MARKER RESEARCH GUIDE FOR CEMETERIES

The Texas Historical Commission created this guide to help county historical commissions and marker sponsors develop a strong application for a cemetery as a topic for a historical marker. It is a guide in researching and preparing the narrative history.

Note: For historical marker consideration, a cemetery must previously be designated as a Historic Texas Cemetery.

NARRATIVE HISTORY: This is the key element to any marker application and the vehicle through which historical context and significance are demonstrated and proven. The narrative history is essentially a research paper that includes four key components — **context, overview, significance and documentation**. A sample is included.

I. **CONTEXT:** The historical context represents a broader set of facts or circumstances that explains why the cemetery should be considered historic. What were the elements that directly led to its development? How does the cemetery's history relate to the history of the community or communities it serviced? What is its relevance to the broader history of the region or state? What events took place (locally, regionally or nationally) that may have had a bearing on how or why the cemetery's development was important? History does not take place in a vacuum; it is dynamic and interconnected, and the context explores these elements.

II. **OVERVIEW:** This is the main body of the narrative history, and it represents the key facts in the story. The overview should be told, as closely as possible, in chronological order with clearly documented connections between earlier and more recent aspects of the context story. While a complete overview is required, the central focus should be on the *historical period of significance* (see *Significance* section), i.e., the formative years of the cemetery and important changes or developments in its history.

III. **HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**: A topic is considered to have historical significance if it had influences, an effect or an impact on the course of history or cultural development; age alone does not determine significance. Topics do not necessarily have to be of statewide or national significance; many historical markers deal with local history and a local level of significance. They may also have cultural significance. To determine significance, ask questions like: What important community figures are buried in the cemetery? Are veterans, organization members and other notables represented in the burial ground? Was the cemetery tied with early community development?

IV. **DOCUMENTATION:** This is, in effect, the evidence necessary to develop the history of the significance of a topic. It is the foundation of historical interpretation and accurate research. For the purposes of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, documentation associated with applications should be broad-based and demonstrate a survey of all available resources, both primary and secondary (see *Types of Sources* section below). Documentation serves as a detailed guide so future researchers can follow the research trail for their own purposes. As used in marker applications, it is most commonly manifested through endnotes, photographs or maps (see *Preparing the Reference Notes* section below).

TYPES OF SOURCES FOR CEMETERY RESEARCH

The THC will consider the objectivity and reliability of information sources used in compiling a narrative history. Whenever possible, consult **primary source** material. Primary sources — those that are contemporary with the topic — include newspaper accounts, diaries, meeting minutes, deed records, census records and legal documents. Such sources, as well as the recollections of disinterested, unbiased and authoritative persons, are preferred over secondary sources.

When using **secondary sources**, check them thoroughly since they are often not as reliable as primary sources. Secondary sources, such as history books, are not contemporary with the topic's history. Oral histories collected from authoritative sources are valuable research tools if properly documented (see example at the end of this document). Any claims of uniqueness (earliest, oldest, first, largest, etc.) must be accompanied by factual documentation from an authoritative, unbiased source.

SUGGESTED SOURCES FOR COMPILING CEMETERY HISTORIES

Government Records
- Municipal (building permits, minutes of official meetings, ordinances, tax records)
- County (contract, abstracts of title, court records, deeds, probate records, tax records, mechanics liens)
- State (land records, homestead records, mineral rights records, transportation records)
- Federal (census)
- Military (pension records, biographical information)

Institutional Records
- Cemetery (family relationships, birth and death dates)
- Church (biographical information on birth, death, marriage; congregational records)
- Fraternal (membership information, dates, building information)

Published Histories
- County (information on buildings, people, institutions, events)
- Community (information on buildings, people, institutions, events)
- Business (commercial trends, economic base of community)
- Fraternal (building information, social history)
- *The Handbook of Texas*, Texas State Historical Association, online or print

Family Papers
- Deeds (ownership, property value, associated improvements)
- Letters and diaries (biographical information, building information, social and economic history)
- Photographs (biographical information, building information)
- Genealogical information (family relationships)

Directories and Gazettes
- Social directories (biographical information)

Maps and Plats
- Sanborn maps (plans, dates of construction, materials, settlement patterns)
- Bird's Eye View maps (building information, settlement patterns, natural features)
- Property and subdivision plats (building hierarchies, dates, settlement patterns)
- Landscaping layouts (land use changes, outbuildings, agricultural or garden history)

Photographs and Printed Images
- Family photographs (biographical information, building evolution, landscape changes)
- Postcards (biographical information, building evolution, landscape changes)

