

Air Products Site Formerly Orange Grove Plantation

Fact Sheet

Air Products Blue Energy LLC (“Air Products”), a subsidiary of the Pennsylvania-headquartered Air Products and Chemicals, Inc.,¹ plans to build a large gas manufacturing and chemical facility on a site formerly occupied by one of the largest sugar plantations in Louisiana and where many people were enslaved. Burial grounds of those who were enslaved on the plantation and those who worked there as share croppers or tenant farmers would have been buried on the site. Air Products recently conducted an archeological survey of the property and identify burial markers. But it appears that the company has not told the public or tried to reach out to any descendants. Air Products has not even alerted Ascension Parish according to records obtained from the parish.

Below are detailed facts with support.

Project description: Air Products plans to build a new industrial complex that will include a hydrogen gas manufacturing facility using methane as the feedstock.² The company also intends to build an ammonia plant that will, in turn, use the hydrogen manufactured onsite as feedstock. Air Products plans to capture the carbon dioxide from the facility, compress it, and transport it in a new pipeline approximately 35 miles through the Maurepas Swamp to two injection wells deep under Lake Maurepas for storage. Air Products refers to the hydrogen manufacturing and ammonia facility, pipelines, and carbon sequestration component of the project collectively as the “Blue Hydrogen Clean Energy Complex.”³

Air Products’ site: Air Products chose to construct its hydrogen manufacturing and ammonia facility on a 376-acre site located in Ascension Parish on the East Bank of the Mississippi River just upriver of the St. James Parish border in Burnside, which is within a broader area called Darrow.⁴ See Figures 1 and 2. Ascension Parish is divided

¹Air Products webpage, <https://www.airproducts.com/campaigns/la-blue-hydrogen-project>; <https://www.airproducts.com/>.

² Air Products Blue Energy LLC Minor Source Initial Air Permit Application, Darrow Blue Energy Facility, Mar. 21, 2022, <https://edms.deq.louisiana.gov/app/doc/view?doc=13210585>.

³ Air Products webpage, <https://www.airproducts.com/campaigns/la-blue-hydrogen-project>.

⁴ See Air Products Minor Source App, Site Plan, Mar. 21, 2022, EDMS 13210585, p. 76 of 149, <https://edms.deq.louisiana.gov/app/doc/view?doc=13210585>; Ascension Parish Assessors Map, <https://ascensionparishmaps.azurewebsites.net/>.

into 10 districts or wards. Burnside and Darrow comprise Ward 5 (also called the Fifth Ward).⁵

