

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Metairie Cemetery
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number I-10 and Metairie Road N/A not for publication
city, town New Orleans N/A vicinity
state Louisiana code LA county Orleans code 071 zip code 70005

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1923</u>	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>15</u>	<u>300</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1939</u>	_____ objects
			<u>304</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Jonathan Fricker October 31, 1991
Signature of certifying official Jonathan Fricker, Deputy SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism Date
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

Henry M. Rapsley 12/6/91
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Italianate

Gothic Revival

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick and stone

walls granite, marble, limestone, stucco

roof same as walls

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Metairie Cemetery, founded in 1872, is certainly southern Louisiana's most distinctive above ground graveyard. It consists of about sixty-five landscaped acres, with 2,243 resources which are "substantial in size and scale" (see breakdown below). One-third of the contributing elements are styled, ranging from Italianate to Exotic Revival styles such as Egyptian. The cemetery is located on Interstate 10 at the edge of New Orleans. It is bounded by the interstate, four-lane Metairie Road, a 1930s vintage neighborhood, and modern Lake Lawn Cemetery. Lake Lawn is immediately adjacent, separated only by a lagoon. The two cemeteries are jointly owned and operated. The non-contributing element rate at Metairie Cemetery is a modest 13%.

Breakdown of Contributing/Non-contributing Resources

1923 contributing structures/300 non-contributing structures (above ground tombs)

15 contributing objects (large scale monuments)

1 contributing building (mausoleum with office wing - photo 6)

4 non-contributing buildings (3 mausoleums-photo 45 for sample; 1 visitors center)

Historical Background

The cemetery came into being in 1872 when the Metairie Cemetery Association received its charter and purchased the old Metairie Race Course. Founded in 1838, the Metairie racetrack had become one of the nation's leading courses by the 1850s. Then came the disruptive Civil War years. After the war, the Metairie Jockey Club attempted to revitalize the course, and although some racing took place, the track was definitely a shadow of its former self. In 1872 the Metairie Cemetery Association purchased the old track and converted the property into a cemetery.

Unlike New Orleans' other above ground cemeteries, which are tightly packed with tombs, Metairie was a designed landscape intended to achieve an **uncrowded**,

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Metairie Cemetery, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, LA

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pastoral effect. It was the creation of engineer Benjamin Morgan Harrod, who used the old racetrack as the basis for his plan. The principal road around the cemetery, the present Metairie Avenue, follows the track. Within this large oval are three smaller ones. A system of bisecting cross avenues and diagonals created circles and triangles which were a natural for special landscaping and choice tombs.

At one time, a series of lagoons nearly surrounded the cemetery. The one on the Metairie Road side had a picturesque stone bridge, complete with planters. There was also a large fish pond with its own bridge. In addition, in 1883 an impressive entrance gate was built complete with a gate lodge. Most of these features fell victim to road construction in the 1950s and '60s. What remains is the cemetery plan, the lagoon on the north side, and much of the historic plant material, including numerous mature trees.

The first burial in Metairie occurred in 1873, and the cemetery flourished as New Orleans' leading families patronized it. It definitely became the place to be buried. Generally speaking, the names on the tombs are not those of the city's old Creole families, who already had vaults at older cemeteries such as St. Louis I, II & III. Instead, they are names from a later period, many "American" and many reflecting the city's diverse ethnic and religious background. For example, there are many Italians buried in Metairie and a goodly number of Jews.

Above Ground Burial

The custom of interring bodies in above ground tombs appears to be Hispanic in origin. It came to Louisiana while the colony was under Spanish rule, between 1762 and 1800. The first cemetery in the colony, established during the French period, was below ground, with the first above ground graveyard, St. Louis #1, being created by the Cabildo (the Spanish governing body) in 1789. The custom was embraced by Louisiana's French population and later by American immigrants. It also should be noted that above ground tombs of the type found in South Louisiana are present in Spain and other former Spanish colonies such as Puerto Rico.

