Bonaventure Cemetery of Savannah, Georgia and St. Roch Cemetery of New Orleans, Louisiana:

An Historical Overview and Comparison Study

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Cover photo portrays a statue in St. Roch Cemetery, New Orleans, LA.
(Photo: Lily Keber, March 2010)

Abstract

Savannah, Georgia and New Orleans, Louisiana, two cities in the southeastern United States demonstrating many similarities in their natural environments, differ greatly in cemetery design. To illustrate this difference, this paper analyzes Savannah's Bonaventure Cemetery and New Orleans's St. Roch Cemetery. Through a comparison study and an overview of the historical contexts in which these two cemeteries were constructed, this paper seeks to both explore the practical and functional aspects of their designs and to gain insight into their cultural and ideological inspirations. The study indicates that Bonaventure Cemetery was created in the spirit of the 19th century American Rural Cemetery Movement which endorsed burial in a rural idyll with "nature" as a model. The origins of the design of St. Roch, on the other hand, seem to have been more diffuse. This cemetery's design appears to have resulted from a blending of French and Spanish cultural roots, Catholic tradition and the unique hydrological circumstances present in New Orleans. A review of these results then leads to a discussion of what cultural values the respective cemetery designs reflect.

Sammandrag

Savannah, Georgia och New Orleans, Louisiana är två städer i sydöstra USA vars naturliga miljöer uppvisar många likheter, men vars begravningsplatser skiljer sig signifikant vad gäller design och utformning. För att illustrera dessa skillnader analyseras i denna uppsats de båda begravningsplatserna Bonaventure i Savannah och St. Roch i New Orleans. Genom en jämförelsestudie och en genomgång av de två begravningsplatsernas historiska sammanhang ämnar uppsatsen undersöka de praktiska och funktionella aspekterna av respektive design, samt få en inblick i de kulturella och ideologiska influenser som ligger till grund för deras utformning. Studien visar att Bonaventure utformades i andan av 1800-talets 'Rural Cemetery Movement' vilken förespråkade begravning i en lantlig miljö och hade 'naturen' som modell medan St. Rochs utformning troligtvis påverkats av flera olika rörelser. Denna begravningsplats design tycks vara resultatet av en blandning av Franska och Spanska kulturella rötter, Katolsk tradition och de unika hydrologiska förhållandena som råder in New Orleans. Ett genomgång av dessa slutsatser inbjuder därför till en diskussion kring vilka kulturella värderingar respektive begravningsplats speglar.

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I. Introduction

A Personal Note: Why study cemeteries?

A study of cemeteries may seem a morbid topic for reflection. Indeed, the physical and biological realities of what lies beneath the earth's surface, or hidden within the hermetically sealed confines of the mausoleum after a burial, are not what most of us, bar perhaps the taphonomist, would call proper dinner conversation. It is unfortunate that, for many, such associations are the first that come to mind when the question of cemeteries is presented. This train of thought may have had its justification in the past, as this paper will discuss, but cemeteries, as anyone who has given the topic much thought will tell you, are much more than a simple depository for an unpleasant biological process.

On the one hand, cemeteries do have a functional role to fill. This fact alone could provide an interesting topic of study. The inventive methods that different cultures have adopted for solving practical problems can be and certainly have been reflected in the history of cemetery design. But on the other hand, the human relationship with the cemetery is much more complex than a study of practicalities would reveal. Instead, the cemetery should be studied for what it can say about human values. The cemetery, through its record of earnest outpouring of human sentiment, can uncover different aspects of a group's cultural and spiritual values which are often invisible in forums outside that of the burial ground. This prevalence of unique cultural artifacts in such a seemingly unlikely locale can perhaps be explained by the metaphor of death as the ultimate critical junction. For some it is a meeting point of the known and the unknown, the common and the mysterious. For others it symbolizes an end to the temporal and the point of embarkment upon a journey into the eternal. The cemetery then, as the ceremonial point of focus at the time of death, can be said to be humans' physical manifestation of this great junction, and hence the high status afforded it. For this reason, the motifs chosen for the planning and adornment of cemeteries strike me as a valid and fascinating point of interest.

The cemetery also plays other important roles for the living. Most obviously, it serves those in mourning as a reserved setting for the expression of grief. It is a link between the rememberers and the remembered. In addition, even for those not mourning the passing of a loved one, it serves recreational purposes in its historical and contemporary role as refuge from city life. I recall a time last summer when my wife had been away traveling and I planned to pick her up from the airport and take her on a picnic to the most beautiful place I could think of. When my mother asked where we were going to go and I replied, "Bonaventure," she gasped, "What! A picnic in a cemetery!" This story serves to illustrate the conundrum that is the cemetery's place in our culture. For some it is a place of reverence, for others, a history book. Still others view the cemetery primarily as a park setting. The cemetery has many fantastic qualities and a variety of uses which are not mutually exclusive. It is my hope that this paper will add credence to the sentiment that the cemetery is not a place of which to be frightened or a place to avoid, but is a landscape of knowledge, enjoyment and possibilities.

Background

Savannah, Georgia and New Orleans, Louisiana are two southeastern cities in the United States with remarkable similarities. Both cities, established on the banks of rivers, are major ports providing goods to large adjoining regions. The humid, warm climate that both cities share has, in the past, made them especially prone to the impact of epidemics, and their position along the U.S.'s southern and eastern coasts opens both to the yearly threat of hurricanes. A walk down a street in Savannah, under a spreading canopy of wintergreen oak, branches thick with hanging grey spanish moss, could easily be mistaken for a stroll down any number or New Orleans streets. But for all of the sweeping similarities in their natural environments, there are important differences to be found in the cities' details. One of these details is their respective cemeteries.

Bonaventure Cemetery, in Savannah, was built in the middle of the 19th century. Burial here, like in many other American cemeteries of the period, takes place below ground in graves often marked by elaborate monuments and statues. The cemetery is characterized by a placement relatively far-removed from the city center and a landscape design more reminiscent of a lush park than of the crowded, unsanitary cemeteries which typified the preceding period in American history.

St. Roch Cemetery on the other hand, along with the bulk of the burial sites of New Orleans, is marked by a very different character. It was built in the same period as Bonaventure, but St. Roch operates instead in the midst of city life and its internal structure is reminiscent of the city streets surrounding it. Enclosed by walls built up of above-ground, stacked *loculi* graves and filled with grid-patterned rows of stone, brick and stucco mausoleums, the cemetery stands in stark contrast to the park-like character of Bonaventure. Exploring why these two cemeteries followed such different courses of development is the chief theme of this paper.

Questions to address

– What characterized American cemetery tradition in the mid 19th century?

– Why did St. Roch Cemetery, along with the bulk of New Orleans cemeteries, develop a physical form so different from Bonaventure and many other American cemeteries of the period?

Objectives

- I will give an overview of the historical contexts in which St. Roch and Bonaventure Cemeteries were designed.

- I will compare these two cemeteries based on physical structure as well as on their respective ideological and cultural roots.

- I will frame a basic discussion of what can be learned from this comparison.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to shed light on some of the varying currents of thought in cemetery design in 19ᵗʰ century America and, through comparison, to gain a better understanding of the design of the two cemeteries in question as well as of the ideologies and cultural values which the designs reflect.

Material and method

Reference material used in this study is comprised predominantly of various books, academic journal articles, and historical newspaper articles describing the Rural Cemetery Movement, Bonaventure Cemetery, the cemeteries of New Orleans and cemeteries of the Mediterranean region. An important primary source for my essay is the book, *On the Laying Out, Planting, and Managing of Cemeteries*, by John Claudius Loudon (1843), which is widely regarded as one of the cornerstones of the American Rural Cemetery Movement.

Parts of my paper are grounded upon the notion that Bonaventure Cemetery is representative of the 19ᵗʰ century Rural Cemetery Movement. While this suggestion has clear support, as I will show in the text, one could argue that there are other cemeteries which are "more representative" of the movement. The reason that I have chosen Bonaventure above other rural cemeteries is twofold: 1) Because of the similarities in natural environment between Savannah and New Orleans, Bonaventure serves as a better comparison with St. Roch than other rural cemeteries, many of which are located in New England. 2) Having been raised in Savannah, I am more familiar with Bonaventure than any other rural cemetery.

In the same light, one could argue that St. Roch is not the most representative of New Orleans cemeteries. To this I respond: 1) Because St. Roch was built in the mid 19ᵗʰ century it stands as a more appropriate comparison to Bonaventure and the Rural Cemetery Movement than other, perhaps more well known, New Orleans cemeteries which were considerably older. 2) St. Roch contains physical structures, such as above ground mausoleums and cemetery walls built of stacked graves, which in scholarly literature are considered typical for New Orleans cemeteries.

