

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Star Cemetery, Shreveport, Caddo Parish, LA

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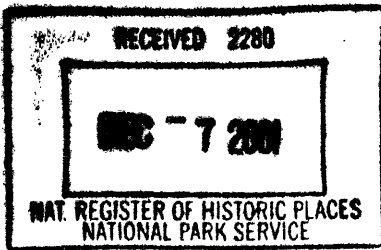
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Star Cemetery

Other Name/Site Number:



14718

2. LOCATION

Street & Number off 2100 block of Texas Ave.

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Shreveport

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Caddo Code: 017 Zip Code: 71103

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: Statewide: Locally: X

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker, Deputy SHPO, Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

Date December 6, 2001

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Edson B. Beall 1-17-02

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s):
District:
Site: X
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1

Non contributing
buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: funerary Sub: cemetery
Current: funerary Sub: cemetery

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: NA
Materials: NA

Foundation:
Walls:
Roof:
Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Established in 1883, Star Cemetery is a ten acre African American burial ground located on flat land in western Shreveport. The roughly square shaped parcel is bounded by Interstate 20 on the north, a U. S. Post Office facility on the south, low self-storage units on the west, and the historic St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery on the east. (Please refer to enlarged USGS map attached.) Star Cemetery has not been in active use for some time, with ninety-two percent of its burials dating from before 1950. Hence it retains a strong historic character, despite some vandalism and general decay of monuments.

Star Cemetery was Shreveport's first African-American cemetery and the only one until the late 1920s. Today surrounded by a chain-link fence, it is accessed via an easy-to-miss, unmarked gravel lane that runs off the 2100 block of Texas Avenue. There is no gateway or other type of formal entrance, and no one can remember a time when there was. The cemetery is completely unplanned, with markers randomly placed and no drives or site features other than shade trees. There are roughly 1300 marked burials, although locals believe that thousands more people are buried there. (Some graves were unmarked from the first and many markers are long gone.)

All but a handful of burials at Star are below ground. For the most part, the grave markers are small and very modest, often with a decidedly homemade character. There are a few more "high style" markers (at least within the context of Star), including a handful of obelisks and columnar shafts.

While the standard modern headstone is wider than it is tall, the typical marker at Star is decidedly vertical, often twice as tall as it is wide. There are some more mainstream granite markers; however, most markers are of concrete or crudely carved stone. The simple, folk character of most of the markers is quite poignant. Even lettering done by someone who was presumably a professional looks free-form rather than carefully chiseled. A particularly distinctive type of gravestone is that formed by three concrete blocks, one laid on top another, and resting on a low base (photo 9). Others are even more clearly homemade in character - i.e., a concrete headstone where perhaps a family member has carefully written the name and other information in block letters. Typical motifs on the folk markers include the hand with finger pointing heavenward, the lamb, and the dove.

Reflecting the considerable importance of fraternal organizations and benevolent societies in the African-American community are the number of headstones with emblems of the Masons, the Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, etc. Among the more unusual are "Rising Star Platinum Lodge," "Willing Workers Chamber," "Royal Mansion Chamber," "Victoria Chamber," and "Queen Esther Temple." (See photo 11.)

Most markers have a minimum of inscription, typically just a name, death date, and age. Among the most memorable are those with an epitaph - those that make us pause and wonder about the person buried there, what their life had been like, and their grieving loved ones. The marker of Sam Hall, who died June 28, 1906 at the age of 31 years, bears the inscription: "My husband leaned his head on Jesus Brest [sic]. He breathed his life out sweetly there. Hattie Hall." With a dove above and a lamb below, the shaft marking Clarrisa Oliphant's 1907 grave reads: "Blessed are the dead which died in the Lord. They may rest from thire [sic] labors. Thire [sic] work do follow them." Then we find the last words of Seleste Louis Chandler (1891-1920): "I am so happy." As local historian Eric Brock observed: "Some of these small, poignant little monuments with their misspellings and odd shapes elicit a greater sense of sadness than many a commercially-made monument, for all its elegance and costliness, ever could."

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In preparation for this nomination, a volunteer group organized by the African American Multicultural Tourism Commission conducted an inventory of marked burials in the spring of 2001. Coordinating the survey was Isabelle M. Woods, who had done a partial survey of Star in the 1980s. Using the information gathered by the volunteers, Mrs. Woods produced a printout showing, among other items, name and death date for each marked burial. In perhaps less than 1% of the marked graves, the death year was illegible. The following breakdown by date obviously does not include these burials – hence the total is a bit less than the total number of marked burials.

MARKED BURIALS AT STAR CEMETERY*

*INCLUDES ONLY THOSE WHERE DEATH YEAR WAS LEGIBLE

1883 – 1910	221	17%
1911 – 1930	550	43%
1931 – 1950	418	32%
post-1950	100	8%

Assessment of Integrity:

In the opinion of the SHPO, there are no serious integrity issues at Star Cemetery – particularly in light of its quite low rate of non-contributing monuments. Of the seven aspects of integrity used by the National Register, only the setting has been compromised. While the setting within the boundaries remains the same (i.e., open land with trees and no pattern to burials), most of the surrounding pieces of property have been redeveloped, as explained above. But because of the size of the cemetery and mature trees, the interstate and other modern developments are not as intrusive as might otherwise be the case.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A_X B__ C__ D__

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A__ B__ C__ D_X E__ F__ G__

Areas of Significance: ethnic heritage (black)

Period(s) of Significance: 1883

Significant Dates: 1883

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: NA

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Star Cemetery is being nominated under National Register Criterion A for its significance in the African-American history of Shreveport. Established in 1883, it met the need in the African-American community for an honorable and respectable burial site. It was the city's first African-American cemetery and remained its only one until the late 1920s.

