

Basic Cemetery Preservation

Texas Historical Commission Real Places Conference 2020

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PRESERVATION BEST PRACTICES

- Document frequently.
- Always document and assess monuments and structures prior to beginning work.
- Avoid Portland Cement.
- Avoid abrasive and mechanical tools, such as power washers, wire brushes, or wire wheels.
- Use qualified professionals, when necessary.
- Only use products, chemicals, and tools appropriate for historic materials.
- Follow the most recent guidelines and standards.
- Plan for continued maintenance over time.

BASIC PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

- Monitor (and prevent) ponding or standing water.
- Advise Grounds Maintenance on proper equipment use (weed eater string, bumpers on mowers, etc.).
- Direct human interaction (foot/vehicular traffic and trash) with paths, features, and signage.
- Encourage appropriate repairs or cleaning.
- Avoid “watering” monuments during the heat of the day.
- Monitor vegetation (including trees) and try to proactively address issues.
- Restore graves following interments.

LEVELS OF REPAIR

Minimal/Surface

These projects may be able to be completed by trained cemetery staff.

Conditions may include soiling, biological growth, adjacent vegetation, loose footstones, releveling, and more.

Moderate/Subsurface

An experienced cemetery conservator is recommended.

Conditions may require multi-step treatments, adhesive repairs or pinning, and/or the testing and application of specialty restoration products.

Major/Structural or Substantial

An experienced cemetery conservator and/or archeologist is required.

Conditions may include significant losses, structural issues, incomplete context or inadequate historic structures. Archeological monitoring may be required.

BASIC CLEANING

- Assess and document the monument.
- Check that the area is safe.
- Check the weather. It is best to clean in cool, cloudy weather.
- Prepare appropriate tools (soft bristled brushes).
- Make a plan for plenty of clean, low-pressure water.
- Carefully remove any vegetation.
- Wet the entire monument.
- Using a soft-bristled brush, gently agitate water on the monument in a circular motion working from bottom to top.
- Frequently rinse with clean water.
- Always start with the gentlest cleaning method possible (usually water).
- Test any cleaner in a discreet area first.
- Recommended cleaners include non-ionic detergents such as Orvus.
- Recommended biocidal cleaners include D/2 Biological Solution and Enviro Klean© BioWash©.

RESOURCES

- Texas Historical Commission (www.thc.texas.gov)
- National Center for Preservation Training and Technology (<http://ncppt.nps.gov>)
- National Park Service Preservation Brief #48 (<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm>)
- Association for Gravestone Studies (www.gravestonestudies.org)
- Association for Preservation Technology (www.apti.org)
- Restoration product manufacturers
- Federal, State, and local cemeteries across the United States