



CHICORA FOUNDATION, INC.

PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

P.O. Box 8664
861 ARBUTUS DRIVE
COLUMBIA, S.C. 29202
803-787-6910
WWW.CHICORA.ORG

September 11, 2003

Ms. Sandra Willis
Washington County Historical Society
PO Box 71
Sandersville, GA 31082

Dear Sandra,

This letter provides you with an overview of our one-day on-site assessment of the Old City Cemetery in Sandersville, Georgia. Before going on, however, let me again thank you, Roy, and everyone else there in Sandersville for both the kindness shown us and also the extraordinary hospitality.

Our comments, as I've mentioned, are based on the single day, September 5, spent at the Old City Cemetery. There may be other issues that we failed to observe or issues that, with additional research or discussion, would self-resolve. Nevertheless, these comments should provide you with an initial plan of action for the cemetery.

Landscape and Cemetery Character

The cemetery is situated just northwest of the city center, bounded by Haynes Street to the north, what was once Cemetery Street (today Virginia Avenue) to the east, Church Street to the south, and a property line to the west. The topography is rolling with sandy clay soils. Running east-west, roughly through the middle of the cemetery, is an old roadbed. While this road was functional during the Civil War, it has since been converted into cemetery lots. Access to the cemetery today is by way of entrances on the east or south, although the road network forms a cross through the cemetery.

The cemetery is organized in a relatively strict geometric fashion, with lots measuring approximately 20-22 feet square. Brick, granite, or concrete coping generally surrounds these lots. Landscape is today minimal. Monuments are largely 3-dimensional. There is one family vault on the property, as well as (at the northern edge of the property) three brick tombs or vaults, sometimes known as "oven tombs." These are characteristic of cemeteries in Savannah, Georgia, although they certainly occur in a variety of other locations as far north as North Carolina. Only two of these tombs are today standing, while the third is in ruins.



Entrance to the Old City Cemetery off Church Street, looking north. Note the abundance of 3-dimensional markers and Pringle vault.

The character of the cemetery is dominated by its early churchyard layout with extensive rural cemetery modifications. Aspects of both are present. For example, the infrequency of plantings and geometric layout are characteristic of the churchyard cemetery. Where plantings occur they are clearly associated with individual lots and represent a softening of the landscape by individual families practicing aspects of the rural cemetery movement. There is no picturesque landscape or

sentimentality that is generally associated with the rural cemetery movement. Yet there the cemetery is visually dominated by the family monuments, ironwork, and even coping – all strong focal points of the rural movement. The overwhelming use of marble, rather than darker slates, sandstones, soapstone, or granite, is another indicator of the evolution away from the churchyard and toward an effort to reassure the mourner.

Consequently, when you enter the cemetery you are drawn to three elements – the centrally located marble Pringle vault that occupies four lots, an abundance of three-dimensional markers – many of which are statuary, and an abundance of coping with interspersed ironwork. These three elements are critical since they are what you are drawn toward – they form the central “core” of the cemetery and represent critical features that should receive a very high preservation priority. They are also clearly influenced by the topography, which creates stepped coping and a range of elevations among the monuments.



The landscape character is defined by geometric layout with curbing, large family memorials, ironwork, and rolling topography.

While arguably less significant, I believe that the vegetation is another element that should not be overlooked. As previously mentioned, there are relatively few plantings on individual lots, but there are perhaps a dozen large and stately trees, as well as a range of

smaller, but still visually attractive trees and large shrubs. An effort should be made to maintain this canopy of larger trees, as well as the various shrubs that are present.

Historical Background

The cemetery is on the National Register of Historic Places, although during our visit we were not able to obtain a copy of this nomination. There has been some historical research, as evidenced by a recently produced brochure and a more detailed, untitled document. There is also an undated (ca. 1920?) plan of the cemetery.

