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# Buckhead cemeteries with common bond consecrated

By Kent A. Miles  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
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James "Whispering" Smith would have been humbled.

The white 19th-century landowner, just days before he died in 1872, willed property for the creation of an African-American place of worship.

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Kent D. Johnson / AJC  
Rev. Philip Chisolm of The New Hope African Methodist Episcopal Church leads a rededication service Sunday afternoon for the Harmony Grove Cemetery.

On Sunday, about 30 people met in the church built upon that land in Buckhead to mark a milestone and to recognize his charitable act.

They came together at New Hope African Methodist Episcopal Church for ceremonies to consecrate two cemeteries with a common bond.

The church cemetery, across from New Hope on Arden Road, is on some of the 2 acres Smith donated. Many church parishioners and veterans are interred there, as are former slaves.

Smith is buried in nearby Harmony Grove cemetery, the resting place off West Paces Ferry Road of many prominent white Atlantans.

Both underwent lengthy renovation projects. A three-year cleanup and renovation at Harmony Grove cemetery is complete. Boy Scouts and volunteers recently finished their annual restoration at New Hope.

"This is indeed a historic moment," said the Rev. Philip Chisolm, New Hope's pastor.

He praised Smith for his act more than a century ago that recognized "in death we are equal, and that everyone deserves a place to find the higher power and life beyond this realm, regardless of race."

Watching as a wreath was placed on Smith's grave was Henry Howell. His great-great-grandfather sold Smith the land that he would later donate for the church.

"It's absolutely wonderful," Howell said.

Wright Mitchell, a Buckhead native and president of the Buckhead Heritage Society, said the connection linking the Harmony Grove and New Hope cemeteries made it right for a joint rededication event.

"There's been a long spirit of cooperation with us," he said.

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Zandria Bell of The New Hope African Methodist Episcopal Church, participates in the rededication service Sunday afternoon.

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