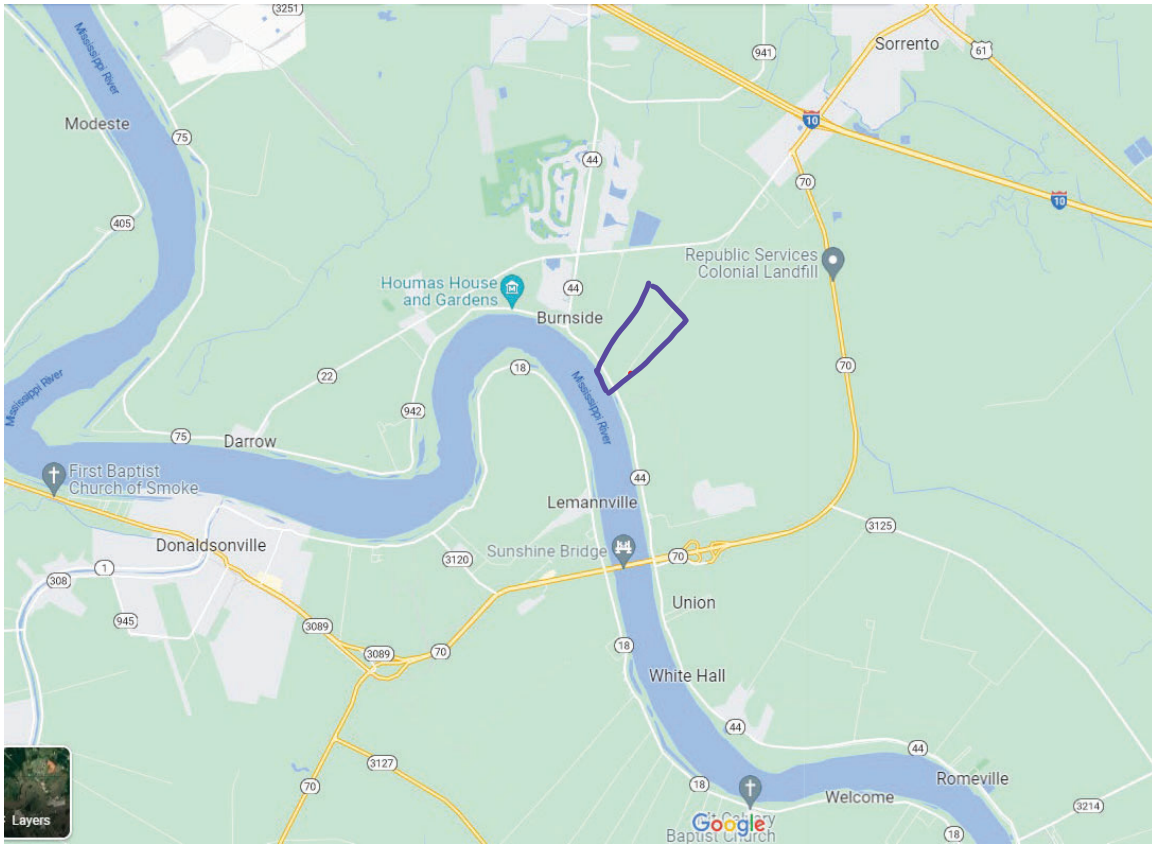


Figure 1 – Google Maps Image with purple line added to show approximate location of Air Products 376-acre site.

⁵ See Ascension Parish Assessors Map, <https://ascensionparishmaps.azurewebsites.net/>.

Figure 5-1 Area Map

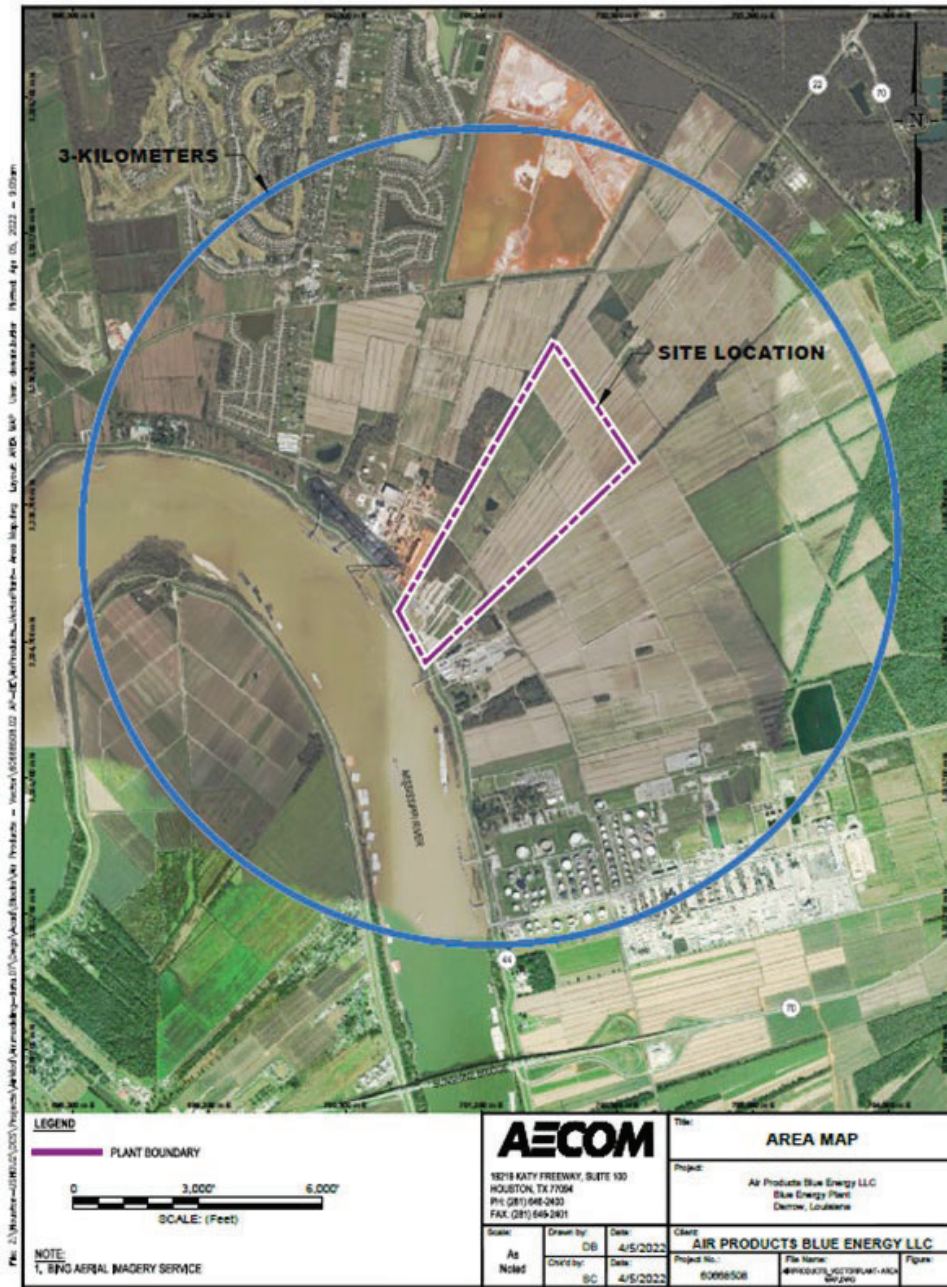


Figure 2 – Area map from Air Products air permit application showing site.