We recommend that additional historical research receive a high priority. In particular this research should focus on several issues:

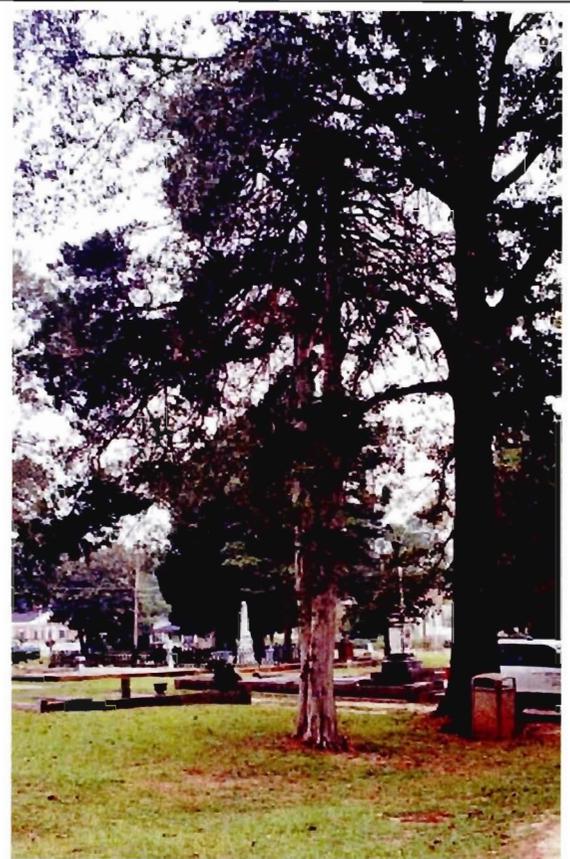
- ❖ A title search of the property; this would address questions such as the growth of the cemetery, its original ownership and subsequent acquisition by the City, when the road through the cemetery stopped being used, and might provide additional plats of the cemetery;
- ❖ A search of deed records for lot acquisition would address questions regarding the original rights of lot owners and the sale price(s) through time;
- ❖ A search of city council records would address questions regarding the erection and subsequent loss of the wall around the cemetery, city actions regarding the expansion and maintenance of the cemetery, and the city's previous maintenance of the cemetery;
- ❖ An examination of aerial photographs from the twentieth century may help us better understand land use activities, fencing, and perhaps even expansion of the cemetery;
- ❖ A search for period newspaper accounts of the cemetery, including obituaries that mention burials in the cemetery, may provide clues on the cemetery's history, activities regarding the expansion of the cemetery, events that took place on the cemetery grounds, and burial practices of the community;
- ❖ A search for period photographs showing the cemetery and, in particular, burials in the cemetery, would be especially helpful in determining appropriate colors for the cemetery fencing and could provide excellent visuals for brochures and displays; and
- ❖ A search for oral history accounts of burials and activities that have taken place in the cemetery.

This historical research could all be accomplished by local individuals, although it is certainly the type of research that organizations such as Chicora do frequently. If we were to conduct the work we would likely allow no more than 3-4 weeks for the efforts. Done by local individuals this could be expanded, but we encourage the work to be focused and to be

accomplished quickly. The results will not only help in preservation efforts, but also will be of special interest and use in promoting the cemetery.

Plantings

The cemetery contains primarily oaks and cedars as the dominant species. There is a double row of small (1-2 inch caliper) dogwoods lining the main north-south access road, although many of these have been damaged by herbicide and subsequently, improper pruning. The trees exhibit a variety of problems related to a lack of pruning and, probably, adequate fertilization. There is no procedure in place for either tree inspections or replacement of trees that might have to be removed. There are areas of volunteer growth, including dense poison ivy on one oak and other weedy species invading shrub plantings and the fence line along the west edge of the cemetery. Weedy species have also previously invaded one of the brick tombs and are currently growing from the roof of the Pringle vault. The lot-specific vegetation appears to be primarily boxwood and small cedars. There is much evidence of



Oak and cedar trees showing damaged limbs and need for careful, professional pruning and fertilization.



Dense volunteer growth partially overwhelming plantings. Note previous removals have left bare earth that will be subject to erosion.

improper pruning that has damaged both the aesthetics and health of these plantings. They, too, have probably received no fertilization.

