Mea Familia: Ethnic Burial Identifiers in St. Michael's Cemetery, Pensacola, Florida

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Introduction

Grave markers from St. Michael's Cemetery, Pensacola, Florida, were studied for evidence of ethnicity and acculturation. The 1,447 grave markers dating from 1870 to 1939 were used to test two hypotheses:

1) grave markers for ethnic groups represented in the cemetery have identifiable sets of burial attributes; and
2) changes in the visible ethnic attribute sets show evidence of the acculturation of ethnic groups over time.

Physical attributes pertaining to grave markers, and personal characteristics (e.g. sex, age) for the individuals inscribed upon the markers were collected for analysis. Historical sources were used to assign ethnicity to each marker by determining the ancestry of the individuals memorialized. Attributes for ten ethnic groups were examined.

Tested Attributes	
Size – extra-small and small combined	Vertical markers
Size – medium	Molding
Size – large	Lot Fencing
Size – extra-large	Grave covers
Size – large and extra-large combined	Coping
Individual markers	Relationship wording
Family markers	Organizations (military and fraternal)
Material – marble	Hands
Material – granite	Fauna
Tomb	Flora
Pedestal	Urns
Low Marker	Crosses – decorative
Ledger	Crosses – plain
Headstone	Religious symbols (includes crosses)
Horizontal markers	

St. Michael's Cemetery

In 2002, the cemetery was surveyed by UWF researchers using a total station and reflecting prism. The 1870–1939 time period for this study was chosen because of the availability of historic records denoting birthplace and the significant number of grave markers for this period (1,447).
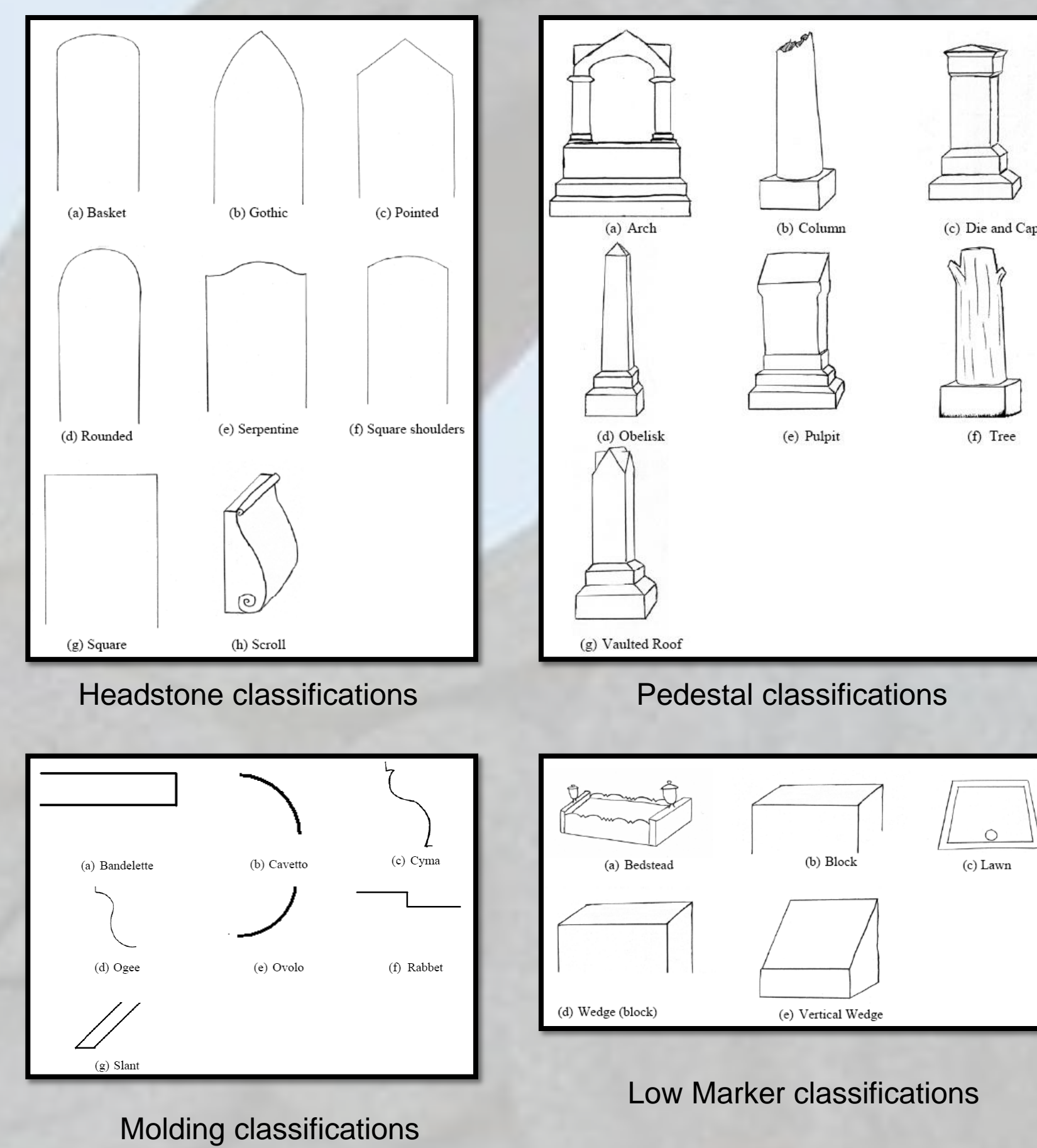