A popular theory is that above ground burial originated because of the low lying ground and the high water table of the New Orleans area, which made below ground burial difficult. This notion may partially explain the popularity of above ground burial, but it is not the complete picture. Regardless of its provenance, the custom of above ground burial persists to this day in southern Louisiana, although it is perhaps not as popular as it once was.

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Continuation Sheet**

Metairie Cemetery, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, LA

Section number 7 Page 2The Survey

In late 1990 and through the summer of 1991, Metairie Cemetery was surveyed exhaustively by members of the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation staff. Each tomb was examined to determine if it met the National Park Service's guidelines for "substantial in size and scale." Determining that threshold was a judgement call because above ground tombs are almost by definition substantial. After considerable thought and reconnaissance of the cemetery, it was determined that the appropriate benchmark for Louisiana's above ground funerary architecture would be human scale. Thus if a tomb, including its water table and base, was taller than an average size adult, it was considered "substantial in size and scale" and included in the count. If a tomb was either comparable in height to the average adult or shorter, it was not counted. It should be noted that the overwhelming majority of tombs fit easily into one category or another. There was seldom any question. Tombs that did not meet the "substantial in size and scale" threshold were decidedly in the minority (less than 5%). Also, the cemetery's below ground burials (roughly 20% of the total) were not counted (except for the handful marked by monuments that are "substantial in size and scale"). (Below ground burials are often located among the above ground tombs in an alternating pattern. In some instances, they are dominant in a given section, as noted on the map.)

Within the "substantial in size and scale" category, tombs range from a few feet taller than the average adult, to those that are the size of small chapels or houses, to a few monuments that soar to heights of over fifty feet. To provide the necessary perspective for someone who has never experienced the scale of Louisiana's above ground funerary architecture, most of the photos for this submission were taken with a person standing near a tomb.

The staff also rated each "substantial in size and scale" tomb as either contributing or non-contributing--in this instance whether or not it was fifty years old. The integrity litmus test was not needed because tombs, once built, remain virtually unaltered. While the majority of tombs were easy to date, a good many were not. One would think that the earliest death date would date a tomb, but this is not always the case. This is partially due to the custom of re-burying long dead relatives. Sometimes a family would build a new family tomb and transfer relatives from the old family tomb. Thus one finds tombs with death dates older than the tomb itself could possibly be. Another confusing factor is the practice of selling tombs from one family to another. When this happens, the previous occupants are removed, and the new owners begin to inter their dead. The result is that obviously quite old tombs have relatively recent death dates. A final complicating factor is that tomb styles on the less expensive end have not changed much over the past seventy years. Thus, for example, a rough granite block tomb dating from 1925 could equally well date from 1950.

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In conducting the survey, the staff found that most tombs were either obviously well over fifty years old or obviously less than fifty years old. If there was any doubt, the death dates on the tablet were examined on the theory that one of them (maybe not the earliest) would correspond to the date of the tomb. In most cases it was possible to place tombs firmly one side or the other of the fifty year cutoff by this means. In cases where neither the architecture nor the death dates offered a firm indication, the staff made the most likely assumption possible, based usually upon the style and depth of the carving. (Tombs that were known beyond a doubt to be non-historic provided the necessary comparison.) In short, while the determination of whether or not a tomb was fifty years old was not completely error proof, it was made by individuals aware of the city's unusual burial practices and extremely familiar with the cemetery's funerary architecture. After looking at literally hundreds upon hundreds of tombs, the staff obtained a good appreciation of historic versus non-historic. The staff feels that the contributing versus non-contributing rate margin of error is less than five percent.

The staff also noted the style of each tomb. Many tombs had only hesitant architectural touches--a molding here, a garland there, etc. These structures were rated as un-styled. In order to be considered styled, a tomb had to have a pronounced and convincing architectural treatment. This was no particular problem because the tombs at Metairie tend to be either completely unstyled or obviously and often spectacularly styled.

