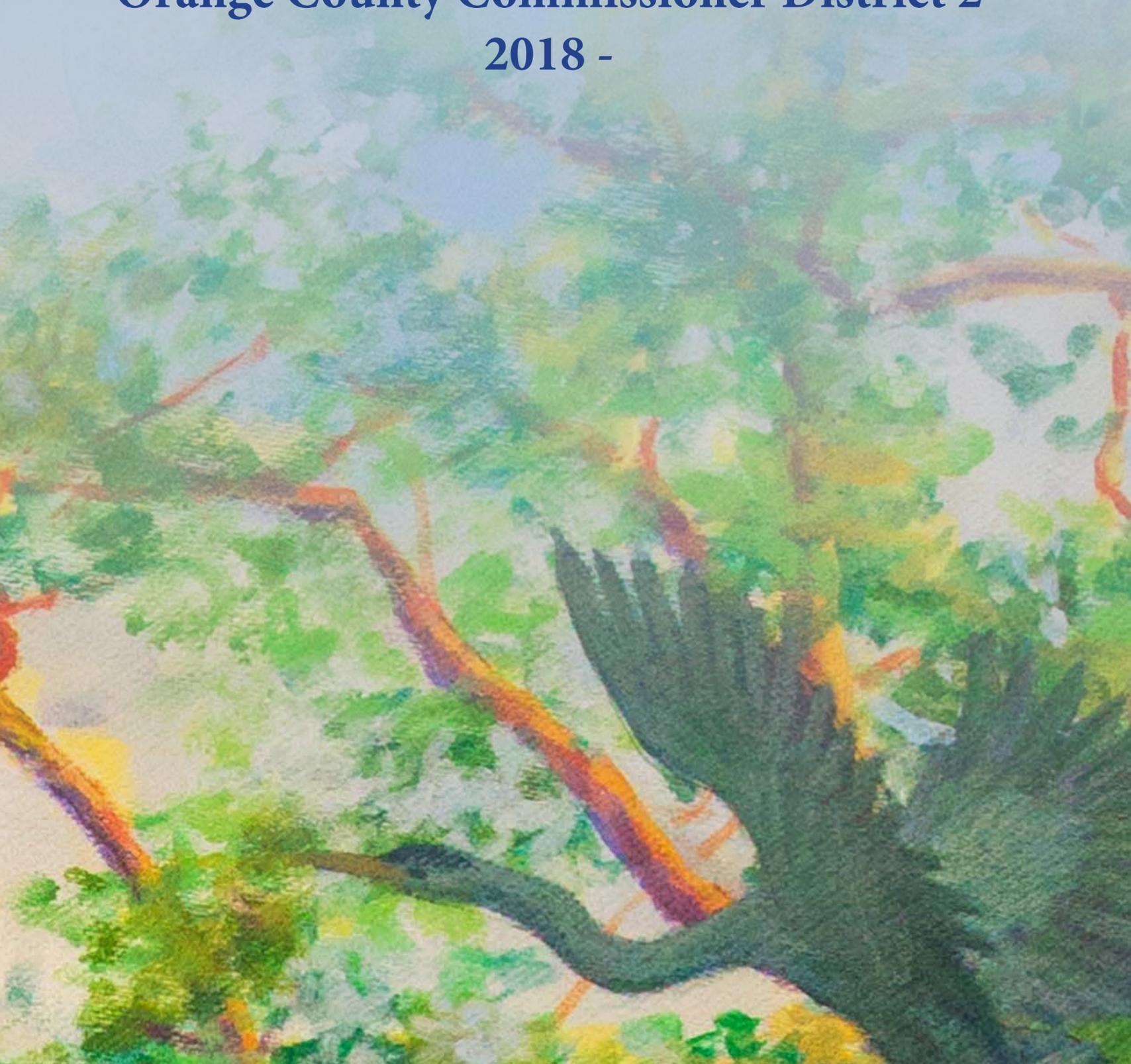


**A Driving Tour of  
Central Apopka**  
*South and Downtown*

**By Christine Moore**  
**Orange County Commissioner District 2**  
**2018 -**



# South

Meads Bottom and Johnson Town formed along the railroad. Both areas had churches by the 1880s. And by 1910, there was a business district, lodge, and school.