Approximately 3000 people live within two miles of Air Products’ site. The large residential subdivisions of Ascension Trace and Pelican Point are less than one mile northwest of the site. Sorrento Primary School, which serves a predominantly Black student body of 550 (prekindergarten-5th grade),⁶ is just over a mile northeast of the site. See Figure 3.

⁶ See <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/sorrento-primary-school-profile>.

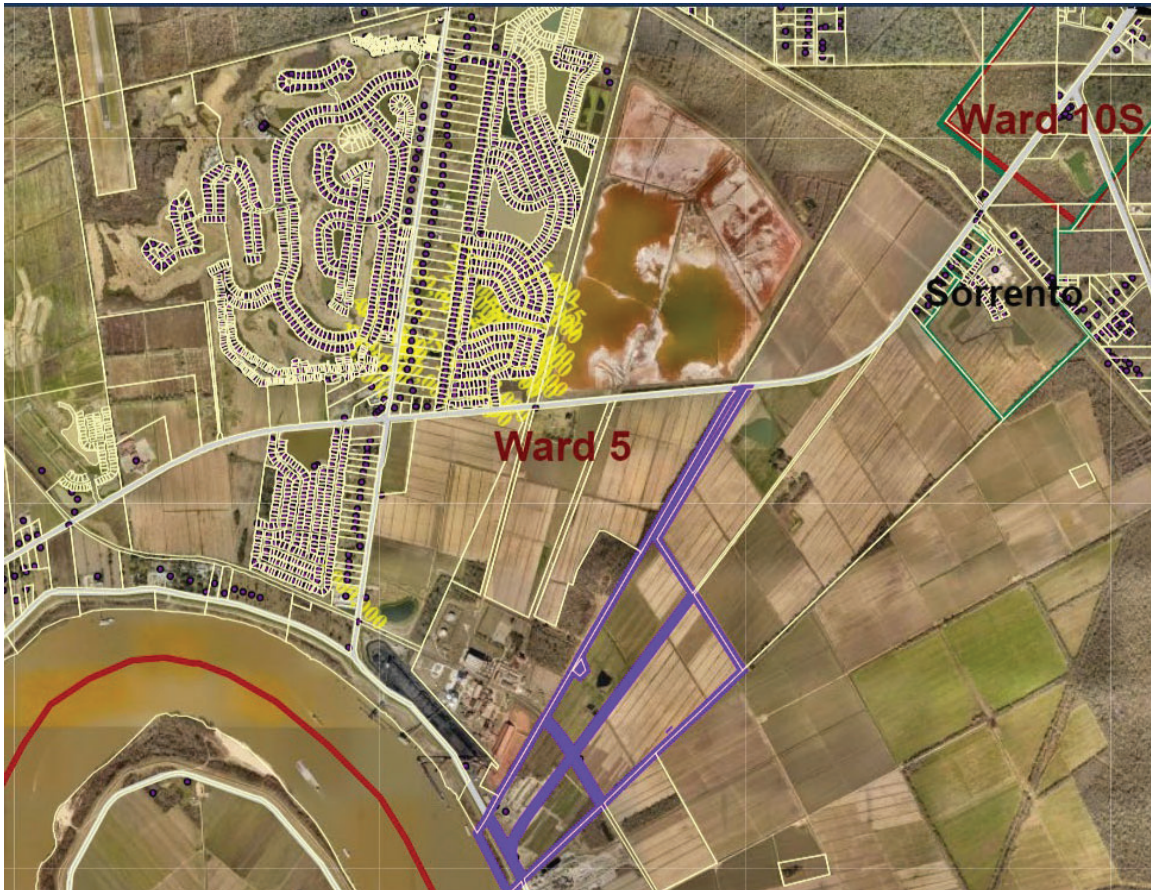


Figure 3 – Air Products site outlined in purple with residential lots outlined in yellow.⁷

The larger subdivision is Pelican Point, with Ascension Trace subdivision just below Hwy 22. Sorrento Primary School is located approximately where Sorrento is labeled on the map.

This area already has some of the worst air pollution in the state. Toxic air pollution from existing industrial facilities in the area put residents within two miles of the site at a higher risk of cancer and respiratory ailments than 90 percent of all Louisiana residents.⁸ Air Products facility, if built and operating, would emit another 185 tons per year of toxic air pollutants.

⁷ See Ascension Parish Assessors Map, <https://ascensionparishmaps.azurewebsites.net/>.

⁸ See EPA's Environmental Justice Screen and Mapping Tool (EJSCREEN) (Version 2.1), <https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper/>.

