

CHAPTER FOUR

Cemetery and Tourism Projects

How This Project Came To Be

My work in cemetery preservation began when I attended a cemetery-cleaning workshop at Sandhill Cemetery given by Jason Church of the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training in Natchitoches on April 16, 2011.¹ Mr. Church first explained precautions to take for our own safety and to protect the stones. Next, Mr. Church cleaned a gravestone, explaining his methods and the reasons behind those methods, as he went along. With his supervision, we were then allowed to clean a stone and put his methods into practice.²

On May 6, 2011, Ms. Julie Harrison hired me to clean the gravestones of her ancestors, Adolphus and Rosine Sterne. Having only moved to Nacogdoches a few months before, I did not realize the honor bestowed on me in cleaning these markers. After hours of cleaning and multiple scraped knuckles, I was curious about the people who lay beneath. The only information that I gained directly from their stones was the names, dates of birth and death, and Mr. Sterne's Masonic affiliation.

¹ Sandhill Cemetery Cleaning led by Jason Church as a part of the City of Nacogdoches's Preserve America Grant.

² To see a video of Jason Church demonstrating how to properly clean a stone visit <http://youtu.be/CIQS-ZryE20>.



Figure 4.1 The Sterne Graves Before Cleaning

Figure 4.2 The Sterne Graves After Cleaning

I soon visited the Sterne-Hoya house museum where I learned about the family and Sterne's role in arming Texas troops for the Texas Revolution. It was not until I read an article on Stern that I realized the importance of the Masonic insignia on the back of his gravemarker. In his early years in Nacogdoches, Sterne owned a mercantile store. In order to aid his fellow Texans in the Fredonian Rebellion of December 1826 through January 1827, Sterne worked with his suppliers and had weapons and ammunition sent to him in barrels of coffee.³ The Mexican government found out his actions, arrested Sterne, and eventually sent him to Matamoros, Mexico for sentencing, and to be killed. It was thanks Sterne's affiliation with the Masons, who worked with the United States government, that Sterne was pardoned and returned to Texas in 1828.⁴

If I had not followed up on my curiosity about Adolphus Sterne, I never would have known what a significant figure he was or the significance of that

³ Archie P. McDonald, "Sterne, Nicholas Adolphus," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fst45> (accessed June 18, 2013).

⁴ From Family Traditions, "Nacogdoches in the Yesteryear," *Daily Sentinel*, June 3, 1960, Vertical File, Biography, STEN-TA, Sterne, Adolphus, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas.

Masonic seal on this gravestone. So I wondered, how often do people visit Oak Grove Cemetery, see these gravestones, and not realize that so much information is waiting for them if they only take the time to look?

After exploring the idea of a thesis based on cemetery research, I then identified three research centers at Stephen F. Austin State University: the Center for Regional Heritage Research, the East Texas Research Center, and the Anthropology and Archaeology Laboratory. These resources can supply a great wealth of information to individuals who have the time and desire to explore them. The Center for Regional Heritage Research has undertaken the difficult but rewarding project of digitizing and documenting all buildings within Nacogdoches's historic overlay zoning districts. The information for each property includes date of construction, architect, former owners, renovations, and materials used for construction. This model and information was useful for this thesis because much of the known information about a structure is made available within one webpage. This is a similar concept to the webpages of this thesis; by selecting one individual, a researcher will find a biography of the individual, pictures, documents, maps, links to related sources (such as the city survey), and the list of materials used in the brochures and biographies for further research.

The East Texas Research Center is the state designated regional repository for archival materials. The ETRC has manuscript collections that include journals, personal papers, business files, photographs, and letters. When

no manuscript collection is available for an individual, it is sometimes possible to find relevant information about them within other collections. For example, information about Vietnam was found within a collection of family letters. Another source of information available in the ETRC is the collection of vertical files, which contain newspaper clippings, brochures, and programs collected over the years about a subject, such as the Sterne-Hoya House. The ETRC also has a digital collection that contains digitized photographs, scanned documents, and oral histories. All of these resources were used for this thesis. When a manuscript collection was not available, sources such as newspaper clippings and photographs provided an additional source of information.