The primary form that this paper takes is that of a literature study for which the aforementioned sources are to provide a base. The analysis methods include an historical overview and a comparison of St. Roch and Bonaventure Cemeteries. Comparison is partly implicit, to be deduced from clear differences exposed in the historical overviews, and partly explicit, in the form of discussion both within the historical overviews and at the paper's end. This discussion section at the paper's end includes personal reflections on 1) the design origins of the two cemeteries, 2) the cultural values which these designs reflect and 3) an alternative ideological approach to cemetery design from those employed at Bonaventure and St. Roch as exemplified by a modern Spanish cemetery.

To serve as a base for this comparison, I give an experiential description, a kind of eye-witness account, of the two cemeteries. This section, supported by photographs and basic maps, is placed at the essay's start to provide the reader with a better understanding of the two sites before entering into the historical overview. These descriptions are based upon my visits to the respective cemeteries in the summer of 2009, though the photographs were all taken in March, 2010.

II. An Experiential Description of Bonaventure Cemetery

To get to Bonaventure, I take a car. Driving from downtown Savannah, I follow a busy, palm-lined road for about three miles until I turn onto Bonaventure Road. This quiet, back road is surrounded by large southern lives oaks interspersed periodically with dirt drives, presumably leading to houses set back from the road. Driving slowly down the curvy road, I can already sense the silence and stillness of the area before I round a curve and see the two stone pillars that mark the entrance to Bonaventure Cemetery. To the right stands a large brick house which seems to be somehow affiliated with the cemetery. I stop the car here, a little unsure of how to proceed. It appears that I can drive onto the cemetery grounds, though this seems a little unusual. However, as there is nowhere to park, I drive through the gates. Immediately, the road forks and I am forced to choose right or left. I choose right and park the car by the side of the road.

Bonaventure's entrance gates (Photo: Emily Earl, March 2010)

When I step out of the car, I am standing under a canopy of arching oak branches. The air is thick, warm and humid and no breeze is blowing to alleviate the slightly oppressive heat of this July afternoon. Large oaks and azalea bushes line the deserted road and grey Spanish moss droops down from the thick, wandering branches overhead. The atmosphere here under the oaks is much as it seemed back out on the winding Bonaventure road: still and quiet. The cemetery, in this regard, seems truly to be part of its natural environment.

Oak-lined road in Bonaventure (Photo: Emily Earl, March 2010)

I begin walking down the dusty gravel road and look beyond the oaks and bushes to see a number of stone statues and pillars sticking up between mossy azaleas. The monuments seem to follow no real order, but rather to be placed out at random amidst the varying waist and shoulder-high bushes. After walking about 40 meters I come to another fork in the road. The layout of the cemetery seems to start as a single point at the entrance and spread out like the branches of a tree. Down to the right stands another car parked beside the road and I can hear low voices speaking a short distance off. I turn instead to the left and see beside the road straight paths that lead to rows of burial plots. That which I had taken for disorder in the placement of graves was actually just a pattern obscured by vegetation. Walking down one of the paths, statues and monuments of varying style appear. There are weeping angels and towering obelisks as well as low, simple gravestones.
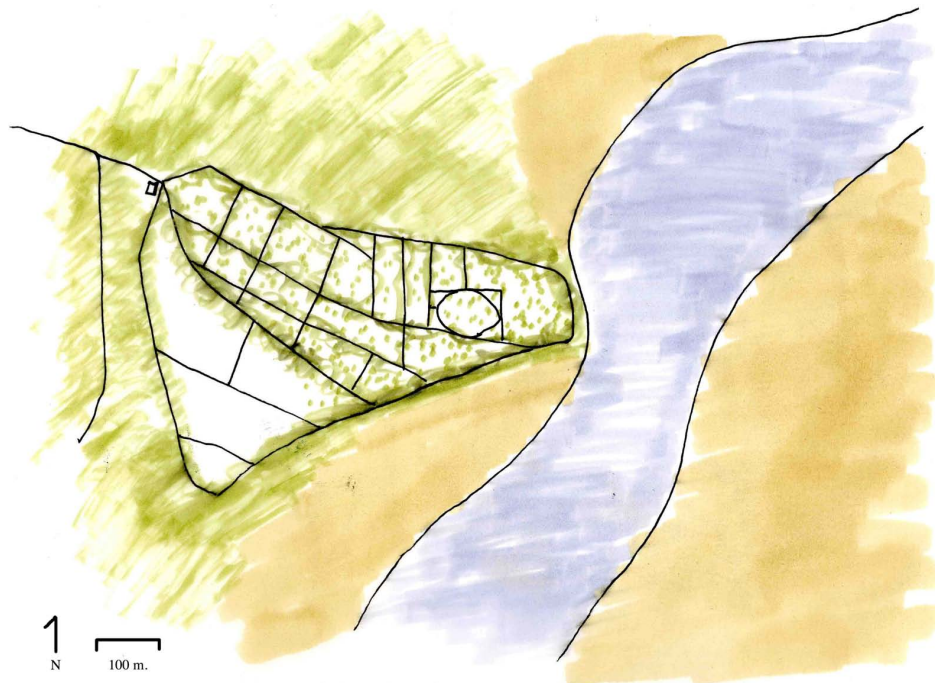
A basic layout of Bonaventure beside the Wilmington River

Walking back out onto the main road, I eventually, after about another three hundred meters, come to a place where the vegetation thins and the oak canopy opens up and a broad-stretched view appears, taking in a wide river and brown, flat marshlands. This image of a winding river complemented by the solemn expressions of figures under the oaks is a soothing sight, to be sure. I walk out onto the stone-covered bluff and sit to take in the view before turning and walking back to the car.

III. An Experiential Description of St. Roch Cemetery

To get to St. Roch Cemetery, I walk along a broad, straight avenue lined with the narrow facades of modest, wood-planked shotgun houses. On the sparse grassy section dividing the two lanes of light traffic grow two rows of mature southern live oaks which create an arching roof over the street and shade from the hot august sun. The temperature is around 32º C, but with the day's high humidity, it feels much warmer. I am sweating, as I have done since I arrived in New Orleans. Approaching the cemetery from the south, up ahead to my right, the house facades give way to a long, low, unbroken surface. When I get closer, it is clear that this is the cemetery wall. It is perhaps two and a half meters high and clad in clean, white stucco. Following the wall to the entrance, the trees open up and add authority to the low, brick guard houses on either side of the entrance. Between these two structures, a decorative wrought-iron gate flanked by white, statue-topped pillars announces that I have come to St. Roch's Cemetery.

St. Roch's entrance gates (Photo: Lily Keber, March, 2010)

Entering the cemetery between these guard houses, the strongest impression I am left with is just how bright it is here! The sun reflects intensely off of the light-toned stone and stucco of the tombs' upright facades. I have left the relaxed New Orleans I know and entered another world, formal and treeless. The lines created by the mausoleums which front the cemetery's central axis are unmistakably straight and point to the entrance of a chapel, the view of which is partially blocked by a tall crucifix standing in the center of the walk-way. Approaching this chapel, I walk by side paths which are, in turn, lined by tombs likening those of the main axis, but here the uniformity is broken to a degree by varying shapes in the mausoleums.

St. Roch's central axis (Photo:Lily Keber, March 2010)

As if following an order, I enter the chapel, which seems somehow too large for the cemetery. The interior is spartanly furnished and there seems to be little of interest. I almost turn around when I see a little gated off side room filtering light into the side of the chapel. In this room, the walls are lined with plaster casts of different body parts and strange trinkets: hearts, hands, feet, shoes, leg braces, a statue of a woman holding a plate on which rests two plaster, human eyes.