I recommend that a certified arborist (a member of the International Society of Arborists) be retained to inspect, fertilize, and prune the trees in the cemetery. It may be necessary to remove the dogwoods that are doing so poorly at present. If so, it is absolutely essential that they be replanted with an appropriate species (i.e., one that is historically appropriate and also one that has no or limited undesirable cemetery preservation



Inappropriate pruning of small cedar that has left a number of branch stubs. This should be corrected by an individual trained in pruning techniques.

If the local garden club is to be involved, as I understand it may be, it is essential that their activities are consistent with an overall plan for the cemetery. Not all areas of the cemetery are appropriate for plantings; the plantings should be evaluated for their appropriateness in a cemetery of this time period; and the plantings must never be allowed to endanger the artifacts of the cemetery. There are relatively few areas where Victorian garden plants are appropriate. Primary among these locations are the various cradle graves in the cemetery. There is also an interest in planting an entrance to the cemetery - I recommend that this be held in abeyance until other cemetery preservation issues are dealt with.

The shrubs and trees in the cemetery provide significant landscape character and should receive better care than they have in the past.

qualities). These replacement trees should be of at least 2-inch caliper.

I also recommend that efforts be made to continue to remove the invading volunteer growth. It is particularly important to remove the poison ivy that has taken over one oak in the cemetery. The application of herbicides must be strictly limited within the cemetery. There should be no broadcast or spraying of herbicides. If it is necessary to kill a volunteer plant, the stump should be cross cut and an appropriate herbicide painted on the exposed cut to allow penetration into the roots.

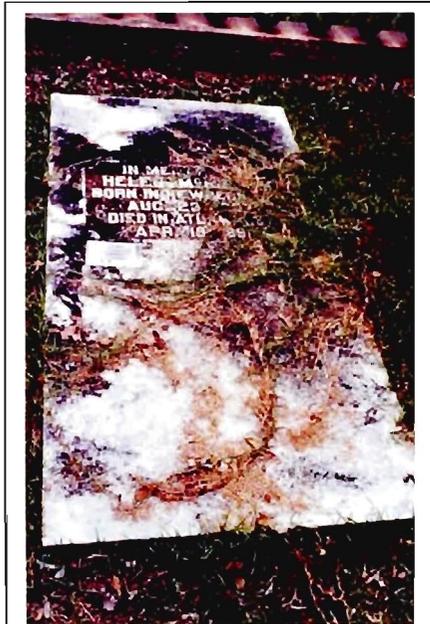
Only individuals trained in appropriate pruning techniques who also have knowledge of the correct pruning season for the different plants should conduct pruning in the cemetery. Every effort should be made to ensure that the pruning damage I've seen be halted immediately.



Extensive damage has been done to these boxwoods. Some are putting out new growth, others have been killed by excessive pruning. All are dwarfed by those not pruned. The character of the lot has been dramatically affected.

Lawn Issues

The cemetery has a relatively good centipede lawn. This is a generally good cemetery grass, being slow growing, drought and pest resistant, and having good coverage capability. It does, however, need more careful attention. Coverage, however, is not uniform and efforts should be taken to diagnosis problems and begin a long-term program to promote better and more uniform coverage. This effort will help reduce the frequency of mowing by establishing a lawn with a uniform grass.



Part of lawn maintenance should be the removal of grass that grows over ledgers such as this one.

Maintenance in the cemetery appears limited to grass cutting and is performed by prison labor with the City providing funds for their guard, transportation, and equipment. I recommend that the value of this service be re-examined. Given the current level of expenditure, it may be possible to hire a trained employee to provide this same care on a full-time basis or it may be possible to retain a landscape company capable of providing better service. A full-range of alternatives should be examined.

I recommend that the cemetery consult with the local agricultural extension agent and have a series of soil tests completed for the lawn to identify the level of liming and fertilization necessary for the good health of the grass. The fertilizer should be a natural, slow release, non-acidic formula. It should be applied as directed by the test results. As a follow-up all broadcast fertilizer *must* be swept off tombs and monuments. It will be necessary to allow at least an annual application of fertilizer to maintain reasonable lawn health.

