



Wood Artifacts in Cemeteries: A Reference Manual

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In 2008, the City of Aspen, Colorado received a grant from the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training to fund the research and compilation of a comprehensive manual written for cemetery stewards to facilitate the preservation of wooden artifacts in cemeteries. The document is intended to fill the current void – the lack of easily accessible information on the conditions and conservation of wooden artifacts in cemeteries. The goal of the document is to provide a foundation for understanding wooden artifacts in cemeteries and offer realistic preservation options for cemetery stewards who must often act to preserve fragile artifacts with limited financial resources. Additionally, the manual identifies the research priorities necessary to develop state-of-the-art methodologies and technologies for cemetery conservation.

The manual provides information on the mechanisms of deterioration for wooden artifacts, methods of identifying forms of deterioration, and possible treatment options. The first section, Understanding Wood in Cemeteries, discusses some of the physical properties of wood and the reasons why treatments suitable for wood in structures or museum artifacts are not always suitable for wooden artifacts in cemeteries. This section also includes an overview of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The second section, Mechanisms of Wood Deterioration, identifies the various forms of wood deterioration that can occur within wood exposed to the elements. The third section, Methods of Identifying and Monitoring Problems, serves as a how-to guide for cemetery stewards to assess the conditions of the wooden artifacts in their care, while the fourth section, Corrective Measures, offers low-cost, low-maintenance options for extending the life of wooden cemetery artifacts. The final section, Considerations for Repair and Treatment, is provided to emphasize that wood within an environmental context functions as a part of that environment and reiterates the importance of understanding the impact of the environment on repairs and treatments. This section includes examples of failed repair and treatment attempts and also discusses the limitations of current repair and treatment options. Advanced assessment technologies that can help to extend the service life of wooden artifacts in cemeteries are also discussed in this section.

Wooden artifacts in cemeteries are often overlooked as pieces of significant cultural heritage and dismissed as impermanent and/or unsalvageable objects. This manual provides the guidelines for simple, affordable maintenance procedures that can extend the service life of wooden artifacts for years, if not decades, to come.

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