

Catholic Cemeteries – Caretaker Notes

Renovation or Restoration?

In General Cemetery Renovation

The difference between renovation and restoration can mean the difference between improving the cemetery's overall operations and maintaining the status quo. Restoration rebuilds the cemetery as it was previously designed; renovation updates an older cemetery to current standards. When the cemetery's circumstances and finances permit, renovation is preferred over restoration since it enhances the cemetery's image and reduces maintenance costs.

- Renovation rejuvenates an older cemetery. Undertaken to improve physical appearance and eliminate hazards, renovation brings older cemeteries into compliance with modern design and maintenance standards, often reducing operating costs.
- Normally, renovation is planned for a large area within a cemetery. A completion schedule with a timetable helps minimize disarray and lot-holder inconvenience caused by the work.
- When renovation has been planned some years in advance of actual work, a general clean up --including removal of undesirable trees and shrubs --can be done over time as a preliminary step.
- Complete renovation usually involves a series of improvements to reduce or eliminate obstructions that mar cemetery appearance, create hazards, and interfere with efficient maintenance.

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Following is a list of common improvements applicable to most cemetery renovations.

Obstruction	Recommended Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Undesirable trees and shrubs	Remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Perennial plants	Remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Evergreens on individual lots (not in accordance with regulations)	Remove
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Plantings or other memorials on individual graves (Living plants will be at risk and may remain unearth for duration of renovation)	Remove/Reset
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monuments will be removed to frame foundations, concrete will be poured to raise grade, Concrete will Reset Cure, Framing will be removed, and monuments will be reset. (work takes several days to complete)	Remove/Raise
Insignia of veteran or fraternal organizations, or other decorations not in accordance with regulations	Remove Broken or dangerous memorials photographed (Repaired if warranted)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Irregular terrain	Level, Fill & re-grade

Notification

When possible and practical, notices outlining the work should be posted in section(s) of the cemetery slated for renovation. The signs can remain throughout the renovation process, to reach visitors who did not receive advance notice.

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Renovation

Once notification has been completed, actual work may begin. With adequate staff and equipment, renovation can be accomplished in a reasonable length of time. Progress is generally monitored by a supervisory foreman assigned to the project and responsible for directing workers. Carefully plotting each portion of the work --before removing markers and other identification -will make proper replacement easier and aid in the layout of future gravesites.

Free-standing urns, flower beds and plantings may be removed during renovation. Planting by lot owners or other visitors may be suspended until renovation work is completed. In some cases, the cemetery may choose to handle all future landscaping.

Remove plants from headstones during the spring cleaning?

As the weather warms up, lot owners and cemetery workers use this time to do some spring cleaning. One problematic area to focus on is removing plants and vines from headstones and family mausoleums as well as other masonry structures (chapels, statues, fences, etc).

It is important to remove heavy vegetation from stone masonry because its presence can pose a wide variety of preservation problems. Cemeteries, in particular older or historic cemeteries, should first carefully examine the vegetation and stone masonry surface. Periodic inspections of areas where masonry meets vegetation should be completed regularly throughout the growing season to prevent problems.

When conducting an inspection, it is important to see if vine roots have penetrated the stone or masonry. If masonry joints, the masonry itself or the stone is found deteriorated due to the roots or because of the weigh of the plant itself , the recommendation would be to contact a conservator before attempting to remove the vegetation from a historic or unique monument/structure.

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If the vine has not yet damaged the masonry or stone, we recommend:

Using lopping or pruning shears to cut the vine trunk about four inches above grade and remove a section of stem about six inches in length above this cut. In other words create about a six inch gap between the stump of the trunk and the stem of the plant. Make vertical cuts through the bark of the stump and peel the bark back slightly to expose about one inch of the inner wood.

Paint brush killer directly on the surface and sides of the stump. Be careful not to get any on the stone or masonry surface. This will kill the root system and help prevent the vine from re-sprouting.

Allow the vine to die naturally, then remove the dried tendrils and roots, taking care not to remove or damage any stone or masonry. Never pull or yank the vines off. This is almost certain to damage the fragile historic fabric of the masonry or stone.

Coax or ease the plant material off the wall using wooden scrappers. Often water will help loosen the plant material. If the vine was very large, it may be necessary to cut the network of stems into smaller sections.

Be careful not to allow the material you're removing to fall or cause additional damage. Be certain to gather all of the debris and remove it from the cemetery.

It is best not to leave dead wood in wall joints. As the wood decays, the void it creates will lead additional and often more serious problems. If the vines were large, it may be necessary to repair the wall or stone.

Gently scrub the surface with a soft, nonmetallic bristle brush and clean, potable water after removing as much material as possible. This will help remove the last of the vegetation.

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Poison Ivy –

Poison ivy is a common plant in a cemetery where maintenance has been minimal. There are two methods to control Poison Ivy. Mechanical or Chemical.

Mechanical control eliminates the need for chemicals, but does expose those involved to the plant's chemical that causes rashes, blisters and itch. This means that if you decide to manually remove the plant, all potentially exposed skin must be covered, and extreme care should be taken to prevent the spread of the oil to other clothing through washing.

Pulling can eliminate poison ivy. The real advantage to this approach is that it can be used in areas where chemicals can't be applied because of other valuable plants. Pulling is easier and more effective after heavy watering.

Glyphosate is moderately effective for killing poison ivy, translocating throughout the plant and eventually killing both leaves and roots. It, however, is non-selective and will kill or severely injure most kinds of plants.

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