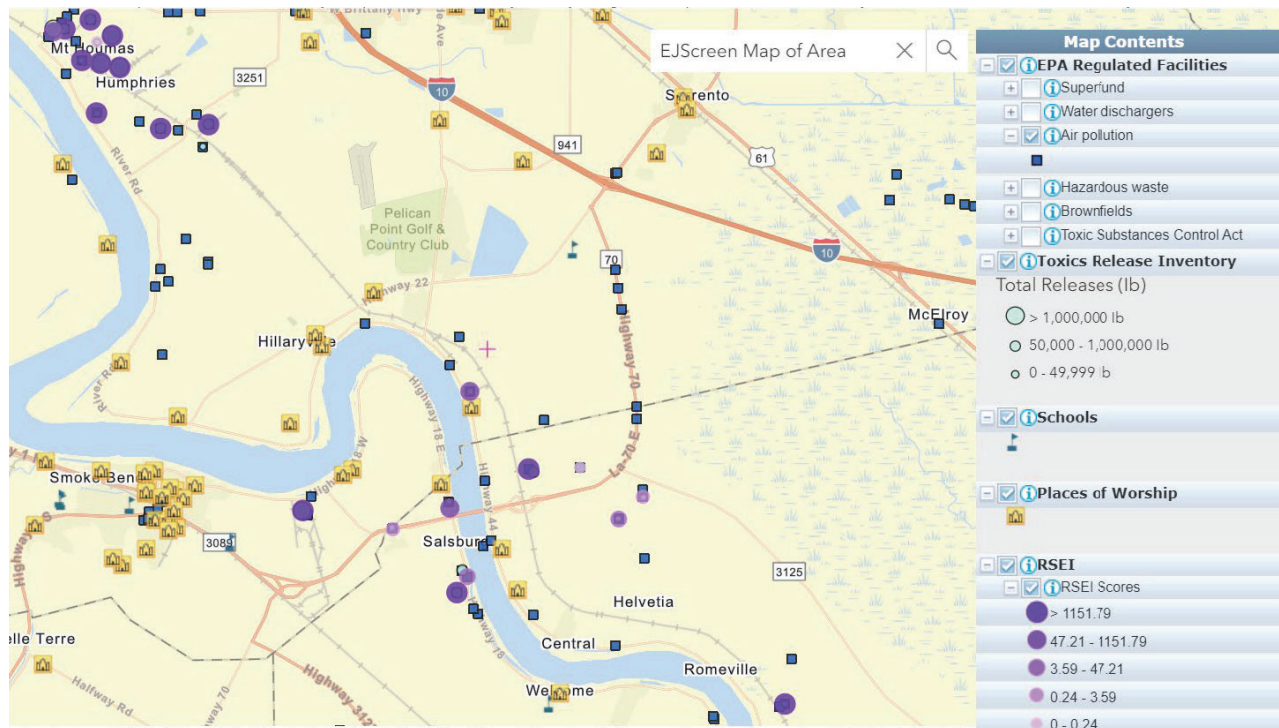


Figure 4 - EJSCREEN Map of Area⁹

Sugar Plantations: Burnside was a major center for sugarcane production in the 1800s, with some of largest plantations and slave populations in the state located there.¹⁰ The town of Burnside was named after John Burnside who by the late 1850s owned several of these plantations, including the Orange Grove Planation¹¹—which is location of the Air Products site.¹² See Figure 5.

⁹ EPA's Environmental Justice Screen and Mapping Tool (EJSCREEN) (Version 2.1), <https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper/>.

¹⁰ See Houmas Plantations and William Porcher Miles Materials Collection, 1760-1927, Wilson Special Collections Library, Collection No. 02334, <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/02334/>.

¹¹ See U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, Cultural Resources Survey of the Burnside Revetment, Item, Ascension and St. James Parishes, Louisiana, Final Report, August 27, 1986 ("1986 Army Corp Burnside Revetment Survey"), pp. 38-42, Ex. A. See also Houmas Plantations and William Porcher Miles Materials Collection, 1760-1927, Wilson Special Collections Library, Collection No. 02334, <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/02334/> (explaining that John Burnside bought several plantations in the area "including Houmas, Orange Grove, Conway, Clark, Riverton, Donaldson, Saint James, White Castle, and Armant" and further explaining that "[t]he term 'Houmas Plantations' is sometimes used to refer to these plantations as a group," and which "are located on the Mississippi River, near Burnside").

¹² See Air Products Minor Source App, Site Plan, EDMS 13210585, p. 76 of 149, <https://edms.deq.louisiana.gov/app/doc/view?doc=13210585>; Ascension Parish Assessor Map, <https://ascensionparishmaps.azurewebsites.net/> (showing maps and providing that Air Products Blue Energy, LLC owns 376.98 acres, Sec. 9-10-3, Parcel B-4). See also SURA, Inc., Phase One