Tomb Placement

Burial plots occur in large blocks defined by roads and avenues. Tombs not set directly on a road front onto interior aisles which run within the blocks. Most tombs are set two to three feet apart, although larger ones have more space around them. In some cases basic tombs were given additional prominence by elevating them on a rectangular mound perhaps three to five feet high and providing a set of monumental approach steps. In such cases the mound is usually reinforced with a low stone retaining wall on all four sides.

Tomb Types

By far the most common type of tomb in Metairie Cemetery is the double vault, with the burial chambers placed one above the other with a pit, or receptacle, below. The remains of earlier burials are placed in the pit to make room for new occupants. This eminently practical arrangement made good use of limited cemetery land and provided a fairly inexpensive way for several generations of the same family to be buried together. A tablet covering the front of the tomb lists the names and birth and death dates of the various occupants. Such a tomb generally ranges from eight to ten feet high, from three

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to five feet wide, and about seven feet deep. They may be ornamented with monumental approach steps, urns, or benches. In addition, their roofs are often surmounted with large stone crosses or free-standing figure sculpture. There are also larger family tombs which contain more vaults, but are similarly articulated.

Less common and more monumental are the very large tombs which have walk-in access to burial vaults are either side. These are often styled as diminutive temples or churches. Some contain large pieces of figure sculpture on the interior.

Metairie Cemetery also contains about a dozen or so Italian society tombs (photos 30, 31 & 60). These were operated by benevolent societies which provided a burial policy for their members. They usually take the form of a sizable structure (for a cemetery) with a wide central corridor, open to the air, flanked by ranges of vaults.

Less common at Metairie Cemetery are banks of wall vaults. These are free-standing walls, perhaps eight to ten feet high, composed of burial vaults. Ranges of wall vaults form the perimeter fence of many of New Orleans' older cemeteries. However, at Metairie there are just three ranges of wall vaults, set off by themselves, near Metairie Road (photo 35).

Comparatively rare pieces of funerary architecture at Metairie include sarcophagi (usually enhanced by an architectural surround), obelisks, and tumuli (artificial mounds filled with vaults and surmounted by a monument or piece of statuary). There is also one historic mausoleum (see photo 6).

Styles

The survey revealed that 32% of the cemetery's contributing elements are styled. The breakdown of contributing elements is as follows:

Italianate	11%
Gothic	8%
Classical Revival	10%
Exotic Revival	1%
Other styles	2%
Unstyled	68%

Generally speaking, Italianate tombs are the earliest examples found in Metairie Cemetery. As a rule, they take the form of an aedicule shaped double vault constructed of stucco over brick. Italianate details include pronounced moldings, parapets, pediments, and segmentally arched tablets. Grander examples may also feature pilasters or quoins.

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Gothic style tombs run the gamut from Ruskinian Gothic to early twentieth century collegiate Gothic. Most examples are rectangular tombs with a pronounced, steeply pitched forward facing gable and a pointed arch opening. Foils and other carved ornamentation may also be applied. Grander examples may also feature buttresses and free-standing colonnettes. The very largest feature spires and are in effect small Gothic chapels. Perhaps the most unusual Gothic tomb is the Egan Tomb, built in the form of a ruined chapel (photo 61). Another distinctive Gothic tomb is that of the Agar family, a large structure encircled by a pointed arch arcade (photo 58).

Classical style tombs were built throughout the historic period. Nineteenth century examples tend to take the form of a stone box with a pair of free-standing columns supporting a carved lintel. Twentieth century examples are more varied. Many are fully developed Greek temples, with probably the most impressive being the Chapman Hyams mausoleum, which has free-standing Ionic columns on all four sides (photo 2). Others feature an overall aedicule form with a pediment shaped top. These are often of smooth polished granite with a very severe look. There are also some one-of-a-kind classical landmarks such as the huge Moriarty obelisk (roughly 60 feet tall-photo 4); the Story tempietto (photo 15); the Luca Vacarro tomb (photo 65), which was inspired by the Tower of the Winds; and the Lacost sarcophagus set in its monster half domed niche (photo 5).