Thank you presents to St. Roch
(Photo: Lily Keber, March 2010)
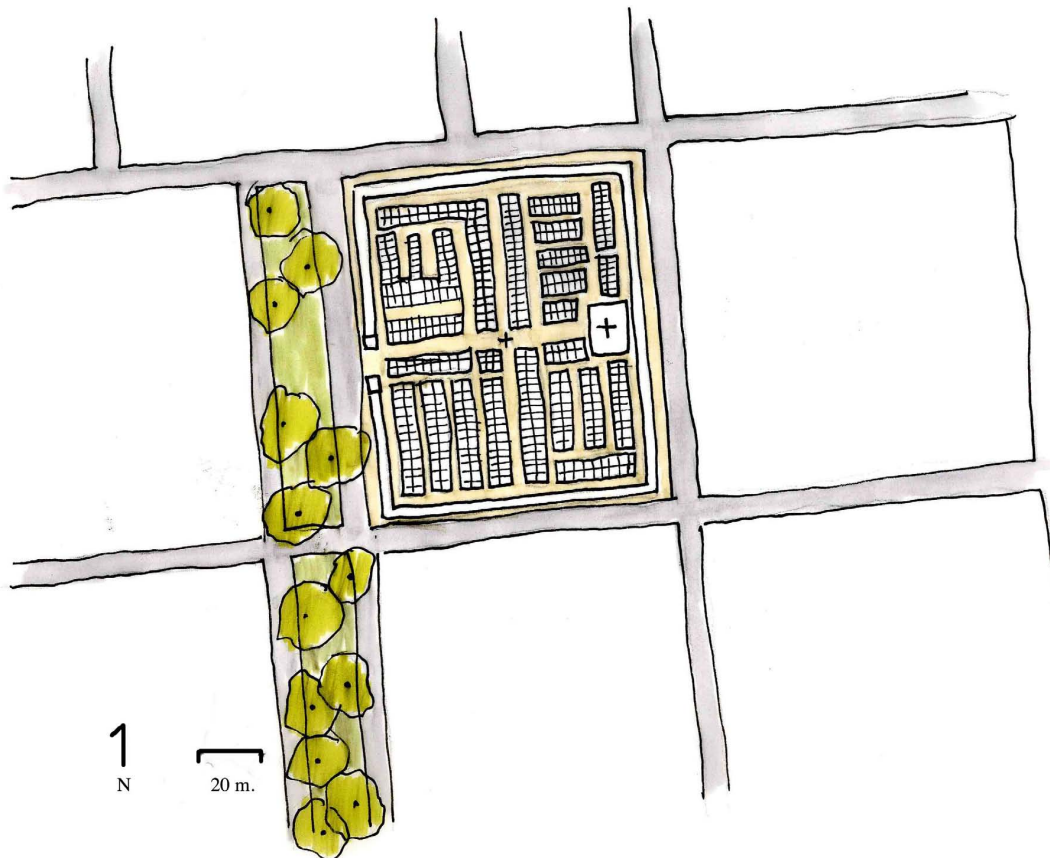
Basic structural map of St. Roch
Cemetery and surrounding city blocks

Stacked *loculi* graves in St. Roch Cemetery   (Photo: Lily Keber, March 2010)

Leaving the chapel a little bewildered, I walk along beside the outer walls which pleasantly close off this surreal environment from the city streets. Along the walls are indented rows of name plates marking small burial niches often sitting behind a small shelf adorned with flowers or trinkets. In contrast to the the rigid formality of the lined-up mausoleums, these walls seem to speak for a kind of solidarity between niche residents. Rather than conveying a sense of foreboding, the regularity of the scene seems open and almost even friendly. Only the periodic appearance of solemn statues in large, open niches along the walls remind me of my initial foreboding impression of the cemetery's central axis. Following the wall, I return to the entrance gate and go back out to the tree-lined avenue and back into the more familiar world of New Orleans.

IV. Historical Overview: Bonaventure and The Rural Cemetery Movement

A Brief Historical Review of Bonaventure Cemetery

Savannah, Georgia in the middle of the 19th Century was, like so many other American cities at the time, a place with a quickly growing population, and as a major port city, Savannah was particularly prone to spontaneous outbursts of disease and death (City of Savannah, Online). Yellow fever epidemics were common throughout the 19th century and led, along with other natural causes of death, to ever more crowding in Savannah's main burial ground, Colonial Park Cemetery. This cemetery, laid out within the city boundaries, had been the place were the majority of those who died in the city between 1750 and 1853 were buried, so it is little wonder that by the middle of the 19th Century, overcrowded conditions and a general unkempt appearance in Colonial Park led to calls for new cemeteries to be established (City of Savannah, Online).

This need for new cemeteries was answered partially by the establishment of Laurel Grove Cemetery which was opened by public authorities in 1852. Built at what was then the city boundaries, interments commenced upon the cemetery's opening. These included 600 transplant burials from other cemeteries, many from the overcrowded Colonial Park Cemetery (Guss, 2004, p. 7).

The other main component of the city's expansion of burial grounds was Bonaventure Cemetery. This cemetery, laid out farther from the city's population center than Laurel Grove, was established 3 miles from downtown on the banks of the Wilmington River. This site, like Laurel Grove, was built on part of an old plantation (City of Savannah, Online). The historical roots of the Bonaventure property are, like most of the American east coast, tied to English settlers and go back to pre-revolutionary times when the land was established as a non-agricultural plantation by the British Mullryne and Tattnall families around 1760 (Wilson and Johnson, 1998, p.7). It was during this early period in the property's recorded history that the roads of the estate were planted with the rows of southern live oak trees, *Quercus virginiana*, which still line the main cemetery roads. These trees, placed at 15 foot intervals, are today probably the cemetery's most prominent feature (City of Savannah, Online). The property changed hands a number of times through the years, and its history of ownership included a government confiscation after the Revolutionary War (Wilson and Johnson, 1998, p. 10-11).

Peter Wiltberger purchased 600 acres of the property in 1846 with the intention of turning 70 acres into a private cemetery. Wiltberger died shortly after purchasing the property, and it was his son, William Wiltberger, who would develop the property into a cemetery. To this end, Wiltberger, along with business partners, created 'The Evergreen Cemetery Company of Bonaventure' in order to develop and sell burial plots. At this period the cemetery went under the name *Evergreen Cemetery* (Wilson and Johnson, 1998, p. 17-19).

The new cemetery was established around the remains of the Tattnall estate house and incorporated the old Tattnall family burial plots. Burials, in other words, had been carried out on the Bonaventure property since 1794, but remained limited to private family interments (City of Savannah, Online). Beginning with the first monument to be erected on the site in 1848, the cemetery, like Laurel Grove, was first populated largely by remains transplanted from other sites, predominantly the old Colonial Park Cemetery. The grounds slowly took shape, forming around the oak-lined access roads, and by 1907 'The Evergreen Cemetery Company' had developed grounds occupying approximately one third of the cemetery's current 100 acre area (City of Savannah, Online).

It was during this time that the question of transportation to and from the newly formed Savannah cemeteries became pertinent (D'Alonzo, 1999, p.17). Due to the cemeteries' placement relatively far from the city center, entrepreneurs saw the opportunity to expand the city's trolley lines which had been under development since 1866. One such line led already to the nearby Savannah suburb of Thunderbolt, and in May, 1875, an extension line was opened to Bonaventure Cemetery. The remnants of these tracks can still be seen in front of the cemetery's main entrance, though the trolleys have long since ceased to function (D'Alonzo, 1999, p.17).

In 1907, after numerous fruitless attempts to sell the property, The Evergreen Cemetery Company succeeded in selling the cemetery to the City of Savannah. At this point it became known solely as Bonaventure Cemetery and has since been in public trust under the care of the city's Park and Tree Commission (Wilson and Johnson, 1998, p.21). Interment rights can only be purchased in one last remaining section of the original Bonaventure Cemetery (City of Savannah, Online).

The United States and the Rural Cemetery Movement

But in what historical context can the creation of Savannah's Bonaventure Cemetery be placed? At the same time as Wiltberger and his Evergreen Cemetery Company laid the foundations for Bonaventure's future development, the rest of the United States was undergoing a patterned change in cemetery planning and design known as the Rural Cemetery Movement. The timeframe in which Bonaventure was created, the general circumstances which called for its creation, its physical placement in relation the city's population center and its planting design seem to indicate that it should be categorized within this movement. But what characterized this trend? This section aims to give an historical overview of this unique aspect of American history, and to identify and define some of the central figures responsible for, places associated with and features characteristic of the movement.

John Claudius Loudon, a Scotsman and an influential landscape architect in Great Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century, wrote a book which is widely acknowledged as the literary cornerstone of the Rural Cemetery Movement (Curl, 1975; Darnall, 1983; French, 1974). This book, *On The Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries,* published in 1843, first came into circulation *after* rural cemeteries began to appear in America and Europe, but *before* they were

commonplace (French, 1974, p.56). This fact implies that his book was both a response to a trend that had already begun and an impetus to its continuance.

Loudon was, above all, practical in his attitudes toward cemetery planning, a fact he exposed already in his book's opening statement:

> The *main objective* of a burial-ground is, the disposal of the remains of the dead in such a manner as that their decomposition, and return to the earth from which they sprung, shall not prove injurious to the living; either by affecting their health, or shocking their feelings, opinions, or prejudices.
> A *secondary objective* is, or ought to be, the improvement of the moral sentiments and general taste of all classes, and more especially of the great masses of society. (Loudon, 1843, p.1)

The sanitary disposition of a burial ground was, in other words, Loudon's chief concern. But his belief in the cemetery's "secondary objective," to uplift a society's morals, would come to affect his vision of the physical form a cemetery could take perhaps just as greatly.

