

HISTORIC RURAL AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERY
PRESERVATION IN SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA

By

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Historic Rural African American Cemetery Preservation in Southeast Louisiana

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The widespread neglect of historic, rural, African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana results in a loss of cultural and historical information associated with the sites. To combat this loss, cemetery preservation is achieved through state and federal legislation and through physical conservation. This study evaluates the influence of historic preservation legislation by providing a review of state and federal legislation that concerns historic cemeteries, identifying Louisiana cemeteries National Register listed for their significance to African American culture, and assessing the introduction of Louisiana's Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission. Utilizing participant observation and condition assessments at five cemetery field studies, this study will to identify common factors of preservation. Comparative analysis of this data will reveal patterns. This thesis will assess the influence of identified legislation on the cemetery field studies. Furthermore, this study recommends that the identification of historic African American cemeteries be prioritized, that immediate action be taken to comprehensively document cemeteries, that digital technologies be utilized to spread awareness of cemeteries, that perpetual care procedures be created, and that preservation efforts emphasize greater collaboration with preservation organizations, landowners, and descendants.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Cemeteries have the potential to reveal information about the past and to act as a memorial place for those interred. Cemetery landscapes are important cultural and historical resources that mirror the past life and history of a community. Cemetery preservation ensures the dignity of those interred and protects the historical and cultural information associated with the site. Cemetery preservation efforts are typically driven by grassroots efforts and followed by reactive federal and state preservation legislation and programming. Despite this support, many historic cemeteries have fallen into ruin.

Cemetery neglect is widespread in southeast Louisiana. When developing the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Plan for 2017 to 2025, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office (LA SHPO) conducted a series of public surveys to align historic preservation goals with public interest; they found that 70 percent of those surveyed identified cemeteries as sites most in need of preservation.¹ The neglect of historic cemeteries results in the loss of valuable cultural and historic information, revealing settlement patterns, events, religion, lifestyle, and genealogy.

South Louisiana is famous for its vibrant funerary traditions and cemeteries.² The most famous cemeteries are the cities of the dead in New Orleans. In 1974, a cemetery preservation movement in southern Louisiana began with the creation of Save Our Cemeteries as a reaction to the proposed demolition of the wall vaults surrounding St. Louis Cemetery No. 2 in New Orleans.³ Through the 1990s, Louisiana cemetery

¹ Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, “Ingredients for Preservation Partnerships in Louisiana—First You Make a Roux 2017-2025,” (Louisiana Office of Cultural Development: 2017), 38, www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/SHPO/Louisiana%20NPS%20Plan%202017_2025%20Final.pdf.

² Jessica H. Schexnayder and Mary H. Manhein. *Fragile Grounds: Louisiana's Endangered Cemeteries*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017, 13.

³ Save Our Cemeteries, “Mission and History, saveourcemeteries.org,

preservation efforts mostly focused on urban sites, prompting their conservation and tourism.

Outside of the city, widespread dereliction consumes rural cemeteries in southeast Louisiana. In 2011, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development recognized that “among the endangered properties are small rural sites, often those of plantation and farming families (both white and black), that are poorly marked and threatened by development and decay.”⁴ Cemetery preservation is challenged by vandalism, expanding development, shifting demographics, and weathering from natural forces, like unpredictable and extreme coastal storms and flooding.⁵ In rural southeast Louisiana, however, historic African American cemeteries are disproportionately threatened because of care and preservation issues arising from racialized poverty.⁶ As the *Advocate* notes, the ownership of many historic rural African American cemeteries is “in a tangled web of various land sales, transfers and trades.”⁷ Some cemeteries are owned by small churches, but their aging congregation prevents better cemetery maintenance.⁸ It is typical for rural cemeteries to have been transferred several times over the years to corporate industries.⁹

<https://www.saveourcemeteries.org/who-we-are/mission.html>.

⁴ Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation, “Our Places, Our Heritage: A Plan for Historic Preservation and Archaeological Conservation in Louisiana, 2011—2015,” Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, January 2011, www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/SHPO/SHPO_Jan_2011.pdf, 9.

⁵ Cindy Ann Nance, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind: A GIS Study of Changes in Cemetery Locations in Southeastern Louisiana from an Archaeological and Geographical Perspective, 1930—1997,” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1999), 289, http://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/7113.

⁶ Anna Mahoney, “Nominating Sweet Olive Cemetery: Baton Rouge’s Oldest African American Cemetery and the Preservation Process of Urban Historic Cemeteries in Southeast Louisiana,” (Master’s thesis, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2014), 66, <https://pqdtopen.proquest.com/pubnum/1557567.html>.

⁷ Terry Jones, “Researcher Maps Hidden Graveyards of Slaves Who Once Tilled Louisiana Sugar Cane Fields,” *Advocate*, Feb. 5, 2017, www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/communities/westside/article_7f0fd2e8-e966-11e6-91bd-7b5708a1dc45.html.

⁸ Jones, T., “Researcher Maps Hidden Graveyards.”

⁹ Nance, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind,” 51.

Currently, the widespread dereliction of historic rural African American cemeteries has sparked a resurgence of grassroots cemetery preservation organizations dedicated to the protection of these sites.¹⁰ Similarly, in 2018, the Louisiana legislature enacted a bill dedicated to the protection of historic African American sites, the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission.¹¹ The mobilization of organized preservation efforts and creation of the Commission reflects the widespread nature of dereliction and demonstrates the concern for these sites held by both the state and its citizens. These recent efforts prompt consideration of how historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana can be preserved. This study identifies factors that specifically influence the preservation efforts of these cemeteries.

A review of existing literature establishes the unique nature of cemeteries. As the landscape changes and demographics shift, cemeteries fall into disrepair and are neglected. This results in a loss of cultural information and tensions with evolving development. Historic preservation legislation typically governs the protection of historic cemeteries.¹ As historic properties, cemeteries may be eligible for support through federal and state legislation and historic preservation programming. Despite protection from federal and state legislation, support from historic preservation programming, and efforts from the greater community, throughout the United States, historic African American cemeteries suffer from widespread dereliction.

This study will further cemetery preservation efforts by revealing positive and negative influences for the preservation of historic rural African American cemeteries in

¹⁰ Debbie Martin, “Westside Cemetery Preservation Association,” Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/WestsideCemeteryPreservationAssociation/>.

¹¹ HCR51, Sess. of 2018 (LA 2018).

Louisiana. As cemetery neglect worsens overtime, it is crucial to conduct studies that help further knowledge on how to preserve information associated with the sites.

Review of Literature

Most property types change their function and existing structures are even removed and replaced. Cemeteries are unique property types because laws typically prohibit the changing of their function and forbid the destruction and/or removal of structures and internments within the site.¹² Cemeteries are intended to last forever, but they do not all have perpetual care funds. Yet if all cemeteries were to be perpetually cared for, the entire planet would be filled with only cemeteries.¹³ A cemetery becomes a challenge to a developing community when it falls into disuse and its care is neglected. Derelict sites can become a hazard to public health and safety.¹⁴ The American Society of Planning explains that cemeteries challenge city planning “when they lie in the path or some needed improvement” and “when the land is needed for another use.”¹⁵

The management of cemeteries provokes opposing viewpoints. Some people feel that even well-maintained cemeteries can negatively affect the property values of a neighborhood.¹⁶ Contrastingly, historic cemeteries are widely recognized as valuable resources by historians, genealogists, anthropologists, and descendants. Graveyards are commonly considered sacred sites.¹⁷ Cemeteries are protected by historic preservation

¹² Native American Graves Protection Act, 25 U.S.C.S. § 3001 (1991).; Louisiana Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation Act, LA. STAT. ANN. § 8:671 (1991).

¹³ Planning Advisory Service, “Cemeteries in the City Plan,” *Information Report No. 16*, American Society of Planning: Chicago, IL (July 1950), 4. https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy_resources/pas/at60/pdf/report16.pdf.

¹⁴ Planning Advisory Service, “Cemeteries in the City Plan,” 4.

¹⁵ Planning Advisory Service, “Cemeteries in the City Plan,” 4.

¹⁶ Planning Advisory Service, “Cemeteries in the City Plan,” 4.

¹⁷ Nadia Orton, “Recovering and Preserving African American Cemeteries,” Preservation Leadership

legislation and supported by historic preservation programming. Both federal, state, and non-governmental organizations publish cemetery conservation guides for both the expert preservationist and the non-expert volunteer.

Over time, it is common for properties to transfer hands; cemeteries are no exception to this. Typically, cemeteries are not mentioned in land transference documents which leads to confusion over the management of the associated cemetery. Conflict arises when various parties hold opposing views of the use of the site. Solutions to these conflicts are found in state and federal cemetery legislation. As best demonstrated through the rediscovery and rededication of the African Burial Grounds in NYC, legislation can positively affect a cemetery, bringing greater attention to the site and calling for greater review on how to appropriately handle the future of the site.¹⁸ Legislation, however, can negatively affect generations of tradition. For example, in Louisiana in November 2016, a descendant of the slave who purchased a cemetery in 1881 wanted to be buried with the rest of her family, yet legal issues concerning the ownership of a cemetery prevented her burial with her family.¹⁹ Instead of recognizing the cultural significance of these family burial traditions, the interments of human remains are simply regarded as property. This is because the laws governing the treatment of cemeteries are largely phrased in the language of property rights.²⁰ In her

Forum, National Trust for Historic Preservation, June 20, 2016, <http://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/special-contributor/2016/06/02/recovering-and-preserving-african-american-cemeteries>.

¹⁸ Andrea E Frohne, *The African Burial Ground in New York City: Memory, Spirituality, and Space*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015., 2015, New York State Series, EBSCOhost, login.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat05280a&AN=rutebrary.ebr11250030&site=eds-live., 8.; Native American Graves Protection Act, 25 U.S.C.S. § 3001 (1991).

¹⁹ Chris Nakamoto, "Burial denied at historic slave cemetery," WBRZ, Nov. 21 2016, <http://www.wbrz.com/news/burial-denied-at-historic-slave-cemetery>.

²⁰ Rebecca Tsosie, "Indigenous Fights and Archaeology," *Native Americans and Archaeologists: Stepping Stones to Common Ground* 68 (1997), 66.; Native American Graves Protection Act, 25 U.S.C.S. § 3001

discourse *Indigenous Rights and Archaeology*, Rebecca Tsosie explains that “at a more fundamental level, the idea of human remains and funerary objects as ‘property’ is odious.”²¹ Understanding the key differences in terminology reveals the power-structure concerning cemetery preservation. Legislation favors the efforts of protecting property, and views the sites as property.

Typically, when properties transfer hands, the landowner can use the land at their own discretion; this is not the case for cemeteries. Cemetery dedication removal is typically an arduous legal process, leaving many to neglect cemeteries on their properties.²² A common practice for industrial owners who have acquired a historic cemetery is to avoid the cemetery altogether; they neither help nor harm the site through neglect.²³ Cemetery neglect results in the loss of valuable cultural and historic repositories of information. In “Preservation Brief 48: Preserving Grave Markers in Historic Cemeteries” to the National Park Service explains that “deferred maintenance usually accelerates deterioration of grave markers.”²⁴ However, Ryan Seidemann, an expert in Louisiana cemetery law, explains that “cemeteries can be managed when they intersect with energy projects; they simply have to be managed with care and in strict adherence to the laws ... to avoid bad publicity, destroying a company’s goodwill, and running afoul of the law.”²⁵ In “Strategy and Society: The Link Between Competitive

(1991).

²¹ Tsosie, “Indigenous Fights and Archaeology,” 66.

²² Ryan Seidemann, “Do Not Disturb: A Practical Guide for What Not to Do around Cemeteries and Human Remains for the Louisiana Energy and Land Use Practitioner,” *LSU Journal of Energy Law and Resources* 2, no. 2, (Spring 2014): 240-280, , <http://digitalcommons.law.lsu.edu/jelr/vol2/iss2/5>.

²³ Seidemann, “Do Not Disturb,” 275.

²⁴ Mary Striegel, et al, “Preservation Brief 48: Preserving Grave Markers in Historic Cemeteries,” Washington D.C.: Technical Preservation Services, September 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/preservedocs/preservation-briefs/48Preserve-Brief-GraveMarkers.pdf>.

²⁵ Seidemann, “Do Not Disturb,” 280.

Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility,” Michael Porter and Mark Kramer explain that as members and leaders of a greater community, companies have a social responsibility, or corporate social responsibility (CSR), to honor ethical values.²⁶

When companies choose to support preservation efforts, they engender goodwill within their community and promote a positive brand image. For example, in March 2018, the Shell Covent Refinery, the River Road African Burial Grounds Coalition, and the Burial Grounds Committee of the River Road African American Museum (RAAMM) collaborated on a cemetery project.²⁷ The result was the successful preservation and rededication of two cemeteries of unmarked graves of enslaved people who had worked on the former Bruslie and Monroe plantations, now land owned by the petroleum company.²⁸ Historic cemeteries can be properly preserved when companies work collaboratively with preservation organizations.

Historic properties may be eligible for federal and state sponsored historic preservation programs, like historic tax incentives and grants for site rehabilitation or inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The National Park Service maintains that this historic tax credit “is the nation’s most effective program to promote historic preservation and community revitalization through historic rehabilitation.”²⁹ Yet

²⁶ Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer, “Strategy and Society: The Link Between Competitive Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility,” *Harvard Business Review* 84, no. 12 (2006): 78—92, <https://www.comfama.com/contenidos/servicios/Gerenciasocial/html/Cursos/Columbia/Lecturas/Strategy-Society.pdf>.

²⁷ River Road African American Museum, “Memorial Service and Marker Dedication for Bruslie Plantation and Monroe Plantation Cemeteries,” *Donaldsonville Chief*, March 13, 2018, www.donaldsonvillechief.com/news/20180313/memorial-service-and-marker-dedication-for-bruslie-plantation-and-monroe-plantation-cemeteries.

²⁸ Olivia McClure, “‘We Are Going to Pay Them Respect’: Hundreds Gather to Honor Slaves Buried in Louisiana Plantation Cemetery,” *Advocate*, March 24, 2018, www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_dbf7b0da-2c71-11e8-bc3e-0f7f089b6296.html.

²⁹ Technical Preservation Services, “Federal Tax Incentive for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2016,” National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, March 2017, 1, <https://www.nps.gov/tPS/tax-incentives/taxdocs/tax-incentives-2016annual.pdf>.

cemeteries are typically not eligible for these incentives. Grants to support historic preservation projects are available to qualifying properties through Historic Preservation Fund Grants.³⁰ These grants are not specifically-targeted towards cemeteries, so cemeteries must compete against other property types seeking funding for preservation.³¹

The National Register Criteria for Evaluation establishes the threshold for defining qualities that make properties historically-valuable and worthy of preservation.³² Grassroots cemetery preservation efforts in Louisiana and across the country inspired the National Park Service to publish the 1992 National Register Bulletin 41 “Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places.”³³ Unless cemeteries meet special requirements, they are not typically eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.³⁴ This is because “for profoundly personal reasons...devout sentiment can overshadow objective evaluation the objective evaluation of cemeteries.”³⁵ Preservation efforts typically focus on architecture even though the National Park Service recognizes cemeteries as eligible for inclusion in the NRHP. Despite cemeteries’ limited eligibility, these historic preservation programs are catalysts for fostering scholarship and public awareness of the important historical themes that sites can represent.³⁶

³⁰ National Park Service, “Historic Preservation Fund Grants,” nps.gov, n.d., <https://www.nps.gov/preservation-grants/>.

