CHCs and Historic Cemeteries: A Framework for Preservation

Part 1: Identify

A Suggested Framework for County-Wide Cemetery Preservation

IDENTIFICATION

- Foundation for any type of preservation plan
- Produces information useful to planning agencies
- Emphasizes a county-wide approach
- Stimulates public awareness
- Aligns with CHC’s statutory assignments (Local Gov’t Code Chapter 318)

Identify all cemeteries in county.

Determine who is working with each cemetery.
Determine what each cemetery needs.

Determine how the CHC can help preserve the cemetery itself or help others preserve the cemetery. Take action accordingly.

www.thc.texas.gov/chc-cemeteries
IDENTIFY: Suggested Activities

CHCs know how many cemeteries exist in the county and where they are located.

- Maintain an inventory of known cemeteries.
- Review and update this inventory regularly.
- Review the THC Historic Sites Atlas to ensure accuracy and completeness.
- File an Existence of Cemetery Form or Notice of Unverified Cemetery and add the cemetery to the county inventory of cemeteries, as appropriate.
- Share locational data with local planning offices and mapping departments.

IDENTIFY: Create and maintain an inventory

Compile a master list of every cemetery ever known to exist in the county and then go out and physically locate each one.

IDENTIFY: Create and maintain an inventory

A team is a combination of Researchers and Explorers Gatherers and Enterers Everyone has something to offer All age groups can be included
IDENTIFY:
Create and maintain an inventory

Divide and Conquer

Start with previous inventories!
Use Caution!

- Who compiled it and when?
- What information was available to them then?
- Is it inclusive?
- Is it specific? Is there a map? Directions?

MAPS
- County road maps
- State highway maps
- USGS topos
- Soil maps
- Water maps
- All date ranges!
Funeral homes and monument makers (especially retired workers)

Death records and obituaries

Church records

DEEDS

Indices not usually helpful

Look at the surrounding/adjacent properties

More info in Module 2

People! - "old-timers," land surveyors, timber assessors, oil and gas gaugers, landmen, title companies, rural mail carriers, agricultural lease holders, hunters, etc.
Advertise your efforts!

What info to collect?
- Name
- AKA
- Location
- # of Graves
- Dates of use
- Size
- Ownership
- Contact Info
- Deeds
- Condition
- Date visited
- Etc., etc.
IDENTIFY: Create and maintain an inventory

How to collect the info?

• Consider your group’s skills and abilities
• Electronic: spreadsheets, databases, GIS
• Paper-based and hybrids

What to do with the info?

• Update it regularly
• Keep it safe
• Make duplicates
• Make it accessible

Share locations with planning & mapping depts.

• Municipal, County GIS Departments
• County Appraisal Districts (parcel maps)
• Subdivision Plat Review Board
• Road and Bridge Departments
• Water Improvement Districts
• Municipal Utility Districts
• Planning and Zoning
• 9-1-1 Addressing
• Others
IDENTIFY:

Review Atlas to ensure accuracy & completeness

https://atlas.thc.texas.gov

- 15,000+ cemeteries in our database
- About 12,500 are mapped in the Atlas

**See handout for details on how to use the Atlas**
Cemeteries can be “discovered…”
- due to imminent threat or
- through a proactive, systematic search

**Texas Health and Safety Code 711.011 (excerpt)**

A person who discovers an **unknown or abandoned cemetery** shall file notice of the discovery of the cemetery with the county clerk of the county in which the cemetery is located and concurrently mail notice to the landowner.

**Health and Safety Code 711.001 Definitions**

"Abandoned cemetery" means a cemetery, regardless of whether it appears on a map or in deed records, that is not owned or operated by a cemetery organization, does not have another person legally responsible for its care, and is not maintained by any person.

"Unknown cemetery" means an abandoned cemetery evidenced by the presence of marked or unmarked graves that does not appear on a map or in deed records.
IDENTIFY:
File notices of newly-discovered cemeteries

• File within 10 days of discovery
• Notify the landowner (CAD)
• Include legal description
• Include evidence

Texas Health and Safety Code 711.0111 (excerpt)

A person who discovers an unverified cemetery shall file notice and evidence of the discovery with the Texas Historical Commission [...], and shall concurrently provide a copy of the notice to the landowner.

**Links to full text of law on THC website**

Health and Safety Code 711.001 Definition

"Unverified cemetery" means a location having some evidence of interment but in which the presence of one or more unmarked graves has not been verified by a person described by Section 711.0105(a) or by the Texas Historical Commission.
IDENTIFY:
File notices of newly-discovered cemeteries

• Detailed instructions and samples on THC website (must use THC form)
• Notify THC
• Notify the landowner (CAD)
• Include evidence
• Landowner can respond to THC
• THC evaluates and takes action depending on whether a cemetery’s existence is verified or not

IDENTIFY:
Suggested Activities

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