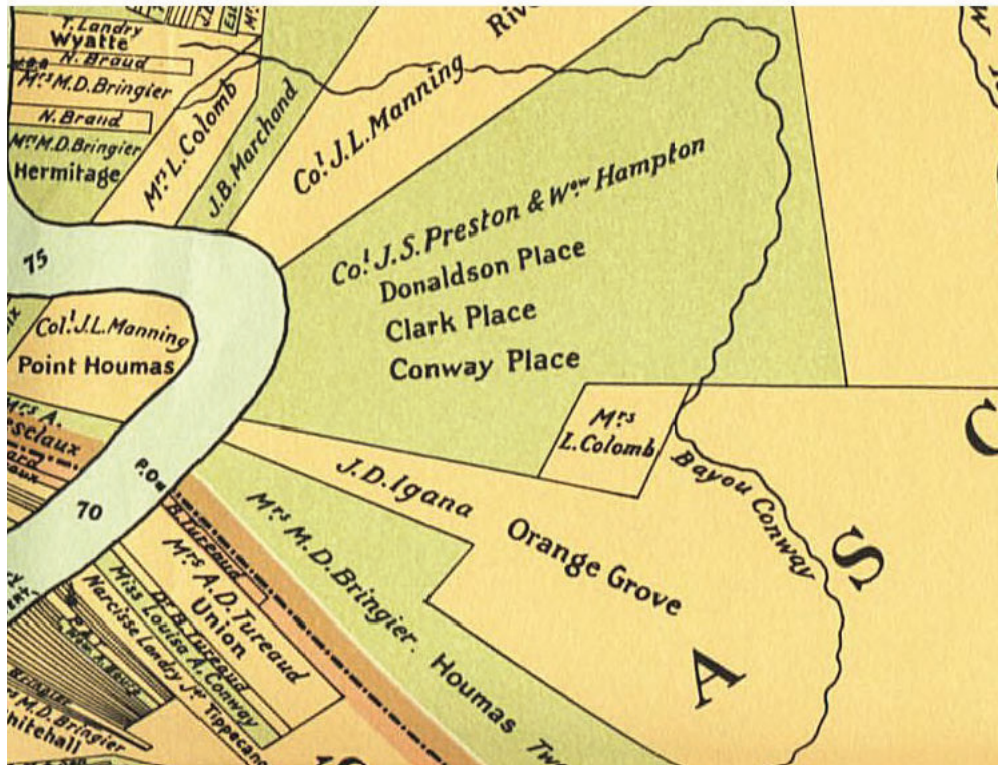


Figure 5 – Portion of 1858 map showing Orange Grove Plantation¹³

The U.S. Census records for 1860 show that John Burnside enslaved 753 slave people in the Fifth Ward, where the Orange Grove Plantation and his other plantations were located.¹⁴ See Figure 6. Ascension Parish had a total population of 15,000 people in 1860, approximately half of whom were identified in the U.S. Census as slaves.¹⁵ Burnside therefore was responsible for approximate 10 percent of the total enslaved population in Ascension Parish at that time.

Cultural Resources Survey of 673.9 Acres Proposed for Industrial Use, Burnside, Ascension Parish, Louisiana, Final Report (“2014 SURA Inc. Burnside Survey”), April 25, 2014, p. 2, Ex. B.

¹³ See also 2014 SURA Inc. Burnside Survey, p. 159, Ex. B.

¹⁴ 1860 U.S. Census (Slave Schedule), Ascension Parish (Ward 5), Louisiana, NARA microfilm publication M653, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration (“1869 U.S. Census Slave Schedule”), Ex. C; Rita Babin Butler, Ascension Parish, Louisiana, 1890 U.S. Census Summary, 1983, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/10617671>. See also Ascension Parish Accessor Maps (showing Ward 5 consists of Darrow and Burnside, including the Orange Grove Plantation), <https://ascensionparishmaps.azurewebsites.net/>.

¹⁵ 2014 SURA Inc. Burnside Survey, p. 19 (citing Prichard, Walter (editor), 1938 A Tourist’s Description of Louisiana in 1860. *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 21:1110-1214), Ex. B.

SCHEDULE 2.—Slave Inhabitants in 5th Ward in the Parish of Ascension State of Louisiana, enumerated by me, on the 26th day of June, 1860. H. J. Bennett Ass't Marshal.

1	2	3			6	7	8	9	1	2	3			6	7	8	9
		Age	Sex	Color							Age	Sex	Color				

31	J. Burnside	1	46	M	B			192		40	16						
32		2	15							41	3						
33		3	42							42	40						
34		4	40							43	9						
35		4	12							44	5						
36		6	30							45	1						
37		7	15							46	60						
38		8	50							47	36						
39		9	12							48	15						
40																	

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 SCHEDULE 2.—Slave Inhabitants in 5th Ward in the Parish of Ascension State of Louisiana, enumerated by me, on the 27th day of June, 1860. H. J. Bennett Ass't Marshal.

1	2	3			6	7	8	9	1	2	3			6	7	8	9
		Age	Sex	Color							Age	Sex	Color				

1	J. Burnside	757	16	F	B				John B Marchand	31	6	M	B				
2		752	15	"	"					32	4	"	"				
3		752	71	"	"					33	2	"	"				

Figure 6 - Excerpts from U.S. Census 1860 Slave Schedule documenting Burnside's 753 people he enslaved (the full list of 753 people covers 11 pages - these excerpts show the beginning and end of the list)¹⁶

As the New York Times reported, historian Michael Tadman found that Louisiana sugar parishes had a pattern of "deaths exceeding births."¹⁷ In the year ending June 1, 1860, the U.S. Census report shows that six of the people that John Burside enslaved on his

¹⁶ 1869 U.S. Census Slave Schedule, Ex. C; Rita Babin Butler, Ascension Parish, Louisiana, 1890 U.S. Census Summary, 1983, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/10617671>. See also Ascension Parish Accessor Maps (showing Ward 5 consists of Darrow and Burnside, including the Orange Grove Plantation), <https://ascensionparishmaps.azurewebsites.net/>.

