

CITIZENS' GUIDE TO CEMETERY MAINTENANCE

In general, DHR strongly recommends thorough documentation of the cemetery both BEFORE and AFTER any maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, or other work. This documentation can be useful to future caretakers and may also be helpful with fundraising and increasing public awareness of your unique historic resource. Please contact DHR with any questions.

Vegetation Management:

- 1 Ornamental and traditional plantings: In Virginia, several plant and tree species were traditionally used as both ornaments and grave markers. We recommend taking care not to damage or remove the following species as they may have been purposefully planted by the family or community:
 - a. Trees: include willow, holly, magnolia, oak, cedar, dogwood.
 - b. Shrubs: include gardenia, camellia, sweetbush, boxwood, rose.
 - c. Plants: include flowering bulbs (daffodil, crocus), periwinkle/vinca, running cedar, yucca.
- 2 Mowing/trimming grass: Try to avoid using riding or deck mowers around monuments, fences and other cemetery features (these are difficult to control in tight spaces, and the blades can throw rocks or otherwise damage fragile headstones). Hand-trimming around monuments and fences is best when possible. If string trimmers are used, we recommend installing the lightest/softest cord available and keeping the head of the trimmer aimed at the ground and away from monuments, fences, etc. Try to keep grass clippings from accumulating on headstones - wet or decomposing grass causes staining and biological growth that can be very difficult to remove.
- 3 Trimming/pruning trees and shrubs: Regular maintenance of trees and shrubs can prevent damage to headstones and other cemetery features. Removal of dying, dead, or unstable limbs before they can fall is recommended if this activity can be done safely. Pruning trees and shrubs away from headstones allows air to circulate, which can help to prevent mildew, moss, and other biological growth. Trees that show signs of disease, crown death, or other loss of stability should be assessed by a tree specialist to determine whether they pose a threat to headstones or graves. If trees must be removed this should be performed by a professional tree service. Stumps should be left in place, not pulled or otherwise removed. A stump grinder may be used if the stump is located away from monuments or other cemetery features. NOTE: grant funds cannot be used for removal of standing trees.
- 4 Climbing vine removal: Vine species that do not attach themselves to monuments (honeysuckle, kudzu, etc.) can be removed by clipping at ground level and gently pulling away. Vine species that attach (including all species of ivy) should be clipped at the ground surface and again at about six inches up the stem, and then be allowed to die back completely. Once the vine has died back completely – leaves dry, stems snap easily – gently pull the vegetation away from the monument. If the vine does not easily release, leave it alone and try again in a few weeks.
- 5 Herbicide use: Broadcast herbicides (both sprays and granular forms) are generally not recommended as they can cause spalling or staining of monuments. To avoid damaging headstones and fences, herbicide can be painted onto the cut ends of removed vines, saplings, etc. with a small paintbrush to discourage regrowth. Be sure to read all directions and use protective clothing and safety glasses.

Care of Existing Monuments:

- 1 Conditions assessment: When possible, a conditions assessment of all markers, fences, and other cemetery features is recommended. This should include both written and photographic documentation for future reference. Inscriptions should be recorded.
 - a Monuments: Is the monument in place, leaning, or fallen? What is it made of? Is the inscription legible and can it be transcribed? Is there any visible damage to the monument and, if so, what kind/where? Is there any visible biological growth and, if so, what kind/where?