Newspapers and Journals
- Society pages (biographical information on civic leaders, institutional history)
- Obituaries (biographical information)

- Articles (significant local events, economic history, social history, building information)

Oral Histories
- Minority history, social history, business history, building evolution and uses

Online Sources
- Texas State Cemetery (http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/)
- Texas General Land Office (http://www.glo.state.tx.us/)
- Texas Reference Sources (http://www.txla.org/pubs/trs/trsonline.html)
- Texas Online Primary Documents (http://home.austin.rr.com/rgriffin/texhisdocs.html)
- The Handbook of Texas Online (http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/)

PREPARING THE REFERENCE NOTES

For the specific purposes of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, the **required** means of resource documentation to be used in preparing the historical narrative are reference notes. Generally speaking, facts that cannot be assumed to be common knowledge should be documented with a reference note. They can be either footnotes (placed at the foot of the page on which the fact is mentioned), endnotes (listed sequentially at the end of the history) or parenthetical notes (placed in parentheses immediately following the fact within the narrative history). The notes must be complete so the reader finds the referenced source easily.

Regardless of which type of reference note is used, the first use of a source should include a full first citation (all relevant resource details) with abbreviated information thereafter in subsequent citations (see examples below). NOTE: With the use of full citation footnotes, a bibliography is no longer a required element of marker applications.

Examples of First Full Citations (Footnotes or Endnotes):
[1] Terry G. Jordan, *Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 79.
[2] Orange County Deed Records, Book 4, p. 139; August 2, 1981.
[3] 1900 United States Census, Fort Bend County, Texas (Roll 1553) Enumeration District 16, p. 16.
[4] Bessie Jones. Interview with Scotty Jergenson, June 21, 1991. Tape recording and transcript available at the Darrouzett Public Library.
[5] Letter from Maria Gutierrez to Henry Guerra, May 23, 1922. Private collection of Henry Guerra, Dallas. Copy on file at the Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco.
[6] "San Jacinto Monument Reconditioned." *Temple Daily Telegram*, Vol. 76, No. 256; July 31, 1983, p. 5-C.

Examples of Subsequent Citations:
[9] Jordan, p. 83.
[10] Orange County Deed Records, p. 140.
[11] 1900 United States Census, p. 23.
[12] Jones, 1991.
[13] Gutierrez letter.
[14] *Temple Daily Telegram*, 1972, p. 5-C.

Note: For sources used in preparing the text but not specifically cited, list them separately under the heading ADDITIONAL SOURCES. For further assistance on reference note styles, see the following guides, or contact your local library.

Chicago Manual of Style, 14th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations. 5th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 1999.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. Revised by John Grossman and Alice Bennett. 6th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

CEMETERY RESEARCH CHECKLIST

Narrative histories submitted to the THC in support of marker applications for cemeteries should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following information. (**Note**: Only cemeteries designated by the THC as Historic Texas Cemeteries are eligible for cemetery markers. For more information on the Historic Texas Cemetery designation and its requirements, see the THC web site section on cemeteries at http://www.thc.state.tx.us/cemeteries/cemdefault.html).

- ☐ Current, former or other known names of the cemetery, with background information on the origins of the names

- ☐ Current location, including relation to communities, towns or natural features

- ☐ Historical information on surrounding communities or settlements

- ☐ Land ownership information, with relevant background on previous owners or land donors

- ☐ Founding information, including date established and biographical information on individuals who established the cemetery (if applicable)

- ☐ Cultural, ethnic or religious associations

- ☐ Cemetery association history

- ☐ Biographical and vital information (e.g. birth and death dates) related to earliest burials (marked/unmarked)

- ☐ Significant individuals or organizations buried in the cemetery, including birth and death dates, and biographical background

- ☐ Physical description of the cemetery, including types of stones and markers, landscaping features, funereal practices and customs, folk art, sections (curbed plots for family or individuals, segregated areas, baby fields, etc.) and interesting or noteworthy features (cairns, memorials, tabernacles, stonework, etc.)

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SAMPLE HISTORY: Community

Note: This sample history, comprised of fictional information, represents in format, scope of content, documentation and length the type of narrative history required for a historical marker application. It is presented as a general guide for developing a narrative of a historic cemetery, whether part of a rural, urban or suburban setting.

GILCHRIST CEMETERY

I. CONTEXT

The Gilchrist Cemetery is located 3.7 miles west of the Post Oak County Courthouse, Jergenson, on the north side of US 190. It began as part of a rural community known as Tolbert Prairie, but it now serves the growing community of Jergenson, as well as much of the rural area of western Post Oak County.