The Exotic Revival category includes some of the cemetery's most extraordinary tombs. Styles include Egyptian Revival and various interpretations of Muslim architecture. There is also a single example of Hindu architecture. The most noteworthy Egyptian tomb is that of Lucien Brunswig, which is a huge pyramid with an entrance guarded by a sphinx and a life-size female figure (photo 56 and accompanying detail shot). Another important example of the Egyptian Revival style is the pylon shaped tomb of Frank Williams, which has elaborate bas relief carvings including papyrus and lotus plants as well as busts of an Egyptian pharaoh (photo 17 and accompanying detail shot). Most of the cemetery's other Egyptian Revival tombs are pylon shaped boxes with massive cove molded cornices. The most unusual Muslim inspired tomb is that of Laurie Beauregard Larendon, whose front ogee domed pavilion features cusped horseshoe arches and repeating patterns of sculpted geometric ornamentation (photo 27).

The "other style" category includes a goodly number of Romanesque Revival tombs, many of which are quite elaborate, with bartizans and copious blind arcading. The other major component of this category is the Modernistic style, consisting principally of carved geometric ornament on a square tomb.

The unstyled category of tombs makes a substantial contribution to the cemetery streetscape. Some feature courses of marble or granite ashlar, while

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others have massive stone slabs. In many cases, there is a contrast between polished and rock-faced surfaces which adds to the character of a tomb. Also, many of them have impressive rooftop figure sculpture or crosses.

Contributing Elements

A contributing element is defined as any tomb that is "substantial in size and scale" and is fifty years old or older. (This would include above ground tombs, the fifteen previously noted large scale monuments and the one historic mausoleum.) As noted previously, integrity of individual tombs is not an issue.

The period of significance spans from 1872, when the cemetery was established, to 1941, the required National Register fifty year cutoff. As previously mentioned, the custom of above ground burial continues to this day. Thus, the fifty year cutoff would have been the only termination date that would not have been entirely arbitrary.

Non-contributing Elements

Thirteen percent is an extremely low intrusion rate for a cemetery in constant use through the present. Also, the non-historic tombs are very similar to the historic tombs in terms of size, massing and materials. The only difference is that they tend to have larger slabs of stone and less ornamental carving. There is no doubt that they do not significantly impact the overall historic character of Metairie Cemetery. (For a closeup view of a sample intrusion, see photo 43. For general views showing the impact of an intrusion or intrusions on a row of historic tombs, see photos 28, 46, 62, and 68.)

Likewise, the four non-contributing buildings have not had that much impact upon the cemetery. The visitors center is a small one story dark brick building located at the very edge of the cemetery (see map). While they have a larger footprint, the three non-historic mausoleums are low in scale. They do not make much of an overall impact because of the size of the cemetery. Also, one of the mausoleums is styled in a historic manner (photo 45).

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

architecture

Period of Significance

1872-1941

Significant Dates

1872-1941

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Cemetery Designer: Benjamin Morgan Harrod

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Metairie Cemetery is of state significance in the area of architecture because in some respects it is Louisiana's most impressive above ground cemetery. It achieves this distinction principally because of its collection of large, quite elaborately styled tombs and, secondarily, because of its size.

Above ground cemeteries are identified in the Louisiana Comprehensive Plan as a particularly important component of the state's patrimony -- a cultural legacy that sets Louisiana apart from the rest of the country. While above ground tombs are found here and there in other states, it is only in South Louisiana where they occur in such profusion. In short, what was an atypical method of interment elsewhere was the norm here. This is particularly true of New Orleans, where the most important collection by far is located, in terms of size, quality, integrity and concentration of above ground burial versus below ground. With their row after row of diminutive buildings, New Orleans cemeteries resemble cities -- what one visitor termed "cities of the dead." In the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office, all of New Orleans' dozen or so above ground cemeteries are significant because they contribute each in their own way to this important cultural legacy.

