

Daughters of Zion Cemetery

The Daughters of Zion Cemetery, also known as Society Cemetery and Old Oakwood Section, was established on two acres in 1873 by the Daughters of Zion, a charitable organization of African American women, in response to the segregated burial policies of the adjacent Oakwood Cemetery. The Daughters of Zion Cemetery offers a visible link to Virginia's post-bellum segregated society and evidence of the vital community role of Reconstruction-era African American mutual aid societies. This cemetery may contain as many as 300 graves, dating between 1873 and 1995, but only 150 are clearly marked with headstones. Burials declined after 1933, when the Daughters of Zion disbanded. Many of Charlottesville's prominent African American residents, including Benjamin E. Tonsler, principal of the Jefferson School for nearly thirty years, and his wife Fannie Gildersleeve Tonsler, are buried in Daughters of Zion Cemetery. Although the cemetery came under public ownership after 1971, the burials continued to be exclusively African American. The Daughters of Zion Cemetery was individually listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 2010.

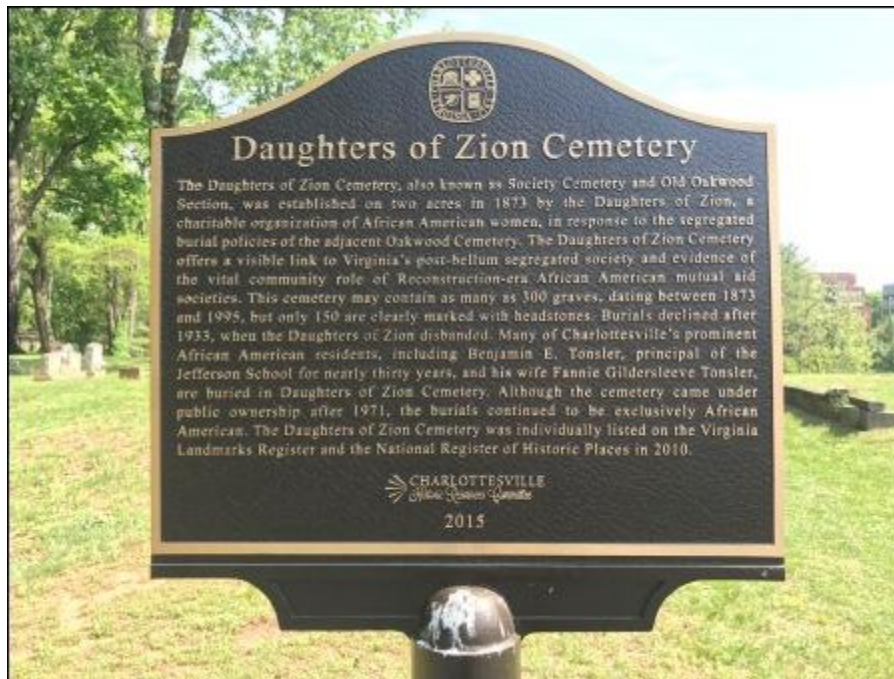


Figure 1: Daughters of Zion Cemetery marker on Oak Street