St. Michael's Cemetery
Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida
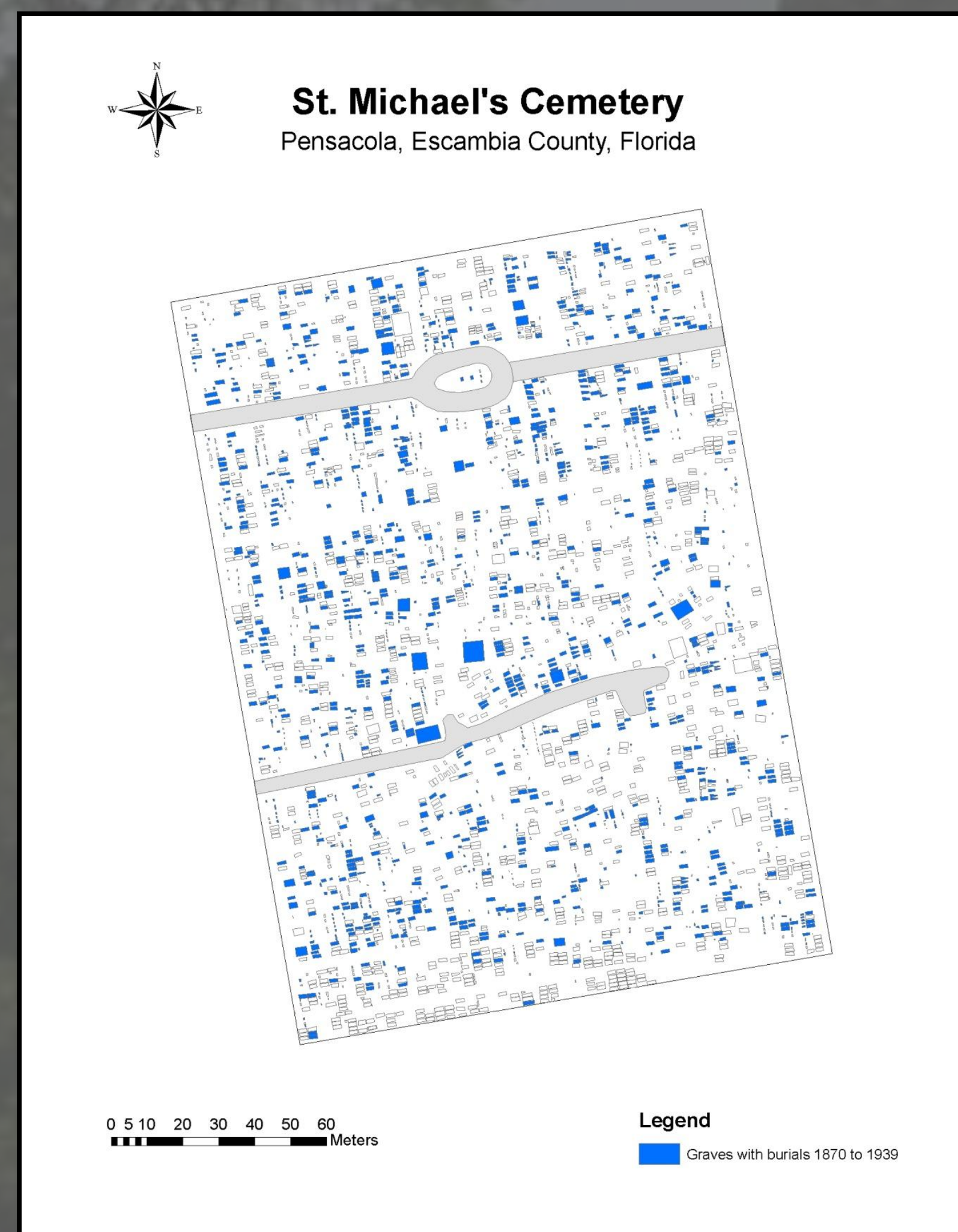
Methods