After the 1920 Ocoee riot, many families relocated to Apopka. Soon a theater and hotel opened. Chapters of the National Negro Business League, Board of Trade, Masonic Lodge, and NAACP were formed. One female business owner, Ella Wall, inspired a character in Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Mules and Men*.

## 1. Marvin C. Zanders Funeral Home and Monument

*232 W. Michael Gladden Blvd., Apopka, FL 32703*

Born in 1934, Marvin C. Zanders was the fifth out of ten children. His love for God and education inspired him to move to New Jersey to earn a degree in embalming. In 1960, he and a co-worker opened a funeral home. Marvin was known for his philanthropic spirit.



**ACTIVITY:** Marvin faced many obstacles in operating a business during segregation. How do you think his struggles would compare to those of his daughter, Helen, who runs it today?

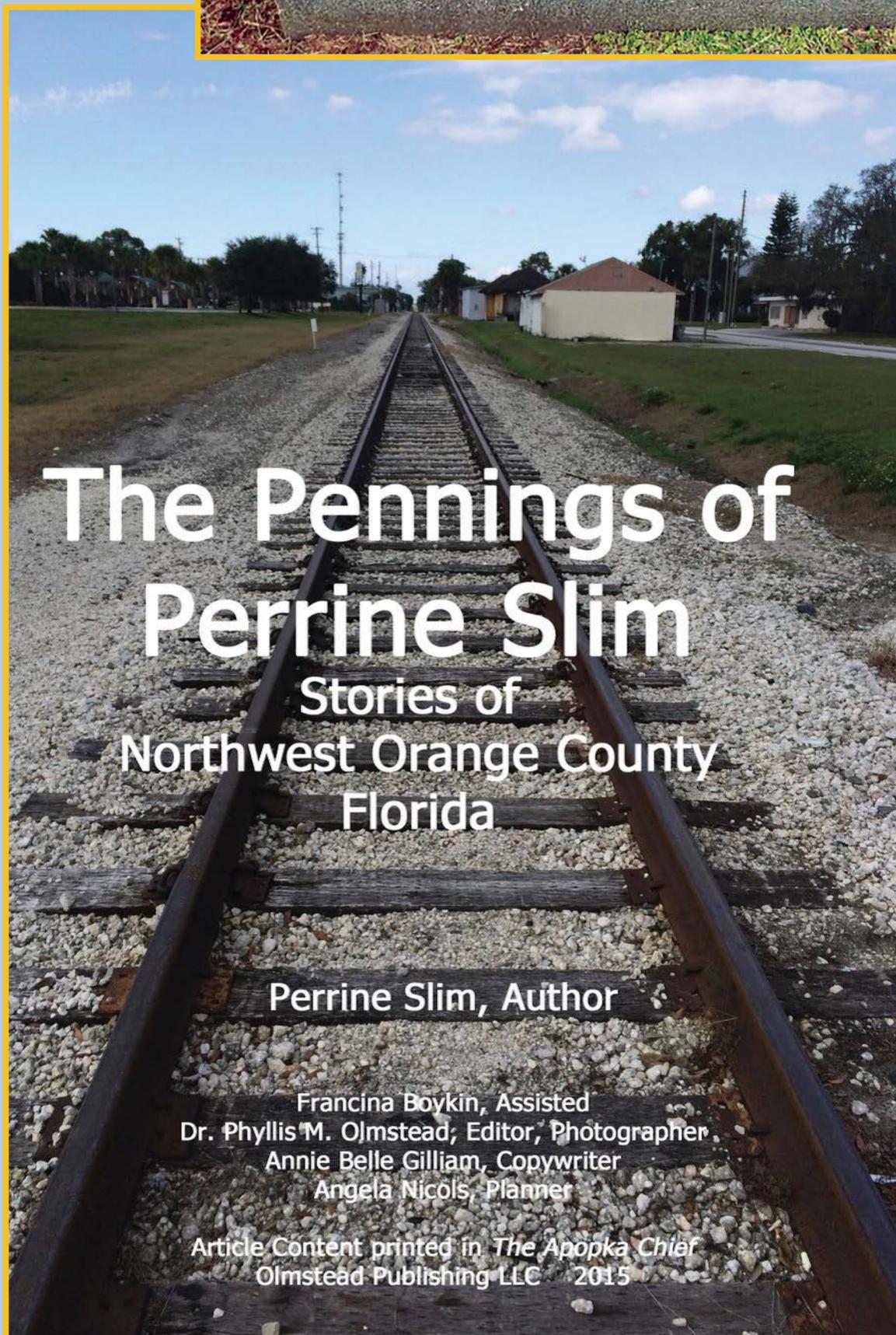


## 2. Michael Gladden Jr. Monument (1899-1982)

1201 S. Central Avenue, Apopka, FL 32703

Mr. Gladden owned Gladden's General Store and his wife, Marie, was a respected principal. He secured deeds for property, developed lots, and operated a farm. In 1982, a monument for him was dedicated.

His nephew, William, wrote a weekly column for the Apopka Chief. His articles became the book *Perrine Slim*.



**ACTIVITY:** Discuss how running a business would have given Mr. Gladden prominence?



### 3. The Big Potato Foundation, Railroad Depot, and Mural

*66 E. Station Street, Apopka, FL 32703*