It will be necessary to power rake some lawn areas, top dress and reseed to help establish lawn in those areas where the grass is thin, non-existent, or heavily infested with weeds. An herbicide should not be used in the cemetery to deal with weeds.



Bare areas such as this will require power raking, top dressing, seeding, and care to promote new grass growth.



Fire ants are a significant problem in the cemetery and treatments should begin immediately.

Regardless of who performs the work, it is absolutely essential that they receive training and have proper supervision. Untrained prisoners and a guard supervising only behavior and not appropriate care are unacceptable. The nylon trimmer line found in the cemetery has a maximum diameter of 0.15 inch. The maximum that should be allowed is 0.08 inch. The trimmer line being used is twice as heavy as is appropriate for cemetery use. We understand that all work in the cemetery is being done by

trimmers. With the broad open areas between plots, significant portions of the cemetery could be mowed using power mowers with ca. 21-inch decks, although all mowers should be padded and none should be allowed closer than a foot to the stones.

Lawn maintenance should also include treating for fire ants (which are a significant problem in the cemetery), picking up branches and other debris on a routine basis, picking up trash, and emptying trash containers.

Pedestrian and Universal Access

I believe that the cemetery, currently, has relatively low pedestrian access. Historically there were no formal paved path areas – pedestrian areas have been grassed. Although the cemetery topography is rolling, walking access has not created erosion or bare areas (primarily because of the low visitation). Paved pathways for this cemetery, however, are not appropriate and I recommend no changes at this time for pedestrian access. Universal access is not feasible beyond that allowed by vehicular access routes.

Gate security will be addressed below.

Vehicular Access

There are only two open points of vehicular access – one from Church Street at the south and another from Virginia Avenue at the east. These gates open onto the two main roads in the cemetery – one running north-south and the other east-west (page two shows the north-south road off Church Street). These roads are dirt with gravel and grass infill. I understand that with the erection of a new fence these two access points will be maintained.

Given the low use of the cemetery for burials these access roads are more than adequate and, in fact, consideration may be given to closing one or both access points permanently (assuming that adequate on-street parking can be provided). The lack of paving is historic and should be retained – in fact it may be appropriate to attempt to limit addition of gravel and foster growth of grass (perhaps by aeration to help reduce soil compaction) in order to soften the harshness of the roads on the landscape (while historically accurate they are not particularly attractive).

Security and Vandalism

The site is essentially open. The various vehicular and pedestrian access points, while gated, are never locked. Perimeter chain link fencing is low and easily scaled. Regardless, security is apparently not an issue on this property since I saw no evidence of vandalism, loitering, or littering.

There is to be a new fence installed that will be more secure. I recommend signage at that time, coupled with a program of daily security checks. Gates should be secured at a set time and opened the following morning at a posted time. A patrol should go through the cemetery to verify that everything is secure before locking up and again the next morning after unlocking. In addition, the city police should establish the cemetery as one of their routine patrol points for nightly visits.

I do not recommend any interior lighting based on the low incidence of vandalism. External lighting (i.e., street lights on utility poles) may be appropriate.

Site Amenities

The cemetery has relatively few amenities – one trash can and a very few benches. Signage is limited to the name of the cemetery and its National Register status. Given the low usage of the site the limited trash receptacles and benches are probably adequate.

I do recommend additional signage. At all pedestrian or vehicular entrances there should be a list of rules. We recommend that the minimum should be (1) hours that the cemetery is open for visitation, (2) a prohibition against rubbings, (3) a warning that the stones are old and fragile and to avoid leaning or sitting on them (and perhaps that all children need to be accompanied and attended by an adult), (3) a prohibition against dogs or other animals in the cemetery, (4) a prohibition against alcoholic beverages, and (5) a prohibition against inappropriate behavior (some phrase this as requiring activities respect the nature of the cemetery, others specify the activities that are inappropriate). I recommend that you consult with your city attorney to be certain that the wording is adequate to allow prosecution of offenders should that become necessary.

Utilities

The cemetery does have water, with hose bibbs at various points. Most of these are galvanized pipes with modern bibbs. These are adequate at present, allowing for watering where necessary to help reduce drought stress. These may be replaced with bibbs that are more in keeping with the historic nature of the cemetery.

