CEMETERY RESOURCE PROTECTION TRAINING (CRPT): PRESERVING HISTORIC CEMETERIES AND HUMAN BURIAL SITES

Presented by:

Florida Public Archaeology Network

Purpose:

- To develop an understanding for the importance of marked and unmarked human burial sites.

- To understand laws and basic conservation practices that protect cemeteries.

Goals:

- Participants will be able to define marked and unmarked burials and be able to describe issues involving protection of those sites.

- Participants will observe proper etiquette when visiting or working in historic cemeteries and instill those practices in others.

- Participants will identify biological and chemical impacts at historic cemeteries and develop basic skills to address minor conservation measures.

Course Outline:

- Introduction to cemeteries as cultural resources

- Laws that protect marked and unmarked burials

- Managing historic cemeteries

- Recording historic cemeteries for the Florida Master Site File

- Defining site boundaries and tools for cemetery survey

- Basic cleaning and maintenance of historic cemeteries

- Practicum portion at local cemetery to apply lessons learned

INTRODUCTION

Cemetery Resources Protection Training (CRPT) was created to provide citizens and local governments with a greater knowledge of how to proactively protect historic cemeteries, memorial sites, and unmarked burials.

The course is divided into two parts – a miniseries of lectures in the classroom and in-field exposure to cemetery resources. Much of the information discussed throughout the seminar illustrates the leading causes of vandalism, improper management of cemetery landscapes, and the effectiveness of reducing human impact on non-renewable cultural resources.

The classroom lectures address federal, state, and local laws pertaining to marked and unmarked burials. An effort will be made to present historic cemeteries as outdoor museums to make them a living part of the local community. As such, they need to be maintained for visitor safety, as well as monitored for biological and chemical impacts. Myriad resources are available to local governments and citizens for protecting local cemeteries, yet much of this information is not successfully communicated to the public. For example, the simple act of recording a cemetery with the Florida Master Site File (FMSF) is an easy step towards long term protection. The next step is to develop a cemetery management plan that allows for survey and prioritization of repairs and projects.

In-field exercises are designed to illustrate basic protection of cemetery resources and emphasize their role in the larger community. For the outdoor portion we will meet in the afternoon at a local cemetery to reinforce materials discussed in the morning session. We will also put participants to work, cleaning headstones with D2 solution and walking the grounds.


What is archaeology?

Archaeology is the branch of anthropology that gathers data from artifacts and the physical remains of past human activities to understand human lifeways. Archaeologists try to connect the physical data to past behaviors, which ultimately helps us understand how past peoples lived and how cultures developed. Context, how artifacts are found in relation to one another and within the environment, helps archaeologists better understand the meaning of archaeological remains.

Cemeteries are a unique kind of archaeological site. Burial of human remains has been documented in Florida for over 8,000 years. Marked and unmarked burials not only represent the individual buried, but the greater community—such as family, mourners, or funeral staff—present at the time of burial. What does this mean for cemetery managers? Cemetery stewards need to understand that burial sites hold just as much information about our collective past as other archaeological sites. They also need to understand that when a site is disturbed or headstones are removed, that information is compromised or lost altogether. As stewards of cemeteries, managers at any level have a responsibility to protect threatened cultural resources, just as they have a responsibility to protect endangered natural resources. If we don't protect cemeteries, they will be forgotten and the results could be devastating. Last but not least, protecting human remains can be seen as a basic human right and we should do our best to respect the final resting place of our ancestors.

What are burial sites?

Burials sites include the physical remains, both above and below ground, of marked and unmarked burials. They include:

- Burial mounds

- Individual interments

- Family burial plots

- Church yards

- Town or city cemeteries

- Formal cemeteries

- Native American burials

- Comingled remains or isolated finds
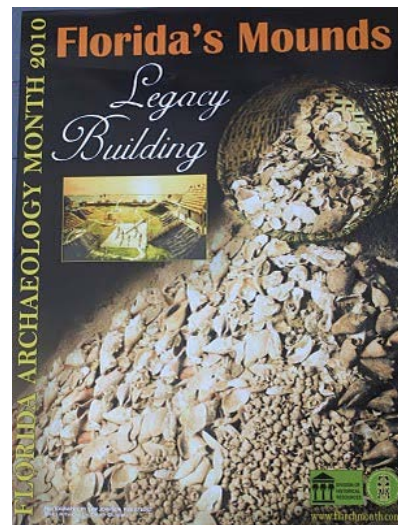
What are associated grave goods?