Data Collection from Cemetery

The GIS survey of the cemetery was obtained from the University of West Florida. For this project, the cemetery was surveyed again to collect specific attribute data for each physical grave marker: marker type, size, material, orientation, and design motifs. Personal data on the markers, such as name, birth/death dates, age, and birthplace were also recorded.

Each marker was classified according to type and shape.

Headstone classifications

Pedestal classifications

Molding classifications

Low Marker classifications

Data Collection from Historical Records

The historical records used in this project include the St. Michael's Church burial register, the United States federal censuses (1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930), the Florida state censuses (1885, 1935), and the Florida Death Index. The federal and state census records enumerate an individual's name, sex, age, color, birthplace, parents' birthplaces. This data was collected for all 1,676 individuals.


Mary Ann Peterson marker
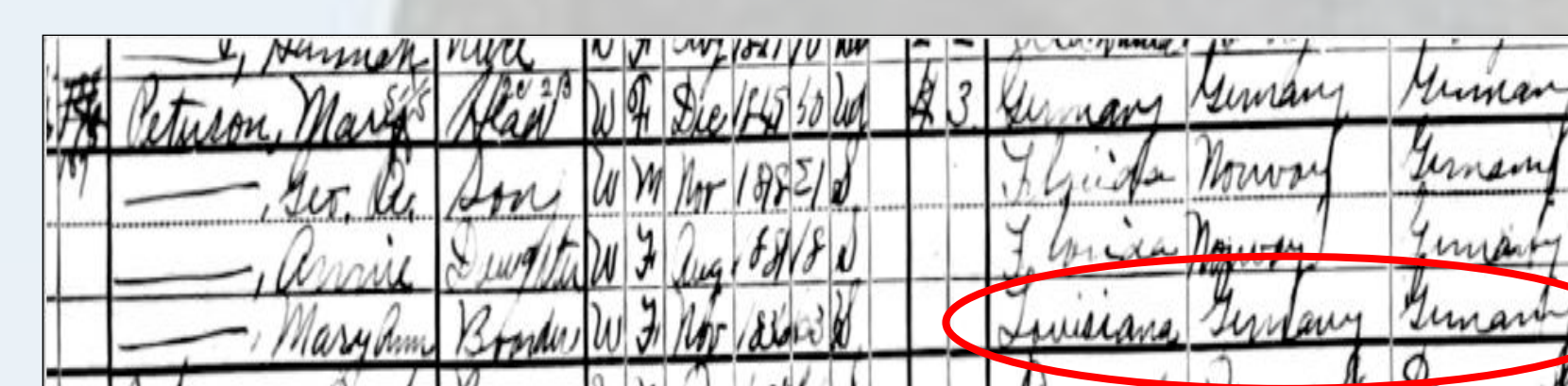
1900 U.S. census enumeration for Mary Ann Peterson, who was born in Louisiana and her parents were born in Germany.