Individual Lot Fences

There are 10 lots (Sparks, Flournoy, Brown, Pringle, Summerlin, Youngblood, Robson, Ott, Rawlings, and UID) with intact ironwork. These fences make a significant contribution to



Inappropriate ironwork repair using wire to retain loose parts. Note also corrosion and flaking of paint.

the character of the cemetery and its landscape and are deserving of efforts to ensure their long-term preservation.

All of the fences are in need of routine maintenance – priming and painting to minimize corrosion damage. All are also in need of security measures to prevent the theft of gates, while some need security to ensure that loose fence segments are not further damaged or stolen. Some fences are in need of extensive repairs – repairing breaks,

resetting posts, replacing missing elements, resetting loose joints, and creating new slip joints to secure elements.

Routine maintenance and securing loose elements should receive the highest priority, with additional repairs made as funding becomes available. I understand that the local technical college may be able to assist in many of the repairs. This is a wonderful source of assistance, so long as the repairs are conducted to preservation specifications.



Loose gate leaning against fence. This needs to be secured immediately.

Individual Lot Coping

Coping in the cemetery includes brick walls, granite, and concrete and, as previously discussed, forms an integral component of the overall landscape character. Much of this coping is in poor condition. Some granite coping or corner posts are leaning and require resetting.



Brick coping or wall around a plot that has failed. The brick needs to be salvaged and the wall rebuilt using the same bond and with period appropriate mortar.

Much of the brick coping has failed and needs to be rebuilt. Some concrete coping has also failed and needs to be reset.

This work should be prioritized to (1) correct minor problems before they become more significant and (2) to attack major problems where rebuilding will provide a major visual improvement to the cemetery.

It is critical that all brick repair efforts use appropriate mortar mixes –

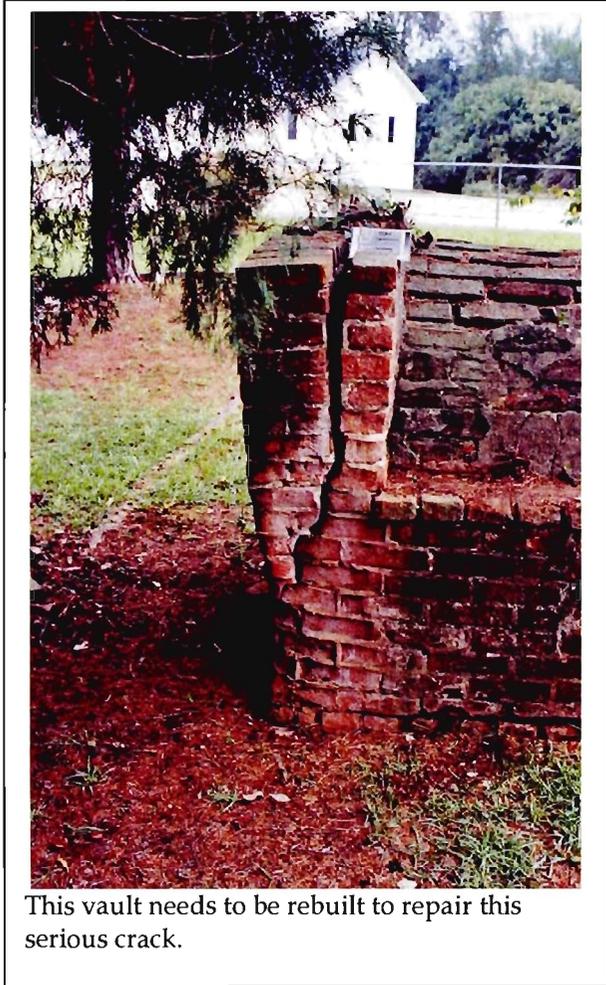
mixes that are not too rich in Portland cement and that are color matched to the original. Wherever possible the bricks should be salvaged and reused. Where additional bricks are necessary they should be matched as closely as possible in size, color, and strength. Bonding patterns must match those still present in the wall.