³¹ Capels and Senville, “Planning for cemeteries,” *Planning Commissioners Journal*, no. 64, (Fall 2006): 1-4, <http://plannersweb.com/wp-content/uploads/2006/10/230.pdf>.

³² Lynn Rainville, *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014, 135-136.

³³ Anna Lucia Mahoney, “Nominating Sweet Olive Cemetery: Baton Rouge’s Oldest African American Cemetery and the Preservation Process of Urban Historic Cemeteries in Southeast Louisiana,” Master’s thesis, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2014, 21, <https://pqdtopen.proquest.com/pubnum/1557567.html>; Elisabeth E. Potter and Beth M. Boland, “Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places,” *National Register Bulletin 41*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division, 1992, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/pur1.32754075448377>.

³⁴ Potter and Boland, “Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places,” 1.

³⁵ Potter and Boland, “Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places,” 1.

³⁶ National Park Service, “The National Register of Historic Places Brochure,” Washington D.C.: U.S.

It is crucial that the sites registered appropriately represent all the diverse peoples that contributed to the culture because the NRHP validates the cultural significance of registered sites and influences public perception. In her 2014 guide focused on the preservation of historic African American cemeteries in Virginia, Rainville notes that “despite the National Register’s seemingly inclusive goals, it is perplexing to learn that of the eighty-five thousand sites in the register, fewer than 2 percent concern African American history.”³⁷ This lack of representation is “unacceptable” because the National Register is a powerful ambassador of public perception.³⁸ Rainville maintains that “the inclusion of more African American sites would broaden the definition of heritage within many communities and help the general public to understand the importance of African American cemeteries and other sites.”³⁹

Across the United States South, historic African American cemeteries are common victims of neglect. Seth Wessler, in “Black Deaths Matter,” explains the typical predicament of African American burial sites: “There’s a black cemetery on the other side of the hill, and it began around the same time as the white one, and the white one is in fine shape—the black one is not.”⁴⁰ Historic African American cemeteries with their low, if not non-existent, burial fees do not have sufficient financial support for continuous maintenance. This difference in historic economic opportunity is the reason historic African American cemeteries are commonly in disrepair while white cemeteries

Dept. of the Interior, 2002, 1, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/pdfs/NRBroch.pdf>.

³⁷ Rainville, *Hidden Histories*, 135.

³⁸ Rainville, *Hidden Histories*, 136.

³⁹ Rainville, *Hidden Histories*, 136.

⁴⁰ Seth Freed Wessler, “Black Deaths Matter,” *Nation*, vol. 301, no. 18, (Nov. 2015): 20—25, 21, [login.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=110353929&site=eds-live](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=110353929&site=eds-live).

are well maintained.⁴¹ The neglect is so widespread that it has prompted states like Virginia and Louisiana to create new legislation targeted towards the research and preservation of these sites.⁴²

Many cemetery preservation guides have been published by both federal and state preservation offices as well as non-governmental organizations. Numerous guides exist because cemetery preservation methods can vary between burial sites. Lynette Strangstad's 1988 publication "A Graveyard Preservation Primer" sets the standard for approaches to basic cemetery restoration and stresses the urgency of administering repairs.⁴³ Some preservation guides, like the Chicora Foundation Inc.'s "Grave Matters: The Preservation of African-American Cemeteries" or Rainville's *Hidden Histories: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia*, speak towards the identification, research, documentation, and preservation of historic African American cemeteries.⁴⁴ Cemetery preservation guides published by state preservation agencies, like those published by cultural or historical offices in Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Texas, and Georgia, are particularly valuable because all cemeteries are closely bound to legal regulations.⁴⁵ Most cemetery preservation guides, such as those of Strangstad and Potter

⁴¹ Seth Freed Wessler, "Black Deaths Matter."; Tadashi Nakagawa, "The Cemetery as a Cultural Manifestation: Louisiana Necrogeography," (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1987), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/4372.

⁴² Code of Virginia §10.1-2211.2 Disbursement of funds appropriated for caring for historical African American cemeteries and graves; HCR51, Sess. of 2018 (LA 2018).

⁴³ Lynette Strangstad, *A Graveyard Preservation Primer*, Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 1995.

⁴⁴ The Chicora Foundation, Inc., "Grave Matters: The Preservation of African-American Cemeteries," Columbia, South Carolina: 1997, 10, www.chicora.org/pdfs/Grave%20Matters%20-%20The%20Preservation%20of%20African%20American%20Cemeteries.pdf.; Rainville, *Hidden Histories*.

⁴⁵ Sheila Richmond, "Cemetery Preservation Guide," Louisiana Folklife Program, 2003,

http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/cem_pres.html;

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Prince George's County, Maryland, Cemetery Preservation Manual*, December 2010,

<http://mncppcapps.org/planning/publications/PDFs/232/Cemetery%20Preservation%20Manual.pdf>.; Gregg King, "Michigan historic cemeteries preservation guide," Charter Township of Canton: 2004, ISBN 0-

and Boland, encourage the support of non-expert volunteers because cemetery preservation has been largely driven by grassroots efforts.⁴⁶ Similarly, the information to be found associated with the cemeteries in this study is intended for the use of non-experts historians, preservationists, and local genealogists. In addition to published guides, some preservation organizations will offer outreach programs intended for non-experts. For example, to combat cemetery neglect, the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation (LTHP), the Shreveport Downtown Development Authority, and the Downtown Shreveport Development Corporation presented a class on cemetery stone cleaning called “Demonstration Class: Cleaning Historic Headstones” in Oakland Cemetery in Shreveport, LA on October 21, 2017.⁴⁷

Existing literature does not speak on how to fight dereliction explicitly at historic rural African American cemeteries in Louisiana. Generalized cemetery preservation guides are not sufficient because legal obligations and appropriate actions towards cemetery preservation can vary between cultural sites. Therefore, what influences preservation efforts of historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana?

Through a comparative analysis of the condition and situations of five neglected cemeteries and the preservation legislation applicable to them, this thesis will highlight that specific factors that affect the preservation of historic rural African American

9755474-0-2, https://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal_mhc_shpo_Cemetery_Guide_105082_7.pdf; William Hover and Christine Neal, “Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan Guidelines,” Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Historic Preservation Division, March 2008, https://gadnr.org/sites/default/files/hpd/pdf/Historic_Cemetery_Preservation_Plan_Guidelines.pdf; Texas Historical Commission, “Preserving Historic Cemeteries: Texas Preservation Guidelines,” The State Agency for Historic Preservation, Austin, Texas: n.d., <http://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/publications/preserving-historic-cemeteries.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Potter and Boland, “Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places.”; Strangstad, *A Graveyard Preservation Primer*.

⁴⁷ Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation and the Shreveport Downtown Development Authority, “Demonstration Class: Cleaning Historic Headstones,” Eventbrite, Oct. 21, 2017, www.eventbrite.com/e/demonstration-class-cleaning-historic-headstones-tickets-38094652130#.

cemeteries and offer possible solutions and best practices for their preservation.

Methodology

Research Design

Existing literature reveals that cemetery preservation is broadly accomplished through federal and state legislation and the physical research, documentation, and maintenance of a site. Therefore, this methodology is divided into two sections: A) Cemetery Legislation and B) Cemetery Field Studies. Section A provides a review of state and federal legislation that concerns historic cemeteries, identifies Louisiana cemeteries National Register listed for their significance to African American culture, and assesses the introduction of Louisiana's Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission. Section B utilizes participant observation and condition assessments at five cemetery field studies to identify common factors of preservation. Comparative analysis of this data will reveal patterns. In addition to historic preservation legislation and physical site conservation, existing literature has revealed other factors that affect cemetery preservation to include volunteers/grassroots efforts, money, time and weather. This study will identify these factors (and note any others that are revealed) in federal and state legislation and at the five historic cemeteries.

Sample Selection

The sites under review are historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana. The National Register of Historic Places typically considers a property historic once it is over fifty years old. Therefore, this study considers sites over fifty years of age historic. These cemeteries are located in West Baton Rouge and Pointe Coupee parishes

and were introduced to the author by a local nonprofit organization in West Baton Rouge, the Westside Cemetery Preservation Association (WCPA). Because grassroots efforts have yielded the greatest results in cemetery preservation in Louisiana, I decided to collaborate with the WCPA. The WCPA formed as a reaction to the derelict conditions of historic African American cemeteries. I learned about this group through an article published in the *Advocate* in February 2017 about a researcher, Debbie Martin, who had rediscovered several abandoned cemeteries in West Baton Rouge Parish through genealogical study and her work to document and preserve these seemingly forgotten memorial places.⁴⁸ I connected with the organization through their Facebook page.⁴⁹ Advocacy groups are quickly mobilized through social media's democratizing nature.⁵⁰ On March 14, 2017, I met with Martin to find out about the mission of the WCPA. Over the next year, I was introduced to five neglected cemeteries in physically different states of disrepair and maintenance. Three sites are currently in the process of being rehabilitated by the WCPA in collaboration with the sites' known owners or caretakers. The nonprofit is currently researching and working on establishing perpetual care procedures for these sites, but the extent of their preservation efforts vary among cemeteries.

Study Area

Both grassroots and state preservation efforts have illuminated the increasing need for the preservation of historic African American cemeteries in Louisiana. The five

⁴⁸ Jones, T., "Researcher Maps Hidden Graveyards."

⁴⁹ Martin, D., "Westside Cemetery Preservation Association," Facebook.

⁵⁰ Obar, Zube, and Lampe, "Advocacy 2.0: An analysis of how advocacy groups in the United States perceive and use social media tools for facilitating civic engagement and collective action."

chosen cemeteries in this study are historic African American cemeteries with a history of neglect in southeast Louisiana. Cemetery preservation guides have identified that sites in need of preservation are characterized by poor maintenance, marked by overgrown vegetation and broken grave markers. Over time, the information associated with the cemetery is lost as the physical site continues to deteriorate. This study investigates five cemeteries that have demonstrated neglect, Silvery Cemetery, Poplar Grove Cemetery, Ashland Cemetery, Orange Grove Cemetery and Alma Cemetery.

Cemetery neglect is widespread in southeast Louisiana. Both Pointe Coupee and West Baton Rouge parishes have experienced widespread cemetery degradation due to industrial development and demographic shifts since the 1930s.⁵¹ Rural areas became more transient as a growing number of people left to pursue education and jobs elsewhere. Out-migration is driven by the younger generations, so those left to tend burials are elderly. Consequently, the human and financial resources once dedicated to preserving historic African American cemeteries have been depleted. In Pointe Coupee, 52 percent of cemeteries are abandoned.⁵² Cemetery abandonment is a result of rural contraction, population decline, rural population loss, a high poverty rate, and a nonwhite to white ratio decrease. Pointe Coupee experienced a rural population loss similar to West Baton Rouge Parish (WBR), yet the population of WBR Parish continues to grow and industrialize. As a result of demographic shifts and industrial change, 45 percent of cemeteries are derelict in West Baton Rouge.⁵³ The nonwhite population that was formerly the majority in 1930 has been replaced by 1990 in WBR Parish.⁵⁴ In Pointe

⁵¹ Nance, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind."

⁵² Nance, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind," 59.

⁵³ Nance, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind," 152.

⁵⁴ Nance, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind," 153.

Coupee and West Baton Rouge, years of flood damage also contribute to cemetery abandonment and physical decline.⁵⁵

This study of southeast Louisiana focuses on neglected cemeteries in parishes adjacent to the Mississippi River (Figure 1). Southeast Louisiana includes the coastal zone of Louisiana, which experiences 80 percent of the nation's coastal land loss.⁵⁶ The Louisiana Coastal Restoration Commission predicts significant land loss through 2050.⁵⁷ The five field studies presented in this thesis highlight the area north of the coastal zone and focus on cemeteries in West Baton Rouge and Pointe Coupee parishes (Figure 2). While these sites are not in imminent danger, coastal subsidence and sea level rise are predicted to increase storm damage to areas further inland (Figure 3).⁵⁸ The low elevation of this region is a major risk factor for flooding.⁵⁹ Even though these sites are unlikely to be affected by land loss through 2050, they still experience severe weather, particularly flooding associated with the close proximity of the Mississippi River. The unpredictability of severe storms and flooding increase the urgency for documentation and preservation of cemeteries in this region.

Unique to southern Louisiana is the unpredictable but inevitable destruction of cemeteries from the flooding of the Mississippi River associated with severe storms.

According to "Losing Ground," a report detailing changes in the Mississippi delta,

⁵⁵ Nance, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind," 153.

⁵⁶ Jessica Schexnayder and Mary H. Manhein, "Fragile Grounds: Mapping South Louisiana's Cemeteries," (Presentation, The International Cemetery Preservation Summit, Niagara Falls, NY, April 8-11, 2004).

⁵⁷ Stephen Barnes, et al., "Economic Evaluation of Coastal Land Loss in Louisiana," Louisiana Coastal Protection Agency, Dec. 2015, http://coastal.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/LSU-Rand_Report_on_Economics_of_Land_Loss-2.pdf.

⁵⁸ Barnes, et al., "Economic Evaluation of Coastal Land Loss in Louisiana."

⁵⁹ Edward Richards, "Why the Master Plan Will Not Protect Louisiana and What We Should Do Instead," LSU Law Center: Climate Change Laws and Policy Project, Feb. 21, 2017, <https://sites.law.lsu.edu/coast/2017/02/why-the-master-plan-will-not-protect-the-coast-and-what-we-should-do-instead/>.

Louisiana loses a “football field of land every 48 minutes—16 square miles a year—due to climate change, drilling and dredging for oil and gas, and levees on the Mississippi River.”⁶⁰ To combat this, the Louisiana Coastal Preservation and Restoration Authority plans to slow the overall land loss to reduce flood risk, according to their 2017 Coastal Master Plan. Edward Richards of The Climate Change Law and Policy Project at the LSU Law Center maintains that “slowing the overall land loss will not protect communities, farms, and businesses from hurricane surge and the day to day flooding driven by sea level rise.”⁶¹ Cindy Nance maintains that severe weather has already contributed to the degradation of cemeteries in southeast Louisiana. Hurricane winds can damage vegetation, remove branches and entire trees, and damage signage and cemetery structures.⁶² Storm surge damages mortuary structures, bringing with it a combination of water, sewage, toxic waste, and large quantities of salt that will damage stone and kill vegetation.⁶³ Sometimes the floods carry coffins and remains miles from their intended final resting place.⁶⁴ The Louisiana Cemetery Board maintains that when water destroys a cemetery, it is typically caused from storm surge, not the naturally high water table that pushes the interments up. In *Fragile Grounds: Louisiana’s Endangered Cemeteries*, anthropologists Jessica Schexnayder and Mary Manhein have mapped the perimeters of cemeteries considered to be the most vulnerable. They maintain that “although the cemetery itself may not be saved, a tangible link to the intangible past can be provided

⁶⁰ Marshall, Bob, Brian Jacobs, and Al Shaw, “Losing Ground,” *The Lens, ProPublica*. August 28, 2014. <http://projects.propublica.org/louisiana/#>.

⁶¹ Richards, “Why the Master Plan Will Not Protect Louisiana and What We Should Do Instead.”

⁶² The Chicora Foundation, Inc. “Cemetery Disaster Planning,” Columbia, South Carolina: 2013, 2, www.chicora.org/pdfs/Cemetery%20Disaster%20Planning.pdf.