The Tolbert Prairie settlement dates to 1874, when Jeremiah and Susannah Tolbert moved to the area from southern Missouri. Jeremiah Tolbert was a blacksmith, and in the years following the Civil War he began moving south from his native Illinois, working on contracts for the U.S. Army. In Cape Girardeau, Missouri, he met Susannah York. The couple wed in 1871 and had two children by the time of their migration to Texas. Four more children were born to the couple in Texas. Attracted by the abundance of water and the availability of inexpensive land, the Tolberts established a farm along Selma Creek. They were soon joined by family and former Missouri neighbors, and the agricultural community that developed around their farm was named for them. Tolbert Prairie never prospered as a town, but remained a dispersed settlement within Jergenson's economic sphere of influence. Today, the name survives through the Tolbert Prairie Road and the Tolbert Elementary School, part of the Jergenson Independent School District.[1]

II. OVERVIEW

In 1875, Missouri natives John Clark Gilchrist and Lucinda Marie Murray Gilchrist settled in Tolbert Prairie, joining their friends from the Cape Girardeau area. They became successful farmers and acquired additional lands that eventually totaled more than 1,000 acres. Generous people, the Gilchrists donated seven acres of land in 1878 for a Methodist church (Gilchrist Memorial Methodist Church), school (Tolbert Prairie School) and what became the Gilchrist Cemetery.[2] Their donation provided a focus for the community, and the church and

school served as determinants of the community well into the 20th century. The church disbanded in 1950, and a local farmer moved the former chapel to his property for use as a barn. The school merged with the Jergenson district in 1951, and the schoolhouse later burned.[3] Only the cemetery and a few early houses remain as evidence of the pioneer settlement.

The first burial in Gilchrist Cemetery occurred in 1881. It was for Juanita Cruz, a 13-year-old girl who drowned in Selma Creek during a flood.[4] It is believed her parents marked her grave with a wooden cross, which is no longer extant. Today, the site of her grave is unknown, and attempts to find additional information on her family proved futile. The family is not listed in either the 1880 or 1900 census records. The oldest marked grave dates to 1886 and is that of William J. Bond. According to Bond family lore, William J. Bond was a native of South Carolina who served in the Georgia legislature before migrating to Texas circa 1871. No records of his legislative service, however, were located as part of this research.[5]

Most early Tolbert Prairie families were associated with agriculture, either as farmers, ranchers, sharecroppers or gin workers. All, it seemed, worked hard and contributed to the quality of life in the community. A number of individuals are remembered today for their special contributions, and several are buried in the Gilchrist Cemetery. Among them is Henry Scott, the first teacher in the Tolbert Prairie School. Scott was a native of East Texas. Educated at Mile Valley State Normal College in Clio, he moved to Tolbert Prairie when the school opened in 1881. He stayed on at the one-room school until 1903, leaving to serve as a coach in the Jergenson Independent School District. He died in 1924.[6] Another noteworthy resident buried in Gilchrist Cemetery is Robert H. "Bob" Tolbert (1875-1918), the son of pioneers Jeremiah and Susannah Tolbert. Bob Tolbert served as postmaster of the Tolbert Prairie post office from 1904 until it closed in 1910. He then moved to Jergenson and in 1911 established the Tolbert Mercantile, now Tolbert Hardware. In 1917, during World War I, he enlisted in Company C, 45th Texas Infantry, and served in France, where he was among those killed at the Battle of Belleau Wood in June 1918. Tolbert Elementary School, noted earlier, is named in his honor.[7]

Another burial of note is that of Jacob Dennis (1949-1971), whose unique grave marker bears a *bas relief* carving of him in a football uniform. The son of Michael (1929-1977) and Linda Dennis (1932-   ), Jacob was valedictorian of the Jergenson High School class of 1968 and quarterback of the school's state championship team in 1967. He served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam Conflict, earning the Bronze Star, and returned to Texas to attend Mile

Valley University on a football scholarship. He died in an automobile accident and was buried with full military honors in Gilchrist Cemetery.[8]

Other burials in Gilchrist Cemetery include members of the pioneer Tolbert and Gilchrist families, veterans of U.S. military conflicts dating to the Civil War, former pastors of the Gilchrist Memorial Church and several schoolteachers. Tombstone detailing reflects fraternal associations, including the Woodmen of the World, the Masons and the Order of the Eastern Star.