Analysis & Results

Individual birthplaces were combined into regional ethnic groupings to allow statistical analysis of the data. England, France, and Spain include combined areas which had been colonial territories of those countries and used the same language. England includes the United Kingdom (excluding Ireland), English-speaking Canada, British Honduras, and British West Indies. France includes France and French-speaking Canada (Quebec). Spain includes Spain, Portugal, Mexico, Venezuela, and Cuba.
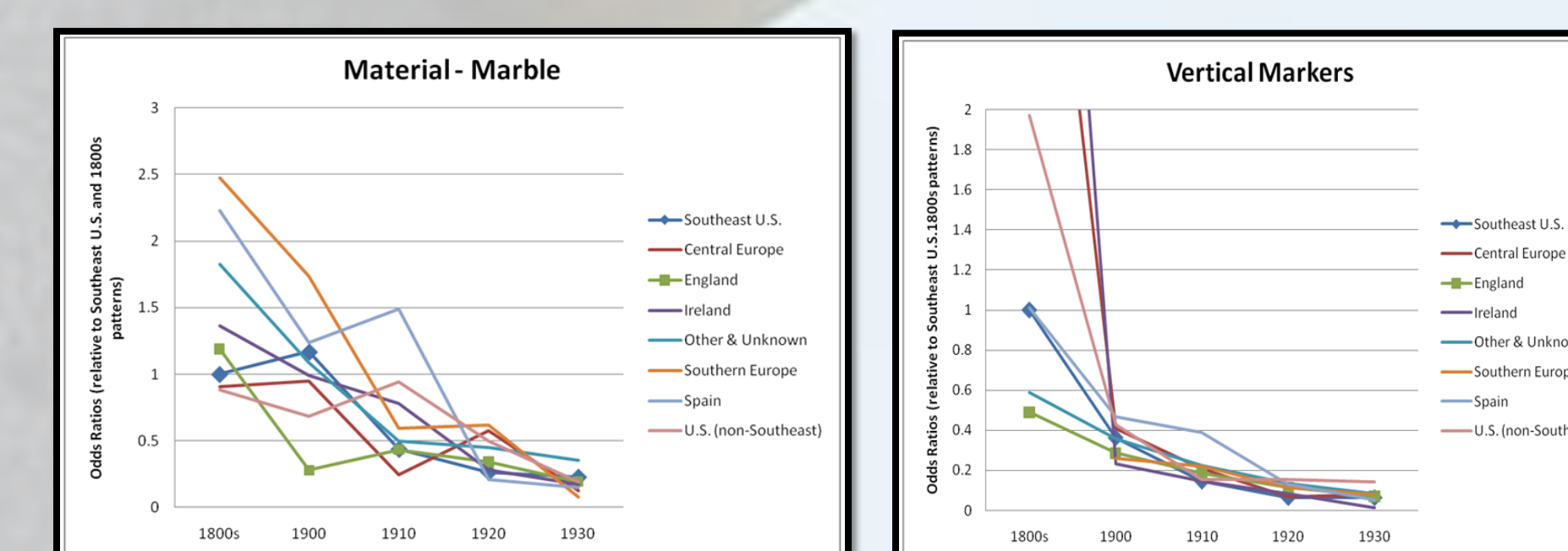