⁶³ The Chicora Foundation, “Cemetery Disaster Planning,” 2

⁶⁴ The Chicora Foundation, “Cemetery Disaster Planning,” 3.; Lily Koppel, “Coffins and Buried Remains Set Adrift by Hurricanes Creates Grisly Puzzle,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 25, 2005, <https://nyti.ms/2Fck7n3>.

through mapping, photography, oral tradition, and cultural artifact documentation.”⁶⁵

These mapping efforts also include several neglected cemeteries in the same parishes as my case studies, West Baton Rouge and Pointe Coupee, highlighting the importance of mapping cemeteries at risk farther inland that suffer from the Mississippi River’s close proximity to the Gulf Coast and its associated storms.

Procedures:

Section A: Cemetery Legislation

It is necessary to understand the state and federal legislation that governs cemeteries before conducting physical preservation as to not run afoul with the law. Therefore, this study provides a review of state and federal legislation that governs the preservation of historic cemeteries. This will reveal the current legal aid, protections, and regulations applicable to historic cemeteries. Of this legislation, this study highlights the influence of the National Register of Historic Places and Louisiana’s Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission. Existing literature illuminates that inclusion in the NRHP can positively influence public perception and validate a site’s historical significance.⁶⁶ Similarly, literature reveals a lack of representation of African American sites on the NRHP.⁶⁷ This study will establish if this is true of historic African American cemeteries in Louisiana by identifying the number of these sites currently National Register listed. In 2018, Louisiana introduced the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission to support the preservation of historic African American

⁶⁵ Schexnayder and Manhein, *Fragile Grounds*, xii.

⁶⁶ Rainville, *Hidden Histories*, 36.; National Park Service, “The National Register of Historic Places Brochure.”

⁶⁷ Rainville, *Hidden Histories*, 135.

cemeteries within the state. This study provides a critical analysis of this new legislation to assess its influence on cemetery preservation.

Review State and Federal Legislation Concerning Historic African American Cemetery Preservation:

To protect and preserve information concerning historic cemeteries, initial research must reveal the state and federal laws and programs protecting burial sites. Existing literature has proven that preservation legislation influences the preservation of historic cemeteries. These sites fall under the jurisdiction of cemetery and historic preservation legislation at both state and federal levels. A review of state and federal legislation will identify the existing legal framework that affects the preservation of historic African American cemeteries in Louisiana.

Identify Cemetery Representation in the NRHP:

I will access the National Register's online database and determine how many historic cemeteries in Louisiana are significant to African American culture. While cemeteries may face greater restrictions for inclusion in federal historic preservation than other historic property types, a review of federal historic preservation programs proves that these sites may be eligible for registry in the NRHP. As noted in the literature, less than 2 percent of NRHP listings represent significance to African American culture.⁶⁸ Contrary to the general lack of representation of African American sites on the NRHP, Laura Blokker's "The African American Experience in Louisiana" reveals that historic sites significant African American heritage in Louisiana are well-represented on the

⁶⁸ Rainville, *Hidden Histories*, 135.

National Register.⁶⁹ This study will evaluate if the NRHP listings for Louisiana cemeteries that are associated with African American heritage reflect either of the previous statements.

Introduction of LA HCR51, the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation

Commission:

Comprehensive scholarship from preservationists and lawyers in Louisiana has criticized the federal and state legal protections for cemeteries. In “Places Worth Saving: A Legal Guide to the Protection of Historic Cemeteries in Louisiana and Recommendations for Additional Protection,” Ryan Seidemann and Rachel Moss maintain that the major gaps in cemetery protection in Louisiana include a “lack of special status of cemeteries under the NHPA [National Historic Preservation Act],” “lack of funding available for historic cemetery preservation or restoration,” and “the absence of historic preservation requirements in La. R.S. [Louisiana Revised Statutes] §§ 8:308 and 8:903” that concern the maintenance and sale of historic and/or abandoned cemeteries.⁷⁰ In southeast Louisiana, interpretations of cemetery laws have historically influenced rural cemeteries to close and become abandoned.⁷¹ Seidemann and Moss report that there is a “dearth of such critical analysis related to the protections available to

⁶⁹ Laura Blokker, “The African American Experience in Louisiana”, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, May 2015, www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/nationalregister/historic_contexts/The_African_American_Experience_in_Louisiana.pdf.

⁷⁰ Ryan M. Seidemann and Rachel L. Moss, “Places Worth Saving: A Legal Guide to the Protection of Historic Cemeteries in Louisiana and Recommendations for Additional Protection,” *Loyola Law Review* 55, no. 3 (2009): 449—516, *Index to Legal Periodicals and Books Full Text* (H.W. Wilson), <http://libezp.lib.lsu.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eih&AN=129672314&site=eds-live&scone=site&profile=eds-main>.

⁷¹ Nance, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind,” 266.

virtually all non–Native American cemeteries.”⁷² In “Requiescat in Pace: The Cemetery Dedication and Its Implications for Land Use in Louisiana and Beyond,” Ryan Seidemann finds that protection for cemeteries is found in cemetery dedication legislation.⁷³ Existing literature reveals that weaknesses in the laws that govern Louisiana’s cemeteries have contributed to their dereliction.

Since the publishing of these critical examinations of cemetery legislation, the Louisiana legislature has introduced a new bill aimed towards the research and preservation of historic African American cemeteries. On April 18, 2018, I attended the introduction of LA HRC51, creating the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission, to Louisiana House Committee on Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs and recorded the proceedings that concerned cemetery preservation. The results of the bill are discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses the influence of both state and federal legislation on historic rural African American cemeteries.

Section B: Cemetery Field Studies:

This study utilizes participant observation at five cemetery field studies to identify common or dissimilar factors present at each site that might influence its preservation. I will highlight both visual and verbal signs of preservation (or lack of) to aid in the evaluation of the preservation efforts at each site. A condition assessment of each cemetery provides an overview of the cemetery’s current form. The visual state of the site

⁷² Seidemann and Moss, “Places Worth Saving,” 511-12.

⁷³ Ryan M. Seidemann, “Requiescat in Pace: The Cemetery Dedication and Its Implications for Land Use in Louisiana and Beyond,” *William and Mary Environment Law and Policy Review* 42, no. 3 (Spring 2018): 895—922, <http://libesp.lib.lsu.edu/login?url=html://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eih&AN=129672314&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

and any observable information concerning the site's preservation will be documented through a condition assessment. The condition assessment will include notation of any verbal information reveals data regarding site preservation that is not necessarily visible. The verbal information acquired at Silvery Cemetery, Poplar Grove Cemetery, Ashland Cemetery, Orange Grove Cemetery, and Alma Cemetery is from the founder of the WCPA, Debbie Martin; the verbal information acquired at Alma cemetery is from Debbie Martin and Joseph Yarbrough, a cemetery archeologist working with the WCPA. Comparative analysis of the condition reports and recorded verbal information will reveal patterns that influence preservation.

I visited Silvery Cemetery, Poplar Grove Cemetery, Ashland Cemetery, and Orange Grove Cemetery in Port Allen, Louisiana, on March 23, 2017, and Alma Cemetery in Pointe Coupee on March 18, 2018. The cemeteries' names reflect their association with historic plantations of the same name. Poplar Grove, Ashland, and Alma Cemetery are estimated to be over fifty years old. Silvery Cemetery and Poplar Grove Cemetery are abandoned in the traditional sense, as there is no landowner maintaining the cemetery property. Ashland Cemetery is not abandoned; it is inactive and under the care of the St. Marks First Baptist Church. Ashland Cemetery has become derelict because the church struggles to maintain the site on its own. The church is not well funded and comprises an elderly congregation; cemetery maintenance is physically demanding and financially challenging. While Ashland Cemetery is no longer active, its neighbor, Orange Grove Cemetery, is active, owned and maintained by the St. Marks First Baptist Church.

It is common for rural African American cemeteries to be associated with a

historic plantation or a benevolent society. The most unique characteristic of the preservation of historic African American cemeteries is that they are “notoriously difficult to locate.”⁷⁴ Typical indicators of a historic rural African American cemetery include “areas of high elevation, slopes near water, rings of trees, old fence lines/edges of fields, and purple flowers.”⁷⁵ These cemeteries are typically are located in agriculturally-unproductive areas. The location of the cemeteries on poor land separated from the plantation reflect Louisiana’s long history of slavery and segregation. African American cemeteries were segregated through the 18th, 19th and much of the 20th century.⁷⁶ After emancipation in 1863, the number of black cemeteries associated with newly founded churches increased, while some African Americans chose to be buried with their enslaved ancestors in the plantation graveyard.⁷⁷ Today, some people still choose to be buried at plantation cemeteries, “often because family members wanted to be buried near loved ones who had died years earlier.”⁷⁸

Condition Assessments

I administered a condition assessment upon visiting each cemetery. This assessment incorporates field survey methodology as demonstrated in the cemetery preservation guides mentioned in the literature review.⁷⁹ Condition reports create a record of the current state and characteristics of the site. Because the materiality of the cemetery

⁷⁴ Blokker, “The African American Experience in Louisiana,” 68.

⁷⁵ Blokker, “The African American Experience in Louisiana,” 68.

⁷⁶ Clarence B. Jones, “Black Cemeteries are Crucially Important—and All Too Often Neglected,” *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/black-cemeteries-are-crucially-important--and-all-too-often-neglected/2017/05/19/5d6a98e0-31bd-11e7-9534-00e4656c22aa_story.html?utm_term=.2c701862c6fd.

⁷⁷ Nance, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind,” 51.

⁷⁸ Jones, T., “Research Maps Hidden Graveyards.”

⁷⁹ See Appendix B for author’s field surveys.

is threatened, the creation of a survey is necessary to act as initial documentation of the site. A condition assessment acts as the foundation for long-term conservation and as a basis of comparison for future surveys of the site by freezing a specific moment in time forever. The condition assessment is intended audience is preservation professionals, descendant communities, genealogists, historians, and researchers.

Condition surveys should record all visual elements of the landscape. Surveyors should photograph and map the site. A goal of the condition assessment is to record site features, such as depressions in the ground, funerary goods, and the site's perimeter. Establishing the earliest date that the site appears on a public map or identifying the site's oldest marker will reveal if the site qualifies as historic. When possible, this study includes qualitative descriptions of a random sampling of grave markers to create a greater context of general site characteristics. Comparative analysis of the assessments will reveal insight into common sepulchral features and challenges to cemetery preservation. In this study, the condition assessment only provides the basic overview of each cemetery. Future preservation of the sites should consider the use of a more comprehensive survey to provide greater documentation of the features of each cemetery.

Because neglected cemeteries, by their very nature, are at constant risk of destruction, physical documentation of each site should be taken as soon as possible. The survey should be completed before the start of hurricane season, June 1, 2019 to preemptively document each site before any further damage is sustained as a result of hurricane season. The urgent timeline for the physical survey is in response to the amount of damage that is already from hurricanes.

Data Analysis

The methodology investigates legislation concerning historic cemetery preservation and five cemetery field studies. This study will apply the identified legislation to the cemetery field studies and assess the implications of this legislation on the sites. The literature has revealed that grassroots efforts, time, weather, and money directly influence cemetery preservation. In what ways do these factors affect the preservation efforts specifically of historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana? I will identify these factors and any common patterns concerning the conditions, resources, and preservation methods of these sites through a comparative analysis of the field study's condition assessments.

Chapter 2: Results of Legislation and Cemetery Field Studies

Chapter 2 identifies federal and state legislation that concerns historic rural African American cemeteries in Louisiana, determines the number of National Register listed African American cemeteries in Louisiana, and reports on the introduction of Louisiana's Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission. Through participant observation and condition assessments, this chapter provides detailed physical descriptions of the five cemetery field studies and of the observable preservation actions. An analysis of the condition assessments reveal common preservation trends concerning sepulchral characteristics, site conditions, preservation means, and resource availability.

Section A: Cemetery Legislation:

This study evaluates historic preservation legislation's effect on historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana. This study will identify major legislation that governs these sites, determine the number of African American cemeteries in Louisiana listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and report the objectives of Louisiana's Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission.

Review of State and Federal Legislation Concerning Historic Rural African American Cemeteries in Louisiana:

This section identifies federal and state legislation that concerns historic cemeteries. Federal legislation that may be applicable to historic cemeteries includes: The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) 1990, and The

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) 1966, as amended 2000.⁸⁰ The NHPA creates the National Register of Historic Places, establishes Section 106 review of federal actions threatening NRHP properties, institutes the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and mandates State Historic Preservation Officers. At a state level, the Louisiana Revised Statutes: Title 8- Cemeteries governs these sites. The Criminal Code of Louisiana, R.S. 14:101, prohibits the desecration of graves.⁸¹ The 1991 Louisiana Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation Act (Unmarked Burials Act) functions as an extension of NAGPRA; The 2010 Louisiana Historic Cemetery Preservation Act clarifies cemetery protections in the Unmarked Burials Act.⁸² According to the Louisiana Attorney General, private property owners are required to provide access and allow public visitation of the cemeteries during reasonable hours.⁸³ Louisiana's Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission, enacted in 2018, seeks to aid in the preservation of historic Africa American cemeteries.⁸⁴ Chapter 3 will further discuss how this legislation affects historic cemeteries.

Identify Cemetery Representation in the NRHP:

At the beginning of the research process for this thesis, only two cemeteries in Louisiana-- the Kenner and Kugler Cemeteries in St. Charles and the Star Cemetery in Shreveport-- were listed on the NRHP for their significance to African American

⁸⁰ National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (44 USC 300101 et seq.: Historic Preservation).

⁸¹ LA. STAT. ANN. § 14:101 (2011).

⁸² LA Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation Act (1991).; LA Historic Cemetery Preservation Act (2010).

⁸³ Louisiana Cemetery Board. "[Opinion #08-0186](http://www.lcb.state.la.us/ago.html)." *Attorney General Opinions*. August 19, 2008. <http://www.lcb.state.la.us/ago.html>.

⁸⁴ HCR51, Sess. of 2018 (LA 2018).

culture.⁸⁵ During the research process of this thesis study, on February 21, 2018, a third historic African American cemetery in Louisiana was listed: Ashland Cemetery in Port Allen, Louisiana.⁸⁶ And on October 17, 2018, the NRHP saw its fourth historic Louisiana cemetery, the Williams Cemetery in St. Tammany, to be listed for its significance to African American culture.⁸⁷ This study will further discuss implications of NRHP inclusion and site-specific factors that influenced the mode of preservation for Ashland Cemetery.

Introduction of LA HCR51, the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation

Commission:

Preservation legislation did not specifically target the preservation of African American cemeteries until 2018. Recognizing that previous legislation omitted protective measures for enslaved peoples' graveyards, Louisiana HCR51 established the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission in May 2018.⁸⁸ The Commission will be comprised of various community representatives who will identify burial places, will act as an official body to register historic African American burial places, and will create a plan to preserve and memorialize the sites. On May 18, 2018, LA HCR51 was approved by the Louisiana legislature, creating the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ National Register of Historic Places, Kenner and Kugler Cemeteries Archaeological Dist., Norco, St. Charles, Louisiana, National Register #87001762.; National Register of Historic Places, Star Cemetery, Shreveport, Caddo, Louisiana, National Register #01001478.

⁸⁶ National Register of Historic Places, St. Marks Baptist Church and Ashland Cemetery, Port Allen, West Baton Rouge, Louisiana, National Register #100002116.

