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July/August, 2001

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Tomb Restorations Completed in St. Louis Cemetery No. I

Save Our Cemeteries could never restore all of the deteriorating tombs of New Orleans, or even come close for that matter. Through our restoration projects the organization's objective is to educate the community about the historical, cultural and architectural significance of the cemeteries and of each family tomb. In this way, we hope to foster a respect for the cemeteries and encourage tomb owners to restore their own tombs to be used by future generations of their families.

From SOC's 26 years of experience in historic preservation, we have learned that there are certain methods for restoration which are most appropriate for historic structures. Therefore, we aim to provide tomb owners, cemetery operators, craftsmen and others interested parties with information on appropriate techniques when doing restorations.

This Spring Save Our Cemeteries with support from the Booth Bricker Fund sponsored the restoration of three tombs. The tombs were restored under the direction of internationally recognized conservation expert Frank Matero, Chairman of the Graduate Program at the University of Pennsylvania and with the expertise of architectural conservator Dorothy Krotzer. These tombs will serve as examples of appropriate restoration techniques and will be monitored over time to evaluate their success in withstanding the elements.

Tulane School of Architecture students from Dr. Gene Cizek's Preservation Studies Program sketched each tomb to be restored. Documentation is essential so that the historic character of the tomb is preserved. The New Orleans Archdiocesan Cemeteries sponsored the work of their tomb restorer and builder Royal Osborne. In this way, our professional preservationists were able to work with Mr. Osborne on proper preservation techniques and skills which he may apply to future work on tombs in New Orleans.

Today, the Esteve, Perrault and Bergamini tombs are three tombs that have been restored in three very different ways. In explaining their techniques, Matero and Krotzer emphasize that no one process is correct for every situation. Each tomb requires an individual effort, and the three restorations illustrate different methods by which tomb preservation can be accomplished. The techniques used are not necessarily high-tech or expensive. Some involve the simplest materials, such as old-fashioned lime-wash, a traditional alternative to paint.



Frank Matero and Dorothy Krotzer discuss restoration plans with students from University of Pennsylvania.

— Photo by Ann Masson

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Tomb Restorations (continued from page 1)

Save Our Cemeteries hopes that through these restorations, we have demonstrated that not all tombs need to be restored to perfect, painted, modern looking structures. In some cases, stabilization work is all the tombs need to allow for continued burials, to prevent further deterioration, and to maintain the historic character of the entire site.

As a result of this restoration project and the "Deadspace" Conservation and Management Plan for St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 sponsored by the National Park Service through the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation, The Samuel H. Kress Foundation and Save Our Cemeteries, Inc., a new and updated restoration manual will be produced for distribution to tomb owners.

In addition, in September SOC will sponsor a cemetery craft workshop demonstrating iron working, masonry and marble care techniques. If you are a builder, contractor, mason, or are just interested in learning more, give us a call so we can put you on the list. Continuing Education Credits will be offered for architects.

SOC is most grateful to all those who have supported this project: the Booth Bricker Fund, the New Orleans Archdiocesan Cemeteries, Tulane University's School of Architecture, The University of Pennsylvania - Graduate School of Fine Arts, the National Park Service through the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation, The Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Ann Masson, Frank Matero, Dorothy Krotzer and of course our generous members and supporters.

In conclusion, SOC is pleased to announce that phase two of the "Conservation and Management Plan for the Creole Cemeteries of New Orleans" has been funded once again by the National Park Service through the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation. SOC is most grateful for their support.

As a member of Save Our Cemeteries, your contributions have helped to sponsor these restorations.

You are invited to tour the site, learn the history of St. Louis I, and view the newly restored tombs. Join us on Saturday, August 4th at 9:00 a.m. at the Basin Street Gate of St. Louis Cemetery No. 1. Please call to reserve a space, 525-3377.

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