

Starting A Cemetery Preservation Association

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 08 January 2013 07:48 - Last Updated Tuesday, 08 January 2013 07:51

Louisiana Cemetery Preservation

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To give you a basic idea of what's involved in the process of starting a Cemetery Preservation Association, we have set up a "bare bones" guide that may be of some help to you in getting started. Thanks go out to the members of the Indiana Pioneer Cemetery Restoration Project mailing list for the valuable input they provided in putting this together.

Before doing anything else

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Check to make sure that there is not a pre existing group in your focus area. A local Historical Society if there is one would be a good source for this information.

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Find out if there are existing readings of the cemeteries in your focus area. If they do exist you might want to see about updating them.

Prior to holding a first meeting

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Promote the fact that you are interested in exploring the possibility of starting up a Cemetery Preservation Association for your focus area to determine if there are others in the area that share your concerns and interests. Make sure that you give them a easy way to contact you, such as both a phone number and a email address. Collect both information and the names, addresses and phone numbers of people who want to be directly involved in organizing a cemetery preservation association.

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Once you have a core group (say 3 to 6 people) that have expressed a desire and a willingness to get involved , you can schedule a private meeting with them to discuss the most pressing issues that could be solved through a cemetery preservation association and how each of them wanted be involved in the organizing committee.

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At this stage, it is very important that this becomes a group project, rather than just your project.

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The organizing committee needs to set the date of the first public local association meeting, decide on a location, decide how to promote attendance, choose the issues to discuss and lead the discussion as to why a cemetery preservation association is needed.

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Start to develop a plan or organization, thinking about issues such as incorporation and such.

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For a location, try to choose a free public location such as a local library meeting room.

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You cannot do too much to promote this first meeting. Do everything that you can think of to get the word out to those that might share your interests.

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Your First Meeting

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At the first meeting, it is important to collect the names and addresses of those attending.

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Have a preprinted interests survey to pass out to the people in attendance that is short and can be completed and returned before they leave.

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Make sure that someone is assigned to record the minutes of the meeting.

Organizing

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Once you have had at least one more meeting, and everyone is in agreement that you need a cemetery preservation association, it is time to get organized. You need to establish bylaws, elect officers, set up committees, and establish an action plan.

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You may find that it is to your advantage to establish yourselves as a non profit corporation. While this is a simple process, the law on how to go about this process varies from state to state so you should check with your local state for the correct information.

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You also may want to file to establish your association as a 501c3 federal non profit corporation.

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If you are going to be dealing with money, you need to set up a bookkeeping system. You should also apply for a business name to protect the identity of your cemetery preservation association. In order to open a bank account, you will need to have a Tax I.D. Number.

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If you want to be eligible for certain grants and to receive a special bulk mailing rate, you may want to apply for tax exempt status. As you work through the process, you will want to become familiar with the resources, including local and regional as well as the various online resources. Make plans to promote the association. One good place to start is by registering your Association with the Saving Graves Association Registry.

Regular Meetings

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Plan on holding regular monthly meetings (general consensus as to a mutually agreeable date).

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Try to hold short meetings (about a hour) in which you run down what projects you are currently involved in, what in the works, legislation, etc. and then review what we know about the cemeteries in your focus area.

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One of the first projects that you should undertake as a group is to IDENTIFY the cemeteries in your specific area. Until you catalog what you KNOW, you won't know where to start trying to

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learn new information. One problem here that you will want to be aware of is that in many cases cemeteries are known by multiple names. One person will talk to you about the "Smith" Cemetery and another will talk about the "Jones" Cemetery. In the end, you finally figure out that they are talking about the same piece of property! This can be accomplished by starting with the USGS topographical maps for all the quads in in your county, or region. You will want to have them laminated and possibly mounted on a backing board. Because of the tremendous detail on the USGS maps, you can usually pinpoint a cemetery's location with a high degree of accuracy. Not all of the cemeteries in your focus area will be found on the USGS map. The rest can be added with Sharpie type marker. Because the maps were laminated prior to mounting, you can take a Q-tip and some alcohol and change any "mistakes".

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Create a website. This alone can take up the majority of the time that you devote to the association.

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Plan cemetery clean-up dates. When one of the group gets involved in a cemetery clean-up, they can call on the others in the group or labor, assistance and advice. Try to make use of community volunteer groups for help when possible.

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