The creation of Star Cemetery and others like it was part of a larger drama being played out all over the South as former slaves in the post-Civil War years sought to establish their own institutions and in a larger sense, their own community identity. Many a southern black church was founded in the late 1860s and '70s, regardless of how new the present building may be. Other major institutions created in the post-war years were benevolent associations (typically mutual aid groups where member dues paid for burials) and cemeteries.

As rigid segregation and disfranchisement crystallized in the late nineteenth century, "separate but unequal" treatment extended to all aspects of life, including its end. In some cities African-Americans were barred from the city cemetery. In Shreveport, according to local historian Eric Brock, blacks prior to Star's establishment were relegated to the pauper's section of Oakland Cemetery.

Within the foregoing context, the establishment of Star Cemetery in 1883, only six years after Reconstruction ended in Louisiana, was a milestone in the African-American history of Shreveport. The Star Cemetery Association was incorporated on March 22, 1883, and on the same day the association purchased a ten acre tract of land for \$350. The fourteen African-Americans who appeared before the notary to form the Star Cemetery Association, many of whom signed by mark, were Sam Chambers (President), W. Harper, Allan F. Moss, Square Hicks, William Johnson, J. H. Henry, W. J. McDonald, G. A. Poland, Zack Wiggins, Peter Johnson, A. G. Miller, William Moreham, S. A. Johnson and C. T. Thomas.

There are about a dozen marked burials at Star from the very early years – the 1880s. The survey conducted earlier this year shows a few death dates that precede Star's establishment, presumably indicating that loved ones buried elsewhere were re-interred. One also presumes that many of the early graves either did not have a marker or the marker is long gone. Fully 60% of the marked burials are from before 1930, with 17% being from before 1910. Star remained the city's only African-American cemetery until the late 1920s when Carver Cemetery opened just south of what was then the city limits.

Various locally prominent African-Americans are buried at Star, most notably ministers, the traditional leaders of the black community. Among them are Rev. Luke Allen, Sr. (1839-1919), an early pastor of Antioch Baptist Church (the "mother church" of Shreveport's black Baptists), and his sons, Prof. William Allen (1869-1898) and Rev. Luke Allen, Jr. (1871-1938), pastor of the Avenue Baptist Church. Other notables buried at Star include The Rev. Dr. A. M. Newman (1845-1898), founder of the Third District Baptist Normal and Collegiate Institute, an early school for training black teachers; J. S. Williams (1870-1938), founder of the city's oldest black funeral home; and Charles Roberson, Shreveport's first black attorney.

Star Cemetery today remains what it was originally and throughout its active years of use – a major focus of ethnic identity in Shreveport's African-American community. Star Cemetery Association has long since ceased to exist. The City of Shreveport in 1960 assumed the role of Star's caretaker. Within the last

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couple of years Star has been in the local news due to the efforts of the African American Multicultural Tourism Commission to encourage the city to improve maintenance, to provide paved access and erect a gateway, and to provide security. A support group, The Descendants of the Dead, has been formed, and various volunteer groups have come together for work days at Star. It is hoped that this National Register nomination will heighten awareness of Star in the general community and provide impetus for its greater safekeeping.

Note: "Private" is checked under ownership (Section 5) because legal records list the Star Cemetery Association as the owner (although this organization has long ceased to exist). While the City of Shreveport has served as caretaker for some time, it does not claim ownership.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Woods, Isabelle. List of Star Cemetery's marked burials, per a survey undertaken in the Spring of 2001. Copy in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

Brock, Eric. "Star Cemetery." Typescript in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

Star Cemetery Association, Act of Incorporation, March 22, 1883.

National Register nomination forms for Zion Cemetery, Memphis, Tennessee and Rest Hill Cemetery, Lebanon, Tennessee.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
- 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):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 10 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
(1)	15	427660	3594980
(2)	15	427860	3594980
(3)	15	427860	3594740
(4)	15	427660	3594740

Verbal Boundary Description:

Tract 6, per assessor's city plat 477, more accurately described as: Begin 409.20 feet south and 467.28 feet east of NW corner of SE 1/4, Sec. 2, TWP 17, RNG 14, thence east along south line of Block 5, Fetzer & Auer Subn. 622.38 feet more or less to west line of Catholic Cemetery, thence south along west line said Catholic Cemetery 759 feet more or less to north line of 30 foot lane, thence west along north line said 30 foot lane to point 622.38 feet, east of west line of this tract prolonged thence north to point 697.62 feet south of south line Block 5, Fetzer & Auer Subn. Thence west 622.38 feet, thence north 697.62 feet to beginning.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries follow historic property lines.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: August 2001

Star Cemetery
Caddo Parish, LA