Ethnic Group Areas
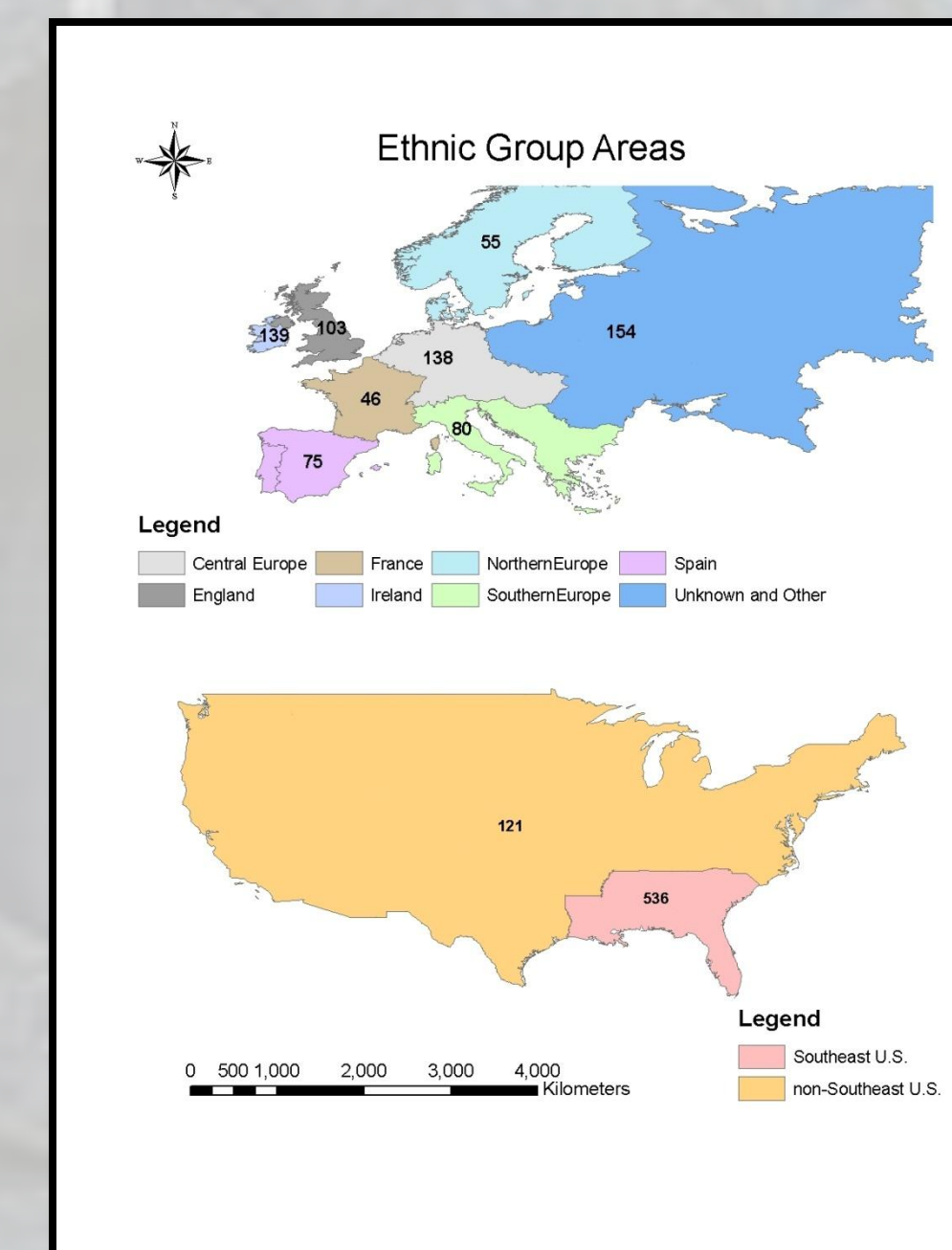
Chi-squared Analysis – Three categories of attributes were analyzed. Physical grave marker attributes include size, individual/family markers, material, and grave marker type. Design motifs include hands, decorative crosses, plain crosses, religious symbols (includes crosses and hands), fauna, flora, urns, relationship wording, and organizations (military/ fraternal). Grave level motifs include molding, lot fencing, grave covers, and coping.

Each attribute with an overall chi-squared p-value of 0.05 or less was tested independently by ethnic group to determine which groups were responsible for the significance.

Significant Ethnic Burial Identifiers

Significant Burial Attributes	Ethnic Group Preference	Ethnic Group Avoidance
Large/extra-large markers	Central Europe	
Vertical monuments	Central Europe, Spain, non-Southeast U.S.	Southeast U.S.
Family markers	England	
Marble		Southern Europe
Headstone molding	Central Europe	
Floral design motifs	Central Europe, Northern Europe	Southern Europe
Relationship wording	Non-Southeast U.S.	
Religious symbolism		Non-Southeast U.S.

Logistic Regression Analysis –The eight significant attributes were analyzed using logistic regression to test the data diachronically. The predictor variable for each test is the burial attribute for Southeast U.S. in the 1800s and the amount of increase or decrease over time shows the changes in usage.


Material - Marble

Vertical Markers

Discussion

Eight significant attribute sets were found by using statistical analysis to test burial identifiers and ethnic groups. These findings support the first hypothesis. This is the first project that has attempted to correlate multiple attributes and document groups of specific preferences for ethnic groups.

The logistic regression testing did not show solid evidence of acculturation of the ethnic groups into Southeast U.S. society. Some of the trends, such as those related to the use of marble and verticality, can be explained by global trends toward low granite markers.

Spatial analysis of the ethnic groups of St. Michael's infers that acculturation had already happened. Point pattern analysis, such as Ripley's K-function, provides support to visual map analysis and indicates non-clustering of ethnic markers groups. Pensacola society, as reflected in the cemetery landscape had already gone through de-segregation and all ethnic groups were treated the same at the cemetery.