Associated grave goods are artifacts interred with a burial. An artifact is an object manufactured or modified by humans. On a prehistoric site associated grave goods may include clothing, personal or sacred objects, projectile points, and ochre or other minerals intentionally placed with the body. For historic burials this may include coffin or casket hardware, clothing, shroud pins, and personal objects such as jewelry or glasses. Objects may also be placed on the surface, such as shell, bottles, ceramics, or synthetic forms of remembrance. Objects not associated with the grave but found in the same location can also be found. The skeletal remains themselves can often provide information on pathology, trauma, diet, age, sex, and cultural affinity.

Why is the protection of burial sites important?

- Protection of human remains is a basic human right.
- Cultural resources such as unmarked burials and historic cemeteries are non-renewable – unlike natural resources, once damaged or destroyed, a burial site will never "grow back."
- If sites are damaged or destroyed, irreplaceable knowledge of our past is lost.
- Historic cemeteries are, in effect, outdoor museums that can provide basic information on our shared heritage.

What are problems affecting burial sites?

- Vandalism—destruction to above- and below-ground remains with the intent to do harm.
- Looting—intentional mining of sites for artifacts.
- Biological impacts—lichen, moss, roots, tannins, creeper vines, fallen trees.
- Chemical impacts—acid rain, fertilizer, pesticides, water quality from sprinklers.
- Improper cleaning—using materials other than conservation grade agents to clean (such as bleach), pressure washing, sand blasting, chemicals and sealants.
- Removal of headstones—fallen headstones or those removed for best intentions but can no longer be returned to proper context.
- Inscription agents—using shaving cream, flour, or any substance to clarify inscriptions for reading or transcribing.
- Erosion—water run-off, bank stabilization, depletion of soil.
- Development—large ground disturbing activities for clearing or construction.

Fallen headstone at West View may be from vandalism, tree fall, or gravity over time.

ARCHAEOLOGY, BURIALS, AND HISTORIC CEMETERIES

What are burial sites?

Burials are the final resting place of human remains in primary or secondary locations. Human remains do not necessarily indicate where humans died, or even the first place they may have been buried. Since the Archaic Period (8,000 years ago) people have been placed in the ground or underwater at communal burial sites. Burials are a unique historical resource and are by their very nature archaeological as they contain the physical remains of the human body. In intentional and unintentional burials the importance of associated artifacts cannot be overstated. The tools, jewelry, or other personal items found with a burial are important for dating the burial, assigning cultural affinity, and belong to the person buried. Once a burial is disturbed the expression of the skeleton and context of the interment can never be replicated and the significant archaeological data are gone forever.

Why are burial sites important?

Burials mean many things:

Burials at the Windover Site, Brevard County.

- Mounds are the only above-ground references to extinct cultures in Florida and often contain human remains. We can learn about settlement patterns, kinship, political and social structure of a society, religion, and diet from human remains. If disturbed, the loss of information is equivalent to cultural genocide.

- Burials in the ground can vary greatly in depth and some soils and environments can preserve bones for hundreds or thousands of years.

- In Florida some human remains are found in mortuary ponds. The tannins in the peat moss bogs preserve human bone and tissue just like the bog bodies found in northern Europe.

Burials contain clues to the human past including settlement information, subsistence, trade, and how people met the basic needs of everyday life. The human remains in a burial tell only one part of the story, are only one piece of the puzzle. The other important thing to keep in mind is that for all intentional burials, at least one person, if not many, were present to bury the deceased. Burials therefore are not only a glimpse into the life of the individual or people buried at a site, but reflect the cultural practices or possible benevolence of those who did the interment.

Why are burial sites difficult to protect?

For many people, burial sites:

- are out of sight, out of mind.

- are spooky. This sentiment is understood but unique to our time. In the past cemeteries have been vital parks for the community or sacred spaces for families and churches.

- are large, unattended open areas with little light or monitoring and therefore subject to looting and vandalism. Vandals often think that no one is looking or no one will miss artifacts taken from a burial. In truth, this is desecration of human remains and a violation of that person's basic human rights.

Slack Farm, Kentucky is one of the worst cases of us'ej'cpf 'ego gvt{ 'vandalism. Archaeologists '''''''''documented'he damage and prosecuted looters using Archaeological Resource Protection Act.

CEMETERIES AS CULTURAL RESOURCES

What makes a cemetery "historic?"

