

# PRESERVATION

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## Examples for educating

# Save Our Cemeteries restores three tombs

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*The preservation theory at work is a simple one—modify the technique to the tomb's needs and then do as little as possible to alter the original while still ensuring its long life.*

As part of the "Deadspace" project, Save Our Cemeteries is restoring three important 19th-century tombs in St. Louis Cemetery Number I. We selected the Esteve, Bergamini, and Perrault family tombs because of their potential to illustrate different conservation and restoration principles and further the educational goals of Save Our Cemeteries, a 26-year-old non-profit dedicated to preserving New Orleans' historic burial places. By example, the group hopes to encourage tomb owners and cemetery operators to use proper restoration techniques when preparing tombs for future generations.

Frequently, well-intentioned "restoration" efforts have resulted in the loss of historic fabric and the alteration of original design. It is one aim of "Deadspace" to determine, illustrate, and share the best available restoration techniques. Three model restorations in St. Louis Cemetery will serve as examples of what to do right in the preservation program at Tulane's School of Architecture, supervised by Professor Eugene Cizek, completed measured drawings to record tomb architecture and conditions before restoration began. Each type of material—limestone or marble tablets, sculpture, and details, iron fencing, stucco-over-brick structural elements, and lime-washed surfaces—was assessed and analyzed by the University of Pennsylvania team to determine the best possible treatment. Where possible, original fabric was simply stabilized. Cleaning was accomplished with gentle, yet efficient processes, such as walnut-shell blasting of the Bergamini tomb ironwork. Perhaps most important was the replication of original stucco and

when preserving the city's delicate tombs. Internationally recognized conservation expert Frank G. Matero, associate professor of Architecture and chairman of the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania, is directing the project with the expertise of New Orleans architectural conservator Dorothy Krotzer. Using their accumulated experience, scientific analysis, and advanced technologies, Matero and Krotzer developed a work plan for each tomb. With support from the Booth-Bricker Fund and the New Orleans Archdiocesan Cemeteries, major work at the Esteve and Bergamini tombs has been completed, and activities at the Perrault tomb are underway.

In restoring these tombs, Matero emphasizes the importance of documenting existing conditions, understanding the materials and techniques used to construct the tombs, and preserving as much of the original fabric as possible. Graduate stucco-wash mixtures for use at the Esteve tomb, which is applicable to other tombs as well.

"Owners need to understand that the use of hard, cement-based materials with soft, old brick structures can cause the eventual destruction of the original tomb," said Matero when discussing the importance of using a lime-based soft mortar and stucco mixtures.

The restorers used different techniques for each tomb, depending on its condition and nature. Matero and Krotzer emphasize that no one process is correct for every situation, and the three restorations illustrate different methods to accomplish tomb preservation. The techniques are not necessarily high-tech or expensive. Some



*Architectural conservator Dorothy Krotzer applies a hot wax coating to the iron and zinc fence at the Bergamini tomb. A denser and more durable material than cast iron, wrought iron was originally waxed, not painted, to prevent rust and deterioration. After cleaning with a gentle and environmentally safe walnut-shell blasting technique, a mixture of waxes was applied to the metals, which had been heated with a small torch. A final coat of cold wax will be applied to protect the new surface. Long-term maintenance of the fence will probably be less costly than paint, which deteriorates quickly. This wax finish both preserves the fence and returns it to its original appearance.*

involve the simplest materials, such as traditional lime wash, a durable and inexpensive alternative to modern synthetic paint. The tombs will be monitored to assess long-term maintenance costs, materials durability, and historic appearance.

New Orleans Archdiocesan Cemeteries sponsored the participation of their mason Royal Osborne in these projects. Not only did this facilitate the



***"Deadspace" project director Frank G. Matero, chairman of the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania, demonstrates the application of traditional lime wash as the surface finish at the Esteve tomb. The inscribed slate tablet was carefully removed, cleaned, and re-assembled during the restoration of the early stepped-top tomb. Soft lime mortar mixes were used to repair the stucco-over-brick structure and ensure compatible and durable repairs. Microscopic analysis of the tomb's original surface indicated that dark gray lime wash, not white, was selected by the tomb's designer. Recent analysis of other tombs reveals that tinted lime wash was frequently used.***

accomplishment of additional work, it enabled Osborne to acquire knowledge of proper preservation techniques and skills to apply in future work.

SOC will produce a new restoration manual for distribution to tomb owners so they can participate more knowledgeably in the repair of their own tombs. Also, Save Our Cemeteries will sponsor a cemetery craft workshop on September 9 to demonstrate traditional iron working, stone carving, and stucco techniques, as well as high-tech modern methods. Continuing Education Credits will be available to architects, and builders, contractors, masons, and other craftsmen will receive certificates of participation.

Save Our Cemeteries hopes to demonstrate through these restorations that tombs can be maintained in good condition without total modern replacement or expensive repair. In some cases, stabilization work is all a tomb needs to enable continued burials, to prevent further deterioration, and to maintain the historic character of the entire site. The preservation theory at work is a simple one—repair, rather than replace, to ensure the long-term viability and maintenance of the tomb.



***Restoration of the Perrault tomb has begun. SOC is sponsoring a program at St. Louis Cemetery Number 1 on Saturday, August 4, 2001, at 9 am. Dorothy Krotzer will explain restoration techniques used at all three tombs and demonstrate the techniques in use at the Perrault tomb.***