Metairie Cemetery enjoys particular distinction among this group because of the sheer number of tombs and its extraordinary collection of large, extravagantly styled tombs. With over 2,000 substantial tombs on some sixty-five acres, it is surpassed only by Greenwood. More importantly, it is obvious to even a casual observer that Metairie Cemetery has the city's most impressive collection of large, elaborately styled tombs. This is what sets Metairie apart from the city's other above ground cemeteries. Early cemeteries such as St. Louis #1 (1789) and #2 (1823) were developed at a time when smaller, more chastely styled Greek Revival and Italianate tombs were being built. It was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Metairie Cemetery was in its heyday, that New Orleans funerary architecture reached its zenith in terms of large, spectacularly styled tombs. Particularly outstanding examples at Metairie in the classical mode include various fully developed temples, two tempiettos,

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Gandolfo, Henri A. Metairie Cemetery: An Historical Memoir. New Orleans, Stewart Enterprises, 1981.

Huber, Leonard V., McDowell, Peggy & Christovich, Mary Louise. New Orleans Architecture: The Cemeteries. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1974.

Inventory of Metairie Cemetery conducted by Division of Historic Preservation, December 1990-June 1991.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings

Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering

Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State historic preservation office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property @ 65 acres

UTM References

A

1	5	7	7	8	3	0	0	3	3	2	0	3	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

1	5	7	7	8	4	8	0	3	3	1	9	9	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

1	5	7	7	7	7	4	0	3	3	1	9	8	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

1	5	7	7	7	8	0	0	3	3	2	0	2	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Please refer to enclosed map.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundaries were chosen to recognize the original boundaries of Metairie Cemetery. To the north, on the other side of the lagoon, is modern Lake Lawn Cemetery. To the east is Interstate 10. To the south is Metairie Road. To the west, separated from the cemetery by a fence, is a 1930s neighborhood.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Division of Historic Preservation

organization State of Louisiana

date September 1991

street & number P. O. Box 44247

telephone 504-342-8160

city or town Baton Rouge

state Louisiana

zip code 70804

Owner: Stewart Enterprises, P. O. Drawer 19925, New Orleans, LA 70179

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and an adaptation of the Tower of the Winds. In addition to more standard squarish tombs with applied Gothic detailing, Metairie has numerous good size Gothic chapels whose spires soar sometimes twenty to thirty feet high, with one over sixty feet. There is also a ruined Gothic chapel (the Egan tomb) as well as a huge structure encircled by a Gothic arcade (Agar tomb). Romanesque Revival tombs, while few in number, are quite striking landmarks, with their bartizans and great round arch openings. Outstanding tombs in the more exotic styles range from the Brunswig pyramid, complete with a sphinx, to Near Eastern fantasies such as the Larendon tomb, with its ogee dome and cusped horseshoe arches. In categories by themselves are monuments such as the sixty foot tall Moriarity obelisk, with its four larger than life figures at the base, and the Lacosst tomb, a massive marble edifice with a sarcophagus set within a half-domed niche. Metairie Cemetery, quite simply, represents the pinnacle of late nineteenth/early twentieth century above ground funerary architecture in Louisiana. In a way, it is the ultimate "city of the dead."

Metairie Cemetery
A: 15/778300/3320320
B: 15/778480/3319960

New Orleans, Orleans Parish, LA
C: 15/777740/3319820
D: 15/777800/3320260

7944 11 5%
INDIAN BEACH

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

57°30"
T 125
T 135

HOUMA 51 MI.
JEFFERSON HEIGHTS 2 MI.

BATON ROUGE 78 MI.
KENNER 7 MI.

CAUSEWAY INTERCHANGE 1.5 MI.

30°00'
30°07'30"

779000m. N.

779000m. E.

780

781