No date criteria is set by the state for a cemetery to be considered historic in Florida. That said, archaeological sites are typically at least 50 years old and other states require cemeteries to contain interments at least a hundred years old for listing. According to the National Register Bulletin Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places (http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb41), a cemetery is eligible for listing on the National Register if "it derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events." In general, cemeteries listed on the National Register are closed to future interments.

Why study cemeteries?

The study of cemeteries is vital to our understanding of a community. Everywhere that people have lived, people have died and their remains have been cared for. When more than one interment is present, a cemetery is formed.

Cemeteries are significant for a number of reasons:
- genealogy
- continuously used and occupied site
- commerce
- recreation
- historical events above ground reflected
- No event in a community does not resonate within a local cemetery

For thousands of years different cultures have buried their dead collectively in cemeteries. Evidence for cemeteries is found throughout Florida's landscape, both on land and in water. Cemeteries teach us about the lives of those before us.


St. Joseph Cemetery in Palatka.

What can be learned from historic cemeteries?

The types of mortuary buildings and features found in cemeteries vary greatly from those found in other parts of the community. Cemetery features include headstones, monuments, fencing, pathways, roads, layout, ornamental fixtures, footstones, inscriptions, urns, coffins, coffin hardware, burial shafts, in some cases box crates placed in the shaft before the casket or coffin was lowered into the ground, cast iron caskets, burial shrouds and pins, items related to clothing, jewelry or other personal objects. These different features or artifacts offer data on technology, manufacture, trade, diversity, and trends of the greater society. Local variations of style or technological preference can be observed in burials even when not indicated in the historical record.

Florida alone has some of the oldest prehistoric and historic cemeteries of the New World:
- 8,000 year old burials discovered at the Windover site near Titusville.
- Prehistoric burials in the banks of the Ocklawaha River.
- Oldest above ground historic cemetery in Florida is Tolomato in St. Augustine with burials dating as far back as 1737 as part of an earlier Spanish mission.
- St. Michaels Cemetery in Pensacola established in 1810 but may have been used as early as 1786.
- Sudden cultural shifts between Spanish, British, and Anglo-American pioneers during the Territorial Period bring markedly different burial practices to light.
- Other ethnic populations represented broadly in Florida cemeteries are Southeast Indian, African-American, Minorcan, Bahamian, Cuban, Greek, and Jewish.
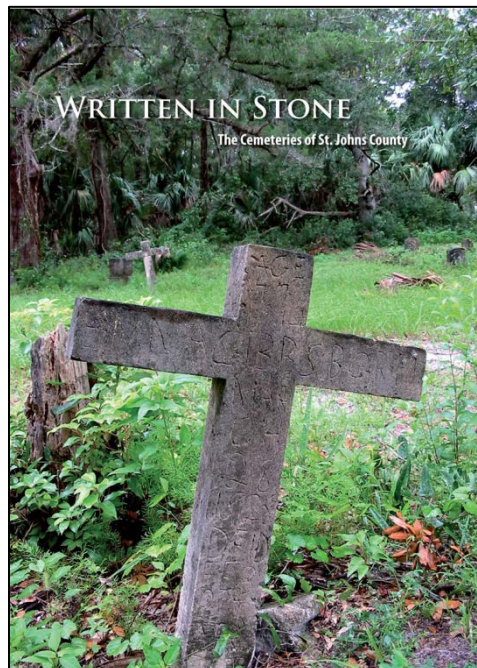
Poster developed by St. Johns County and FPAN to promote cemeteries as outdoor museums.

ISSUES IN CEMETERY PROTECTION

## *What is the impact of disturbing a burial site?*

As is true with all archaeological sites, once context has been disturbed, the potential for significant data is compromised. Cemeteries with above-ground features are just as vulnerable as those with only below-ground vestiges. If a headstone is removed, the data associated with that individual is lost and can never be put back. Cemeteries are one of the few opportunities in archaeology where remains can be associated to a single individual.

What happens to a cemetery when people begin removing above-ground objects?

- Data is lost and the context is destroyed. We lose the opportunity to learn about the individual, their family, and their legacy in a community.

- Once a burial is disturbed, the bones are often exposed and the expression is lost. From the archaeological point of view, when even coffin hardware as simple as nails are removed, the ability to tie the burial into overarching trends within the community is diminished and the potential to study is stunted.

What happens when artifacts are removed from a burial?

- When the relationship between artifacts is disturbed, the amount of information that can be learned from the site is compromised.

