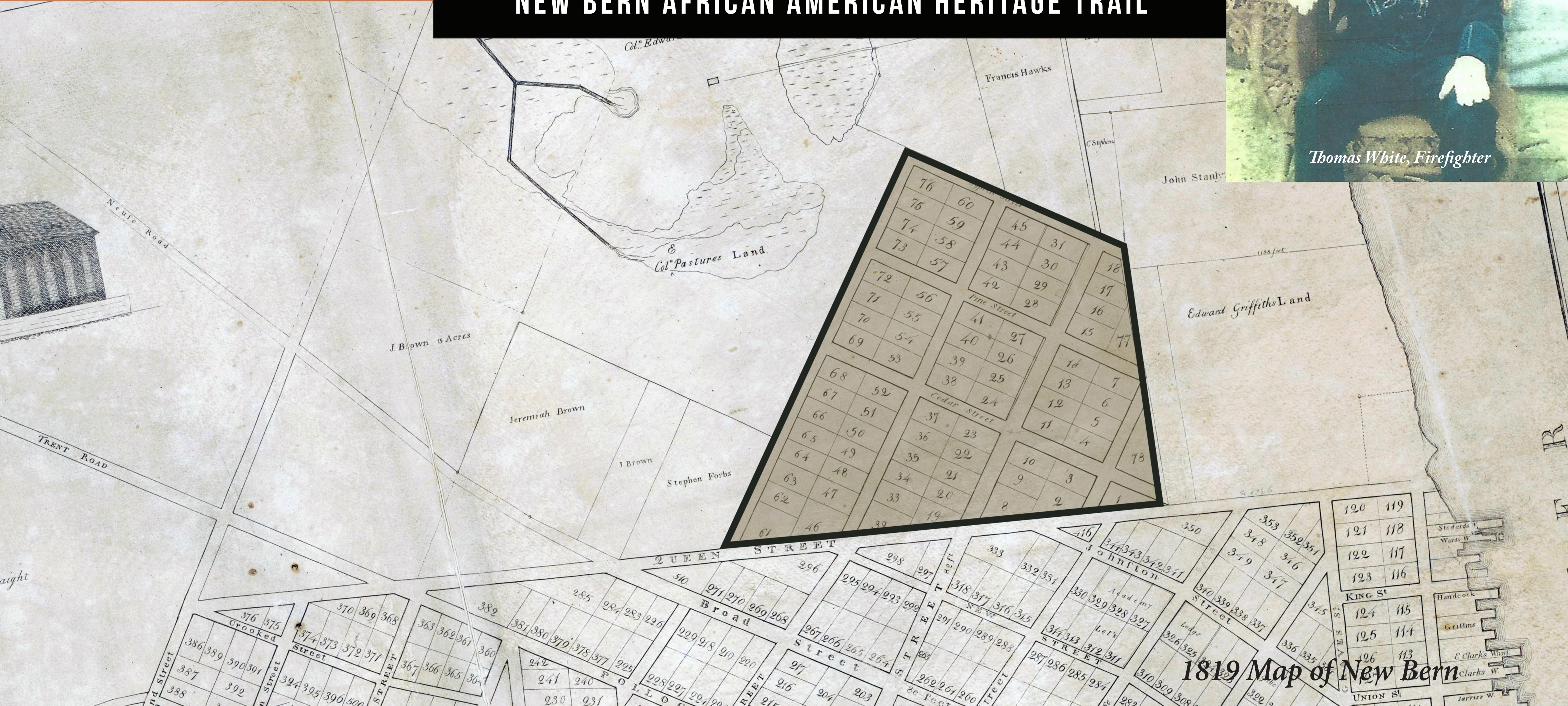


# Dryborough

## NEW BERN AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL



Thomas White, Firefighter



1819 Map of New Bern

African Americans have played an active and prominent role in the history of New Bern since well before the American Revolution. The earliest enslaved Blacks arrived at one of colonial North Carolina’s inland seaports aboard ships from the West Indies or directly from Africa. Others came from the Virginia and Maryland colonies as free Blacks untethered by the institution of slavery but still subject to the authority and control of White-dominated governments and social institutions.

By 1820, the total number of Black New Bernians, free and enslaved, surpassed the White population. At the time, the North Carolina constitution gave more rights to free Blacks than any other Southern state. Among those living in New Bern were prosperous artisans, farmers, and shopkeepers. However, as a result of the hysteria generated by the Nat Turner slave rebellion in Virginia (1831), North Carolina began restricting the rights of free Blacks. In 1832, the legislature forbade them from entering the state, and, in 1835, those already living in North Carolina lost their right to vote. They were further barred from preaching in public, owning a gun without a special permit, and attending public schools. As the country moved toward Civil War, Black New Bernians felt the wrath of a divided nation.



TRAIL SIGNS

### Creating Community



Benjamin Smith

The Dryborough community, located north of downtown New Bern, was platted in 1806 by Benjamin Smith, a future North Carolina governor (1810–1811), on land inherited by his wife, Sarah, from her father, William Dry III, a Brunswick merchant and planter. Dryborough was the second platted town created in Craven County. An array of individuals purchased tracts in the new development in the first decade, including both wealthy White investors and free Black artisans. Most properties were improved for use as rental units, others as dwellings for enslaved persons. Dryborough was annexed in 1859 by New Bern, becoming a core neighborhood north of town.