The general landscape of the Gilchrist Cemetery is traditional in nature. Graves are oriented east-west, with the only exception occurring in the newest section (2001) that features curved pathways and plots. The oldest graves are located in the northeast section of the graveyard and are denoted by individually curbed plots, tall vertical stones, older vegetation and a few metal fences from the Victorian era. In general, the markers are of granite, limestone and marble, although there are a number of metal crosses dating to the late 19th century. Large granite obelisks, visible from any point in the cemetery, denote the graves of the Tolbert and Gilchrist family patriarchs and matriarchs. There are no wooden markers, although oral history accounts indicate they were once quite common. It is believed most succumbed to the elements or were lost in prairie fires.[9]

In the center of the cemetery is a flagpole erected by the Jergenson Veterans of Foreign Wars Post in 1946 as a memorial to World War II veterans. Other structures include concrete benches placed in the 1930s by the Gilchrist Memorial Methodist Church, an arched masonry entryway constructed in 1990, a metal tabernacle of unknown date and a caretaker's tool shed of recent origin.[10] Noteworthy features are the curbed plots, ornate fencing, sidewalks, a separate area for the burials of babies and a lichgate. Prominent vegetation includes an Italian cypress at the center of the cemetery, large live oak trees and crepe myrtles. This site includes traditional plantings of roses and irises. Grave ornamentation includes toys, religious iconography, candles and synthetic flowers.

The Gilchrist Cemetery Association formed in 1949 to provide maintenance for the burial ground. Records of the association indicate members served as groundskeepers in the early years, primarily as part of annual homecoming "cleanings" each spring. Since 1978, however, the association has contracted with private companies to provide that service. Under the direction of Mildred Birch (d. 2005), members raised funds for a new fence, the metal tabernacle and

masonry entryway. Enlarged through the years with donations of land and money, the cemetery now contains nine acres. Burials are open to residents of Tolbert Prairie or former members of Gilchrist Memorial Methodist Church.[11]

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The Gilchrist Cemetery is significant because it is the primary remaining vestige of the Tolbert Prairie settlement that predates the Post Oak County seat of Jergenson. Its graves provide a record of pioneer area families, as well as teachers, preachers, military veterans and business leaders. Still used, the cemetery today reflects the continuum of the area's history, with clearly discernable pioneer and modern sections. The landscape provides excellent examples of funereal practices in its markers, plantings and structural features. The land around the cemetery is changing rapidly as development associated with the growth of Jergenson begins to encroach on the previously rural landscape. An Official Texas Historical Marker for Gilchrist Cemetery would provide important historical interpretation of the pioneer era and serve to educate young people, many of whom attend Tolbert Elementary, about the names and events of the past.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

[1] Prater, Elihu. *Beyond the Rim: A History of Early Post Oak County*. Jergenson: Post Oak County Historical Commission, 1978. Pg. 323; Smith, Jim, ed. "Tolbert Prairie," *The Texana Handbook*. Austin: Smith Texana Publishers, 1999. Vol. 5, pp. 356-357.

[2] Gilchrist, Kelly. *The Gilchrists of Texas*. New York: YJCWTS Publishers, 1977. Pg. 333; Prater, pp. 444-445; Deed Records, vol. 23, pg. 194. Office of the Post Oak County Clerk, Post Oak County Courthouse, Jergenson.

[3] Gilchrist, p. 444; Records of the Post Oak County School Superintendent, 1910-1955. Office of the County Clerk, Post Oak County Courthouse, Jergenson.

[4] Cemetery survey of Gilchrist Cemetery, conducted by members of the Post Oak County Historical Commission, November 9, 2005. Records on file at the Post Oak County Museum, Jergenson. The history included in the survey notes the missing marker.

[5] Prater 434; Researchers associated with this application made efforts to locate additional information on Mr. Bond through contact with surviving family members and through assistance from the Georgia Historical Society. Efforts to find his obituary proved unsuccessful.

[6] "Former Students Mourn Loss of Henry Scott," *The Jergenson Vindicator*, November 9, 1948. Section A, p. 3; Post Oak County School Superintendent records.

[7] "Local Soldier Killed in Fighting at Belleau Wood," *The Jergenson Vindicator*, June 18, 1918. Section A, p. 1; Phillips, Mary. "A History of Tolbert Elementary School." An unpublished manuscript commissioned by the Tolbert Prairie Elementary School PTA, 1988. Copy available in the Post Oak County Library, Jergenson.

[8] "Crash Claims Local Hero," *The Jergenson Vindicator*, March 9, 1971. Section B, p. 7.

[9] Petry, Frank M. Interview with John Dalmon, September 9, 2005. Tape and notes only, available at the Post Oak County Library, Jergenson. Mr. Dalmon worked as caretaker of Gilchrist Cemetery from 1955 to 1962; Minutes of the Gilchrist Cemetery Association, 1949-1962.

[10] Gilchrist Cemetery Association minutes.