- If artifacts are removed from a burial and not properly conserved they can disintegrate (i.e., metal and wood).
  - o Artifacts can survive a long time underground. Once exposed to air and salts from human touch, the integrity of the material begins to break down.
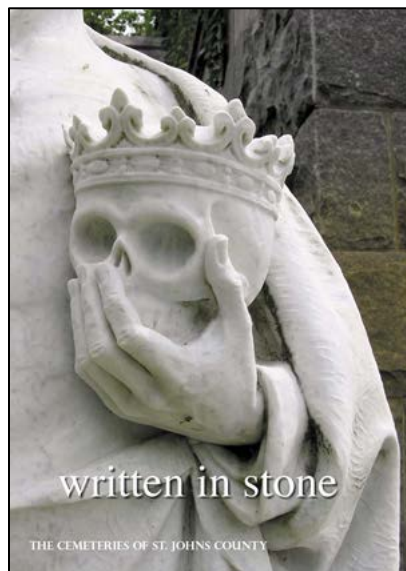
Bookmark developed by St. Johns County and FPAN to promote cemeteries as outdoor museums.

Conservation of the above ground elements

What simple measures can be taken to protect cemetery resources?

- If burials are grouped together in a cemetery, then the fate of the remains is tightly associated with one another. Proper landscaping and security is a must to preserve the cultural resources retained with in the cemetery.

- Most historic cemeteries are maintained by self-appointed stewards, family members, churches, or city governments. Once the basic boundary of a cemetery is defined, the managing entity should make every effort to keep the vegetation in check and not neglect the growth. Deterioration by neglect can be avoided with simple mowing or volunteer grounds keeping.

- Cleaning headstones can be very satisfying, but the overall character as stipulated in a cemetery management plan should guide any work. Cleaning for aesthetics is different than cleaning to maintain the integrity of the stone.

- The manager must identify materials of headstones and monuments before undertaking changes. For example, cement applied to the coquina pyramids below at National Cemetery in St. Augustine did more harm by locking in moisture than it did to stabilize the monuments. Cement had to be removed.

- The Secretary of the Interior sets the standards for conservation of cemeteries. Treatments must do no harm, be reversible, and be recognizable as a treatment.

Dade Monuments at the National Cemetery in St. Augustine.

Managing visitors and site stewards

Often the best security for a cemetery is for people to be seen visiting and working in the cemetery. Make sure visitors are aware of proper etiquette that includes:

- Take only pictures. Refrain from rubbing headstones or amplifying the inscriptions with any substances, including shaving cream or flour.

- Refrain from cleaning stones with anything except distilled water and a conservation grade cleaning agent. **Do not use bleach.** The salts attack the very matrix of the stone and do more damage than any biological growth or chemical forces.

- Do not lean against headstones or monuments. Large leaning monuments should be taken down or cordoned off for safety issues.

- Do not dig or create holes in the surface. Removal of vines and branches is fine, but seek a professional if removing any roots or fallen features.

- Never move a headstone off site for any reason except extreme cases of vandalism and security. Even then, document the location and placement of the headstone with drawings and photographs before removal.

- If you have found a marked burial or are concerned about vandalism at a known grave site, contact the county Sheriff Department or if within city limits the police department.

Important information

- Marked burials, whether they are currently marked or were ever historically marked, are generally the jurisdiction of the county Sheriff's office.

- When in doubt about human remains, contact local law enforcement. The county coroner or state archaeologist may be notified, but start with the county Sheriff's office or if city-owned contact the police department.

- The greatest risk to an archaeological find, including cemeteries, is in the first few days after discovery. If making an announcement in the paper, be prepared to increase visual inspection of the cemetery or set up a neighborhood watch. The greatest deterrent to vandalism is knowing the site is being visited, watched, and observed.
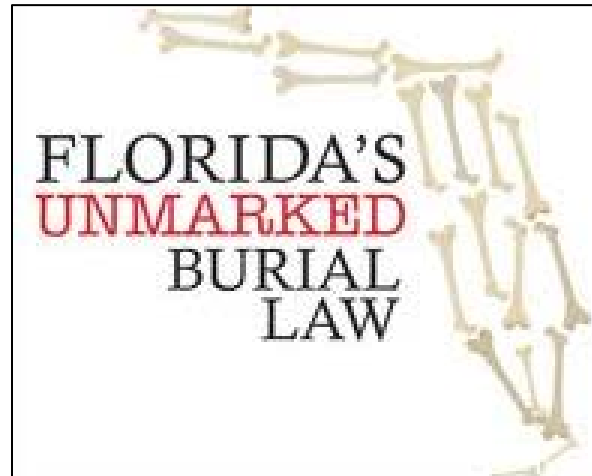
UNMARKED BURIALS

What are unmarked burials?