Brick Vaults

There are three vaults at the north edge of the cemetery property. One is in ruins, a second has very serious tree root damage to the wall, and a third, while intact,



Precast concrete coping that failed and was stacked up. This coping needs to be reset in order to restore this family lot and improve the visual appearance of the cemetery.



This vault needs to be rebuilt to repair this serious crack.

this tomb, nor did I do any detailed examination of the external structure. Nevertheless, there is evidence of considerable staining on the exterior of the structure. Much appears associated with drainage and/or leaching from the joints. The gable roof consists of slate panels. There is grass or other vegetation growing on the roof joints. I found that mortar was brittle and readily flaked out of the joints on the exterior; this may allow water intrusion. Otherwise the structure appears sound and plumb.

I recommend cleaning using

evidences improper pointing using poor technique and a very hard Portland cement mortar. There is evidence that these vaults (consistent with those found elsewhere) at one time had a stucco coat. Remnants are found on one vault.

There is no way to rebuild the vault that is in ruins without information such as dimensions and photographs, which I doubt exist. Therefore, it is critical that the remaining two vaults are carefully maintained.

The one evidencing a large crack from tree root damage will need immediate intervention to prevent that wall from failing. After detailed drawings and/or photographs, a mason will need to remove the wall, salvage the bricks and then rebuild the wall using appropriate soft lime mortar. Both vaults should be covered using a non-Portland cement stucco and covered with lime wash.

The Pringle Vault or Mausoleum

Another significant feature in the cemetery landscape is the large marble Pringle Vault. I was not able to inspect the interior of



The Pringle Vault requires cleaning, removing vegetation from the roof, and repointing.

low water pressure (60-80 psi) and D/2 Architectural Antimicrobial. Vegetation on the roof should be removed at that time. A mason should inspect the joints and repoint as necessary. If access can be gained to the interior it would be wise to inspect the walls to determine if re-caulking is necessary.

Exposed Human Remains at the Holt Grave

The 1895 Annie Lee Holt grave consists of a marble die on base and a marble ledger. While such ledgers usually cover an earthen grave, in this case the casket was laid into a brick vault. The vault was bricked over and the ledger laid on these bricks – there was no earthen backfill of the grave. Through time, either by accident or through vandalism, the Holt ledger has been broken and the brick vault penetrated. We found fragments of the vault displaced and a large hole extending into the burial chamber. Initially we identified this only as a safety hazard, but after closer examination we identified human bone, coffin remains, and coffin hardware in the vault.

We recommend that this be immediately subjected to an archaeological study for the purpose of recovering the human remains and associated coffin fragments. This will provide a unique opportunity to



Broken ledger over the Holt grave or brick vault.



Interior of the Holt vault or grave. Arrows point out locations of human bone and a coffin handle. Note also brick from collapsed vault roof.

examine one of Sandersville’s earliest inhabitants for information concerning diet and disease. The study will be non-intrusive and can be conducted in a manner that is respectful.

The collapsed brick debris should be removed. Afterwards the human remains and coffin items returned to the grave, the vault reroofed by a mason, and a new ledger placed on the grave (since the ledger does not have any engraving, it will be more cost effective to replace, rather than repair, the

ledger). We have enclosed a proposal for this work as a separate document.

Sunken Graves

There are a number of graves across the cemetery that have sunk. As the coffin and the remains decompose, the overlying soil compacts and sinks, leaving a depression. These depressions, while characteristic of historic cemeteries, may present hazards to the public. In many cases the sinking also endangers the marker, causing it to either crack (if it is a ledger) or to tilt and fall (if a three-dimensional monument). As long as the grave is marked, the depression can be filled and the grave leveled.



Sunken grave covered with a ledger. Repair here will include carefully removing the ledger, filling the grave, and releveling the ledger. This requires great care since the ledger is likely fragile from constant exposure to ground moisture.

Graves should be filled with good soil and reseeded to encourage grass growth.

Grave Markers

Markers include both granite and marble, although the latter are by far the most numerous. Some of these are elaborate three-dimensional statuary and obelisks are very common at this site. As explained earlier, these three-dimensional artifacts dominate the landscape and provide a critical context for the rehabilitation of the cemetery.