The Big Potato Foundation is meant to cultivate healthy community projects through creative and cultural programs.

Apopka Seaboard Air Line Railroad Depot was rebuilt in 1918 after a tornado destroyed the original brick building. The station served as both a freight and passenger depot until 1938 when passenger service was discontinued due to the automobile.

Lake Apopka Farmworkers Historical Mural was hand drawn and painted by Mrs. Linda Lee and her grandchildren. The pictures reflect her memories of the community told to her by her mother.



**ACTIVITY:** Discuss how scenes from the mural demonstrate the character and hard work of the people?



# Downtown

The earliest inhabitants were the Acuera tribe. Coacoochee “Wild Cat” the war chief was born here in 1809. The area was called Ahapopka, Aha, meaning “Potato”, and papka, meaning “eating places”.

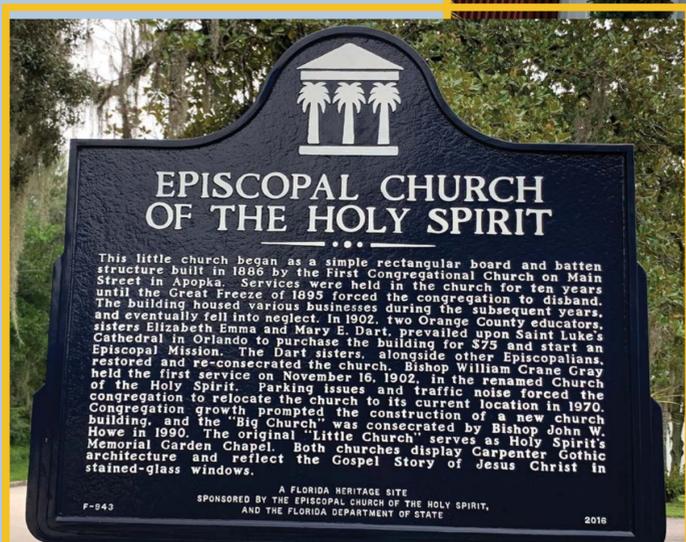
Early pioneers were first drawn to Apopka because of the lodge, high dry land and ample lakes and rivers for travel. The city was chartered in 1882.

Apopka is known for having one of the longest-serving mayors in the United States, John H. Land, for 61.25 years with a short three-year gap.

## 4. Church of the Holy Spirit – “Little Church” and Historical Marker

*601 S. Highland Avenue, Apopka, FL 32703*

The little church began as a simple rectangular wooden structure in 1866. Services were held until the Great Freeze of 1895 forced the congregation to disband. In 1902, the dilapidated building was purchased by sisters for a mission. In 1970, the church was moved to its current location.