SFASU archaeologists at the Anthropology and Archaeology Laboratory have excavated many of the historic sites in town. As part of lab field schools, professors such as James Corbin, wrote reports on the findings. While it is sometimes not possible to gain access to the actual objects due to their fragile nature or privacy agreements, these field reports reveal where objects were found, what type of objects were found, and an analysis of what these findings mean in regards to the use of the area and history of the location. *The Adolphus Sterne Home*, for example, was helpful because it confirmed that Sterne

landscaped and relandscaped his property, a fact that Sterne discussed in his diary but was physically confirmed by this report.⁵

What does all of this mean? It means that there is a great interest in the history of Nacogdoches, that the town has a wealth of historical information, and one must only connect these resources to get a more complete story. While this seems easy enough, most visitors do not have the time or ability to seek out all sources of information. This thesis is a way to bring these sources of information together in a way that is easily accessible for tourists. This project's website and brochures will help tourists to decide which locations in Nacogdoches they would like to visit, will provide tourists with information about individuals and the history of Nacogdoches as they visit the sites, and will provide information for research.

Cemetery Cleaning Workshops

Cemeteries are valuable historic resources, which can tell researchers about religion, historic events, genealogy, social status, and the lives of the individuals who are buried there. Due to taboos associated with disturbing a cemetery, they serve as a semi permanent and seldom changing resource.⁶ Through cemetery cleaning, individuals not only remove decades of debris and growth from the stone but also preserve them for future use. Chicora Foundation Inc. defines preservation of a gravestone as an attempt "to keep a stone from

⁵ James E. Corbin, *The Adolphus Sterne Home: Preliminary Archaeological Investigations of a Mid-Nineteenth Century Plantation in Nacogdoches, Texas*, (Anthropology Laboratory, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1983), 49.

⁶ Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, 89.

deteriorating further, stabilizing it, and ensuring that it is there for the future.” As part of this thesis, I gave three cemetery cleaning workshops in 2012.

In order to teach others about this form of preservation, it was necessary to use many of Freeman Tilden’s principles. Principle one states that to teach, it is necessary to determine the learner’s interest and relay the message in a way so that they understand why the information should be important to them.⁷ In the case of Old North Church Cemetery and Old Shady Grove Cemetery, this interest came from the fact that volunteers were related to individuals buried in the cemetery. The common interest of the volunteers for the Oak Grove cleaning was that the cleaning constituted part of their grade. Principle two states that it is necessary to relate the unfamiliar to the familiar.⁸ Though many of the volunteers had never cleaned a stone, most had hand washed their vehicle, so by using that comparison, volunteers were able to understand the necessity of being gentle. Principle four, the need to stimulate the guest’s interest in the subject applied to all cleanings in various ways.⁹ The cleanings at Old North and Shady Grove inspired the volunteers by teaching them a new skill, which they could later perform on their own. The volunteers at the Oak Grove cleaning became interested in the cleaning not only because it gave them a new skill but also because Dr. Tom McKinney told them stories of the individuals buried in the family plot. Finally, Principle six states that young children like to learn and this

⁷ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 36.

⁸ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 44.

⁹ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 59.

was very true.¹⁰ Children came to the Shady Grove cleaning and they were very eager to learn and try out a new skill, to the point that they cleaned each gravestone multiple times. Through the use of Tilden's principles, volunteers were provoked to be interested in a topic that they had previously known little about.

My first cemetery cleaning workshop was planned for Old North Church Cemetery, the oldest cemetery in Nacogdoches. With the needed permission from the director of the church's cemetery committee, I printed brochures with date and time of my workshop along with a short how-to of gravestone cleaning for those who could not attend.¹¹ I visited Old North Church on May 6, 2012, its Homecoming. I selected this date because Homecoming is a time when individuals return to Old North Church and visit their families in the cemetery, so attendance is high that day and individuals are already thinking of the cemetery and the graves of their family members. I talked to attendees, handed out brochures, received permission to clean stones, and attempted to convince them to attend the workshop. The actual day of the workshop, May 12, 2012, was overcast with a sporadic drizzle and I worried that none of the families would come. Luckily, I did have three attendees. I instructed them, as I had been taught, on how to properly clean the stones. As we worked our way through family plots, the attendees shared stories about the individuals. Though

¹⁰ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 76.

¹¹ Cemetery cleaning brochure may be found on the thesis website - <http://www.sfasu.edu/heritagecenter/7679.asp>

attendance was low, those who did attend were excited to learn a new skill and eagerly accepted samples of Orvus, a mild cleaner that can be used on everything from horses to cars, for future cleanings, but above all else, the participants seemed even more excited to be honoring their ancestors.