Sanitation Issues

Loudon's concern with sanitation was not groundless. Unsanitary conditions were, rather, the single greatest impetus behind the trend towards rural cemeteries (French, 1974; Mytum, 1989; Curl, 1975). The custom in both Europe and America for hundreds of years prior had been so called intramural burials, whereby corpses were buried within the boundaries of a city, most often in a church yard, but also to a lesser extent on town commons (French, 1974, p. 42-43). This practice was deemed sustainable until rapid urbanization in the 18th and 19th centuries led to explosive population growth in cities. Mytum (1989, p. 286) relates that as space became scarce in the old burial grounds, the custom had been that graves were reused, a practice that was not problematic until the cycle of reuse became so rapid that corpses were not given time to decompose fully before their graves were needed for new burials. This problem was only exacerbated by epidemics, which were a recurring reality in 18th and 19th century cities (Mytum, 1989, p.284). Cholera and yellow fever, among other diseases, caused many deaths in a short period of time, a situation which called for mass burials. Such conditions placed ever increasing strain on intramural cemetery capacity and caused serious health risks for cemetery workers, citizens living nearby, and the population at large whose drinking water risked contamination (Mytum, 1989, p.286).

Far from being places which could, as Loudon desired, strengthen the moral constitution of the urban masses, the state of these intramural burial grounds was such that they were places to be avoided rather than places of refuge (Mytum, 1989, p.288). He recognized that the first step to achieving his vision of cemeteries' improving moral sentiment and taste was improving their sanitation, and to this end he proposed certain practical solutions such as always leaving at least 6 feet of space between interred bodies, vertically as well as horizontally, even if this meant digging graves 18 or 24 feet deep in order to stack 3 to 4 corpses below ground (Loudon, 1843, p.2). But as Mytum (1989, p. 283) on the other hand points out, there was often a disparity between the inventive solutions which rural cemetery advocates proposed and the actual measures that were enacted.

Cemetery Placement Outside of Cities

A major unifying element within the Rural Cemetery Movement was, as the name implies, the placement of cemeteries outside of urban centers. One of the early European examples of this practice which was recognized as an important forerunner of the Rural Cemetery Movement in America was Père la Chaise outside of Paris (Darnall, 1983, p.252). Though the establishment of the cemetery was essentially a direct response to health concerns, it was in part the innovative use of the hilly terrain on which it was established and the fact that it was located on what was then the ouskirts of the city that would cause it to leave its mark on the history of cemetery design (Mytum, 1989, p.289). Of course Père la Chaise was not the first cemetery to be chosen for its exceptional topographical qualities. As Semple (2008, p.416) illustrates, the archaeological record attests to the fact that burial sites throughout human history have been chosen for unique qualities in the terrain or for proximity to natural or manmade features in the landscape.

View over the Wilmington River from Bonaventure Cemetery (Photo: Emily Earl, March 2010)

Placing cemeteries outside of cities led to an improvement in sanitary conditions, but according to Loudon, it was not cemeteries' proximity to population centers which posed the chief sanitation problem. He suggested that the real problem was the uncontrolled means by which burials were carried out. In fact, he wrote that if his guidelines for spacing interments at six foot intervals were followed, then "in general, the nearer the town, the more desirable (the cemetery) would be, both as a burial-ground and a promenade" (Loudon, 1843, p.14). Despite this fact, practically all new cemeteries of the period were placed outside of cities, and often at great distances from the city: Mt. Auburn Cemetery, the first of the American rural cemeteries, was

placed 3 miles outside of Boston's urban center (French, 1974, p.43); Bonaventure was established 3 miles from Savannah (Wilson and Johnson, 1998, p.7); Brookwood, an English cemetery in the rural tradition created to serve London's population, was placed 25 miles outside of the city! (Herman, in press, p.5)

If there was no simple explanation based on sanitary concerns for cemeteries to be placed so far from the city and the people, why then did rural cemeteries become the norm? Perhaps the egregious nature of the cemetery-related sanitation problems leading up to the reforms caused citizens to overreact, forcing cemeteries to be pushed far outside of city boundaries. Another argument could be that the space necessary for new 'sanitary' cemeteries would be too great and that population growth in cities would soon swallow up the new grounds and lead to a situation reminiscent of the one for which the new cemeteries were intended to provide a solution. This is plausible, but according to Loudon's 1843 calculations, if those eight London cemeteries already established at the time were to employ his sanitary, space saving recommendations, London's burial needs would be supplied for 200 years (Loudon, 1843, p7). (This was before the establishment of Brookwood and other large rural cemeteries in the second half of the nineteenth century.) Fear of so called "body snatchers," who were hired to exhume freshly buried corpses in order to provide cadavers for medical dissection (Blakeley and Harrington, 1997), could be another explanation for the phenomenon. All of these arguments played, perhaps, some role in both the decision to place cemeteries outside of cities, and in the formation of the Rural Cemetery Movement in general, but as Mytum points out, there was yet another important factor at play: Attitudes towards death and towards the role that the cemetery should play in society were rapidly changing in the nineteenth century (Mytum, 1989). Because this factor is vital to an understanding of the Rural Cemetery Movement, it should be examined more closely.

Changing Attitudes towards Death

J.C. Loudon, ever the consolidating voice of the Rural Cemetery Movement, pointed to ancient history as a means for explaining concurrent trends. In the customary style of citing the superiority of ancient "enlightened" thought, he claimed that, "the ancients (…) contemplated death without terror." (Loudon, 1843, p.11) This premise he sets in opposition to his perception of what had, during the period leading up to his own time, gone awry in man's state of thought in matters related to death and the cemetery. This negative trend he blamed on, "the monkish artifice of associating man's latter end with all that was disgusting and horrible, and of inspiring the world with the idea that, to gain heaven, it was not necessary to exist rationally on earth." (Loudon, 1843, p.12)

While perhaps grossly generalizing ancient attitudes towards death, Loudon's perception of 17th and 18th century thought on the subject has found support among current researchers. Indeed, French (1974, p.40) points to the prevalence of the elegiac form in American and English literature during the period as evidence of a focus on the morbid and melancholy. Employing this form, writers like Philip Freneau and Edward Young painted dreary and morbid, yet romanticized images of death. At the same time, tombstone inscriptions and imagery adopted in the period's cemeteries, like the physical state of the cemeteries themselves, seemed intended to

warn visitors of death's horrors rather than convey any positive message of hope or renewal (Mytum, 1989, p.295).

With the advent of the Rural Cemetery Movement, these morbid funerary images which had become the norm throughout the 17th and 18th centuries began to give way to attitudes espousing a gentler view of death. Loudon cites early 19th century writers like Coleridge and Washington Irving who began to question the tradition of morose imagery in the cemetery. Instead, Coleridge wrote, "the soothing influences of nature" (Loudon, 1843, p.8) should be the cemetery's model. A rural repose, likened to falling asleep, in a "natural" landscape emphasized this new mode of thought and became the common response to criticisms of the old style. Scholars have pointed out that this change also mirrored the development of intellectual thought outside the realm of cemetery debate. This shift can be seen as enlightenment thought, rejecting the authoritarian "hand of man" as typified by Versailles, (Darnall, 1983, p.250) gave way to movements such as Romanticism and American Transcendentalism which embraced a kind of "back to nature" philosophy (French, 1974, p.58-59). The Rural Cemetery Movement, it would seem, was a response to the trends of the time in more than just practical questions of sanitation.

The Cemetery as Cultural Institution

According to rural cemetery founders and alluded to by Loudon in his second *main objective* in cemetery design, the creation of rural cemeteries would have yet another benefit for the American continent: It would serve as a much needed cultural institution (French, 1974, p.44-46). As French indicates, European visitors to America in the nineteenth century often held the opinion that the United States, due to its dearth of historically significant buildings and other obvious ties to an illustrious past, was culturally bankrupt (French, 1974, p.57). Europe, on the other hand, had not only centuries' worth of architectural treasures, but was even seeing the beginnings of the creation of public parks as exemplified by Haussmann's mid-nineteenth century park system in Paris. Scholars now recognize that rural cemeteries, by virtue of the fact that they were among the first public and semi-public green spaces in American cities, became a vital part of the United States' answer to its need for cultural improvement (Darnall, 1983, p. 249).

But in what concrete ways can a cemetery be culturally enriching? Aside from their pure recreational value, Loudon thought that they could serve as a kind of library for the poor. He wrote that the "country churchyard" had long been the common laborers' only access to historical documentation, thereby providing them with a sense of historical identity (Loudon, 1843, p. 13). Supporters thought that rural cemeteries, by invigorating an awareness of history and by providing fine settings for burial of loved ones, would inspire sentiments of patriotism in local populations, sentiments which rural cemetery proponents even tied to improved morals (French, 1974, p.48-49). Another idea which was used to gain support for the movement, again by tying cultural improvement to burial grounds, was the idea of inspiring botanical curiosity in visitors. At Mount Auburn Cemetery, outside of Boston, the purchase of grounds was a joint venture between citizens who wanted to establish a cemetery, and a local botanical society which wanted to create an arboretum (French, 1974, p. 44-45).