**ACTIVITY:** Discuss the information on the marker and take a picture of the carpenter gothic structure.



## 5. Museum of the Apopkans

*122 E. 5th Street, Apopka, FL 32703*

Edward Miner's exhibit of early artifacts at the 1968 Folk Festival inspired the formation of the Historical Society. The museum was first located in the school. By 2001, the current log cabin style building was constructed.



**ACTIVITY:** Discuss how exhibits bring history to life. Find several artifacts on the front lawn.

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## 6. City Hall, Tree, Fern, JHL Statue, and 9/11 Memorial

*120 E. Main Street, Apopka, FL 32703*

**City Hall** – From 1996 through the 2018 tornado, the wooden Union School was located on the current city hall property. Soon citizens rebuilt a new elementary and high school. In the 1950s, the high school was converted into Apopka City Hall.

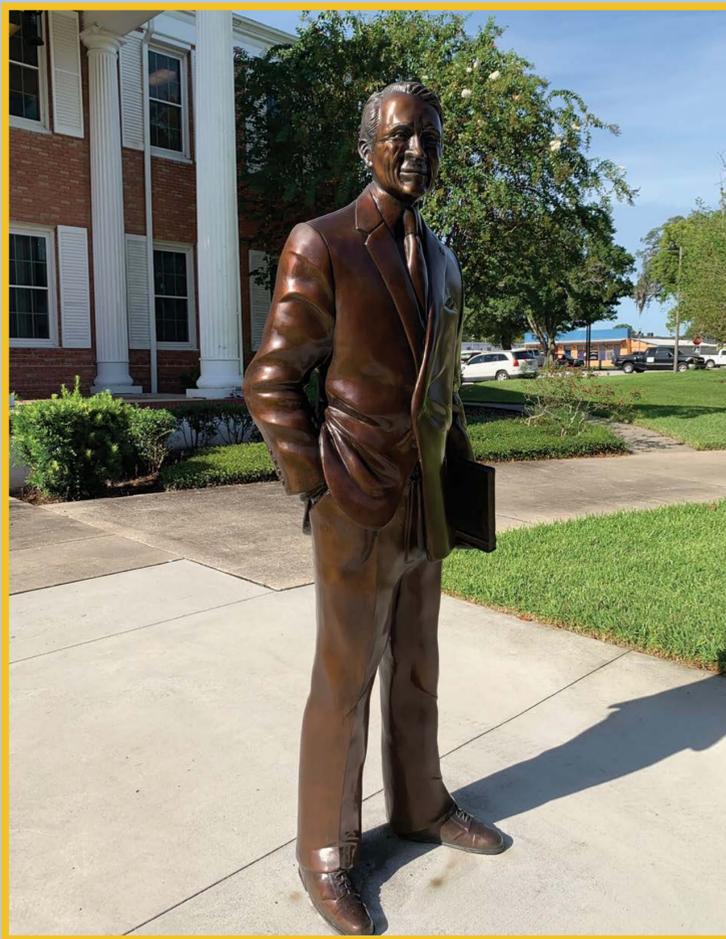
**Sycamore Tree** – On Arbor Day in 1960, PB Sheppard, a city commissioner, planted two sycamore trees.

On January 11, 1918, a tornado slammed into the town and wiped out one of the beloved sycamore trees. The original tree is still standing.

**Fern** – For the centennial celebration of the city's founding in 1982, a monument honoring Harry Ustler and P. Newell, the creators of the fern foliage industry, was erected.

**John H. Land Statute** – In 2017, the Council had fabricated a bronze statue to commemorate the long-time service of Mayor John H. Land.

**9/11 Memorial** – In 2016, Eagle Scout Christian Lamphere created a memorial for the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. It features a 10-foot exterior panel from the World Trade Center as well as two pieces of Pennsylvania granite.