Any place where there are human remains without signage, the potential to do harm and disturb a burial exists. **Typically, unmarked burials are found by those doing the greatest amount of ground-disturbing activities: farmers, construction workers, and utility workers.** Even archaeologists find unmarked burials where they least expect them and have to call the county coroner and ultimately the state archaeologist for consultation. Once notifications are made, a variety of procedures may unfold. Ground disturbing activities cease until the remains can be documented in the field. Work can often continue in another area unless more remains are found. If further consultation is required, such as notifying descendent communities or the local Tribal Historic Preservation Office, the state archaeologist will take the appropriate actions. In extreme cases, whole cemeteries can be removed to another area of the community. Removal of prehistoric or historic human remains is not a consideration to be taken lightly and can only be done by a qualified professional archaeologist.

It is important to remember that in the past removal of human remains was not a rare event. Historical documents often reveal the removal of a cemetery, but in reality this has not thoroughly been carried out. Alternatively, archaeologists may search for a cemetery where one was historically documented but can no longer be found. Therefore, it is not uncommon when dealing with burial sites past and present to find comingled remains or unexplained partial remains.

What should you do if human remains are found?

If you believe you have found unmarked human remains, contact local law enforcement who will notify the county coroner's office. The coroner's office will determine if the bones are historical in nature, and if so the coroner should contact the state archaeologist or advise the program manager of your project to make notifications. Florida's state archaeologist is Dr. Mary Glowacki, Chief and State Archaeologist, Bureau of Archaeological Research, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, Tallahassee, FL at 850-245-6444 or mglowacki@dos.state.fl.us.

A copy of Florida's Unmarked Burial Law and other information related to abandoned and maintained cemeteries can be found at:
http://www.flheritage.com/archaeology/cemeteries/index.cfm?page=Laws.

TEACHING WHAT YOU LEARNED

What can you do?

Education is the key. Integrate between departments and organizations to spread the word. Parks departments, environmental and historical organizations, law enforcement, grounds and maintenance, managers at every level, and community education outlets must cooperate to keep cemeteries safe and secure. By communicating the idea that conservation of cemetery resources is of value to the living community, new generations of residents can appreciate their local cemetery as a vital part of where they live.

How can managers of cemeteries help conserve cultural resources?

- Do manage cemeteries as outdoor museums and keep them a dynamic part of the community.

- Do allow visitation for all family members, and when appropriate the public. Don't let the cemetery be forgotten and fall into neglect.

- Do develop a cemetery management plan that includes landscape and conservation priorities.

- Do encourage the community to be involved in recording and basic cleaning of headstones and monuments.

- Do provide educational materials to school and civic groups uq they may come to treat the cemetery as an outdoor museum.

- Do NOT let unsupervised groups clean headstones without proper vtckpkpi "" """"tgi ctf kpi "of cleaning agents and procedure.

- Do NOT let visitors rub stone, apply shaving cream, bleach, or flour.

- Do NOT take, disturb, remove, or damage any part of a burial including headstones, footstones, monuments, and fencing.

Record your local cemetery

Protection begins with identification. With a simple call to the Florida Master Site File (FMSF) you can check if your cemetery has been previously recorded. If not, basic location information and a map is all the Uite Hile requires to assign a state number. Once the cemetery is part of the Uite Hile, any ground disturbing activities within 2 km will take rquukdng impact to the cemetery into consideration. Uqo g"Federal and State permitting o c{"tgs wkgt extra work"q"kpxguvki cvg known cultural resources. While some counties have taken on intensive studies to locate and list every known historic cemetery (i.e. Nassau and St. Johns County), most counties do not have the resources. For more information on the Florida Master Site File and cemeteries, visit their website at j wr<11y y y 0hrj gtkvci g0eqo lrtgugtxcvkqp luksghkng0"""

Stewards of Sampson Cemetery in St. Johns County set dates for maintaining the grounds.

To learn more about burials and historic cemeteries

- Visit local cemeteries in your area.

- Volunteer to clean up a local cemetery.

- Register for a cemetery preservation workshop from either the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT) or National Preservation Institute (NPI).

- Read resources contained in this binder or on the disk for more landscape advice, conservation, ideas for community involvement, and best practices.

Encourage others to consider cemeteries as part of the community!