While a pure arboretum never materialized at Mount Auburn, the opportunity of combining botanical garden and cemetery was carried out in London at Abney Park Cemetery in 1840 where all trees and shrubbery were labeled with a name plate for the "edification of the working classes" (Curl, 1975, p.29).

A sculpture-topped burial marker in Bonaventure
(Photo: Emily Earl, March 2010)

In addition to fostering a sense of belonging based on historical roots, Loudon (1843, p. 13) thought that a properly executed rural cemetery could provide ordinary citizens with the additional advantage of access to the arts by providing samples of architecture and sculpture. The typical rural cemetery did, in fact, come to be filled with a diverse collection of styles ranging from Egyptian obelisks to Italian Renaissance sculpture. According to preservationist Shary Berg (1992, p. 53), in the early years of the Rural Cemetery Movement, (ca. 1831-52) a monumental classical style dominated the scene, while later years (ca. 1853-73) saw an influx of elaborate, sentimental statues. Darnall writes that this all-inclusive range of styles and the apparently sincere enthusiasm with which they were carried out in rural cemeteries amounted to an uncritical acceptance of the Classics on the part of the Americans. She says that works in the classical style which contemporary Englishmen had commissioned were intended to be ironic or witty while their American counterparts were intended as literal and sentimental (Darnall, 1983, p.254). Darnall also seems to be making a case for a "cultural bankruptcy" of nineteenth century America, but as monuments were erected by individuals and not by a mandated program, this can at worst be construed as a criticism of personal taste.

The Use of Vegetation in Rural Cemeteries

One last important defining characteristic of the Rural Cemetery Movement which highlighted its departure from intramural cemetery norms was its vegetation. Rural Cemeteries, which were also referred to as *garden cemeteries* (Loudon, 1843, p.11) came to exhibit a lush, park-like character, a fact that had to do in large part with their placement on long-unused land. Often chosen, as at Mount Auburn, for their mature vegetation, these cemeteries stood in stark contrast to the barren city cemeteries marked by overuse and contaminated soil (French, 1974, p.44).

Contemporary proponents of the style thought that vegetation would serve as a soothing element for mourning visitors. Loudon quotes John Strang, author of a work describing a garden cemetery at Glasgow, as saying:

> Does it not become the duty of every well wisher to his species, to pour into the tomb the light of religion and philosophy, and thereby to dissipate the vain phantoms which the false gloom of the grave has tended to call forth? The decoration of the cemetery is a mean peculiarly calculated to produce these effects. Beneath the shade of a spreading tree, amid the fragrance of the balmy flower, surrounded on every hand with the noble works of art, the imagination is robbed of its gloomy horrors, the wildest fancy is freed from its debasing fears. (Loudon, 1843, p. 12)

Placement in a "natural" landscape was to be the crowning element of the movement, but the arrangement of vegetation, according to Loudon, could not be carried out in just any way. Again, Loudon placed practical considerations above all other priorities, and in the case of vegetation this meant that its placement could not interfere with proper air circulation in the cemetery, a property which, he asserted, led to improving decomposition of bodies. Following this thought, he recommended never placing trees or bushes in large groups as this would inhibit wind-flow (Loudon, 1843, p.69). Instead, he suggested that vegetation should be evenly spaced out between graves so as to maximize the "natural" experience of the burial ground and the amount of land available for interments while minimizing stagnation (Loudon, 1843, p.20).

Loudon's recommended planting designs (Loudon, 1843, p. 20, 69) had yet another intention: that the cemetery should not come to resemble a "pleasure ground," which was something he considered "highly objectionable" (Loudon, 1843, p.69). Though American rural cemeteries seem to have followed Loudon's advice on planting design, as demonstrated at Bonaventure, the intended effect of stifling idle social activities was less successful than Loudon had hoped. Instead, rural cemeteries in America often became cities' *chief* "pleasure ground," serving as a backdrop for country walks, carriage rides and picnics (French, 1974, p.37-38; D'Alonzo, 1999, p.17). Perhaps this was tied to the fact that, as mentioned before, the new cemeteries were, in many cases, American cities' first public green spaces. It would seem that the beautiful, new and, in their context, unique cultural institutions could not be reserved exclusively for mourners, but would also, until public parks became more widespread, have to serve the public's need for recreation.

V. Historical Overview: New Orleans and
St. Roch Cemetery

A Brief History of New Orleans and St. Roch Cemetery

In order to understand New Orleans's cemeteries, one must first form at least a basic understanding of the history of the city itself. Unlike the British colonial outposts of the eastern United States, of which Savannah was the southernmost, colonial New Orleans, along with the rest of Louisiana, was under French control. Founded in 1718 by Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, sieur de Bienville, New Orleans was chosen for its strategic position along the banks of the Mississippi River (Kelman, 2003, p.4). The settlement was placed on an isolated patch of elevated ground in the midst of the vast network of swamps which comprised the Mississippi River Delta, a placement which Bienville nevertheless judged to be defensible due to the perceived advantages of proximity to the Gulf of Mexico and to countless minor tributary inlets to the great river. The choice of this soggy terrain for the site of what would become the United State's largest southern port city has been a defining element of New Orleans's development ever since (Kelman, 2003, p.5-6).

As Brock (1999a, p. 7) relates, under Bienville, the French ruled in New Orleans and the colony of Louisiana until 1762 when control of the city was signed over to the Spanish. The Spanish then legally controlled the city until 1803 when it was briefly ceded back to the French, only to be sold shortly thereafter in the same year to the United States as the famed "Louisiana Purchase."   It is of little surprise then that the early character of New Orleans, having been shaped by almost a century and a half of French and Spanish settlement as opposed to the predominantly English influence common in most of the rest of the United States, would continue to play a central role in the city's unique cultural development in the years to come.

Brock (1999b, p.7) writes that the earliest burial ground in the New Orleans, used only in the years immediately after founding, was placed along the banks of the Mississippi River. Already by 1721, those responsible for city design thought it best to create a new cemetery outside of the city's boundaries. Thus the "St. Peter Street Cemetery," referred to by the name of the street on which it would now sit if still in existence, was created and served as the city's only cemetery for more than a half century, until 1789. By this time, the city's growth had engulfed the site and it was consequently divided up and sold for development (Brock, 1999b, p.7). According to scholar Dell Upton (1997, p. 133), the job of replacing the St. Peter Street site fell, in 1789, to a cemetery called "St. Louis No. 1". Repeating the pattern established by the New Orleans's first two cemeteries of building outside of the city's boundaries only to have city expansion eventually catch up, this burial ground was set up beyond the flood ramparts in an area that was undeveloped at the time but which soon would be surrounded by city life (Upton, 1997, p.133). St. Louis No. 1 would be only the first in a long line of burial grounds that the city of New Orleans would eventually construct.

Like Savannah, New Orleans in the middle of the nineteenth century was a rapidly growing port city plagued by periodic epidemics (Mytum, 1989, p.286-7). It was one

such outbreak, the yellow fever epidemic of 1867, which led to the construction of St. Roch Cemetery. Merrill (2005, p. 255) writes that the German Catholic priest, Fr. Peter Leonhard Thevis of New Orleans's third district, where St. Roch now stands, made a promise to God during the epidemic to construct a chapel if his parishioners were spared from death. This promise having been fulfilled, after the epidemic Thevis built in his district a mortuary chapel to St. Roch, a saint known for his healing powers. This chapel was modeled after *Campo Sancto dei Tedeschi*, a chapel for Germans next to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Within the chapel was built a room where people come and leave gifts to St. Roch in thanks for his healing intervention. Often these gifts represent different parts of the body which the gift-bearer believes to have been healed through St. Roch's intervention (Merrill, 2005, p.255-6). On the grounds adjacent to the chapel, St. Roch Cemetery was laid out as a walled in, *loculus* style cemetery with family vaults placed in the center. In addition to the *loculi* burial chambers, Merrill tells us that 14 niches were also built into the walls with statues representing the Catholic *stations of the cross*. These niches still fill a ceremonial function on All Saints Day (Merrill, 2005, p.256).

Cemetery Placement in New Orleans

Perhaps the most conspicuous characteristic of New Orleans cemeteries, aside from their unique appearance, is the fact of their very presence within the city. While cemetery tradition in most of the rest of the United States was marked during this period by the Rural Cemetery Movement, cemetery builders in New Orleans built cemeteries within the city itself (Merrill, 2005, p.255). This situation presents somewhat of an irony because, as Mytum (1989, p.287) has pointed out, planners in New Orleans were among the first in the Americas to recognize the dangers of intramural burial. Thus, the cemeteries' presence in the city was not from the beginning an intentional aim, but rather a result of city growth. As noted (Upton, 1997, p.133), cemeteries like the early St. Peter Street site and St. Louis No. 1 were built on the edge of town only to have city expansion eventually surround them.