¹⁷ Khalil Gibran Muhammad, The Barbaric History of Sugar in America, New York Times, Aug. 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/sugar-slave-trade-slavery.html>.

plantations in the Fifth Ward died that year, four of whom were one year of age or younger.¹⁸ See Figure 7.

SCHEDULE 3.—Persons who Died during the Year ending 1st June, 1860, in *Ward No 5* in the Parish of *Ascension* State of *Louisiana*, enumerated by me, *H. F. Remitté* Ass't Marshal.

1	DESCRIPTION.						7	8	9	10	11
	2	3	4	5	6						
NAME OF EVERY PERSON WHO DIED during the year ending 1st June, 1860, whose usual place of abode at the time of death was in this family.	Age.	Sex.	White, black or mulatto.	Free or slave.	Married or widowed.	PLACE OF BIRTH, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	THE MONTH in which the person died.	PROFESSION, OCCUPATION, OR TRADE.	DISEASE OR CAUSE OF DEATH.	NUMBER OF DAYS ILL.	
"	2	M	"	1	✓	"	June		bone cancer	10	
"	60	M	"	1	✓	"	"	Field hand	Dropsy	48	
<i>J. Burnside</i>	1	F	"	1	✓	<i>La</i>	<i>March</i>		Unknown	10	
"	4 1/2	M	"	1	✓	"	"		"	30	
"	3 1/2	M	"	1	✓	"	April		"	1	
"	1	F	"	1	✓	"	Sept		"	4	
"	70	M	"	1	✓	<i>Va</i>	<i>July</i>	Field hand	"	✓	
"	90	M	"	1	✓	<i>La</i>	<i>July</i>	"	"	✓	

Figure 7 – U.S. Census 1860 Mortality Schedule, Ascension Parish, Ward 5¹⁹

In 1867, after the Civil War ended and slavery was abolished, at least 58 “freedmen” were “working hands” on the Orange Grove Plantation, including 44 men, 11 women, and 3 children.²⁰ See Figure 8. Orange Grove Plantation remained a large sugar plantation until at least 1905.²¹

Monthly Report of <i>John A. Brough</i> Asst. Insp. of Freedmen for the Parish of <i>St. James & Ascension</i> State of Louisiana, for the Month ending on the <i>thirtieth</i> day of <i>June</i> 1867		NUMBER OF FREEDMEN OF PLANTATION.										No. of Days absent from School.		NUMBER OF ACRES UNDER CULTIVATION.						KIND OF CONTRACT HAVING AND EMPLOYED TYPES, AND NUMBER OF HANDS EMPLOYED UNDER EACH.				REMARKS.						
NAME OF OWNER OR LESSER OF PLANTATION.	NAME OF PLANTATION.	WOMEN HANDS.			CHILDREN.			Aggregate.	No. of Absent.	Total.	Acres of Sugar.	Acres of Cotton.	Acres of Rice.	Acres of Tobacco.	Acres of other Crops.	Total Acres Cultivated.	Houses and Cottages.	Plantations and Quarters.	Field and Mill Wages.	Organizing.	Share of Crop.	No. of Acres used in Pastures.	No. of Acres sold in Pastures.	Average Monthly Wages.						
		Males.	Females.	Total.	Males.	Females.	Total.																							
<i>L. J. Broussard</i>	<i>Hermitage</i>	38	11	0	0	49	1	2	0	5	52	0	0	0	0	52	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0
<i>D. L. Broussard</i>	<i>Bocage</i>	25	8	0	0	33	1	1	0	2	36	0	0	0	0	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	0
<i>J. B. Marchand</i>	<i>Nis</i>	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
<i>J. B. LeBlanc</i>	<i>Beau</i>	16	0	4	0	20	0	12	8	20	42	0	0	0	0	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0
<i>J. B. Burnside</i>	<i>Donaldson</i>	35	46	3	0	84	0	0	0	84	1	4	4	8	84	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0
<i>J. B. Burnside</i>	<i>Clark</i>	53	27	17	0	80	1	1	0	81	0	25	26	57	600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	0
<i>J. B. Burnside</i>	<i>Conway</i>	37	25	0	0	62	0	0	0	62	0	2	4	65	70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0
<i>John Burnside</i>	<i>Orange Grove</i>	44	11	0	0	55	0	0	0	55	0	2	0	2	57	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0

Figure 8 – Last line identifies the 58 people at John Burnside's Orange Grove Plantation in 1867²²

¹⁸ U.S. Census 1860 Mortality Schedule, Ascension Parish, Ward 5, Ex. D.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Report of Freedmen for St. James and Ascension Parishes, June 30, 1887, Ex. E.