### Cedar Grove Cemetery

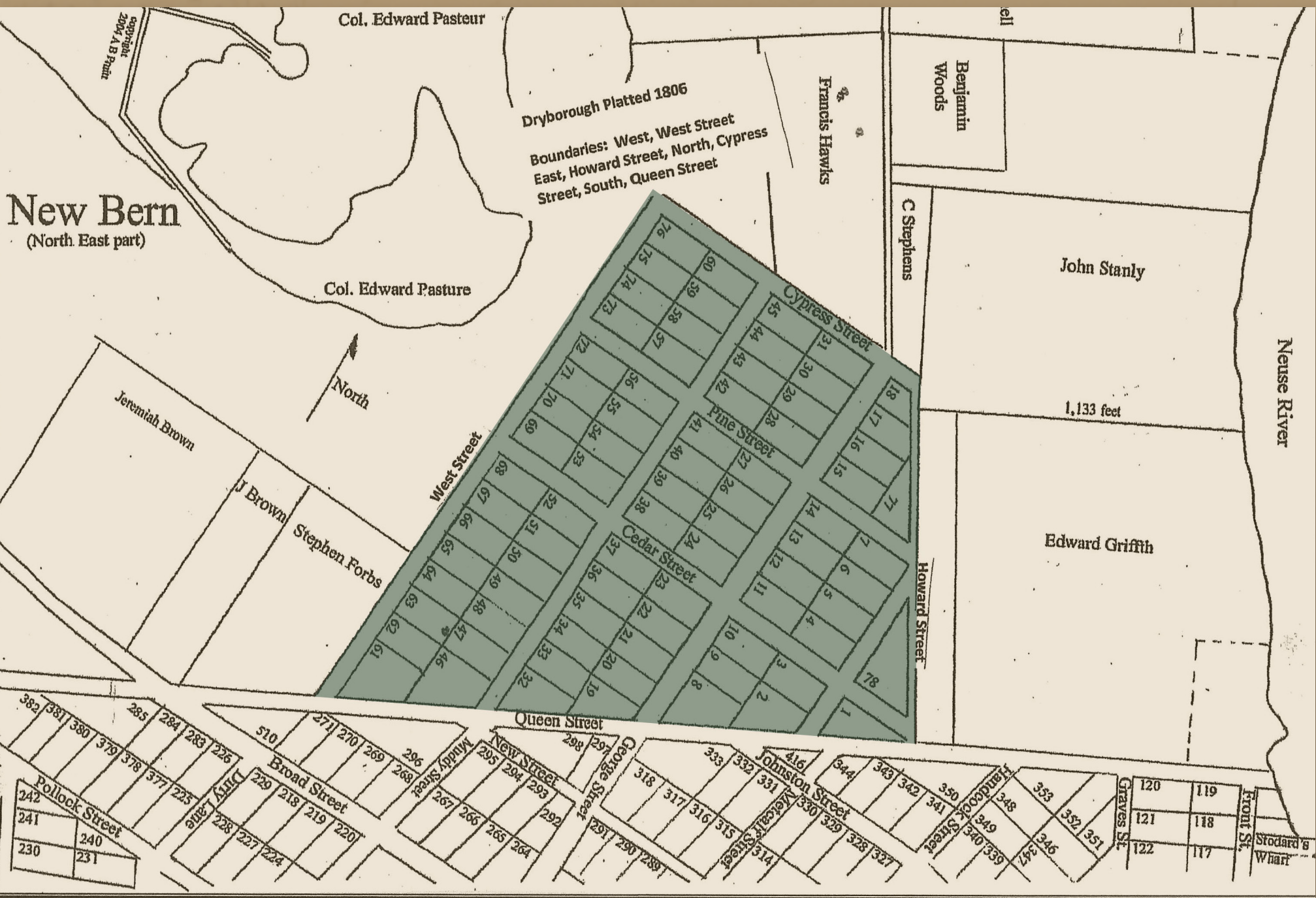
Until the early 20th century, Cedar Grove Cemetery was representative of Dryborough’s diversity. Established in 1800 by Christ Church, the town’s oldest congregation (1715), the original burying ground consisted of five Dryborough lots hastily assembled during one of New Bern’s deadliest yellow fever epidemics. At the time, the properties were filled with large red cedar trees draped in Spanish moss.

The cemetery was expanded in 1854 and deeded to the Town of New Bern. For decorative purposes and to keep out roaming livestock, a perimeter wall was constructed using marl, a composite of shell rock quarried from the Trent River, and lime. Throughout much of the 19th century the cemetery was the final resting place for many of New Bern’s White, free Black, and enslaved populations.

In 1900, the cemetery boundaries were expanded again. Soon after, Alderman R. J. Disosway proposed a bill to “move the colored bodies from Cedar Grove Cemetery to Greenwood,” the city’s African American-only burial ground. In February 1914, plots in Cedar Grove’s Section A that were once the “graves of the colored race,” were offered for sale. A new ordinance was passed stating that only Whites could be buried in Cedar Grove and only Blacks in Greenwood. Cedar Grove was expanded for the final time in 1920.

### Greenwood Cemetery

Greenwood Cemetery, officially established in 1860 on the grounds of an earlier cemetery, is one of North Carolina’s oldest public African American burial grounds. Thirteen headstones dated between 1816 and 1859 mark those graves relocated from Cedar Grove in 1914. At least five men who served as U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War are interred in Greenwood, as well as prominent African American legislator of the postwar period, James Edward O’Hara.



Original 1806 Dryborough Boundaries

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, Dryborough witnessed tremendous change. Property values increased closer to town and working class ownership in the community expanded. More free Black artisans, including tailors, painters, carpenters, and brick masons, along with commercial laborers, both Black and White, flocked to the area. Some purchased homes. Others rented rooms in tenement houses. By 1860, Dryborough was a racially diverse working-class community and home to one of North Carolina’s largest populations of free Black artisans.

Images: Library of Congress, State Archives of North Carolina, Ethel Staten