During the course of the nineteenth century however, other cemeteries, such as St. Roch, were intentionally placed within the city (Merrill, 2005, p.255). As an explanation for this phenomenon, Upton has suggested that the idea of the "reform cemetery" was adopted in New Orleans. Proponents of the reform cemetery embraced the idea of intramural burial, but "sought to alleviate some of the terrors of burial inside the city and to soften the abode of death with plantings and other amenities" (1997, p.142). The implication is that, rather than perceiving an inherent problem with placing cemeteries close to population centers, supporters of the reform cemetery in New Orleans thought that the sanitary concerns pertaining to intramural burial resulted only from abuse and overuse of the earth. Thus, they were problems which could be addressed through proper measures. As indicated, one of the elements which could "alleviate the terrors" of the cemetery was vegetation. Indeed, historic photographs of many of the historic cemeteries of New Orleans (Brock, 1999b) show some limited plantings of trees and bushes, but as we see at least in the case of St. Roch, many of these plantings have disappeared with the years.

In addition, it should be noted that removal of cemeteries far outside of the city's boundaries was not as practicable in New Orleans as it was in the rest of the country. Given the swampy terrain surrounding the city (Kelman, 2003, p.4), city planners had little choice as to where to place cemeteries. With this in mind, from a functional standpoint, cemetery placement within the city can perhaps best be attributed to: 1) the reform cemetery belief that sanitary concerns could be addressed by adapted burial methods and 2) hydrological necessity.

Hydrological Challenges in New Orleans

The determination of *where* the cemeteries should be placed was not the final question to be addressed in the city's cemetery construction debate, because even burial within the city was not without its hydrological complications. According to Kelman (2003, p.6), New Orleans, due to its tenuous geographical position in the ever shifting Mississippi Delta, is a city which has had to fight for land on which to build. Surrounded by a system of human-built levees to protect from natural flooding, much of the city lies below sea level, a condition resulting in an exceptionally high water table and vulnerability to periodic floods (Kelman, 2003, p.6). This vulnerability was highlighted by the intense flooding caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 when much of the city, including St. Roch Cemetery, sat partially submerged for a number of days. Indeed, the city's high water table presents a less than ideal hydrological situation for ground burial as practiced in most other U.S. cities at the time (Upton, 1997, p.134). That is not to say that ground burial is impossible in New Orleans. In fact, Nakagawa, in his study of Louisiana cemeteries, has concluded that below ground burials in southern Louisiana are actually quite common and even stand for the majority of interments in some delta cemeteries. (Nakagawa, 1990, p.145) St. Roch even has a few below-ground burial plots.

However, the fact that below ground burial in the city is *possible* did not reduce the many prejudices against sending loved ones to a "watery grave." Upton (1997, p.134) has written that among the most common of these prejudices were beliefs that coffins could unexpectedly float to the earth's surface and that corpses would be devoured by crayfish.   While prejudices clearly exaggerated the realities of below ground burial in New Orleans, there were still strong arguments for looking for an alternative. Loudon (1843, p.4) pointed out that decomposition occurred most slowly in waterlogged soils and the fact that cemeteries were necessarily confined to land within the city's boundaries entailed a real sanitary risk in a growing urban center faced with inevitable cemetery crowding.

Above-ground Interment in the Urban Environment: Functional aspects

In such an environment, above ground interment seems a natural response, and it was just this practice that eventually became the norm in New Orleans (Brock, 1999b, p.7). At the same time it must be recognized that New Orleans cemeteries have not always had the structure we see today, but rather, like the city itself, the cemeteries developed slowly with time (Upton, 1997, p.135-7).   Brock writes that the first above-ground burials in the city were family vaults constructed for the rich. Most

could not afford to build such vaults as building material was very scarce in the city's early years, and the brick and stone which could be obtained was used in buildings for the living rather than the dead. Thus, above-ground burial was the exception rather than the rule until rich families began to fill the grounds at St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 with mausoleums in the early nineteenth century (Brock, 1999b, p.7-8). These vaults had the distinct advantage in the minds of New Orleanians of preventing the "terrors" of in-ground burial while simultaneously providing the kind of conspicuous memorialization in death popular in the rest of the United States and Europe (Upton, 1997, p.137).

Loculi burial in St. Roch Cemetery   (Photo: Lily Keber, March 2010)

Eventually, cemetery builders began implementing a design to make above-ground burial affordable even for poorer citizens (Upton, 1997, 138-9). This design took the form of stacked up burial chambers in niches called *loculi* which created wall-like structures, or free-standing oven-shaped tombs which Upton tells us are referred to in New Orleans as *fours* (1997, p.137). The design was intended both to make burial more "democratized" and to maximize efficiency in a limited space. Thus, in such structures, burial rights are rented for a set period of time, often between 25-50 years, rather than purchased (Upton, 1997, p.138).   When the agreed period is concluded, the wooden coffins are removed and burned while the remains of the interred are pushed down a hole at the back of the space into a common holding chamber, making room for a new coffin (Mytum, 1989, p.287). Upton has also noted that when built into the walls of the cemetery, burial in *loculi* had the additional benefit of keeping out vandals and grave robbers, problems faced in New Orleans just as they were in other major cities. At some New Orleans cemeteries such as St. Roch, a guard house was even built that served the double function as a place to lay the dead before burial and as a residence for guards (Upton, 1997, p.141). In these ways, ever more efficient use of space was adopted in New Orleans cemeteries, providing practical answers to the decision to inter the dead within city boundaries. These changes also serve to demonstrate a continuing adaptation of cemetery design to local circumstances.

A clear impact of the adoption of above-ground burial within the city was that the world of the dead and the world of the living were suddenly all the more conspicuously linked. Indeed, it is a common observation that the layout of New Orleans cemeteries resembles the street grid of the city itself, and the free-standing mausoleums even resemble the 'shotgun' houses for which the city is famous (Upton, 1997, p.135). So closely linked were the workings of New Orleans and its 'cities of

the dead' that the location of graves was recorded according to both the cemeteries' internal structure and the street network outside the cemetery walls (Upton, 1997, p.139).

Mausoleums in St. Roch Cemetery   (Photo: Lily Keber, March 2010)

Catholicism and Attitudes towards Death in New Orleans

An intimate physical link between the living and dead can serve to illustrate the living community's attitudes towards death (Goody and Poppi, 1994, p.168). Visiting the grave is considered an outward sign of devotion to the dead (Goody and Poppi, 1994, p.149) and because of the proximity of the worlds of the dead and living in New Orleans, this act could be carried out very frequently, the cemetery becoming "a part of the daily and ritual life of (the city's) inhabitants" (Upton, 1997, p.142). Upton writes, "Visitors could confront death and bereavement frankly and naturally and thus incorporate them into daily urban life" (1997, p.141). In this way, the cemetery's position in New Orleans gave death a much more central place in both the community's collective consciousness and in its daily rituals.

The majority of New Orleans's cemeteries, including St. Roch, are Catholic (Brock, 1999b, p.7), and the active role that the living play in them and the form that they take can to some extent be explained by tenets of the Catholic faith. St. Roch's niche statues representing the stations of the cross are an obvious example of this influence on design (Merrill, 2005, p. 256). Catholic belief can even offer an additional explanation for their placement within the city. Goody has pointed out that according to Catholic tradition, a deceased person's travel through purgatory can be eased by prayer and by the physical devotion of the living as expressed through regular visits to

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the grave (Goody and Poppi, 1994, pp.149,168). Therefore, if we assume that New Orleans Catholics followed Catholicism's tenets to the letter, it would appear that visitors to Catholic cemeteries like St. Roch were driven by more than just a desire to alleviate grief. By their presence they were actually fulfilling a kind of mandate of their faith. In this light, the physical proximity and adaption of the cemeteries to their urban surroundings can perhaps be understood as a convenience rather than a dilemma for Catholics, as regular visits to cemeteries outside of the city would obviously be a greater burden on loved ones.

However, it is difficult to know to what degree the daily practices of New Orleanians were religiously motivated, and even if this was quantifiable, Catholicism alone would still not satisfactorily answer the question of why New Orleans cemeteries took the form they did. The fact is that there are also protestant cemeteries in New Orleans with grid forms of mausoleums and *loculi* walls similar to those in the Catholic cemeteries (Upton, 1997, p.139). In his study of Louisiana cemeteries, Nakagawa has pointed to the folly of trying to catagorically explain cultural traits in a landscape based on "an implicit assumption of homogeneity in a culture area" (Nakagawa, 1990, p. 142). So while the tenets of Catholicism can explain some features in cemeteries such as St. Roch, there must, therefore, be other factors at play in shaping New Orleans cemeteries. One important additional place to look for clues is in similar structures elsewhere in the world.