⁸⁷ National Register of Historic Places, Williams Cemetery, Lacombe, St. Tammany, Louisiana, National Register #100003028.

⁸⁸ HCR51, Sess. of 2018 (LA 2018).

⁸⁹ HCR51, Sess. of 2018 (LA 2018).

Section B: Cemetery Field Studies:

This study collects ethnographic data through participant observation and condition assessments. The results will include detailed physical descriptions of the places and any other information available at the site concerning its preservation. This data will be analyzed for patterns and cultural meanings concerning the preservation of these cemeteries.

Field Study 1: Silvery Cemetery:

When I arrived at Silvery Cemetery on March 17, 2017, it was obvious the site was likely abandoned. The cemetery was completely overgrown with vegetation and trees, as can be seen in satellite imagery (Figure 4). I could not establish when the cemetery was founded, but its existence on the 1953 U.S. Geological Survey qualifies the site as historic, warranting inclusion in this study.⁹⁰ From a distance, Silvery Cemetery appears to be a random cluster of trees in the middle of an otherwise cultivated and maintained sugar cane field. The boundaries of the cemetery are not demarcated by a fence, nor is there a sign identifying the graveyard. The site is about an eighth of a mile from the nearest paved road. There is no proper entrance to the site; I had to climb over fallen trees and massive piles of mud to enter the cemetery.

Because of the physical condition of the site, with its overgrown vegetation and muddy ground, I had difficulty estimating the number of burials. For the same reason, I could not identify the oldest or the most recent marker in the cemetery. Further investigation revealed four headstones accompanied by four cracked vaults. The four

⁹⁰ Lobdell (1953), U.S. Geological Survey, Lobdell [map] 1:24000, Topographic Quadrangle Map, Reston, VA, 1965, <http://historicalmaps.arcgis.com/usgs/>.

vaults were next to each other with their lids open, having been exposed by vandals. The vegetal overgrowth prevented me from taking any measurements of vaults or tombs. Due to the vegetation issues which prevented access to the rest of the property, it was impossible to count the internment depressions.

There is no recorded caretaker for Silvery Cemetery, and no preservation efforts, such as lawn maintenance or gravestone mending, are evident at this site. The founder of the Westside Cemetery Preservation Association, Debbie Martin, accompanied me to Silvery Cemetery and told me that she had reported the cemetery's geographical location to the Louisiana Division of Archaeology; Martin's report of the site acts as an additional form of site preservation by ensuring a record of the site. The WCPA does not currently have major preservation plans for Silvery Cemetery.

Field Study 2: Poplar Grove Cemetery:

On March 23, 2017, I visited Poplar Grove Cemetery, an abandoned African American cemetery in Port Allen, Louisiana. During my visit to the cemetery, I could not establish when it was founded. To gauge the site's age, I consulted the 1963 U.S. Geological Survey.⁹¹ Poplar Grove Cemetery's existence on this map qualifies the site as historic. The cemetery is named for its association with Poplar Grove Plantation. Today, Poplar Grove Cemetery is located behind a building occupied by the American Radiation Society (Figure 5). The cemetery is about 1.7 acres in size and appears to be an overgrown wooded area in the middle of cleared and cultivated fields (Figure 6 & Figure 7). The approach to the site was littered; gas containers sat outside the wooded threshold

⁹¹ Baton Rouge West (1963), U.S. Geological Survey, Baton Rouge West [map], 1:24000, Topographic Quadrangle Map, Reston, VA, 1964, <http://historicalmaps.arcgis.com/usgs/>.

of the cemetery (Figure 8). Inside the cemetery, a Styrofoam cooler was tangled on vegetation and grave markers (Figure 9). The cemetery is planned, as the remaining grave markers and depressions in the ground are in straight rows. Unmarked burials compose the majority of the cemetery (Figure 10). I estimate that there are over two hundred unmarked burials; however, my estimate does not account for the possibility that multiple burials exist within each of the unmarked graves. Within the area of the cemetery, I was able to count forty permanent markers. About fifteen vaults remain in good condition, with their vaults intact and not covered by vegetation. In the very center of the site there were four concrete vaults, three single-vaults and one double-vault in good condition (Figure 11). Out of these vaults, two featured granite headstones. No markers remained on the south side of the site. Twenty-five of the remaining grave markers and vaults were on the northwest side of site. Very few of the vaults had name placards. All the grave markers prior to the 1980s appeared to be handmade from concrete. The inscriptions on the markers suggested that they were inscribed by someone's finger or a hand-operated tool when the concrete was still wet (Figure 12, 14, 16, and 17). The vaults from the 1980s are marked with granite headstones either on the ground at the head of the vault or on top of the vault (Figure 13).

The dates on the markers indicate that burials at the cemetery continued from 1941 through 1983. However, many graves are unmarked, so I could not identify whether the interments were older or more recent. The oldest of the few graves bearing legible inscriptions dated from 1941. The 4ft x 13.5in x 2in domed tablet headstone read: "CLARA CALVIN BORN FEB 20 1900 DIED AUG 18 1941" (Figure 14). Another grave with the same date of death had a block headstone, measuring 25in x 13in x 7in.

This granite headstone had sawn sides and a polished surface with a machine-cut inscription that read “Clara Dogan Jones Jan 7 1900 Aug 18 1941” (Figure 15). The headstone was laid atop of a 7ft x 3ft x 1ft stone vault. A concrete flower pot, nine inches in circumference and ten inches tall, was attached to the vault. Other headstones looked older but were so sunken in the ground that the dates were not legible. For example, the oldest-looking markers were small tablet-shaped headstones and footstones. Henry Wishation’s headstone looks old, but only stood one foot above the ground (Figure 16). The sunken marker suggests that the grave has been in that location for a long time. Another sunken marker featured a hand-written headstone, 17in x 7in x 9in, and read “ALICE GRIMES DIED [JU]NE 10” (Figure 12). The rest of the marker was too sunken in the ground to read. This section of the marker was observed to have a modern metal rod to support the remaining part of the headstone. Lying seven feet away from the headstone, the footstone, 19in x 10in x 3in, read “At Rest” and contained a piece of glass in the center (Figure 17). Other studies of historic African American cemeteries indicate that reflective items often act as a symbolic grave protections.⁹² The most recent grave I encountered dated to 1984. The burial consisted of a concrete double vault, 3ft x 7ft. On top of the vault, a 3ft x 1.3ft x 4in granite block headstone with a slightly domed top read “DEBORAH B. DOGAN SEPT 10, 1923 OCT 3, 1984 MILTON DOGAN SR. MAY 12, 1912 MAY 3, 1983” (Fig. 16). The WCPA has submitted Poplar Grove Cemetery for registration with the Louisiana Division of Archaeology but there are no current plans for future preservation or maintenance of the site.

⁹² Rainville, *Hidden Histories*, 61.; The Chicora Foundation, Inc., “Grave Matters,” 7.

Field Study 3: Ashland Cemetery:

Ashland Cemetery is a family cemetery established in the late nineteenth century by the Devalls, a prominent African American family in the historic Chamberlin community. In 1919, the family moved away and placed Ashland Cemetery under the care of the local St. Mark's First Baptist Church.⁹³ Ashland Cemetery occupies approximately 1.5 acres (Figure 18). The boundary of the cemetery is demarcated by shrubs that act as a border between neighboring sugar cane fields. When I visited Ashland Cemetery on March 17, 2017, approximately one-third of the cemetery had been cleared of vegetation, and the other two-thirds of the cemetery were overgrown. The site, can be accessed from Deer Lane (Figure 19). From the road, one must walk about fifteen feet until they reach the first row of graves. Approaching the site, one is greeted by two concrete vaults, neither of which are secured to the ground and both without lids (displaced during a hurricane) (Figure 20). A sign nailed to a tree reveals that this place is Ashland Cemetery and it is under the care of the St. Mark Baptist Church.

Halfway into the site, the cemetery begins to follow a pattern of thirty rows of fifteen graves. The first ten rows of graves are overgrown but accessible on foot (Figure 21). At the time of my visit, the remainder of the cemetery was completely overgrown and wooded but could not be safely entered and surveyed (Figure 22). The cemetery holds approximately 450 graves. I estimated this by what I could visually see, including graves that I could not access. This estimate does not account for double burials or unmarked graves. The most recent grave marker that I encountered during my visit was a 1ft x 1ft x 2in granite horizontal slab with sawn edges. The surface of the marker is

⁹³ Appendix B, Condition Assessment 3

polished with a machine-engraved cherub resting its head above the text: “JOSHUA K PARKER JULY 15 1995 AUG 21 1995” (Figure 23). The oldest, and most ornate, grave accessible was a 7ft x 3.5ft x 1.5ft stone vault with a curved top. Stone reliefs of swag decorated the sides of the vault. A two-foot- long slanted face marker reads: “IN MEMORY OF --VIL- DEVALL 1897 [enclosed within a trapezoid-shaped outline] 1951 AT REST” (Figure 24). The cemetery features a variety of markers, both permanent and temporary. An example of a temporary marker is the presence of lilies (Figure 25). Permanent markers include above-ground concrete vaults, domed-tablet headstones, and metal placards.

Past preservation efforts at Ashland Cemetery are demonstrated by the signage denoting the name and cemetery caretaker. One vault has been covered with a plastic tarp as a means of preservation (Figure 28). However, this protection against the elements is not advisable because the tarp can retain water and create a moist environment that may further harm the masonry.⁹⁴ WCPA is not affiliated with this attempt at cemetery preservation.

Over the past year, the Westside Cemetery Preservation Association had been recruiting volunteers and organizing cemetery cleanups. They plan to hold more cleanups to ensure regular maintenance of the landscape. The WCPA was in the process of securing donations from local merchants, corporations, and general public of lawn mowers and other gardening tools to help clear the vegetation. The WCPA hopes to add Ashland Cemetery to the National Register of Historic Places.⁹⁵ Martin has created a

⁹⁴ Striegel, et al, “Preservation Brief 48.”

⁹⁵ Louisiana National Register Review Committee Meeting, “Minutes,” Dec. 14, 2017, https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/nationalregister/meeting_agendas/December142017minutes.pdf.

preservation plan for the site that includes regular and perpetual care, signage and fences, and the creation of a meditation area for descendants to memorialize their loved ones.

Ashland Cemetery is the organization's first official preservation project.

On March 17, 2018, Debbie Martin reported plans to nominate Ashland Cemetery and an associated property, the St. Mark Baptist Church, for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. In December 2017, Ashland Cemetery and the St. Mark Baptist Church were nominated for inclusion in the NRHP. These sites were nominated under Criterion A for their association “with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history” in the areas of “education and ethnic history; black.”⁹⁶ The St. Mark Baptist Church was established in 1867 in West Baton Rouge Parish, surrounded by sugar cane fields. The church was completed in 1877, making it the first church established after the Emancipation Proclamation in the Chamberlin community. The early congregation would have been made up of community members that worked on small plantations—Smithfield, Allendale, Winterville, Orange Grove, and Erwinville—within five miles of the church and cemetery. On February 21, 2018, St. Mark Baptist Church and Ashland Cemetery were listed on the NRHP for their significance during 1877-1967. The official site listing is “St. Mark Baptist Church and Ashland Cemetery.”⁹⁷

Field Study 4: Orange Grove Cemetery:

Adjacent to Ashland Cemetery, Orange Grove Cemetery was founded in the early twentieth century. The site occupies about 1.4 acres within a nearly 1.7 acre lot (Figure

⁹⁶ Louisiana National Register Review Committee Meeting, “Minutes.”

⁹⁷ Louisiana National Register Review Committee Meeting, “Minutes.”

29). A sign identifies the site as Orange Grove Cemetery and establishes that it is under the care of the St. Marks Baptist Church. Unpaved roads of matted grass offer entry into the site. Surrounded by sugar cane fields, Orange Grove is actively maintained (Figure 30). The grass is cut, and the weeds are removed regularly by members of the congregation and volunteers from the WCPA, as well as volunteers from the St. Marks Baptist Church as part of their mission of perpetual care. Unfortunately, approximately one-third of the vaults are broken (Figure 31). The church congregation is elderly and unable to afford the repairs necessary to restore the damaged vaults.

The graves lie in twenty visible rows with twenty-five graves across each row oriented east-west. I counted approximately six hundred graves within this site; however only about one hundred graves have visible markers. Many of the markers are damaged in some way. One vault I encountered had its lid cracked open, allowing a foot of standing water to accumulate inside the 7.75ft x 3ft x 18in vault (Figure 32). No human remains appeared to remain inside the vault. Three shattered 7ft x 3ft stone vaults dating to the 1990s prove that weather damage is not necessarily correlated to age (Figure 31). Two brick vaults were completely shattered, exposing caskets and human remains (Figure 33 & Figure 34).

Lily plants are scattered throughout Orange Grove, mostly growing in spots that appear to be unmarked grave depressions (Figure 35). As documented in other African American cemetery studies, plants are commonly used to mark graves.⁹⁸ The vaults and headstones that appeared to predate the 1980s were too sunken in the ground to reveal their actual dates. I was told by Martin that the oldest visible marker dated to 1936 and

⁹⁸ Chicora Foundation, "Grave Matters," 7.

the most recent grave dated to 2015; however, I could not locate either one. The most recent grave I found was dated to 2005 (Figure 36). Its vault is 5ft x 9ft x 1ft, concrete, and painted white. A granite, slightly domed, block headstone was positioned on the vault. The surface was polished with the inscription “MIKE’ MICHAEL ANTHONY JORDAN ALPHA FEB 25, 1980 OMEGA JULY 11, 2005 BELOVED SON AND BROTHER”. Carved above the inscription was a religious motif of a cross and floral design; the sides of the marker were rock polished.

Field Study 5: Alma Cemetery:

On March 18, 2018, I visited Alma Cemetery in Pointe Coupee, Louisiana during a week- long preservation project led by the WCPA. Alma Cemetery is located on Alma Plantation, an active sugar mill (Figure 37). The cemetery is named for its associated plantation. With the permission and funding provided by the owner of Alma Plantation, David Stewart, the WCPA is currently working to preserve and protect the historic African American cemetery. This funding made it possible to hire Gulf Coast cemetery archaeologist Joseph Yarbrough to perform surveys of the site including mapping and ground penetrating radar. The Westside Cemetery Preservation Association, along with Joseph Yarbrough, consulted death certificates and obituaries to find out more about the individuals interred in the cemetery. The WCPA has found records of three burials of enslaved people dating to the 1830s indicate the earliest burial activity at this site.

The goals for the preservation of Alma Cemetery are to record and document the site for historical records, create a perpetual care plan which includes regular maintenance (e.g., mowing the grass and pulling weeds), and create signage and a place

for visitor meditation. Yarbrough divided his investigation into three phases: data mapping, site mapping, and ground-penetrating radar. I observed the data and site mapping phases on March 18, 2018 (Figure 38). Phase 1 featured the creation of a data map. Yarbrough recorded information about existing tombs and markers, labeling the markers numerically and recording other information, such as inscriptions and decorative motifs. Phase 2 included the creation of a site map. Topographical features were noted including the location of standing burials labeled to represent the appropriate number associated with the data map. Approximately two hundred markers remain standing, yet only 141 are marked with a name. The earliest marker that the WCPA mapped dates to 1905; the newest marker dates to 2018 (Figure 39). The burials are positioned east-west in roughly three rows following for nearly one thousand feet the bend of a small bayou that protrudes into the sugar cane fields. However, as the bayou changes its course to northeast-southwest, the position of the burials follows the water (Figure 40). The bayou is lined by rows of vaults, except for a fifteen-foot span in middle of the cemetery plot that is bereft of permanent markers (Figure 41). Purple lily plants and wildflowers grow in this space (Figure 42). Depressions in the ground suggest that about 60 percent of the burials are unmarked.

