the brick curb. The epitaph on the plaque marker reads:

Mills O. Burnham  
Sept 18, 1817 – Apr 17, 1888

Figure 7. Mills and Mary Burnham graves. Source, S. Michell

There is a small gap between the Burnham’s and the next two graves, however they are still clustered in a line on the western half of the cemetery (Figure 3). South of Mills Burnham, lies Henry Wilson. His grave is marked by a military issued granite headstone with a semicircular arch on the top (dimensions: 60 cm in length, 33 cm in width, and 10 cm thick).
There is no grave curb or footstone to determine the length and width of the grave. The epitaph is worn but still in good condition although the bottom half is weathered and not as sharply incised and it reads:

\[
\text{Henry Wilson} \\
\text{New York} \\
PVT 2 U.S. ARTY \\
Mexican War \\
April 14, 1917
\]

Next to her husband, Frances Wilson’s grave lies to the south of her parents and husband (Figure 8). It is marked by a rectangular headstone made of granite, and it shows very little damage or weathering. The dimensions of the headstone are 50 cm in length, 35 cm in width, and 20 cm thick. There is no grave curb or footstone to determine the length and width of the grave. The epitaph is very clear and reads:

\[
\text{In Memory Of} \\
\text{Frances A.} \\
\text{Wilson} \\
1838 - 1924
\]

Figure 8. Henry and Frances Wilson graves. Source, S. Michell
The last headstone in the Burnham Cemetery belongs to Elliot J. Burns. This burial is isolated from the other headstones and is located further south and slightly towards the center than the other graves (Figure 9). His grave is marked by a gray stone headstone, slightly sunken on the south side, with very little damage or weathering showing. The headstone dimensions are 50 cm in length, 30 cm in width, and 12 cm thick. There is no grave curb or footstone to determine the length and width of the grave. The epitaph is slightly worn but it good condition and reads:

_In Memoriam_
_Elliott J. Burns_
_Born Mar. 17, 1854_
_Died Dec. 28, 1896._

_I am the resurrection and the life_

Figure 9. Elliott J. Burn’s headstone on south end of Burnham Cemetery. Source, S. Michell
Supposedly there is an unmarked grave without a traditional marker reported in the north east area of the cemetery. A shrub and small white fence 1.0 meter long and 0.50 meters wide dimensions are said to be the unofficial markers, however further analysis is needed to determine more details about the burial (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Unmarked grave with bush and fencing, Source S. Michell

The CCAMP archaeology students used methods such as soil probing, thermal imaging, ground-penetrating-radar, cadaver dogs, and metal detecting to investigate these questions and see if there is any indication of the presence of unmarked burials at the Burnham Cemetery. Their reports contain the results of these investigations. After our CCAMP investigation, positive
soil probe tests, as well as indications from the cadaver dog, suggest that such a burial likely exists at this location.

**Conclusion**

As part of the CCAMP project, site files and documentations were updated for the Burnham Cemetery. It is important to survey and record as much data from this site as possible, since it is highly susceptible to damage from weather, bioturbation, and rising sea-levels. The Burnham Cemetery is especially valuable to archaeologists and historians in the Cape Canaveral area due to the “number of interments and good bone preservation” (Cantley et al., 1994: 147) and its long occupation. This historic cemetery can provide important scientific information about health, diet, medicine, and life on the cape in the past.
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