Figure 4.3 Smelley Grave Before Cleaning, Old North Church Cemetery Cleaning
Figure 4.4 Smelley Grave After Cleaning, Old North Church Cemetery Cleaning

The next cleaning took place on July 26, 2012 at Oak Grove Cemetery. In this case Dr. Perky Beisel asked me to visit an Introduction to Public History class beforehand to explain cemetery cleaning to the undergraduate students

who were going to clean gravestones a few days later.¹² Upon arriving at Oak Grove, students listened to Dr. Tom McKinney talk about each of his family members interred in the family plot. Afterwards the students chose their stones, some based on their favorite story, and cleaning commenced. Though this cleaning was a class assignment, therefore lacking the direct familial connection, many of the students said that they enjoyed cleaning the stones, were glad to have a new skill, and felt that they had a connection to the person because of Dr. McKinney's stories. While some of the students may have viewed this cleaning as another assignment, some were so interested in gravestone cleaning that they volunteered to participate in another cemetery cleaning the following weekend in Houston County.



Figure 4.5 SFA Students Cleaning at Oak Grove Cemetery, Photo Courtesy of Perky Beisel

¹² For videos and photographs of the cemetery cleaning at Oak Grove, visit the thesis website at <http://www.sfasu.edu/heritagecenter/7679.asp> .

The final cleaning took place at Old Shady Grove Cemetery in the middle of the Davy Crockett National Forest.¹³ The people at this cleaning varied in age from approximately seven to seventy, and most everyone attending was related to those buried at the cemetery. As with Old North Church Cemetery, older family members shared photographs and stories about their relatives and the community as we cleaned. The children were very eager to clean the stones and stated that they really enjoyed the work because it was gratifying to see such a change in the appearance of the stone so quickly. Other volunteers worked to clear brush that was encroaching on the cemetery and trim back trees that were unhealthy or threatened the gravemarkers. Those who were physically unable to clean the stones observed, shared stories, and seemed to truly appreciate the positive changes that they saw in the old cemetery. Within approximately four hours all of the stones were clean and the cemetery space was again free of brush.

¹³ For videos and photographs of the cemetery cleaning at Old Shady Grove, visit the thesis website at <http://www.sfasu.edu/heritagecenter/7679.asp>.



Figure 4.6 Cleaning at Old Shady Grove Cemetery, Houston County, Photograph Courtesy of Perky Beisel

From these three cleanings, I learned many things. Trying to recruit individuals to attend workshops can be difficult and people often seem uninterested. This could be because when explained, gravestone cleaning sounds tedious and time consuming, which it certainly is, but when shown how to do the cleaning, workers found the job to be relatively simple. Another difference was whether the cleaning was my idea or the individual's. When the individuals asked me for help, they were eager to work and share their memories because they were personally invested in the outcome. In all cases I discovered that individuals care most about cleaning and the cemetery when they have a connection, whether it be their own family stories or the stories of another. The more information workers have about those whose stones they are cleaning, the

more they care about and relate to that individual. This finding is part of what drives the thesis. Walking around a cemetery and objectively observing the stones is one thing but when individuals know about the lives of those buried beneath, the dead are no longer so removed from the living.

Brochures

The brochures serve as an introduction to this project and are condensed versions of the website. A QR code on each brochure enables visitors to access the website to read further information and to view photographs associated with each subject while touring. For those who do not have QR scanners on their phones, the web address is listed so that they may view the site later.

The website is located on the Center for Regional Heritage Research's webpage, the same site that contains the Nacogdoches city survey. While the website was created in RedDot, which has few formatting options, the brochures were created in Microsoft Word, therefore it was possible to select a typeface and font size so they are printed in Times New Roman, ranging from eleven to thirty-six point type.

The brochures are not meant to be a stand-alone resource due to the limited amount of information that can be held on them. However, they offer an overview of what may be found on the website, some photographs, and a listing of other sites associated with the tour subjects. Brochures fall under Serrell's category of "introductory labels" because if all goes according to plan, visitors will pick up one of these brochures and be "introduc[ed] to the big ideas [and] to

orient[ed] ... to the space,” in this case via a listing of associated sites.¹⁴ Each brochure lists sites associated with the tour subjects included in this thesis. Places of interest include Oak Grove Cemetery, homes, places of business, historical markers, and historic sites around town. For example, sites associated with Jack McKinney include Oak Grove Cemetery where he is buried, the McKinney Drilling Company Building where he worked, the Hotel Fredonia whose construction he initiated, and J. McKinney’s, the restaurant named for him in the Hotel Fredonia. Not all of these places are open for visitors, and whether the site is open to visitors is included in the brochure, but some tourists will enjoy simply seeing the structure and from it they can gain a better connection to the past and encourage further learning through the website.