²¹ See 1986 Army Corps Burside Revetment Survey, pp. 39–40, Ex. A.

²² Report of Freedmen for St. James and Ascension Parishes, June 30, 1887, Ex. E.

Archeological Investigations of the Air Products Site: An archeological firm conducted an investigation for the former owner of the Air Products site and produced a report in 2014 on file with the State Historic Preservation Office.²³ That investigation identified the remains of several structures from the Orange Grove Plantation, including: a store, plantation house, tenant houses, possible sugar mill, and blacksmith's shop, all of which "could qualify for the [National Register of Historic Places]."²⁴ The investigation also identified a small cemetery called the "Orange Grove Cemetery," about one acre in size and surrounded with a fence.²⁵ The surveyors found six grave markers inside the fenced cemetery, three of which had the following legibly inscribed: Cherry Alfred (born 1875, died 1924), Sydney Vicknair (born 1862, died 1948), and Chas. Vicknair (date not legible), respectively.²⁶ The 2014 survey report provides:

The six gravestones/markers occupy a relatively small part of the entire fenced area. It is almost certain, therefore, that the remainder of the cemetery area contains graves that are no longer marked. The latest death date on any of the stones is 1948. It is likely that burials in the cemetery ceased about this time, or within the next decade. Considering the antiquity of the plantation, it is probable that much earlier graves occur in and possibly near the cemetery.²⁷

The 2014 report further states that "[i]t would take additional research to determine the names of the unknown persons buried in the Orange Grove Cemetery," and that "[i]t is almost certain the persons interred in the cemetery were the owners of Orange Grove Plantation and their managerial employees and relatives."²⁸ The report, which remarks that the "Orange Grove Cemetery" will continue to be preserved, further recommends:

[I]n view of the fact that no slave/tenant cemetery has been identified to date at the Orange [G]rove Planation, and slave/tenants were sometimes buried near the property owners, a buffer of 100 feet [] be preserved on all sides of the cemetery, outward from the current fence, with the exception of the side facing the canal.²⁹

²³ 2014 SURA Inc. Burnside Survey, p. 146, Ex. B.

²⁴ *Id.* at 163.

²⁵ *Id.* at 146.

²⁶ *Id.* at 151-157.

²⁷ *Id.* at 158 (emphasis added).

²⁸ *Id.* (emphasis added).

²⁹ *Id.* at 164 (emphasis added).

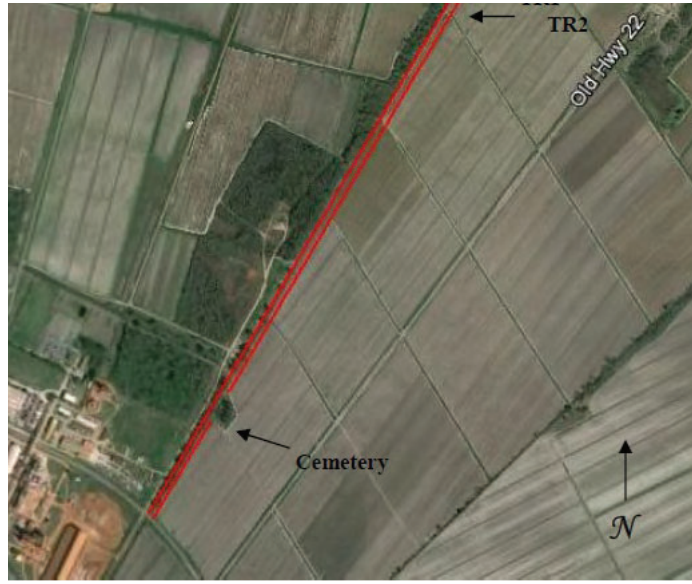


Figure 9 – Google aerial map showing Orange Grove Cemetery³⁰

The State Historic Preservation Office does not have any further reports on record about the Air Products site beyond the 2014 survey report. The state has no record of the location of slave or Black tenant burials on the site. But these burial grounds likely exist on this land. As Forensic Architecture explains:

Sugarcane was historically the most dangerous crop to cultivate. To accommodate a negative demographic growth rate among the enslaved population, each plantation established at least one, and sometimes as many as three cemeteries for its enslaved population. The majority of these burial grounds were omitted from historical maps. Over the decades, all outward traces of many of these cemeteries have been erased. On rare occasions, cemeteries resurface – when petrochemical corporations break ground on new construction sites.³¹

In fact, Shell Oil Company discovered “the unmarked graves of as many as 1,000 slaves”³² on sugar plantations immediately downriver of and adjacent to the Orange Grove Plantation in 2013 when it surveyed its property for plans to expand the Shell

³⁰ *Id.* at 50, Figure 28.

³¹ Forensic Architecture, Environmental Racism in Death Alley, <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/environmental-racism-in-death-alley-louisiana> (emphasis added).