To clean the site, WCPA volunteers trimmed overgrown vegetation and removed garbage from the ground (Figure 43). Markers that appeared structurally sound were washed with light water pressure and scrubbed with a soft-bristled brush to remove dirt and bio-growth. Cleaning the site was dangerous. During my visit, an underground wasp nest was disturbed, halting the preservation project until the next day (Figure 45). Approximately three-quarters of the site were cleared when I arrived at the site (Figure

46). The other quarter of the site was overgrown with vegetation (Figure 47). Not all vegetation could be safely removed without harming a burial or marker; for example, a tree had grown in the narrow space between a row of vaults and could not be safely removed without harming the structures, so the tree had to remain (Figure 48). Many of the markers were concrete vaults, typically measuring about 38in x 94in x 24in, and accompanied by tablet- shaped headstones made of concrete or granite. Not every marked burial was aboveground (Figure 49). Wooden crosses, metal placards, pieces of glass, handwritten inscriptions in concrete, and permanent flower pots adorn burials (Figures 50, 51, and 52). Small pieces of plastic flowers litter the cemetery (Figure 53). Many vaults and markers featured damage from past storms (Figure 54). A few gravestones were so close to the lip of the bayou that they looked like they could easily fall into the water. Some burials within three feet of the water appeared to have sunk a few centimeters into the ground. Because these markers have been disturbed by the runoff, it is possible that other burials have been lost to the bayou.

The WCPA's future preservation plans include the use of ground-penetrating radar for Phase 3 of the preservation project. Use of this technology will act as noninvasive means to determine more accurately how many burials are truly present and ascertain the depth of the chambers. I did not observe this survey because it was completed at a later date (April 2018). Additionally, the WCPA was in communication with a documentary film crew that was interested in recording the preservation efforts at Alma Cemetery.

Sepulchral Characteristics, Site Conditions, and Preservation Means

Burials feature temporary markers, permanent markers, and unmarked graves. Permanent markers featured a mix of aboveground concrete vaults, homemade headstones with handwritten inscriptions in concrete, and modern granite commercial-grade headstones. The inscriptions on the headstones were usually brief—name, birth date, and death date. Unmarked burials are common in historic rural African American cemeteries. Although these burials are bereft of permanent markers, depressions in the ground measuring roughly 3ft x 7ft, indicate burials. Occasionally, unmarked burials are indicated by plants.⁹⁹ Purple lilies were visible at all cemeteries, suggesting that lilies are commonly planted at burials in place of a more permanent marker. The Chicora Foundation postulates that the African American emphasis on temporary markers reflects a distinctly African American view that there is always room for another burial.¹⁰⁰ This understanding of a graveyard differs from that of a white cemetery where the site is viewed in terms of “a finite number of square feet.”¹⁰¹ However, in his 1987 study of Louisiana cemeteries, “The Cemetery as a Cultural Manifestation: Louisiana Necrogeography,” Tadashi Nakagawa argues that differences between white and black sepulchral culture exist only because of the traditionally lower economic status of African Americans in Louisiana.¹⁰²

Damaged permanent markers were visible at every cemetery. Most damage appeared to be a result of past floods, tropical storms, and hurricanes. Overgrown vegetation, as seen at Alma Cemetery, Ashland Cemetery, Poplar Grove Cemetery, and

⁹⁹ The Chicora Foundation, Inc., “Grave Matters,” 10.

¹⁰⁰ The Chicora Foundation, Inc., “Grave Matters,” 10.

¹⁰¹ The Chicora Foundation, Inc., “Grave Matters,” 10.

¹⁰² Nakagawa, “The Cemetery as a Cultural Manifestation: Louisiana Necrogeography.”

Silvery Cemetery, is the most significant indication that a cemetery is neglected. Neglect indicates poor condition; abandonment indicates an absence of a caretaker. Poplar Grove Cemetery and Silvery Cemetery are abandoned. Alma Cemetery, Ashland Cemetery, and Orange Grove Cemetery were at one point neglected, but never abandoned.

This study found that there is a distinction between a cemetery that is neglected and one that is abandoned. Some cemeteries are not actually abandoned but remain in the same condition of neglect as abandoned cemeteries for similar reasons. The condition of Orange Grove Cemetery in comparison with the condition of Ashland Cemetery reveals that the two sites suffer neglect for the same reasons: the contraction of the historic African American community and limited economic resources. The distinction between historic and modern cemetery made little difference in the general condition of neglect. Historic, modern, active, and nonactive cemeteries with known caretakers all suffer the same effects of decreased local population, weak preservation legislation, and severe weather. Even when cemeteries are active, and successfully preserved and maintained after years of abandonment, they require continuous care to protect grave markers from damage and decay. To ensure the cemetery does not fall back into disrepair, perpetual care must be established.

This study concluded that sites with organized community and landowner involvement, like Ashland, Orange Grove, and Alma cemeteries, are more successfully preserved. For this reason, the WCPA was formed in 2017 as a response to widespread cemetery dereliction in West Baton Rouge Parish. Because the WCPA was in communication with the landowners of Alma Cemetery and Ashland Cemetery, they were able to perform preservation work at each site. Volunteers led the site cleaning and

maintenance at Ashland and Orange Grove Cemetery. The WCPA mobilizes volunteers through their social media posts. The WCPA was not in contact with the owners of Silvery Cemetery and Poplar Grove cemetery so the sites were only reported to the Louisiana Division of Archaeology. The extent of the preservation efforts at each cemetery was dependent upon the resources available to caretakers.

Resource Availability

While all the cemeteries in this study have suffered from a past of neglect and severe weather, each cemetery's preservation methods varied because of the availability of resources. In addition to legislation and site conservation, these resources include financial funding and community support. The locations of Poplar Grove Cemetery and Silvery Cemetery were reported to the Louisiana Division of Archaeology. However, without an organized preservation plan, funding, or greater stakeholder participation, no further preservation is planned.

The owners of Ashland Cemetery, Orange Grove Cemetery, and Alma Cemetery have been working collaboratively with the WCPA to clean, research, and preserve the cemeteries. While Ashland Cemetery has been included in the National Register of Historic Places, further physical preservation at the site is halted because of limited funding. Debbie Martin, founder of the WCPA, spoke to local officials about the possibility of arranging a perpetual care plan for the cemeteries, with the care being sourced from local prisoners. However, to utilize this prison program, the preservation association must provide seated lawnmowers, push mowers, and other landscaping tools for the inmates to use. The WCPA maintains that a grant or large donation must be

secured to purchase the supplies. The Alma Plantation is an exception to this trend of limited funding. Private funding has facilitated comprehensive investigation of Alma Cemetery, allowing for the hire of a professional archaeologist, and the use of sophisticated technology like ground-penetrating radar. Community participation facilitates the preservation of cemeteries.

This study observed accelerated preservation efforts when landowners and preservation organization worked collaboratively. Severe weather hastens the urgency for immediate identification and documentation of cemeteries. Availability of funding dictated the type of preservation methods administered (or not administered). The dereliction of the cemeteries demonstrates that legal protections for cemeteries are insufficient. Chapter 3 will analyze these themes to further delineate the complexities that surround the preservation of historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana.

Chapter 3: Resource Limitations on Cemetery Preservation

Factors that influence cemetery preservation include damage from severe weather and resource limitations, including time, availability of funding, community participation, and protective preservation legislation. While all locations were impacted by severe weather, they experienced different levels of access to resources. The availability of resources directly influenced the site's ability to tackle cemetery maintenance and preservation projects. This chapter discusses how time, money, community participation, and the existing cemetery preservation system facilitated by the government influence cemetery preservation.

The literature on historic cemeteries notes that historic preservation programming is typically limited for cemeteries.¹⁰³ These sites are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, but as Rainville illuminates, struggle to find inclusion. However, Rainville's 2014 comment may soon be out of date. This past year witnessed the representation of historic African American cemeteries double. Prior to 2018, only two Louisiana cemeteries were listed for their significance to African American culture.

In 2018, two historic African American cemeteries in Louisiana were added to the NRHP: Ashland Cemetery in West Baton Rouge and Williams Cemetery in St. Tammany. For 16 years, the NRHP did not see an addition of African American cemeteries. By counting the number of African American cemeteries listed in the NRHP, this study demonstrates a positive trend supporting greater representation and preservation of these sites.

Less than a year after I visited Ashland Cemetery, it was added to the NRHP. The

¹⁰³ Seidemann and Moss, "Places Worth Saving."

inclusion of Ashland in the NRHP may have been accelerated because in 2018 the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office gave priority to historic sites in West Baton Rouge.¹⁰⁴ Cemeteries are more likely to be included in the NRHP if the burial ground is associated with a significant historic architectural structure. For this reason, Ashland Cemetery may have had a better chance to be approved for NRHP listing because it was listed with a historic architectural structure, the St. Mark Baptist Church. A review of the National Register reveals Ashland Cemetery is the third cemetery in Louisiana to be included in the NRHP for its significance to African American history. The sparse representation of African American cemeteries in Louisiana on the NRHP indicates that in the past inclusion has been difficult to attain, but the recent inclusion of Ashland Cemetery and Williams Cemetery supports a growing recognition for the preservation of these sites at a speed not seen before. Greater inclusion of African American sites broadens the constructs of heritage and allows for public understanding of the site's cultural importance.¹⁰⁵

This research witnessed another positive step towards greater research, preservation, and reverence of African American cemeteries, with the creation of the Ancestral Slavery Burial Grounds Preservation Commission. When damage occurs to a cemetery, descendants often look to the government to repair the destruction. However, neither the Louisiana Cemetery Board nor the Division of Archaeology “nor any other government entity for that matter, has the authority or wherewithal to repair damaged or

¹⁰⁴ Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, “National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund Grants,” [crt.state.la.us](https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/historic-preservation/grants/national-park-service-historic-preservation-fund-grants/index), n.d., <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/historic-preservation/grants/national-park-service-historic-preservation-fund-grants/index>.

¹⁰⁵ Rainville, *Hidden Histories*, 136.

vandalized cemeteries.”¹⁰⁶ To solve this lack of cemetery preservation leadership, the Slavery Ancestral Burials Preservation Commission Act serves as the official government entity with the authority to repair historic African American cemeteries throughout the state. The widespread dereliction of rural African American cemeteries and lack of comprehensive cemetery preservation legislation influenced the passage of Louisiana HCR 51, creating The Slavery Ancestral Burials Preservation Commission. In the creation and implementation of Louisiana HCR 51, members of the community, including preservation professionals, politicians, descendants, historians, and local citizens came together to support new protective cemetery preservation legislation.¹⁰⁷ On May 18, 2018, the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission was created to study and develop measures to preserve and protect unmarked historic burial grounds, graves, and cemeteries of the formerly enslaved in Louisiana. This is the first legislation in Louisiana specifically dedicated to the preservation of historic African American cemeteries. The Slavery Ancestral Burials Preservation Commission acts as an official place to report historic African American cemeteries in Louisiana to ensure that a record of these places exists. The Commission is intended to provide official guidance on matters of proper preservation for these sites and acts as a stepping stone toward greater preservation and protection of historic African American cemeteries in Louisiana. Supporters of the Commission hope this legislation will be the first step toward the creation of a federal law similar to the NAGPRA.¹⁰⁸

The Ancestral Slavery Burial Grounds Commission comes at an important time

¹⁰⁶ Seidemann and Moss, “Places Worth Saving,” 497.

¹⁰⁷ HCR51, Sess. of 2018 (LA 2018).

¹⁰⁸ Native American Graves Protection Act, 25 U.S.C.S. § 3001 (1991).

for preservation in Louisiana. Now is the time to identify and document historic African American cemeteries before they experience further damage and fade from community memory. The Commission demonstrates the state's recognition of these important cultural resource and acts as a foundation for positive change in the condition and documentation of these cemeteries. With support from the greater community, the Commission can be successful. As demonstrated in this study and mentioned in existing Louisiana-focused cemetery preservation literature, past historic cemetery preservation legislation has been unsuccessful due to a lack of funding.¹⁰⁹ Funding is often difficult to secure for cemetery preservation, even with state support. For example, in 2010, the Louisiana state legislature created the Louisiana Historic Preservation Program and Trust Fund to help identify and preserve burial grounds statewide. However, a year later, no monies were dedicated to the fund and no board members were appointed to the committee.¹¹⁰ The Commission is still too new to determine its' strength. Currently, legislation alone is not comprehensive enough to fully preserve a cemetery.

Cemetery preservation legislation has seemingly failed in the past and rural historic African American cemeteries are generally unsuccessful in attaining funding for preservation from state and federal preservation programs. State and federal legislation prohibit the redevelopment of cemeteries which, at least to some degree, ensures that neglected cemeteries are not destroyed by human means.¹¹¹ Yet the poor conditions of cemeteries observed in these case studies demonstrate the failure of past cemetery

¹⁰⁹ Seidemann and Moss, "Places Worth Saving," 514.

¹¹⁰ Louisiana Historic Preservation Program and Trust Fund, LA RS 25:940 (2010).

¹¹¹ The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 54 U.S.C. § 300101 *et seq.*; The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, 42 U.S.C. § 4321 *et seq.*; LA. STAT. ANN. § 14:101 (2011).; LA Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation Act (1991).; LA Historic Cemetery Preservation Act (2010).

legislation to safeguard those interred. While these case studies observed preservationists report sites to the Louisiana Division of Archaeology and achieve the listing of a cemetery in the National Register of Historic Places, and will be represented on official documents, they nevertheless do not guarantee immediate or any protection unless community involvement actively safeguards these cemeteries. Recognizing this, Louisiana HCR 51 framed the bill to not ask for funding from the government. As this study has seen, however, a lack of funding typically limits preservation, so this may be problematic. The Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Commission must seek no- cost or low-cost methods of preservation, like support from the greater community and resources from outside the state, in order to be successful. The creation of an organized preservation commission has the potential to mobilize cemetery preservation efforts throughout the state.

In Louisiana, previous state preservation plans were unsuccessful because of budget cuts in 2011 and 2014.¹¹² Unfortunately, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office (LA SHPO) expects more budget cuts in the future. To combat the lack of funding for state-run programs, the LA SHPO calls for the expansion and establishment of preservation partnerships with “cultural resource management firms, non-profit organizations, universities and colleges.”¹¹³ The LA SHPO further explains that cemetery preservation is “a local and state issue that requires a group of dedicated individuals and funding that is often difficult to secure as many organizations and municipalities try to do more with less.”¹¹⁴ The state has made it clear that it does not have funding for many

¹¹² Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, “Ingredients for Preservation Partnerships,” 40.

¹¹³ Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, “Ingredients for Preservation Partnerships,” 35.

¹¹⁴ Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, “Ingredients for Preservation Partnerships,” 19.

preservation projects in general.¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, this study proved that comprehensive cemetery preservation needs monetary funding.