St. Michael's Cemetery
Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida
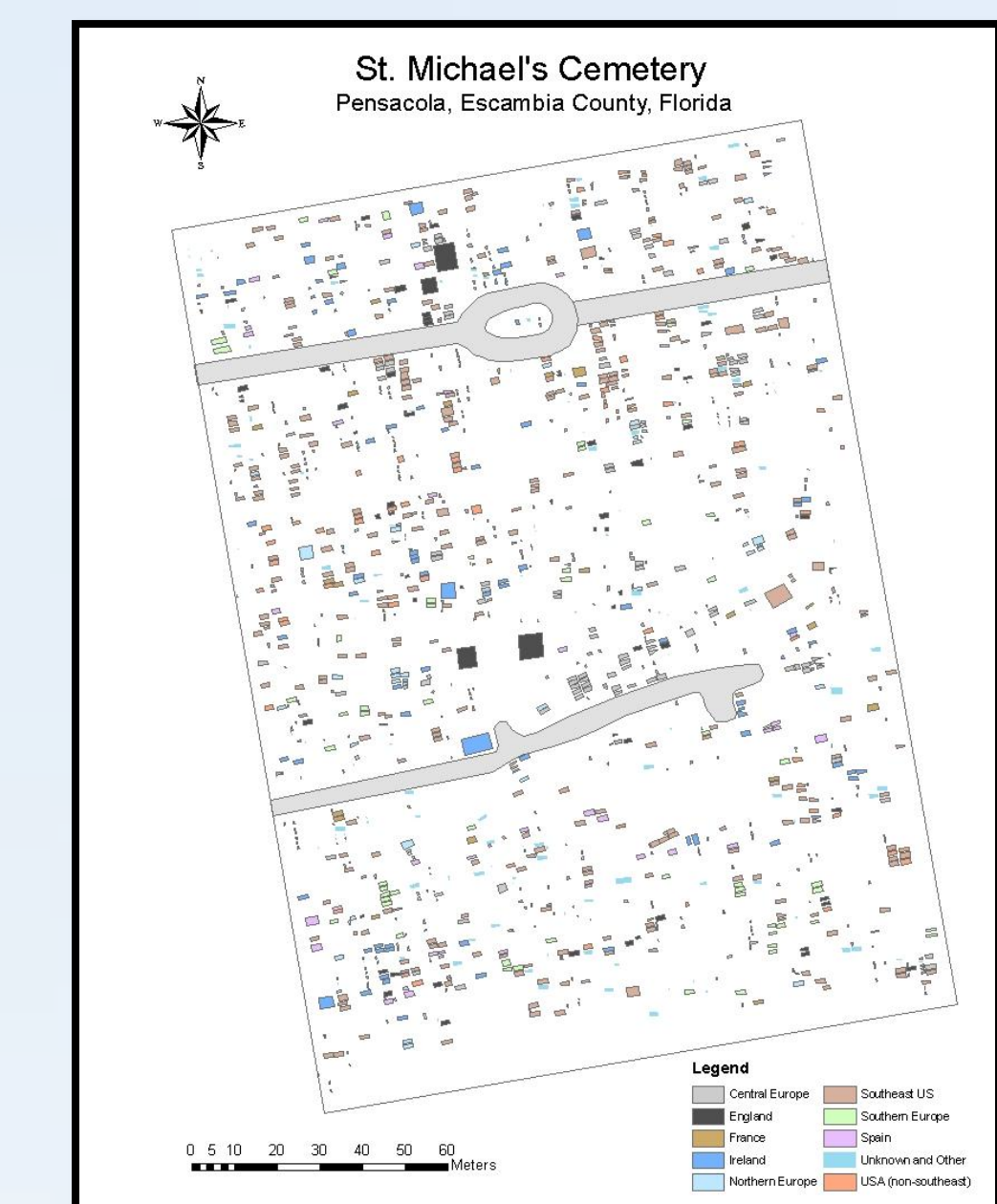
Spatial analysis showing ethnic dispersal

Conclusion

The statistical results indicate a correlation of ethnicity with marker attributes. Central Europeans had the most identifiable preferences including large markers, vertical markers, floral design motifs, and headstone molding. Other observable patterns include the use of family markers, non-marble materials, horizontal markers, relationship wording, and religious symbolism.

Spatial analysis illustrates that ethnic markers were dispersed across the cemetery; this lack of segregation in the graveyard may be due to acculturation. However, the diachronic changes in burial identifiers cannot be clearly ascribed to the acculturation of immigrants. Use of marble materials and the height of markers diminished for all ethnic groups. Changes in the memorialization industry were likely contributing factors to differences in attribute selection over time. Therefore, while ethnic burial identifiers are statistically visible in the cemetery landscape, attribute changes are not exclusively caused by acculturation.