³² Terry Jones, Graves of 1,000 enslaved people found near Ascension refinery; Shell, preservationists to honor them, *The Advocate*, Mar. 18, 2018, https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/ascension/graves-of-1-000-enslaved-people-found-near-ascension-refinery-shell-preservationists-to-honor-them/article_18c62526-2611-11e8-9aec-d71a6bbc9b0c.html.

Convent Refinery.³³ It appears that Shell Oil did not make this important discovery available to the public for another five years.³⁴ As Forensic Architecture reports: “Black residents of neighbouring communities had attempted to alert archaeologists and state officials to the locations of these cemeteries [discovered by Shell Oil] – only to have their ancestral knowledge dismissed, their ancestral burial grounds left to fall into neglect and under the threat of development.”³⁵

Air Products is currently investigating the site: Air Products’ facility plan shows that the company intends to develop its entire site. It appears that Air Products has configured its heavy haul road to skirt around the small cemetery that was identified in the 2014 survey report but without the additional recommended 100-foot buffer.³⁶ See Figure 10. There is no indication that Air Products intends to avoid the other structures that the prior surveyors said “could qualify for the [National Register of Historic Places].”³⁷

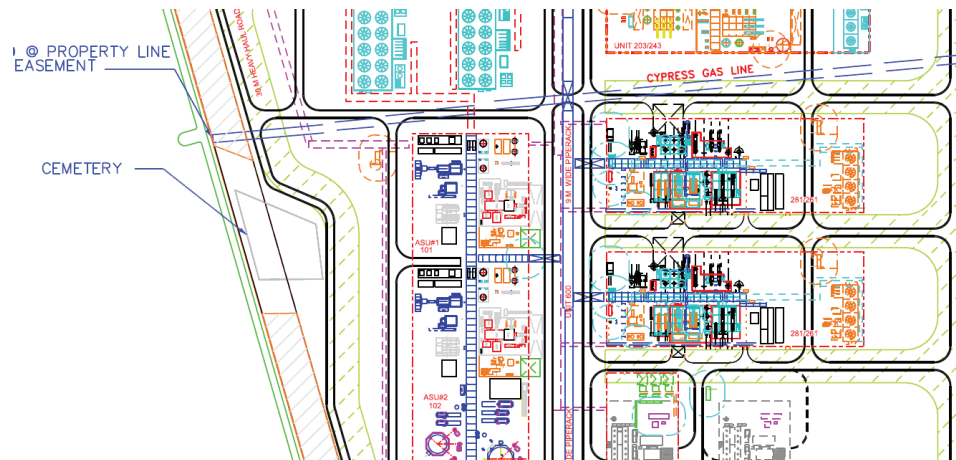


Figure 10 – Portion of Air Products Plot Plan³⁸

Records obtained from the State Historic Preservation Office show that Air Products is currently conducting its own investigation of the site. On November 17, 2022, Air

³³ *Id.*; Kevin McGill, As Shell preserves Louisiana slave burial ground, question persists: Where are the rest?, The Advocate, Jun 14, 2018, https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/as-shell-preserves-louisiana-slave-burial-ground-question-persists-where-are-the-rest/article_5a1ab0fa-6fdb-11e8-b6d6-932aad7138e2.html.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Forensic Architecture, Environmental Racism in Death Alley, Louisiana, Phase I Investigative Report, Final, July 4, 2021, p. 2, https://content.forensic-architecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Environmental-Racism-in-Death-Alley-Louisiana_Phase-1-Report_Final_2021.07.04.pdf.

³⁶ Air Products Air Dispersion Modeling Protocol, June 2022, Figure 4-1, Ex. F.

³⁷ 2014 SURA Inc. Burnside Survey, p. 163, Ex. B.

³⁸ *Id.*

Products' consultant said the following in connection with seeking an unmarked burials permit:

We are planning to conduct ground scraping within the buffered area around the known extent of graves at the Orange Grove Cemetery in Ascension Parish. This is part of the Darrow Blue Energy Project.³⁹

A few weeks later, Air Products' consultant contacted the State Historic Preservation Office again, stating:

During a pedestrian recon of the cemetery area, I observed a scatter of approximately 15 stones, mostly squared and resembling cemetery markers. They are located along the tree line between the edge of a plowed field and the canal on the west side of the project area. The stones are distributed over an area located between 65 and 350 feet north of the protective fence around the Orange Grove cemetery. At least 3 of the stones have some sort of letter/numbering inscribed, but it is difficult to make out.⁴⁰

Air Products therefore has identified potential grave markers well outside the protected cemetery. According to the documents obtained from the state, it appears that Air Products has limited its search of unmarked burials to the area around the Orange Grove Cemetery, but there may be other areas that contain burial grounds on this large plantation.

There is no indication that Air Products has attempted to find any descendants of anyone who may have been buried at the Orange Grove Plantation. Air Products should make this process known to the public, especially area residents in area communities and potential descendants.

³⁹ Air Products Consultant email to SHPO, Nov. 17, 2022, Ex. G.

⁴⁰ Air Products Consultant email to SHPO, Dec. 8, 2022 (emphasis added), Ex. G.