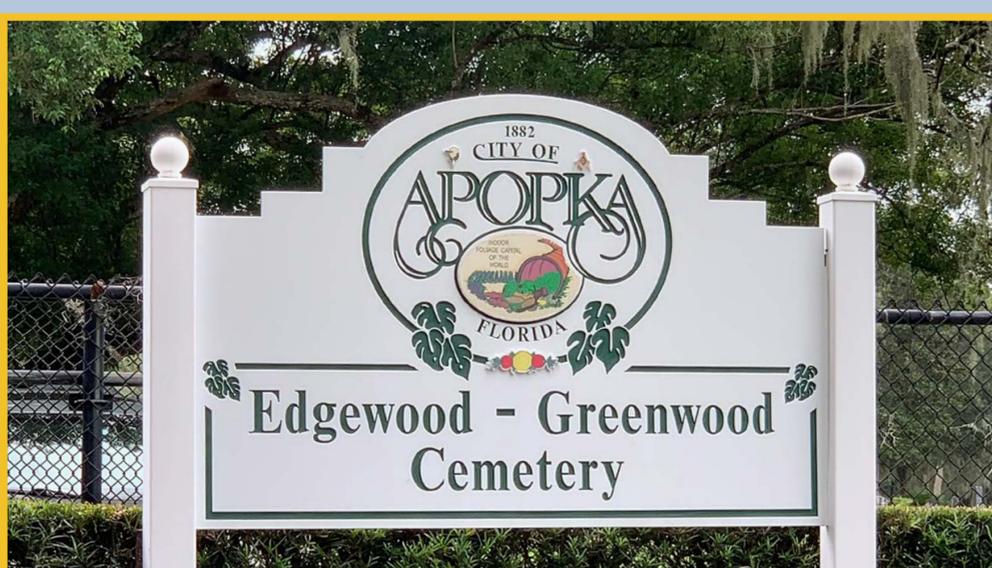


**ACTIVITY:** Park and walk through the grounds to find the memorials. Discuss their significance.

## 7. Edgewood/Greenwood Cemetery – Apopka Schoolhouse Historical Marker

*141 Edgewood Street, Apopka, FL 32703*

The school and church built in 1885 were in what is now the cemetery. In 1891, after a controversy the school burned down. Dr. Zelotes Mason (1814-1893) was instrumental in starting the town's Masonic Lodge and Presbyterian Church. He owned the land where the cemetery was located and was the first to be buried there.





