

The use of seashells was customary in earlier times for marking as well as decorating graves. Every year local residents would proceed armed with yard tools to the cemetery to clear away accumulated debris to ready it for the annual Memorial Day service. The finished task of pulling weeds and replacing seashells would unquestionably be the sign of readiness for the memorial ceremony. Some of the graves still bear evidence they were once covered with seashells.

The practice of using seashells to mark graves has been traced back to an African belief that the sea shell encloses the soul's immortal presence.

There was a prayer to the mbamba sea shell: Strong as your house you shall keep my life for me. When you leave for the sea, take me along, that I may live forever with you.

Even into the twentieth century some Gullah explained the use of shells on graves as representing the sea:

The sea brought us, the sea shall take us back. So the shells upon our graves stand for water, the means of glory and the land of demise.

Earlier ancestors adopted the custom of east-facing west tombstones based on the belief that when Jesus returns the departed will rise from the grave already facing his direction.