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April 2014

## Modern Folk Masters

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## Xiomáro's Look at 'The Other Side'

Pictured are the crosses of slaves Charles and Caesar at the William Floyd Estate. Artist and photographer Xiomáro put together a photo collection of the grave site which was displayed during Black History Month.

Photo courtesy of Xiomáro

# Photo Series Captures Slave Graves

by *Brian Radewitz*  
Editor

**X**iomáro recently created a photo series titled "The Other Side" which centered on a slave cemetery on Long Island. His work focuses on the William Floyd Estate and the series was showcased at New York City's African Burial Ground National Monument during Black History Month. Xiomáro took some time to answer a few questions about the project.

**Q: How did this project with the burial ground come about?**

The burial ground is located in Mastic on the William Floyd Estate, which is a National Park unit of Fire Island National Seashore. Park officials there liked the collection of photographs I was commissioned to create of President Theodore Roosevelt's Oyster



Bay home, which is Long Island's other National Park site known as Sagamore Hill. Like Roosevelt, William Floyd is an important American figure. Floyd is a signer of the Declaration of Independence and his house in Mastic was visited by Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and other patriots.

The Floyd family cemetery and, in particular, the adjacent slave burial ground drew my interest. A lot is not known about William Floyd and many people are not aware of the park. There is even less known about his slaves and even fewer people know that seven of them — Charles, Caesar, Harry, Sam, Pompey, Lon and Isaac — are buried there.

**Q: How important do you think locations like this are for people today in remembering history?**

It's absolutely critical and not something that should solely be thought about during Black History Month. Slavery has been an institution since ancient times. So, given the long history of the practice, it's really a human issue. And the African American experience of slavery is the best to learn from because, historically speaking, it happened very recently.

**Q: These crosses actually have names on them. Do you think that creates a bigger impact instead of just having a group of white crosses?**

Yes, because nameless crosses would have made these individuals anonymous and harder to connect with. Having the names humanizes them. It adds flesh and bones to the paper characters and events we read about in history books. On the other hand, these crosses only have first names and they were of the type that were commonly given to slaves. A last name distinguishes one person from another having the same first name and, historically, may also identify one's trade or town of origination. The crosses don't even indicate their dates of birth or death.

**Q: How did you go about photographing this work?**

I spent a lot of time visiting the graves and noticing the contrast between the simplicity of the crosses with the ornate and more informative tombstones in the Floyd family cemetery, which is encircled in a white wooden fence several feet away. I also reflected about who these slaves were, what they looked like and what life might have been like for them. Being in their midst was simultaneously eerie, poignant and mysterious. When it finally came time to create the photographs, I used a variety of techniques to try expressing all of these thoughts and feelings.

**Q: What is it about historical places that draws your interest?**

Pretty much everyone is familiar with National Parks, such as the Grand Canyon and Yosemite. But the National Park System in our northeast region is rich in unique historical places that have their own kind of awe and beauty that can transform one's mind



Pictured is a partial view of the slave burial ground at the William Floyd Estate.

Photo courtesy of Xiomáro



Pictured is the tombstone of Marian Floyd, giving a comparison to the slaves' burial crosses that lie adjacently to the Floyd family cemetery.

Photo courtesy of Xiomáro

and spirit. The William Floyd Estate in Mastic and Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay are two of New York State's hidden treasures.

For more on Xiomáro, visit [xiomaro.com](http://xiomaro.com) where you can download the full photo collection as an e-book.

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