In general the markers at the cemetery are in good condition. Much of the marble is stained, being affected by acid rain. They are, in spite of this, in sound condition with relatively little indication of sugaring. There is relatively little lichen growth in the cemetery. Cleaning of the stones should be a very low priority at this time.

We noted three categories of markers that are in need of immediate intervention. One group consists of markers that are broken and require repair to prevent loss of fabric or additional damage. These stones, approximately seven in number, will require drilling and pinning by a professional conservator.

A second group are markers that are severely tilted and, without intervention, are likely to fall, damaging themselves or other markers. We have identified approximately five such markers, one or two of which will require the assistance of a monument company to allow safe disassembly and reassembly. These stones will require that new foundations or footings be

established and the monuments relevelled. Resetting may be achieved with an appropriate soft lime mortar mix or may require drilling and insertion of stainless steel pins to ensure the safety of the monument.

The third category consists of cradle graves that have collapsed and are sustaining damage from landscape activities. While this last group of markers is the least critical, their repair would allow the cradles to be planted in perennials. This is likely to attract significant public attention. These will require resetting the cradle side rails. In some cases these have been broken by ground pressure and will need to be repaired by pinning. In all cases there will be a need to use stainless steel corner braces (in lieu of original ferrous cramps [U-shaped metal staples]) to retain the cradle shape. Approximately seven cradles have been identified.



Example of a concrete ledger that should be recast on-site using modern cement. In background are two marble ledgers – one broken and one sinking.

There are additional stones of concern. These are largely examples that have received previous treatments, not always using the most appropriate repair techniques. Regardless, the stones are at present stable and we propose no action on these other than continued monitoring. The City should be aware that conservation treatments – just like cutting the grass – are a

maintenance item and the cost will be on-going. There may come a time in the next 5 to 10 years when additional stones require intervention. At present, however, we recommend only action outlined above.

A final issue worthy of brief mention are the concrete ledgers at the site. A few of these are in very poor condition with the concrete fragmented and displaced. Often these have debris stacked up and are visually distracting. These can be repaired by the use of form boards to create a ledger the same size as that being replaced and pouring new concrete. Generally air entrained concrete should be used and the ledger finished to resemble the one it replaces. Care should be taken to prevent damage to nearby stones by concrete splattering or workers. In virtually every case it will be necessary to have the concrete wheel barrowed to the grave site – it is not safe to bring the truck into the cemetery.

Chicora Foundation has been asked to provide treatment proposals for these three categories of stones and they are enclosed as a separate document.

Priorities

While this letter indicates that there is much to be done at the Old City Cemetery, it is important to emphasize that the graveyard is in relatively good condition – I have seen cemeteries far smaller that need a great deal more work. This speaks to the care and attention that the cemetery has received over the past 100 years.

High Priority

- ❖ Collect and rebury Holt remains
- ❖ Stone conservation including repair of broken monuments, resetting of tilted monuments, and repair of cradle graves
- ❖ Lawn repairs, including top dressing and seeding, liming and fertilizing, and the development of a more comprehensive maintenance program
- ❖ Prune and fertilize the trees in the cemetery
- ❖ Paint the iron work in the cemetery
- ❖ Repair (including stucco) the two brick tombs
- ❖ Secure all decorative gates in the cemetery

Medium Priority

- ❖ Rebuild the brick and concrete plot coping (this probably needs to be further phased, given the extent of the damage)
- ❖ Develop and erect regulatory and informational signage
- ❖ Conduct additional historical research (required prior to interpretative signage, below)
- ❖ Clean and repair the Pringle vault
- ❖ Fill sinking graves and, where necessary, relevel unbroken ledgers

Low Priority

- ❖ Repair/rehabilitate the fences
- ❖ Place additional site amenities, such as benches
- ❖ Conduct additional plantings
- ❖ Develop and erect interpretative signage
- ❖ Reform and pour concrete to replace damaged or destroyed concrete ledgers

Sincerely,

Michael Trinkley, Ph.D.
Director