As the LA SHPO continues to cut its budget, the successful preservation of historic rural African American cemeteries relies on the preservation efforts of non-profit community organizations and individuals outside of the government. This study found that community involvement, particularly in the form of preservation organization and landowner collaboration, influences cemetery preservation. Positive preservation results were seen only when the landowner was involved in the project. Preservation requires patience, persistence, and a financially-sustainable organization. The creation of an organized community preservation group mobilizes preservation movements. At Ashland Cemetery and Orange Grove Cemetery, volunteers associated with the Westside Cemetery Preservation Association (WCPA) maintain the cemeteries. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the preservation and rededication of the Brusly and Monroe Plantation Cemeteries was accomplished with the creation of associated preservation organizations. Similarly, West Baton Rouge Parish and Pointe Coupee Parish can look to the leadership and example of other organized preservation groups that have successfully preserved historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana.

In these cases, preservation was accomplished with the support and cooperation of the descendant community, the landowner and a preservation organization. While preservation can be accomplished without landowner support, this study witnessed more comprehensive preservation methods associated with the participation of the landowner. The sites bereft of landowner participation experienced minimal preservation effort--

¹¹⁵ Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, "Ingredients for Preservation Partnerships," 40.

only being reported to the LA Division of Archaeology by a preservation organization. The WCPA hopes that in the future they can care for Silvery Cemetery and Poplar Grove Cemetery, but they do not have the resources to focus on these sites in addition to the sites they already care for: Ashland Cemetery, Alma Cemetery, and Orange Grove Cemetery. Unfortunately, preservation organizations alone do not have the means to preserve all neglected cemeteries in the region.

Clearly, cemetery preservation must start with living people and recruiting concerned community members to raise funds—as well as do the physical work of cemetery preservation. But recruiting volunteers for cemetery maintenance can be challenging. Grounds maintenance is physically tiring, and it may be difficult to get volunteers from an elderly community to regularly labor outside; this was the case for Ashland and Orange Grove Cemeteries. Volunteers from WCPA provide site maintenance by regularly mowing the lawns at both cemeteries. The case studies from West Baton Rouge and Pointe Coupee demonstrate successful cemetery preservation when through the collaboration of landowner with volunteers from local communities and non-profit organizations. However, it can be difficult to maintain a steady stream of volunteers to do regular maintenance and funds may not be available to hire professional grounds maintenance.

In southeast Louisiana, time is a particularly critical factor because of the unpredictable nature of severe storms on a seasonal basis. As stated in numerous reports, scientists predict that storms will become more severe as the coastal region experiences subsidence and sea level rise.¹¹⁶ While outdoor sites are always at the mercy of the

¹¹⁶ Barnes, et al., “Economic Evaluation of Coastal Land Loss in Louisiana.”; Schexnayder and Manhein, *Fragile Grounds*; Marshall, B., Jacobs, B., and Shaw, A., “Losing Ground.”

weather, those working to preserve historic cemeteries in Louisiana recognize an increased urgency to document sites before a storm strikes. Places that lack an existing record are in greatest need for site documentation. In order to measure damage or preservation, there first needs to be means for comparison. Sites lacking a record are most at risk to deterioration because without a record, any future damage or preservation cannot be measured. Neglect of a site will cause its eventual destruction, but even well-maintained sites can be damaged or destroyed by storms.

Damage to interments by severe weather was observed at each cemetery visited. At Ashland Cemetery, empty vaults were strewn across the cemetery in positions that did not look intentional. These vaults were probably dislocated during a hurricane. The destruction caused by the storms can sometimes be irreparable because interments can be physically lost. Documentation of a site prior to a storm can preserve a record of the site if an emergency occurs. At every cemetery visited in this study, funding did not allow for repair of masonry.

While many preservationists and community members wish to conserve cemeteries, the primary limitation for cemetery preservation is the availability of funding. Just as Ryan Seidemann and Rachel Moss suggest, historic cemetery preservation is often hindered by the difficulty of securing funding for costly repairs.¹¹⁷ These repairs may include professional fees, cleaning supplies, and material replacement or conservation.¹¹⁸ Funding facilitates the documentation and maintenance of a cemetery. These cemeteries utilized low-cost methods of cemetery preservation like, basic site documentation and

¹¹⁷ Seidemann and Moss, "Places Worth Saving," 514.

¹¹⁸ The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Prince George's County, Maryland, Cemetery Preservation Manual*, 15.

cleaning, the service of volunteers, and National Register nomination. Funding dictates whether volunteers need to be recruited or if a cleaning crew might be hired. As seen at Alma Cemetery, a larger budget allowed for the hiring of a professional archaeologist and allowed for more sophisticated use of mapping technologies. Because the landowner provided funding for the preservation efforts of Alma Cemetery, the site's documentation and cleaning was swifter and more comprehensive than the preservation of Ashland Cemetery. Silvery and Poplar Grove cemeteries did not have funding for their preservation, so preservation was limited to reporting of the site to the state. Ashland Cemetery and Orange Grove Cemetery have received little funding, but funds have been used to acquire gardening tools.

An analysis of historic preservation legislation and the conditions of five rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana reveals that severe weather, funding, community involvement, and comprehensive cemetery preservation legislation directly impact the methods of preservation administered at a site. Severe weather directly contributes to current damage of physical burial markers, increasing the urgency for documentation of cemeteries in southeast Louisiana. Funding directly affects the type(s) of preservation method administered at a site. Cemetery preservation is most effective when there is collaboration between the landowner of the cemetery and a preservation organization. Weak cemetery preservation legislation manifests in the dereliction and degradation of cemeteries. Through the creation of new legislation and the inclusion of Ashland Cemetery in the NRHP, 2018 proved to be a prolific year for the increased preservation of historic African American cemeteries in Louisiana. Growing interest and advances for historic cemetery preservation are reversing cemetery demise. Considering

these influences to preservation, Chapter 4 next cogitates recommendations for the preservation of historic African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana.

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana are preserved through various methods dependent upon the resources available to the site. Because funding is limited for cemetery preservation, community collaboration and support is the most driving element in all successful preservation actions. Notably, the collaboration of preservation organizations with landowners accelerates cemetery preservation. With support from local preservation organizations, politicians, descendants, genealogists, landowners, historians, preservation professionals, and nonprofessionals, historic cemetery preservation can be accomplished through physical site documentation and maintenance, community involvement, and the creation of more comprehensive cemetery preservation legislation.

To combat the further loss of African American history and cemeteries, this study recommends the following for future preservation: (1) immediate action be taken to comprehensively document cemeteries, (2) promote cemetery preservation through an online media presence, (3) establish perpetual care procedures, and (4) increase landowner participation by incentivizing historic tax credits.

Recommendation 1: Immediate action be taken to identify and comprehensively document cemeteries

This study recommends that the identification of historic rural African American cemeteries be prioritized. These sites should be documented as soon as possible because of the increased risk of severe weather in southeast Louisiana. Because laws protect cemeteries from being disturbed even while their surroundings change, communities may

be reluctant to document complicated sites involving decay and neglect. In southeast Louisiana, severe storms physically destroy cemeteries, sometimes carrying coffins and remains miles from their intended final resting place. Without comprehensive documentation of these sites, historic African American cemeteries are at risk of being forgotten, and may at a future point disappear from community memory. As demonstrated by cemetery archaeologist Joseph Yarbrough, mapping of the location and inscriptions of the interments ensures a record of the burials.

While not administered in the cemeteries visited in this study, future preservation of cemeteries could benefit from Schexnayder and Manhein's method of perimeter mapping, which ensures a record of the entire location.¹¹⁹ Because the physical infrastructure of the cemetery is threatened, the creation of a condition survey is recommended as initial documentation of the site. A condition survey acts as the foundation for long-term conservation and as a basis of comparison for future surveys of the site. Condition surveys should record all visual elements of the landscape. Surveyors must record both sketches and photographs of the site. The sketches should include accurate drawings on the features within the site, especially noting measurements and details of funerary goods, depressions in the ground, and the site's perimeter. The condition survey's intended audience is genealogists, historians, and researchers. The survey provides insight into understanding the site at a certain point in time.

After the initial survey, the site should be cleaned and surveyed again. To reveal the condition of underlying structures, plant growth should be removed with caution as it can be harmful to the structure and to the person conducting the removal. Workers and

¹¹⁹ Schexnayder and Manhein, *Fragile Grounds*.

volunteers should be mindful not to remove burial plants, like lilies, because they may mark a burial. A hundred years of dirt and bio-growth can be removed from stone markers with a little elbow grease, a bristled brush, D2 Biological Cleaner, and a small amount of water pressure.¹²⁰ While removing plant growth or cleaning gravestones, preservationists should be mindful of pressing too hard against the markers because they could break or fall. Similarly, grave rubbings should be prohibited because the pressure damages markers.

The cleaned site should be documented through photographs and sketches of the site and record physical elements geographically. Cleaned gravestones may reveal interment information not found in previous research. New information based on information from headstones must be researched, beginning with death certificates and obituaries. As noted in the National Park Service's "Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places": "In cases where written documentation is not available, studies of a cemetery may reveal important information about an area... because [no recorded] information... can be obtained."¹²¹ If funding allows, other methods of site mapping should be used like GPR and remote sensor technology. Other more expensive (and skilled) methods like archaeological surveys may reveal more information about the historical site. However, this type of surveying is not ethical without proper consultation with the landowner, local historic preservation agencies, and the descendent community. Ideally, the project would integrate geospatial technologies with the primary resource-driven project to increase access for future research potential.

¹²⁰ Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation and the Shreveport Downtown Development Authority, "Demonstration Class: Cleaning Historic Headstones."

¹²¹ Potter and Boland, "Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places," 14.

Recommendation 2: Promote historic preservation through an online media presence

An online media presence encourages the preservation of historic rural African American cemeteries. By utilizing an online presence, both preservation professionals and nonprofessionals can increase visibility, spread awareness, and recruit support for local preservation projects. This study recommends that the online media is utilized in two ways: (1) that cemetery preservation organizations and those affiliated use social media to facilitate civic engagement and collective action and (2) that the government-sponsor the creation of an online registry, similar to the NRHP's database, to standardize public access to information about the cemeteries.

Social media's democratizing nature allows for the quick and easy organization of advocacy groups.¹²² Publicly accessible online pages provide forums to increase awareness of the dereliction of cemeteries. The use of social media helps inform and recruit local citizens, as well as individuals farther away. When I interviewed Debbie Martin, she noted that the creation of the WCPA Facebook page has allowed for the mobilization of her local preservation movement.¹²³ Additionally, the creation of GoFundMe and AmazonSmile accounts has allowed the WCPA's work to gain momentum through digital support. The online presence allowed the WCPA to acquire tools for site maintenance and recruit volunteers. In addition to social media, local newspapers, like the *Advocate*, are available online. This allows for news to travel across the country at a faster rate than ever before. I had learned about the WCPA's struggle in Louisiana while I was in graduate cemetery heritage seminar at Rutgers University in

¹²² Obar, Zube, and Lampe, "Advocacy 2.0: An analysis of how advocacy groups in the United States perceive and use social media tools for facilitating civic engagement and collective action."

¹²³ Martin, D., "Westside Cemetery Preservation Association," Facebook.

New Jersey. Because the *Advocate* article provided a link to the WCPA's Facebook page, I was able to connect with the non-profit organization from over 1,000 miles away.¹²⁴ As digital venues continue to expand, the preservation of historic cemeteries can be accelerated through the internet.

To promote greater identification of cemeteries and access to associated information, government sponsored preservation organizations, like the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission and the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, should collaborate to create an online registry of historic African American cemeteries. Since the LA SHPO reported that the public feels cemeteries are most in need of preservation, partnering with the Slavery Ancestral Burial Commission will allow the LA SHPO to address the public's concern and reach its goal of building new ways to identify and protect historic properties as well as its goal to create and expand preservation programs.¹²⁵ To preserve records of historic cemeteries, all information concerning the sites should be shared through the creation of an online database. Ideally, this database would be sponsored by the Ancestral Slavery Burial Grounds Commission and the LA SHPO. The association with the state government legitimizes the registry. As the Commission develops its preservation plan, it should consider the creation of a single online collection of all historic African American cemeteries in Louisiana. The Commission should create a system that allows for the public to submit the location of cemeteries and any associated information to the Commission for review, similar to how one might apply for the NRHP. Documentation, especially utilizing oral histories and

¹²⁴ Jones, T., "Research Maps Hidden Graveyards."; Martin, D., "Westside Cemetery Preservation Association," Facebook.

¹²⁵ Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, "Ingredients for Preservation Partnerships," 38.

aerial photographs, helps protect the memory of the space.

Once submissions are accepted, the shared information concerning the location, history, and details of the graveyard should be publicly accessible via an online database. Instead of having to physically go to the location of the abandoned cemetery, use of digital media promotes the democratization, security, and standardization of information. Sites in this database should never be de-listed. Listing in the database should act similarly to a protective easement for a historic property. A protective easement, as defined by the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation, “protects historic features, requires continued maintenance, establishes a review process, and protects in perpetuity.”¹²⁶ The digital nature of the information ensures that the site is not forgotten and may be preserved no matter what damage may occur in the future. The cemeteries listed in the new database must receive perpetual care.

Recommendation 3: Establish Perpetual Care Procedures

This study recommends that the Commission collaborate with the LA SHPO to establish perpetual care procedures for the sites listed in the database. The perpetual care plan must first include the creation of the registry for the historic cemeteries, which allows for submissions to be reviewed by the Commission. While the database is modeled on the NRHP, listing in this new database must provide physical protection in the form of perpetual care. The Commission and the LA SHPO should develop general standards for preservation and maintenance of these sites. To create perpetual care funds,

¹²⁶ Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation, “Making the Most of Your Historic Building,” Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, 2016, https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/grants/NPShistoricfunding-2016/FY16-17Deliverables/Making%20the%20Most%20of%20Your%20Historic%20Building_Baton%20Rouge.pdf.

the organizations involved in the preservation efforts should orchestrate fundraisers within their local communities. To establish perpetual care, the LA SHPO and the Commission must reach out to the greater community to recruit volunteers. Until enough volunteers can be organized for regular maintenance of all historic African American cemeteries, preservation efforts should prioritize sites based on degree of deterioration and proximity of coast/water sources. To establish perpetual care, preservation organizations must seek support from the entire community.

Cemetery maintenance requires the on-going work of many individuals. To establish perpetual care, preservation efforts must increase stakeholder participation. By attending community events and utilizing social media, preservation organizations can enlist the support of students, service organizations, descendant communities, businesses, and landowners. Local preservation organizations must publicize cemetery clean-up events as service hour opportunities to those in schools and service organizations. To gain more support for the preservation of these cemeteries and to ensure the proper means of preservation is administered at the sites, landowners and preservation organizations should seek greater consultation with the descendant community. Reaching out to the descendant community ensures that preservation can be accomplished in the most respectful and culturally appropriate manner.

