

## Common Priorities in a Cemetery Preservation Project

Deciding a course of action in the preservation project will be in part dictated by the condition of the cemetery and the scope of resources available. General condition assessments, area surveys and individual marker surveys will reveal conditions needing attention. Those needs can then be divided into three categories of priority: high, medium, and low. A high priority item is one that should be addressed within the first period of work in the project, such as conditions that pose a safety threat to visitors or workers. Medium level priorities should focus on security concerns and repairs that will prevent the acceleration of deterioration. Finally, low priority can be given to cosmetic repairs, cleaning of markers and the addition of signage. Other considerations for the establishment of priorities would include available resources and partnership opportunities, and the historical or archaeological significance of the cemetery or markers

Below are examples of each type of priority:

### High Priority Items

- Contact property owner and get written permission to come onto the property and work in the cemetery
- If intending to work on a plot other than your own, you are also advised to contact descendants of the deceased and get their permission in writing
- Research and understand state laws and any local regulations applicable to cemeteries in the area
- Conduct an initial clean up removing only those items which pose a risk to those working in the cemetery, e.g., broken glass, fallen limbs
- Conduct a general cemetery survey identifying features of the cemetery, complete with pictures
- Conduct individual marker survey
- Draw a map of the cemetery
- Establish a "Friends of the Cemetery" or similar non-profit group
- Repair monuments that pose a safety hazard, such as loose pieces or tilted monuments that could fall
- Remove invasive or undesirable plant species such as poison ivy, poison oak or kudzu.
- Conduct a vegetation survey to identify purposefully placed, historical plantings

### Medium Priority Items

- Tree pruning
- Repair to roads and paths
- Securing buildings, gates and other features
- Resetting tilted or fallen grave markers
- Begin reestablishing turf or other appropriate ground covers
- Develop a long-term maintenance plan
- Approach appropriate county or city government officials about developing a local cemetery protection ordinance if one does not exist

## Low Priority Items

- Repair or replace missing cemetery features such as benches, signs and fences
- Establish web site about the cemetery (a good place to solicit donations for needed repairs and maintenance)
- Enhance public participation by conducting cemetery tours, holding special events in the cemetery, creating brochures to tell the history of the cemetery, developing activities appropriate for school-aged children, or other means of promoting public involvement

## Listing in the National Register of Historic Places

If listing the cemetery in the National Register of Historic Places is a consideration, contact the state National Register coordinator early in your project. Gaining an understanding of the requirements of the National Register program will prevent mistakes that could affect your cemetery's eligibility.

The following is a summary of the eligibility criteria for cemeteries, as set by the U.S. Department of Interior:

- **Criterion A**

Properties can be eligible for the National Register if they are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

A cemetery might be eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A in relation to events for various reasons – for example, if it contains the graves of many of the community's early settlers where other properties, such as the early settlers' houses no longer survive to represent this period of the community's history; if it is important for its association with an ethnic group or settlement important in the community's history; or if it is associated with one or more important events, such as a mining disaster that resulted in a substantial number of interments.

- **Criterion B**

Properties can be considered eligible under Criterion B if they are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

The persons with whom the burial place is associated must be of outstanding importance to the community, state, or nation.

- **Criterion C**

Properties can be eligible for the National Register under Criterion C if they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

A cemetery may be eligible under Criterion C as a representative example of a cemetery whose layout and features reflect an important movement in landscape design, such as the Romantic Movement; as an important example of the work of a significant landscape architect or designer; because of the architectural and/or artistic importance of the funerary architecture and/or art present there; or for the reason that the cemetery as a whole possesses significance because the entire cemetery, including planning, landscaping, architecture, and monuments display high artistic value.

- **Criterion D**

Properties can be eligible for the National Register if they have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Burial places may be eligible for their potential to yield information about cultural and ethnic groups and burial practices. Such information is generally obtained through archaeological investigation.