Cultural Roots of New Orleans Cemeteries

As already noted, while the majority of early immigrants to the colonial United States were English and northern European, the early settlers of New Orleans were French, and to a lesser degree, Spanish (Brock, 1999a, p. 7; Nakagawa, 1990, p. 140). These settlers would have taken with them traditions from their home countries and evidence seems to indicate that these traditions probably included customs of cemetery construction (Mytum, 1989, p.287). Indeed, a common response which migrating groups have to dislocation is the establishment of cemetery pattens likening those in their places of origin. This act is intended to create a connection with home or, "in effect, to bridge time and place" (Francis, et al., 2005, p. 179).

It is important to recognize then that the *loculi* form of walled-in burial was the traditional form of interment in the western Mediterranean region, the region from which many of the settlers of New Orleans migrated (Mytum, 1989, p. 288). Scholars have described cemeteries employing these methods in Italy, France, Spain and Gibraltar (Goody and Poppi, 1994; Mytum, 1989). Interestingly, the Mediterranean region is a place with generally warm and well-drained soils which should encourage safe, rapid decomposition (Loudon, 1843, p.4), yet Mediterranean populations still choose above ground burial. Good and Poppi (1994, p.153-5) have indicated that in Italy, above ground burial arose cheifly as a method of efficiently exploiting urban space. The implication is that if above ground burial was not a response to damp soils in the region from which the basic pattern for the design of New Orleans cemeteries originated, it probably was not the *only* explanation for its adoption in New Orleans.

But what did the above ground burial structures in the Mediterranean region actually look like? A particularly giving description of a late 19th century Spanish cemetery

was written by a foreign correspondent to the *New York Times* in 1899 and can shed light on the similarities between Mediterranean burial customs and those in New Orleans. In the article the author described "strange silent cities" where "the coffins are thrust like books on library shelves, each above each to the altitude of perhaps a dozen layers" (Bates, 1899, Online) and went on to relate what was to her the novel idea of *loculi* being rented out for a pre-determined number of years. She also described gridded streets of mausoleums for the rich and explained the construction of the cemetery by saying, "Such wall graves are characteristically Spanish, this mode of burial in the peninsula being of long antiquity" (Bates, 1899, Online). The author sounds as if she could just as well be describing St. Roch Cemetery in New Orleans. Furthermore, to place her description of the "silent cities" in a context more familiar for her American readers, she described adjacent English and German cemeteries "with green turfed mounds and a profusion of blossoming shrubs and flower beds" (Bates, 1899, Online). This contrast serves to emphasize the typical differences between Mediterranean and northern European, and by extension, North American cemeteries.

While wall-graves were absent from the Anglo-American cemeteries of the period (Mytum, 1989, p.287), loculi interments did occur in other parts of the Spanish-American world. The Espada Cemetery in Havana, Cuba, for example was expanded with wall-graves in 1840 (Aruca, 1996, p.38). Additionally, Upton has pointed out that above ground burials were common throughout the Caribbean region and even appeared in coastal regions in parts of the southern United States, (Upton, 1997, p.137) though this does not necessarily mean that the cemeteries in which they appeared were of the walled-in type found in the Mediterranean and New Orleans. This evidence supports the notion that the Mediterranean was the source region for the walled-in cemetery form and for above ground loculi burial as practiced in the New Orleans.

VI. Discussion: Comparing Bonaventure and St. Roch

Now that we have looked at some of the key elements of the respective designs of Bonaventure and St. Roch Cemeteries and seen the contexts in which they were formed, we can begin to discuss and reflect upon important similarities and differences between the two. Any kind of expression of personal preference will be avoided as this is not the intention of this paper. The two cemeteries, as pointed out, were formed under different circumstances in separate geographical locations causing them to satisfy different demands for different groups. The aim of this exercise is instead to reach some broad conclusions about what insights can be drawn from the historical overview of these two cemeteries.

Design Origins of Bonaventure and St. Roch

Though the designs of both Bonaventure and St. Roch Cemeteries were determined by a combination of factors, Bonaventure's design origins seem to fit more into a traceable, patterned framework of development than St Roch's. Outside groups have categorized Bonaventure within the Rural Cemetery Movement (Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2009, Online), and this conclusion seems to be supported by physical characteristics, such as its planting design and its placement outside of the city, which are in line with other American rural cemeteries. It is also supported by the fact that its establishment in Savannah, dated to 1846, followed the general trend of rural cemetery establishment in a logical chronological and geographical pattern. As Stanley French (1974, p.53) points out, from the establishment of Mount Auburn in Boston in 1831, the rural cemetery style spread first to other cities in the northeastern United States and, like many other trends of the time, made its way slowly southward.

Also an indication of its authenticity within the movement, Bonaventure's design seems to be based on a central core of tenets which were articulated in J.C. Loudon's work. Though deviating from some of Loudon's detailed recommendations, as probably all cemeteries within the movement did, Bonaventure still conforms to the reformist spirit of the document in most respects. Of course, it is important to point out that we cannot actually know if the founders of Bonaventure actually read Loudon's text. Therefore, what seems perhaps more relevant to the discussion than if Bonaventure conformed without exception to the tenets of a canonized text is the appraisal of whether or not it conformed to the relatively unified aesthetic and cultural expression represented by the rural cemeteries themselves. This it did, as already shown.

Nevertheless, an interesting point of consideration in this context is how one is to approach apparent disagreement between physical evidence in patterns of cemetery development and a written source, such as Loudon's, which is supposed to be a cornerstone of that development (Curl, 1975; Darnall, 1983; French, 1974). For example, evidence from the rural cemeteries shows that his recommendations for multiple burials in the same plot with 6 feet of vertical space in between (Loudon, 1843, p.2) were rarely, if ever, followed (Mytum, 1989, p. 294). It seems most reasonable in this case to follow the physical evidence left by those who actually built

the rural cemeteries. Loudon was, after all, a single voice far removed from the daily realities of American culture even if his opinions did influence the Rural Cemetery Movement in many ways. Beyond just his physical removal, he was perhaps also ideologically deviant from some rural cemetery advocates: He was one who openly expressed practicality above all else in a field where valuing the practical above the emotional is by no means a foregone conclusion. The physical evidence then is perhaps a more reliable standard for judging and categorizing this cultural phenomenon. However, a written source from the period is indispensable as a standard of comparison, or a kind of checklist, after which historians can judge cemeteries after time has eroded their original appearances. In addition, Loudon's text is valuable in that it provides expressed evidence of cultural attitudes from the past and therefore can function as a complement to physical evaluation.

If the creators of Bonaventure can be said to have had a clear, unbroken pattern to follow in the form of the Rural Cemetery Movement and Loudon's text, St. Roch Cemetery, on the other hand, had only scattered pieces of a pattern. Judging by its physical appearance and by the known pieces of ethnic and cultural history of the city of New Orleans, we can, after the fact, point to guideposts and *speculate* upon why St. Roch took the shape it did, but it is much more difficult than in the case of Bonaventure to form a clear picture of the relative influence of inspirations leading to the founders' design. We know for example that the mode of burial and many of the physical structures of New Orleans' cemeteries resemble those of cemeteries in Mediterranean countries such as Spain, France and Italy (Goody and Poppi, 1994; Mytum, 1989). There is, at the same time, a widespread belief that above ground burial is carried out in New Orleans due to the high water table (Upton, 1997, p. 134). We also know that the burial practices seem to be adapted to Catholic tradition, (Goody and Poppi, 1994) but we have little help, as Nakagawa has pointed out (1990), of knowing to what degree these different aspects have shaped the final physical form that New Orleans cemeteries took. In any case, the creators of New Orleans cemeteries seem not to have had any obvious, fundamental 'guide book' to follow, and the special hydrological conditions in the city prevented, at least to some degree, a development in line with the rest of the United States.

If one cannot point to a single, specific historical pattern in explaining the form of the cemeteries, then maybe form can most rightly be attributed to the *lack* of a pattern. But looking upon the stately walls and logical, gridded rows of St. Roch, it seems problematic to make a serious case for the absence of a pattern. There must be another important aspect to understanding the situation. Having started as burial grounds with humble beginnings, not so very different from other urban cemeteries of the 18th century, we have seen how New Orleans cemeteries changed through time and how their character and form adapted to the city's special conditions making them what they are today. While other cemeteries of the day were designed to be rural, picturesque images frozen in time, New Orleans cemeteries were in a constant state of urban flux. It is then perhaps this process of adaptation and willingness to incorporate varying influences that can best serve to explain the current shapes of St. Roch and other New Orleans cemeteries.

