

GUIDELINES FOR CEMETERY PRESERVATION SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE ARKANSAS ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY

The Arkansas Archeological Survey's (ARAS) mission is to study Arkansas' past, to preserve and manage information about archeological sites, and to share what we learn with the people of Arkansas. This set of objectives guides all our activities, including our responses to requests for assistance with cemetery preservation projects. The first point of contact for people requesting help is State Archeologist Mel Zabecki (mzabeck@uark.edu) or the Research Station Archeologist closest to the cemetery <https://archeology.uark.edu/who-we-are/research-stations/>. Individuals and groups should always feel free to contact the Survey to report cemetery sites locations, to discuss any urgent concerns about cemetery sites, or to request general information. Individuals and groups requesting assistance should undertake preliminary steps to determine needs and define project goals. ARAS staff will review all requests and provide options for those requesting our help.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE CONTACTING US

1. Review the information presented in "Grave Concerns: A Preservation Manual for Historic Cemeteries in Arkansas," available from the Department of Arkansas Heritage (AHPP) (<http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/publications>). This is the essential guide on how to begin historic research on Arkansas cemeteries, identify landowners, document unmarked grave locations, and record information about marked grave locations.
2. Gather available information on the history of the cemetery and its present condition, including maps, records, newspaper clippings, etc. Documenting the present physical condition is a pre-requisite to any further activity.
3. Carefully identify your goals: cleanup and damage repair, determination of boundaries if they are unmarked, mapping of grave lots, etc.
4. Please note that even a small group of local volunteers can accomplish much without assistance from outside sources, financial or otherwise. Helpful advice is often available from other cemetery associations who overcame the same challenges that your group is facing. The more you can do on your own, the stronger the case you can make for outside assistance when and where it is really needed.

WHAT THE ARAS CAN DO

1. Our main role is to offer information and advice concerning the preservation of cemeteries.
2. We can fill out state archeological site forms if we do not have a record of the cemetery in our files, but you can do this yourself by downloading the state site form and instructions found at <https://archeology.uark.edu/forms-records/>. It is important to know who owns the property, and we can do nothing without prior permission of the landowner. It can sometimes be tricky to get landowner contact information, so understand that lacking landowner contact information could impede your project from moving on.
3. If needed, we can assist landowners and caretakers in producing simple maps that show marked grave locations, fences, and other visible cemetery features.
4. We can advise landowners and caretakers about steps they can take to protect or enhance cemeteries for current use and preservation. We do NOT do the physical work or research that may be necessary, but we can suggest other organizations who may be able to provide those services.

WHAT THE ARAS CANNOT DO

1. We will not clear the cemetery of vegetation or remove trash.
2. We normally do not make highly detailed maps of cemeteries or inventories of headstone inscriptions or undertake genealogical research to obtain information about the people buried there unless the cemetery is small and has been abandoned.
3. We generally cannot map cemeteries with more than 50 marked graves.
4. We will not write the specifications of cemetery conservation projects. Each cemetery is unique, and the affiliated cemetery association is often best able to identify goals and determine the resources needed to achieve those goals.
5. We cannot provide legal advice. Please refer to the summary of the Arkansas cemetery laws on the AHPP website at <https://www.arkansasheritage.com/arkansas-preservation/programs/cemetery-preservation/arkansas-cemetery-laws>.

COMMENTS ON GEOPHYSICAL SURVEYS

Many cemetery preservation groups believe that geophysical surveys—employing such technologies as ground-penetrating radar, gradiometry, soil resistivity and conductivity, and magnetic susceptibility—will help them locate unmarked graves, determine cemetery boundaries, or identify places where no graves have been placed. While this may be true in some circumstances, it is important to understand that the results achieved with these instruments are highly dependent on uncontrollable environmental factors like soil structure, soil moisture, ground cover, and disturbance. The following points must be considered prior to any requests for geophysical surveys:

1. Geophysical surveys in cemeteries are time and labor intensive, and therefore expensive. These surveys generally require a three- or four-person crew, who may only be able to survey one to two acres per week depending on topography and vegetation. Surveys require setting up a grid of 20 x 20 meter units across the area to be investigated, and that area must be clear of obtrusive vegetation, including closely-spaced trees. A week-long project can cost upwards of \$30,000, including the lab days required to process and interpret data collected in the field. There are several companies who can provide these services under contract.
2. Geophysical surveys do not produce images that illustrate grave shafts, human skeletal remains, or coffins. Each technology examines a specific sedimentary property (electrical resistance, electrical conductivity, geomagnetic orientation, sediment density, etc.) in the effort to detect disturbances. Soil conditions at the time of the survey are critical to the success of the effort; such things as lack of moisture, the presence of buried metal, or the presence of subsequent disturbances (tree falls, etc.) may produce ambiguous results. Any disturbances that are detected may be the product of a wide variety of events, both natural and cultural. Follow-up excavations centered over identified disturbances are usually required to verify the nature of the anomaly—whether it is a grave or something else. Under no circumstances will geophysical survey results indicate the age or sex of buried remains.
3. Often a detailed map of marked graves and unmarked depressions produced by a professional land surveyor, at considerably less cost than geophysical survey, will provide the information required for effective cemetery preservation efforts.
4. Geophysical survey needs can only be established after genealogical and historical research have been completed and other forms of physical inspection have been conducted. If the cemetery is threatened with destruction (in whole or in part) and if questions remain about grave

locations, boundaries, or other buried phenomena, then a geophysical survey may be appropriate.

5. ARAS staff can rarely conduct geophysical surveys at cemeteries, even when money is available to pay for the work. The ARAS will donate geophysical surveys only in very special cases where small areas are threatened, and the project falls within our research and conservation mission.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. County judges may be able to authorize the use of county prisoners to help with vegetation clearing, trash cleanup, and other maintenance tasks.
2. Anyone clearing vegetation or helping with maintenance should know that marker stone positions (headstones, footstones, etc.) are very important for understanding the location, orientation, and distribution of buried remains; these should NEVER be moved, even if they have no visible inscription. Similarly, surface depressions may indicate the locations of unmarked graves and therefore should be mapped before they are filled in. Note also that filling depressions with sand or other sediments may compromise the effectiveness of subsequent geophysical surveys.
3. Cemetery preservation groups should always try to document the locations of all marker stones and record everything written on them. Efforts should be made to collect genealogical information for all of the people buried there and their families. All this information should be deposited in several places to ensure its preservation, including local or county historical societies, local churches and libraries, and on websites. The ARAS can add this information to our site file extension records if we have a primary form for the site. Sharing cemetery information at church or town meetings and through a website is a great way to engage the local community and attract volunteers.