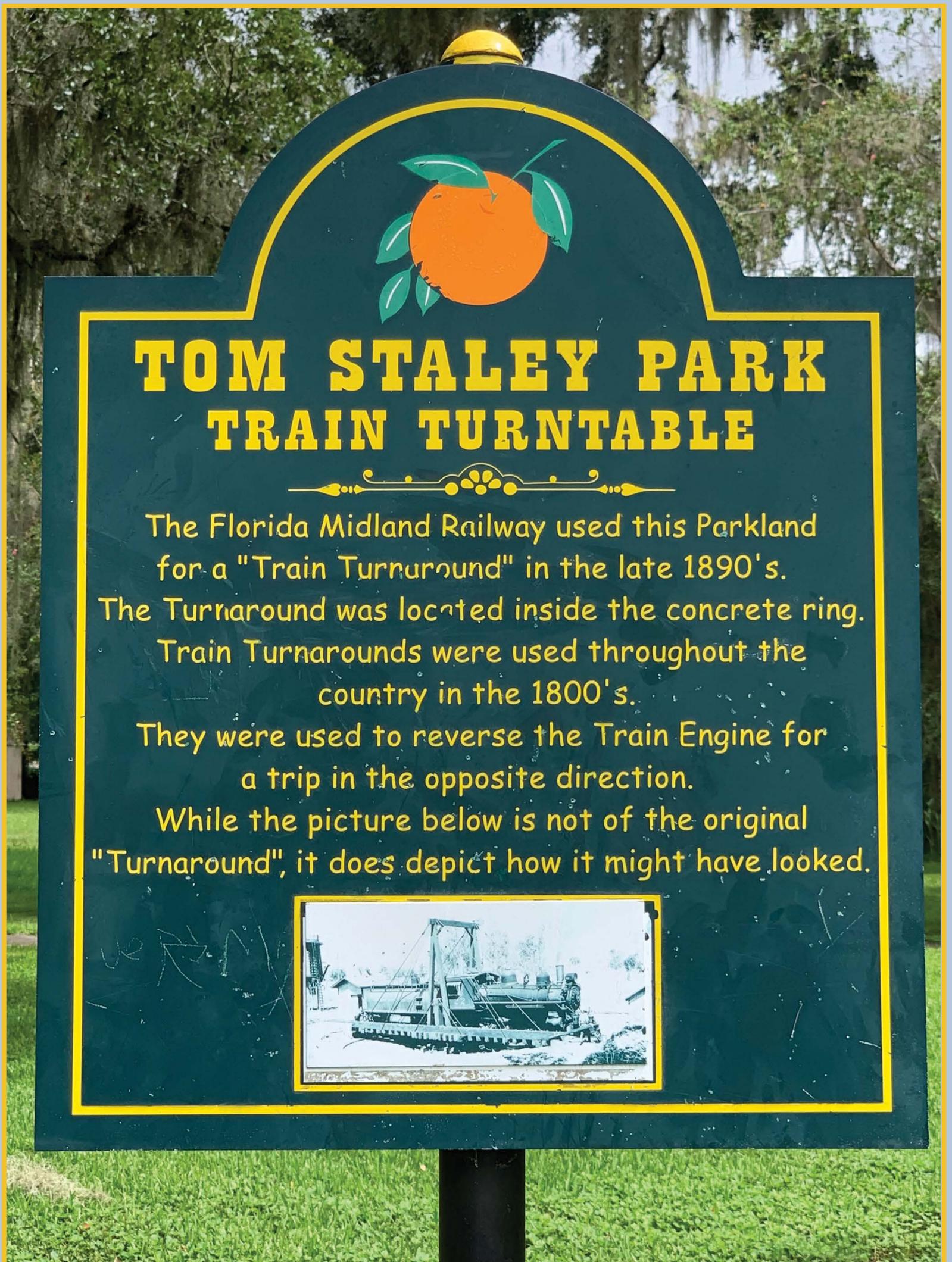
**ACTIVITY:** While practicing proper cemetery etiquette, find significant grave sites and the historical schoolhouse marker.

## 8. Apopka Station/Tom Staley Park

*111 S. Forest Avenue, Apopka, FL 32712*

**Apopka Station** is a trailhead on the West Orange Trail. The route follows the former Orange Belt Train Line.

**Tom Staley Park** – Tom Staley was the Orange County Commissioner from 1988-1996. The small, circular park behind Apopka Station is where the trains turned around.



**ACTIVITY:** Read and discuss the historical marker and enjoy eating in one of the area parks.

## 9. Kit Land Nelson Park and Edwards Field

*10 S. Forest Avenue, Apopka 32703*

**Kit Land Nelson Park** – Originally named “City Park”, after her death, the park was renamed in her honor. Kit was a big supporter of parks, foliage industry, and Woman’s Club.

**Edwards Field** – Baseball was a favorite pastime. While the stands were demolished in 2017, the field is still used for athletics, fair, and event parking.



**ACTIVITY:** Cool off at the splash park, or take a quick walk down the West Orange Trail.



**Artist: Lisa Mikler**

*Scene from Community of People*

*(Pictured: John Land, Marvin Zanders, Sister Ann Kendrick, and soldier)*



**Christine Moore**  
 Orange County  
 Commissioner District 2  
 2018 -



*The driving tour requires ninety minutes of time and covers about seven miles.*

**For more information:**

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**YouTube: Christine Moore or FB: Ahapopka**  
**Digital version available at: [www.ocfl.net/District2](http://www.ocfl.net/District2)**

It is recommended students read Ahapopka prior to taking the Central Driving Tour. The entire series of driving tours is available at the North Orange County Library and Canon Coffee.