Concepts of Permanence and Transience in Bonaventure and St. Roch

The idea of permanence comes as a natural topic to a discussion of cemeteries. In western thought, death is a permanent state or, one could say, *the* permanent state. Ken Worpole (2003, p.191) speaks of how one of the cemetery's prime functions in western culture has traditionally been to serve as a permanent record of individual, transient lives on earth, and that this task has been accomplished through a variety of designs. The variation in these designs can often be simultaneously interpreted to reveal deep-seated preferences and values that different cultures harbor. A reflection upon the designs of Bonaventure and St. Roch can illustrate this idea.

The grounds at Bonaventure seem in many ways to be a proclamation of the primary importance of the individual and the immutability of individual human will. Individuals purchase burial plots, and thereby take possession of hallowed ground as private property *in perpetuity*. On this private ground, individuals are then free, within certain bounds, to erect any kind of marker they see fit, thereby staking a physical claim in a world where they no longer physically exist. Richard Francaviglia has attributed this practice to what he calls the Victorian "striving for immortality" (1971, p. 507). Indeed, the markers chosen in Bonaventure, both in style and in the language of epitaphs, often seem to be placed in defiance of the limitations of the grave or as a statement that the influence wielded by the individual in life will follow him or her in death. The robust nature of many of these monuments seem intended to stand for eternity, and it is the impossibility of this task that represents for many the rural cemetery's greatest irony.

An obelisk in Bonaventure (Photo: Emily Earl, March 2010)

Placed among large oaks and flowering azaleas, the monuments work together with "nature" in Bonaventure to simulate an impression of timelessness for the visitor in a place that seems permanent and unchanging.   It is perhaps this interplay between man-made and natural symbols of constancy in Bonaventure which inspire reflection in visitors, and in this timeless environment it is the individual which is brought into focus. Therefore, while it could be said that the general purpose of a cemetery taken as a whole is to stand as one great monument to the transient nature of human beings' existence on earth, a walk through Bonaventure contradicts this sentiment and seems instead to posit an enduring influence for the individual. It seeks to provide undisturbed, 'eternal rest' in an incorruptible abode.

At St. Roch, the interplay between representations of permanence and transience are shifted from how I have interpreted them as functioning at Bonaventure. The nature of burial style and imagery in the cemetery are completely different here. Instead of occupying a measured plot of land in perpetuity, the interred are placed in a rented space for a pre-determined period. Individual corpses are thereby acknowledged already from the time of interment as occupying only a temporary place in the physical world as well as in the community's collective memory. This arrangement also limits the prominence of statuary memorialization, or at least shifts it from individual burial plots to family tombs, thereby limiting its overall effect. In this way, focus, to a large degree, is taken from the individual and placed instead upon the community or family.

The burial practices adopted in New Orleans cemeteries by no means detract from the significance the community attaches to death, but they do suggest a lighter, more accepting attitude towards death by an implicit recognition of the temporary nature of individual memory. In the case of the rural cemeteries, generations pass, and with them pass the memories attached to "permanently" memorialized individuals. Monuments and burial plots, while gaining a certain historical value, lose the sentimental value that was originally invested in them. The primary meaning of the cemetery as a place of grieving is lost, and the functions it serves must be altered if it is to survive. In this sense, the methods adopted in New Orleans seem to be a more open and honest way for a community to treat death and can perhaps be interpreted as a healthy reminder of the brevity of life on earth. This is a major breaking point between Bonaventure and St. Roch. By letting burial places be continually reoccupied in this manner, cemeteries such as St. Roch are designed with a built-in mechanism for renewal and adaptation, a characteristic which, as suggested earlier, was central to the unique development of New Orleans cemeteries. Such methods also assure that the burial grounds will continue to enjoy an active and relevant position in community life.

A Modern Perspective

To set this discussion in a modern context, an interesting aside at this point which can hopefully lead to a deeper understanding of Bonaventure and St. Roch is the consideration of an entirely different ideological approach to cemetery design than those already discussed. This new approach is what Worpole (2003, p.191) calls "natural burial" which I will illustrate by the example of Igualada Cemetery outside of Barcelona, Spain. Completed in 1994, this cemetery utilizes the *loculus* construction as at St. Roch, but strives to intimately engage the surrounding landscape in the design. The stacked burial chambers are constructed below ground level, tucked into a hillside with native vegetation prominent throughout the grounds. A common impression for visitors is that nature is meant to "take over" the cemetery (Robinson, 2006, p.2).

In reflecting upon the meaning of Igualada, Robinson poses the rhetorical question, "What sort of cultural landscape is it […] that takes up sides with nature against the monumentalist enterprise of culture, especially when it was supposed to offer visitors an intimation of immortality?" (2006, p. 2-3) Here he goes on to explain that the design was not, in fact, a self-defeatist statement where nature is the victor in a

struggle between itself and human culture, but rather that the two must be seen as vitally linked "in the so-called *cycle of life*" (Robinson, 2006, p. 3).

In a discussion of permanence and transience, Igualada cemetery provides an interesting extension to the ideologies expressed at Bonaventure and St. Roch. While Bonaventure's design seemingly asserts the permanent ascendency of the *individual*, and St. Roch is a testament to the primacy of the *community*, Igualada refines the argument by presenting the natural world as a partner operating in cooperation with culture (interpreted as incorporating the individual and the community). Humans can thus be seen as filling futile, transient roles when viewed as solitary actors, but they take on a mantle of permanence when acknowledged as collaborators in the greater "cycle of life."

The ideological foundations behind Igualada Cemetery strike a familiar tone in the ecologically conscious discourse within today's field of landscape architecture. In the same way, Bonaventure and St. Roch were products of their period's cultural values. By bringing a modern cemetery into the discussion, my intention was to emphasize the point that ideological trends always set the stage for new development. It is not difficult to accept that current trends, such as those represented at Igualada, will lay the foundation for the future of design. In the same way, cultural landscapes of the past set the stage for today's design ideas. That is why they are important to understand. Landscapes like Bonaventure and St. Roch not only tell us about how life was a century and a half ago, they also help explain the current state of the field of landscape architecture.

VII. Concluding Remarks

I have shown how Bonaventure Cemetery's physical form seems to have been shaped, to a large degree, by historical precedent in the form of the Rural Cemetery Movement. This movement, whose tenets were articulated by John Claudius Loudon, was coupled to a shift in cultural attitudes towards death, and lead cemetery designers to implement lush, park-like planting designs outside of cities to replace unsanitary intramural burial grounds. I have likewise examined St. Roch Cemetery and determined that its shape cannot as easily be attributed to a straightforward imitation of historical precedent. New Orleans's unique hydrological situation, its Catholic character, its cultural roots, and local attitudes toward the dead all seem to have affected St. Roch's placement and design. However, the *degree* to which any one of these factors affected the final design is impossible to conclude. What one can conclude about cemetery design in New Orleans is that it was a gradual process of adaptation to local circumstances. This is perhaps the most important distinction between Bonaventure and St. Roch. While Bonaventure was designed as a permanent and unchanging "natural" image, a thing separate from the day to day life of city dwellers, St. Roch, as a product of urban adaptation, was designed to play an active and flexible role within the community.

A weakness in my methods in writing this essay has been that, aside from my visit to Bonaventure, I have had to rely entirely on literary sources for my descriptions of the Rural Cemetery Movement. Comparisons of Bonaventure with other American rural cemeteries based on first hand accounts of those burial grounds might have painted a more complex picture of the movement and perhaps revealed more variation within it than I have portrayed in this paper. In the same light, I have discussed New Orleans cemeteries based on a description of only one cemetery when, in fact, there is a variation in layout and design of burial grounds within in the city. I have explained my choice of St. Roch by saying that the time period in which it was created made it an appropriate comparison with the Rural Cemetery Movement and by pointing to some important commonalities it shares with other New Orleans Cemeteries. As in the case of Bonaventure and the Rural Cemetery Movement, my suggestion of these commonalities has been based primarily on a literature study. It would have instead been useful to visit and describe a number of other New Orleans cemeteries in order to give the reader a more nuanced view of the designs and structures present there.

Another weakness in this essay is related to an inherent difficulty in discussing historical landscapes: We cannot experience the landscape in the period and context in which it was constructed. Therefore, it is important to refer to a variety of historical first-hand accounts of those landscapes. While I have closely followed John Claudius Loudon's work in order to get a clearer picture of cultural attitudes of the period, I have not been able to use any primary source material specifically describing Bonaventure or St. Roch which might have provided a valuable narrative of the changes they have undergone in the time since they were built.

Of course, it would be an impossible task to chart out a complete picture of and explanation for the shape of a cultural landscape. Just as a map can never fully reflect

physical reality, a historical portrait cannot account for all aspects of a landscape's infinitely complex and, for that matter, constantly changing physical form. But highlighting some of the key design features of these two cemeteries and juxtaposing them with historical and cultural trends can at least begin to provide us with a better understanding of their current shape, which was this paper's central purpose.

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