Preservation organizations must prioritize gaining the support of businesses that have inherited a historic cemetery. Not only does the participation of local businesses encourages good community relations, but it fosters a good reputation for the participating businesses and improves employee morale.¹²⁷ For example, the successful

¹²⁷ Porter and Kramer, "Strategy and Society: The Link Between Competitive Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility."

preservation and rededication of the Brusly and Monroe cemeteries on property belonging the Shell Covert Refinery encouraged goodwill between the company and the local community. Businesses with historic cemeteries on their property must seek to follow Shell's example. Because businesses often avoid the cemeteries outright, preservation organizations should proactively reach out to these businesses to help establish a preservation plan. For example, to support the preservation of Poplar Grove Cemetery, the WCPA should seek support from the businesses that physically surround, like the American Radiation Society, the owner of the Poplar Grove Plantation, and the National Register listed historic house associated with the Poplar Grove Plantation.¹²⁸

Because funding and volunteers can be difficult to acquire, cemetery preservation groups in Louisiana should work with the local government to develop a perpetual care program that utilizes prison inmates to clean the abandoned cemeteries weekly. If this avenue is explored, inmates must be true volunteers or they must be paid a full wage when cleaning the cemeteries. In Louisiana, past efforts of trustees have been utilized to clean historic African American cemeteries. Louisiana cemetery law maintains that any state or local political subdivision are eligible to use prison labor to clean abandoned cemeteries so long as the subdivision reimburse "any cost incurred by the prison labor."¹²⁹ In 2015, one of the oldest African American cemeteries in Baton Rouge, Sweet Olive Cemetery, benefited from the work of trustees.¹³⁰ These men from the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison provided lawn maintenance and gave respect to those interred at the

¹²⁸ Sam Irwin, "Grower Profile: Mitchel Ourso, White Castle Farmer, Iberville Politician," American Sugar Cane League, <http://www.amscl.org/sugar-news-archives/Mitchel-Ourso-1>.; "Poplar Grove Plantation House," [poplargroveplantation.com](http://www.poplargroveplantation.com), n.d. <http://www.poplargroveplantation.com/home.html>.

¹²⁹ LA R.S. § 8:411-418, <http://www.lcb.state.la.us/legal/lca2018.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Rick Portier, "Taming the Jungle That Has Claimed Sweet Olive Cemetery," *WAFB*, Nov. 2, 2015, www.wafb.com/story/30414565/taming-the-jungle-that-has-claimed-sweet-olive-cemetery.

Sweet Olive Cemetery. While the use of inmate labor may be controversial, it could potentially provide a viable labor force for perpetual care.

Recommendation 4: Increase landowner participation by extending the State and Federal Historic Tax Incentive Program to businesses that have inherited cemeteries

The most successful cemetery preservation efforts observed in this study are accompanied by landowner support and involvement. It is common for landowners to be businesses. For example, Alma Cemetery is located on a working sugar plantation-- a business. The LA SHPO should consider offering tax incentives to landowners of historic cemeteries just as landowners of historic buildings are encouraged to maintain those structures with tax incentives, similar to the State and Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Programs. Established in 1976, the Historic Tax Credit provides income producing property developers a 20% tax credit to ease the burden of the cost associated with the rehabilitation of historic buildings.¹³¹ The historic tax credit is the most effective historic preservation program that is offered by the government.¹³² To increase landowner involvement in preservation projects, this study recommends that Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program be extended to the businesses that have inherited historic cemeteries.

The NPS boasts that the historic tax credit program has not only rehabilitated over 42,000 properties but also generated jobs. The extension of this program to businesses that have inherited historic cemeteries could stimulate similar results. Tax credits could

¹³¹ National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, "Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit (Historic Tax Credit)," <http://ncshpo.org/issues/historic-tax-credit/>.

¹³² Technical Preservation Services, "Federal Tax Incentive for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings", 1.

allow businesses the necessary funds to hire preservation professionals to create preservation plans as well as document and research sites. Tax incentives could allow for businesses to purchase lawn mowers and other equipment needed for regular maintenance of the cemetery. These sites require continuous care; historic tax credits allow for the hire of landscaping professionals in perpetuity. In Louisiana, the Commission should prescribe standards for proper modes of maintenance by businesses that qualify for the tax credit. A representative from the Commission or the LA SHPO should physically visit the cemetery yearly to ensure that the qualifying business is properly maintaining the site.

In Louisiana, the unpredictability of severe storms heightens the urgency for site documentation. Without protection and surveillance, abandoned cemeteries are at the mercy of nature, vandalism, and grave robbers, but with increased community participation and strengthened cemetery preservation programs cemeteries can be preserved and memorialized in perpetuity. An online media presence can facilitate the quick mobilization of volunteers to perform cemetery preservation and maintenance. Similarly, the Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission in Commission and the LA SHPO must sponsor the creation of an online historic cemetery registry. Submissions to the cemetery registry must be reviewed and approved by the Commission. Listing in the database must warrant perpetual care. Preservation organizations must collaborate with the local community to gain support and increase awareness of these cemeteries. Landowner participation is the most driving factor for successful cemetery preservation. However, funding is a major limiting factor for cemetery preservation; a historic tax credit can offset some of the costs associated with

preservation. Extending the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Program to businesses that have inherited historic cemeteries spreads goodwill within the community, allows for the preservation cemeteries, and creates jobs. With the support of the entire community, perpetual care can be established.

This study calls for the immediate identification and documentation of cemeteries. To combat insufficient preservation legislation, this study recommends the expansion of government preservation programs. The LA SHPO and the Commission should collaborate to create an online registry of cemeteries and establish perpetual care procedures. Regular maintenance volunteers from the local community or prison can be recruited to administer regular cemetery maintenance. State and federal historic tax credit programs must be expanded to include cemeteries. The expansion of the historic tax credit program will increase landowner participation and provide funding needed to start preservation efforts. Preservation organizations should increase their use of social media to mobilize cemetery preservation efforts.

Conclusion

The mobilization of grassroots preservation efforts and the utilization and creation of historic preservation legislation combats the widespread neglect of historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana. This study identifies the National Register to be the most influential federal preservation program to a historic cemetery. Greater inclusion of African American sites on the NRHP broadens the understanding of heritage among public perception. The creation of Louisiana's Slavery Ancestral Burial Grounds Preservation Commission reflects positively for the

future preservation of historic African American cemeteries. The investigation and analysis of Silvery Cemetery, Poplar Grove Cemetery, Ashland Cemetery, and Orange Grove Cemetery in West Baton Rouge Parish, and Alma Cemetery in Pointe Coupee Parish, reveal cemetery preservation methods are influenced by the effects of severe weather and the availability of preservation resources. Preservation resources include comprehensive cemetery preservation legislation, funding, and community support. The greatest influence of cemetery preservation is landowner involvement. This study has witnessed the successful actions of individuals and organizations to preserve historic rural African American cemeteries through physical site documentation and maintenance, the creation of more comprehensive legislation, and community outreach. With the continued support of the community, historic rural African American cemeteries in southeast Louisiana may be comprehensively preserved and memorialized.

Appendix A: Illustrations



Figure 1. Map of study region (Louisiana Regional Folklife Program, <https://folklife.nsula.edu/regions/Region4.html>).

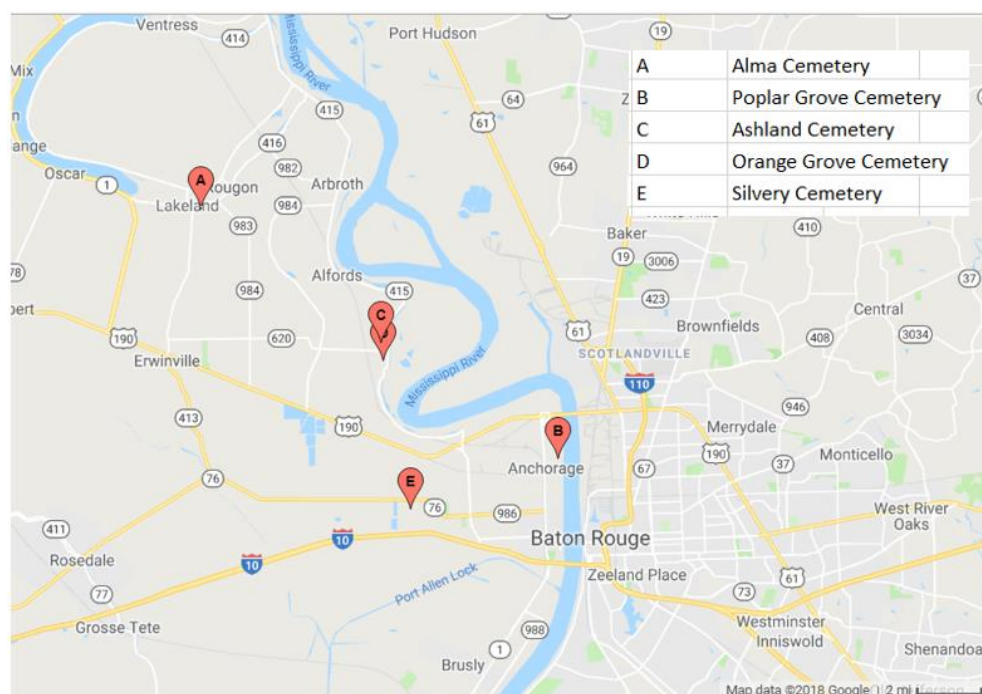


Figure 2. Map highlighting location of case studies (Batchgeo, <https://batchgeo.com/map/93f4d2e1c85340ae49ff93137fc20835>).

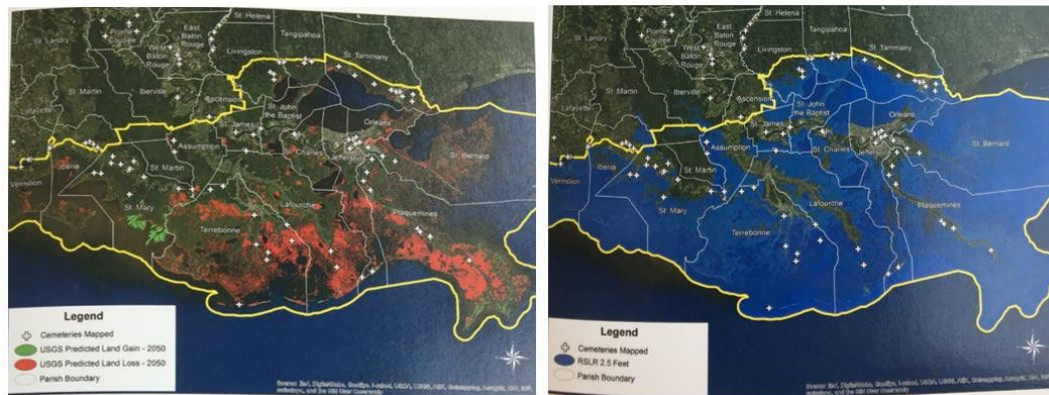


Figure 3. (Left) Southeastern Louisiana cemeteries affected by predicted land loss through 2050; (Right) Southeastern Louisiana cemeteries which will be inundated by a projected relative sea level rise of 2.5. feet (Schexnayder and Manhein. *Fragile Grounds*, 125).

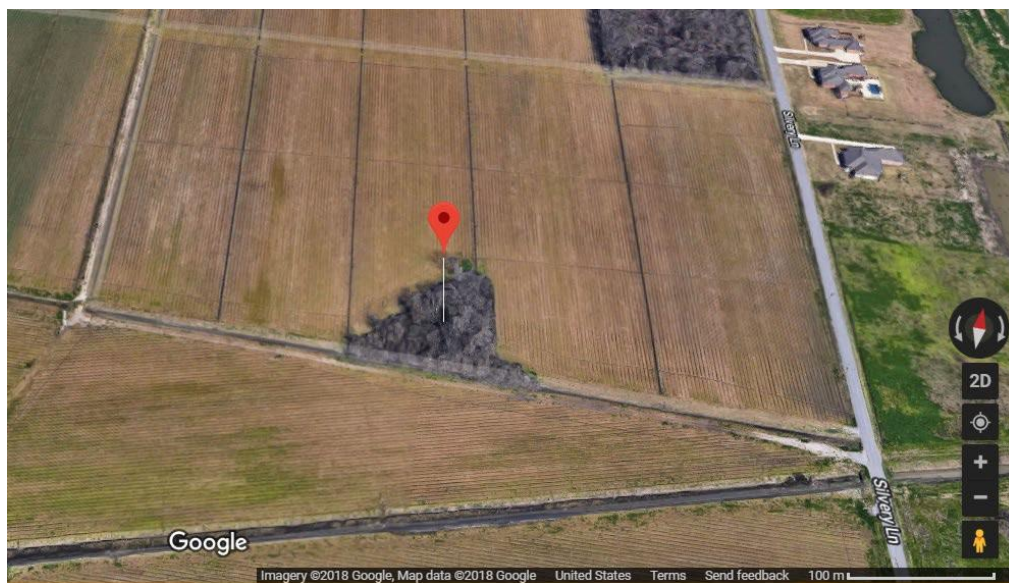


Figure 4. Aerial of Silvery Cemetery (Google Maps 2018, www.googlemaps.com)

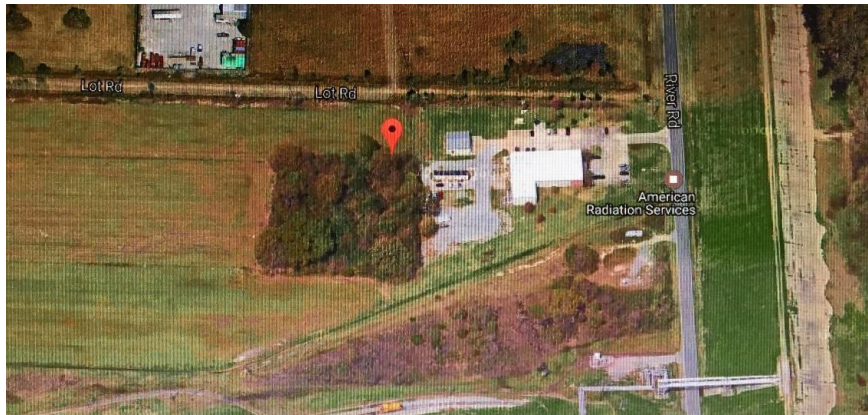


Figure 5. Aerial of Poplar Grove Cemetery (Google Maps 2018, www.googlemaps.com)



Figure 6. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Approach to the cemetery. View approaching the north east corner of the cemetery. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 7. Poplar Grove Cemetery. View looking out of cemetery. View facing north-west. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 8. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Litter in front of site. View facing west. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 9. Poplar Grove Cemetery. A Styrofoam cooler littering the graveyard. View from the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 10. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Unmarked graves. View of the southwest section of the cemetery. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017



Figure 11. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Four vaults stand in good condition. View from the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 12. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Hand carved inscription in concrete. View from the north. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 13. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Commercial-grade granite marker in front of concrete vault. View from the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 14. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Oldest legible marker. View from the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 15. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Commercial-grade granite headstone with concrete flower pot on top of sunken concrete vault. View from the west. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 16. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Sunken headstone with handwritten inscription in concrete. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 17. Poplar Grove Cemetery. Headstone featuring glass and handwritten inscription in concrete. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.