Website

The website brings together all of the information from the museums, buildings, documents, artifacts, gravestones, and family stories in one place. To accomplish this, tour subjects were selected to connect to their associated places and objects. Individuals were chosen based on the amount of publically available information and associated places. As previously stated, chosen individuals and subjects include Adolphus Sterne, Thomas J. Rusk, Charles Hoya, Diedrich Rulfs, Frank Aikman, Karle Wilson Baker, Lera Millard Thomas, Jack McKinney, the Texas Revolution in Nacogdoches, Nacogdoches in wartime, and Oak Grove Cemetery

¹⁴ Serrell, *Exhibit Labels*, 33.

While this website serves as an online exhibit, it is also a thorough history of each individual or subject that one may access via QR codes or by typing in the complete web address at home. When providing tourists with information, it is necessary to remember that guests may be standing in Oak Grove Cemetery or at one of the historic sites around town, so information needs divided into easy to read sections.¹⁵ At the same time, information about the individuals and subjects should spark interest among visitors to travel to other resources in town.

This website, unlike an exhibit, will not simply be a description of artifacts but the story of a person or group of people, so it is not possible to limit information on each to fewer than three hundred words per topic or artifact as prescribed for the writing of exhibit labels by Beverly Serrell.¹⁶ While this website's information is not a label, Serrell's tips on label writing serve as a reminder to keep information concise and break it up into manageable sections. Since this guideline is recommended to keep the attention and interest of the audience, each history has been broken down into subtopics based on occurrences such as historical events, life phases, politics, and wars.

Photographs fall under what Serrell defines as modalities or "the forms, or modes, of presenting information or experiences. Different modalities provide choices of ways for learners to receive information, which can, therefore, appeal

¹⁵ Barry Lord, in *The Manual of Museum Exhibitions*, eds. Barry Lord and Gail Dexter Lord, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2001), 15-18.

¹⁶ Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, 33.

to a broader range of learners.”¹⁷ Other modalities include the written word, images, videos, sounds, and objects, devices, or programs that can be manipulated. This project website contains all of these modalities. In addition to the text and photographs, it includes links to a searchable map and oral histories that may be listened to for further information. Another resource this project uses is videos of cemetery cleanings and gravemarker interpretation workshops associated with the best practices from City of Nacogdoches’s Preserve America Grant.¹⁸ By creating this website using best practices in exhibit development and interpretation, the information should be interesting and understandable to all individuals.

To assure that this website will remain online long term, it is located on the Center for Regional Heritage Research’s website. The Center’s website is constructed using a program called RedDot so this project’s site must be as well. Serrell recommends multiple typefaces, sizes, and colors to use in exhibit labels but unfortunately, this program does not offer these all of these options.¹⁹ While this program does not contain many formatting options, it does allow users to easily insert text and photographs, which are the two most important features for creating an online exhibit. While previous projects through Center have not

¹⁷ Serrell, *Exhibit Labels*, 66.

¹⁸ Videos include: “Preserve America: Gravestone Cleaning Workshop With Jason Church,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIQS-ZryE20&feature=share&list=PLz_YDirZuv_2Zz4kmagabh95pJPX1bKLV ; “Gravemarkers Workshop Oak Grove Cemetery with Nancy Adgent,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKHx5Zlx9cs&feature=share&list=PLz_YDirZuv_0RSiy6jxtTO3mBiP3Q_QtD

¹⁹ Serrell, *Exhibit Labels*, 193-197.

contained interwoven text and images, this site contains both arranged in an exhibit format. For tips on formatting a webpage in RedDot, please see Appendix 2.

Conclusion

The goal of these projects was to bring together historic research and primary sources such as gravestones, items in museums and archives, and historic sites, in order to create a more robust and varied heritage tourism program for Nacogdoches. The brochures serve as an introduction to the project as well as a gateway to the website and local historic sites and resources. The website gives information about the tour subjects through text, images of documents and photographs, oral histories, and maps. Oak Grove Cemetery is the focal point of this expanded interpretive program in order to educate tourists about the heritage of Nacogdoches and the use and preservation of cemeteries as historic resources.