- b Fences: What is the fence made of? Is the fence in place, leaning, or fallen? Are portions missing? Does the fence enclose the entire cemetery? If not, how many monuments or other markers does the fence enclose? What is it made of? Is there any visible damage and, if so, what kind/where? Is there any visible biological growth and, if so, what kind/where?
 - c Walls and other enclosures: What type of wall/enclosure? Is it intact or damaged in any way? Does it enclose the entire cemetery? If not, how many monuments or other markers does it enclose? Is there any visible damage and, if so, what kind/where? Is there any visible biological growth and, if so, what kind/where?
- 2 Basic cleaning: The Department of Historic Resources recommends that monuments be cleaned with nothing stronger than clear running water and a soft, natural-bristle brush, using circular motions to avoid abrading the monument. If soiling or biological growth does not respond to this method, the Department strongly recommends contacting the Department or a conservation professional. Use of chemical cleansers, bleach, or power washing is not allowable under this grant.
 - a The black crust often visible on marble monuments cannot be effectively treated – it is an environmental byproduct resulting from a chemical reaction between the marble and acid rain. Attempts to remove this crust will result in damage to the underlying stone.
 - b Mosses may sometimes be removed by thoroughly wetting the accumulation and carefully peeling it away with a wooden or rubber spatula. If the moss does not easily come away, or if any evidence of stone damage is noted, do not attempt further removal.
 - c Lichens grow beneath the surface of stone monuments and are extremely difficult to remove without damage to the underlying stone. If lichen removal is desirable the Department strongly recommends working with a conservation professional to prevent damage.
- 3 Repairs: The Department recommends working with a trained stonemason or monument company when monuments require repair. The use of mortar, epoxy, mastic, and other commercially available adhesives is not recommended as repairs made using these materials are unreliable at best and may result in the monument failing in another location.
- 4 Resetting: Stone generally weighs between 150 and 175 pounds per cubic foot. This means that the average monument may outweigh the person attempting to reset it – a recipe for considerable damage to both the stone and anyone around it. As a result, the Department recommends that leaning or fallen monuments be reset by a monument company or trained cemetery personnel.

Installation of Replacement Markers: Metal stake markers, wooden crosses, and small modern markers that lie flat on the ground may be relatively easily installed by cemetery caretakers. The Department recommends that larger or upright monuments be installed by a monument company to avoid injury. Note: care should be taken to avoid excavation of more than a few inches as the depth of historic interments is notoriously unpredictable. Graves may be as shallow as 1.5 feet below modern ground surface. DHR must pre-approve replacement markers.

Maintenance and Repair of Fences, Walls and Other Enclosures:

- 1 Conditions assessment: As with monuments, this should include both written and photographic documentation.
- 2 Treatment of decorative iron fencing: Painted fencing that is generally in good condition can be treated where necessary with a commercial rust inhibitor and repainted. Unpainted fencing and fencing that is damaged or missing sections should be assessed and treated by a professional.
- 3 In-kind repairs to stone, brick, and concrete walls and enclosures: “In-kind” is replacement with materials matching that which already exists. Protective clothing and safety gear is recommended when working with stone and brick.
- 4 In-kind repairs to wood and woven wire fencing: Rotted or broken fenceposts should be replaced in the existing postholes. Additional excavation should be avoided.

Maintenance and Repair of Mausoleums and Other Structures: Mausoleums, crypts, and other fully or partially aboveground funerary structures can be constructed of stone, brick, concrete, or a mixture of building materials. Repairs should be performed by or under the supervision of a mason. As these structures usually house human remains, the Department strongly recommends that efforts be made to contact the family or descendants and request permission if the structure must be opened or dismantled in any fashion. DO NOT expose or disturb human remains without first contacting the Department.

Installation of Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage: To avoid inadvertent disturbance of interments, the Department recommends installation of wayfinding and other signage along public paths and roadways only. If installation at or near gravesites is preferred, care should be taken.

In-kind Repairs to Existing Paths, Roads, and Parking Areas: The Department recommends the use of same or similar surface treatments when repairing existing paths, roads, and parking areas. The use of heavy machinery and mechanical regrading should be avoided.

Preservation Planning: Hiring an experienced professional to draft a preservation plan for a historic cemetery is highly recommended for any organization that is responsible for maintaining a cemetery. A useful preservation plan, at a minimum, should consist of the following components: a Mission Statement; an Inventory and Documentation of Cemetery Resources; a Condition Assessment of Identified Resources, and a Maintenance and Treatment Plan to include a priority schedule of maintenance and treatment based on severity of threat and budget.

Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) can be a useful tool for identifying potential grave locations and other soil features. Organizations considering this type of survey should be aware that results will vary depending on the age of the cemetery, the depth of interment, the type(s) of soil present, the presence of heavy undergrowth or debris, and other factors. In order to obtain the best results, it is essential that this work be designed, performed, and interpreted by trained professionals, preferably those with experience in surveying cemetery properties. In order to obtain funding for this activity, a scope of work and operator resumes must be reviewed and approved in advance by DHR.