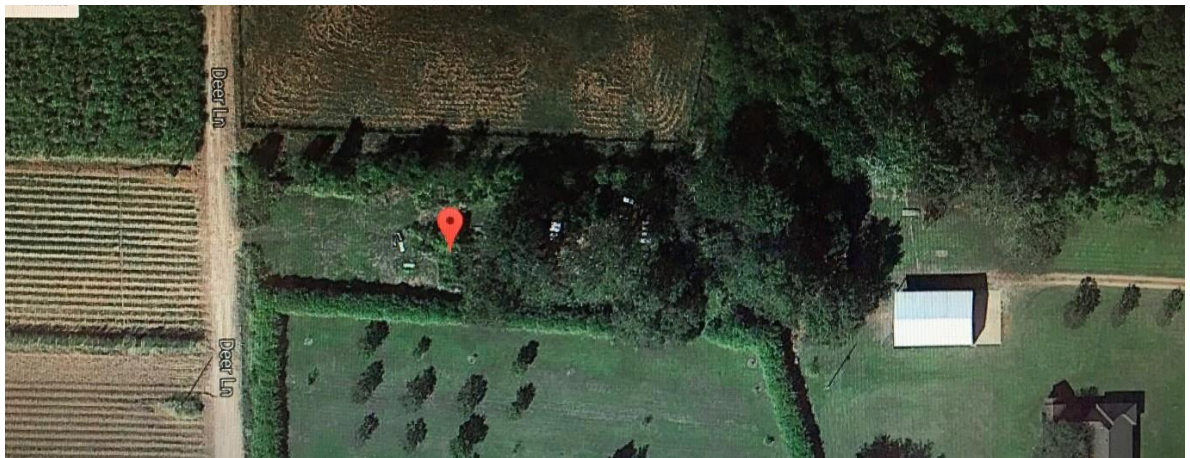


Figure 18. Aerial view of Ashland Cemetery (Google Maps 2018, www.googlemaps.com)



Figure 19. Ashland Cemetery. Cleared section accessed from Deer Lane, an unpaved road. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 20. Ashland Cemetery. Two displaced (empty) concrete vaults. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 21. Ashland Cemetery. Rows of interments (concrete vaults). View facing the east. Photograph by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 22. Ashland Cemetery. Overgrown section (furthest eastern section of site). View facing the east. Photograph by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 23. Ashland Cemetery. Most recent marker observed at site. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 24. Ashland Cemetery. (Left) Oldest observed interment, view facing east, (Right) Close-up relief, east side of vault. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 25. Ashland Cemetery. Lilies mark interments. View facing south. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 26. Ashland Cemetery. Domed-tablet marble headstone. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 27. Ashland Cemetery. Markers, lilies, and stacked concrete vaults. View facing southeast. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 28. Ashland Cemetery. Plastic tarps cover vaults. View facing the north. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.

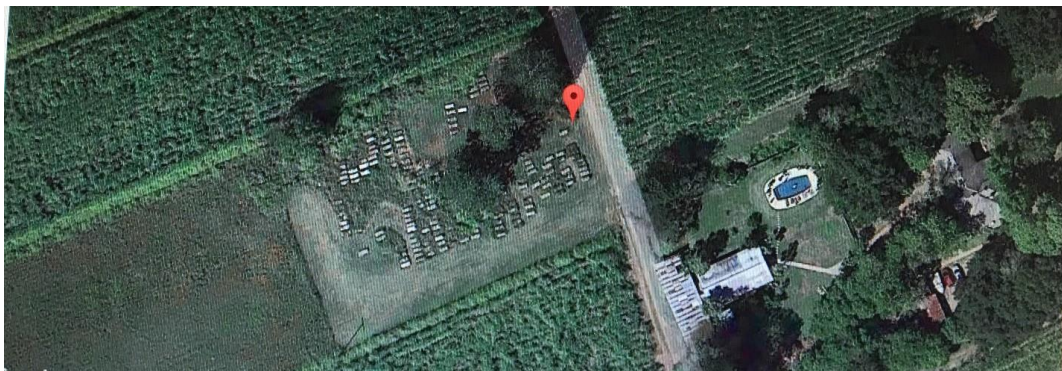


Figure 29. Orange Grove Cemetery (Google Maps 2018, www.googlemaps.com).



Figure 30. Orange Grove Cemetery. View of cleared sugar cane fields surrounding the cemetery. View facing the north. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 31. Orange Grove Cemetery. Damaged vaults. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 32. Orange Grove Cemetery. Broken vault filled with water. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 33. Orange Grove Cemetery. Exterior view, broken brick vault. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 34. Orange Grove Cemetery. Broken vaults. View facing west. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 35. Orange Grove Cemetery. Lilies grow among the rows of vaults. View facing west. Photographed by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 36. Orange Grove Cemetery. Most recent (2004) interment decorated with beads, plastic flowers, and a balloon—signs of recent visitation. View facing the west. Photograph by author, March 23, 2017.



Figure 37. Aerial of Alma Plantation Cemetery. The burials are located along the west side of the bayou. (Google Maps 2018, www.googlemaps.com).



Figure 38. Alma Cemetery. Tools used by Joseph Yarbrough for creating Alma's site and data maps. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 39. Alma Cemetery. Most recent burial from 2018 decorated with arrangements of plastic flowers. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 40. Alma Cemetery. Vaults along bayou. View facing east. Photograph by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 41. Alma Cemetery. Unmarked burials along the south end of bayou. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 41. Alma Cemetery. Lilies and wildflowers cover unmarked burials. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 43. Alma Cemetery. Litter and overgrown vegetation among rows of concrete vaults. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 44. Alma Cemetery. Site cleaning disturbed an underground nest of wasps. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 45. Alma Cemetery. Cleaned section. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 46. Alma Cemetery. Overgrown vegetation completely covers vaults. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 47. Alma Cemetery. Not all vegetation could safely be removed. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 48. Alma Cemetery. Marker indicates below-ground burial. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 49. Alma Cemetery. Vault features a wooden cross and a handwritten inscription into concrete. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 50. Alma Cemetery. Concrete vault marked by metal placard. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 51. Alma Cemetery. (Left) Above-ground vault featuring a piece of glass. (Right) Close-up of glass on vault. View facing north. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 52. Alma Cemetery. Plastic flowers cover the cemetery. View facing the east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.



Figure 53: Alma Cemetery. Damaged vault. View facing east. Photographed by author, March 18, 2018.

Appendix B: Cemetery Condition Reports

Condition Assessment 1: Poplar Grove Cemetery

Date of Recording: March 23, 2017

City, State: Port Allen, Louisiana

Signage?: no

Ownership/Association of Site: Could not determine

Site Condition: Wooded/ Abandoned

Over fifty years of age?: Yes

Number of burials: Could not determine

Oldest/youngest burial: 1941; 1983

Size of cemetery/boundaries: 1.7 acres, behind American Radiology Society building, in the middle of a cleared sugar cane field

Number of internments: About 250 unmarked, 40 permeant markers (various conditions), 15 vaults (in good condition)

Additional Information:

- No past, present, or future preservation plans with the WCPA.
- located behind a building occupied by the American Radiation Society
- site is overgrown/wooded; in the middle of cleared and cultivated fields
- littered; gas containers, a Styrofoam cooler
- grave markers and depressions in the ground are in straight rows
- majority unmarked burials; estimate over two hundred unmarked graves
- forty permanent markers; fifteen vaults remain in good condition, intact and not covered by vegetation
- In the very center of the site there were four concrete vaults, three single-vaults and one double-vault in good condition Out of these vaults, two featured granite headstones.
- No markers on the south side of the site
- Twenty-five of the grave markers and vaults were on the northwest side of site
- Very few of the vaults with name placards.
- All the grave markers prior to the 1980s appeared to be handmade from concrete
- The vaults from the 1980s are marked with granite headstones either on the ground at the head of the vault or on top of the vault
- 1941: 4ft x 13.5in x 2in domed tablet headstone read: "CLARA CALVIN BORN FEB 20 1900 DIED AUG 18 1941". Another grave with the same date of death had a block headstone, measuring 25in x 13in x 7in; granite headstone with sawn sides and a polished surface with a machine-cut inscription that read "Clara Dogan Jones Jan 7 1900 Aug 18 1941". The headstone was laid atop of a 7ft x 3ft x 1ft stone vault. A concrete flower pot, nine inches in circumference and ten inches tall, was attached to the vault.
- other markers: sunken headstones in the ground/ dates were not legible. Small tablet-shaped headstones and footstones; Henry Wishation's headstone looks old, but only stood one foot above the ground; Another sunken marker featured a hand-written headstone, 17in x 7in x 9in, and read "ALICE GRIMES DIED [JU]NE 10" (Figure 12). The rest of the marker was too sunken in the ground to read. This section of the marker was observed to have a modern metal rod to support the remaining part of the headstone. Lying seven feet away from the headstone, the footstone, 19in x 10in x 3in, read "At Rest" and contained a piece of glass in the center
- most recent grave 1984: concrete double vault, 3ft x 7ft; On top of the vault, a 3ft x 1.3ft x 4in granite block headstone with a slightly domed top read "DEBORAH B. DOGAN SEPT 10, 1923 OCT 3, 1984 MILTON DOGAN SR. MAY 12, 1912 MAY 3, 1983"

- WCPA has reported site to the Louisiana Division of Archaeology but there are no current plans for future preservation or maintenance of the site.

Condition Assessment 2: Silvery Cemetery

Date of Recording: March 23, 2017
 City, State: Port Allen, Louisiana
 Signage?: no
 Site Association: Could not determine
 Site Condition: Wooded/ Abandoned
 Over fifty years of age?: no visible markers of age
 Number of burials: Could not determine
 Oldest/youngest burial: Could not determine
 Size of cemetery/boundaries:

Additional Information:

Heavily wooded area among a clear sugar cane field.
 WCPA reported site to LA Division of Archaeology but has no current preservation plans for Silvery Cemetery.

Condition Assessment 3: Orange Grove Cemetery

Date of Recording: March 23, 2017
 City, State: Port Allen, Louisiana
 Signage?: Yes
 Site Association: St. Marks First Baptist Church
 Site Condition: clean/ no overgrown vegetation or litter; one-third of vaults are broken
 Over fifty years of age?: Yes
 Number of burials: estimate 600 (including unmarked depressions); 100 markers
 Oldest/youngest burial: 1936; 2015
 Size of cemetery/boundaries: 1.4 acre within a 1.7 acre lot; by sugar cane field

Additional Information:

Volunteers with the WCPA and St. Marks First Baptist Church maintain site

Condition Assessment 4: Ashland Cemetery

Date of Recording: March 23, 2017
 City, State: Port Allen, Louisiana
 Signage?: Yes
 Site Association: St. Marks First Baptist Church
 Site Condition: one-third of the cemetery had been cleared of vegetation, and the other two-thirds of the cemetery were overgrown
 Over fifty years of age?: Yes
 Number of burials: ~450

- Oldest/youngest burial: Visible* recent grave marker: 1ft x 1ft x 2in granite horizontal slab with sawn edges. The surface of the marker is polished with a machine-engraved cherub resting its head above the text: "JOSHUA K PARKER JULY 15 1995 AUG 21 1995"
- oldest grave: 7ft x 3.5ft x 1.5ft stone vault with a curved top. Stone reliefs of swag on sides of the vault. A two-foot- long slanted face marker reads: "IN MEMORY OF -- VIL- DEVALL 1897 [enclosed within a trapezoid-shaped outline] 1951 AT REST" (Figure 24).

Size of cemetery/boundaries: 1.5 acres

Additional Information:

- WCPA and St. Marks First Baptist Church maintain site

- WCPA spoke to Sheriff about possible use of trustys for perpetual aid; WCPA would need to provide tools for maintenance; WCPA needs funds for tools; WCPA seeks grants/donations
 - historic Chamberlin community
 - family cemetery
 - established in the late nineteenth century by the Devalls, a prominent African American family
 - 1919: family moved away; Cemetery placed under the care of the local St. Mark's First Baptist Church.
 - approximately 1.5 acres
 - boundary: shrubs border sugar cane fields.
 - accessed from Deer Lane, first row of graves 15 ft away from dirt road
 - concrete vaults (unsecured, no lids) displaced during a hurricane strewn across front of site
 - sign nailed to a tree reveals that this place is Ashland Cemetery and it is under the care of the St. Mark Baptist Church.
 - thirty rows of fifteen
 - first ten rows of graves are overgrown but accessible on foot/ remainder of the cemetery was completely overgrown and wooded, could not be safely entered
 - approximately 450 graves
 - Mix of permanent and temporary markers.
 - lilies
 - Permanent markers: above-ground concrete vaults, domed-tablet headstones, and metal placards.
 - One vault covered with a plastic tarp (WCPA is not affiliated with this tarp)
 - WCPA: recruit volunteers and organize cemetery cleanups. They plan to hold more cleanups to ensure perpetual care. The WCPA was in the process of securing donations from local merchants, corporations, and general public of lawn mowers and other gardening tools to help clear the vegetation.
 - WCPA seeks to add site to NRHP
 - WCPA preservation plan: regular and perpetual care, signage and fences, and the creation of a meditation area for descendants to memorialize their loved ones.
- Ashland Cemetery is the organization's first official preservation project.

Condition Assessment 5: Alma Cemetery

Date of Recording: March 18, 2018

City, State: Pointe Coupee, Louisiana

Signage?: no

Site Association: Alma Plantation; WCPA

Site Condition: Two-thirds cleared; one-third overgrown; some litter

Over fifty years of age?: Yes

Number of burials: 200 marked burials

Oldest/youngest burial: 1830s (according to plantation records); visible burials: 1905; 2018

Size of cemetery/boundaries: along bayou

Additional Information:

- week- long preservation project led by the WCPA
- Alma Plantation is an active sugar mill
- funding provided by the owner of Alma Plantation, David Stewart

- Gulf Coast cemetery archaeologist Joseph Yarbrough: performs surveys of the site
- Westside Cemetery Preservation Association, along with Joseph Yarbrough, consulted death certificates and obituaries to find out more about the individuals interred in the cemetery.
- WCPA has found records of three burials of enslaved people dating to the 1830s indicate the earliest burial activity at this site.
- The goals for the preservation of Alma Cemetery are to record and document the site for historical records, create a perpetual care plan which includes regular maintenance (e.g., mowing the grass and pulling weeds), and create signage and a place for visitor meditation
- Phase 1: data map. Yarbrough recorded information about existing tombs and markers, labeling the markers numerically and recording other information, such as inscriptions and decorative motifs
- Phase 2, creation of a site map: Topographical features were noted including the location of standing burials labeled to represent the appropriate number associated with the data map
- Approximately two hundred markers remain standing, only 141 are marked with a name
- The bayou is lined by rows of vaults, except for a fifteen-foot span in middle of the cemetery plot that is bereft of permanent markers. Burials are positioned east-west in roughly three rows following for nearly one thousand feet the bend of a small bayou that protrudes into the sugar cane fields. Bayou changes its course to northeast-southwest, the position of the burials follows the water
- Purple lily plants and wildflowers
- Depressions in the ground suggest that about 60 percent of the burials are unmarked
- WCPA volunteers trimmed overgrown vegetation and removed garbage from the ground; Gravestone cleaning: markers that appeared structurally sound were washed with light water pressure and scrubbed with a soft-bristled brush to remove dirt and bio-growth; done by two volunteers (Martin and another person)
- Approximately three-quarters of the site were cleared when I arrived at the site, other quarter of the site was overgrown with vegetation Not all vegetation could be safely removed without harming a burial or marker; for example, a tree had grown in the narrow space between a row of vaults and could not be safely removed without harming the structures, so the tree had to remain
- Markers: concrete vaults (about 38in x 94in x 24in), and accompanied by tablet-shaped headstones made of concrete or granite, Wooden crosses, metal placards, pieces of glass, handwritten inscriptions in concrete, permanent flower pots
- with small pieces of plastic flowers littered
- Many damaged markers from storms
- Burials by lip of bayou, sunken, within three feet of water
- The WCPA's future preservation plans, Phase 3: ground-penetrating radar to how many burials are present/ the depth of the chambers (April 2018)
- Documentary film crew that was interested in recording the preservation efforts
- Disturbed underground wasp nest; ended for the day

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