"CITIES OF DEAD" HAVE RICH PAST

TIMES PICAYUNE

Historians Tell Record of
St. Louis Cemeteries
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Cities of the dead . . . broad avenues lined with miniature temples arranged with a seemingly perfect regularity — tombs ranging from the most ordinary to the baroque marble tomb of the Delachaise-Liva
dais families.

No doubt a native New Or
eleansian would describe the cit
ty's cemeteries in this way, and they would be correct to a cer
tain extent.

Today, the city's dead are buried above ground in tombs resembling little houses built close together.

Back in 1721, however, when Adrien DePauze, Royal Military Engineer for the French government, arrived in New Or
eleans to lay out the streets of
the new town, he designed a cemetery where the dead were buried below ground, like most conventional cemeteries.

EARLY PLAN

An early plan of New Orleans, dated May 20, 1795 shows this cemetery extending along the upper side of St. Peter Street between the streets now known as Burgundy and Rampart.

Local historian Leonard V. Huber, in a book co-authored with Samuel Wilson Jr. "The St. Louis Cemeteries of New Orleans", says that when the cem
tery was laid out the streets
extended no farther back from the river than Dauphine Street.

Following the Indian massesacre of the French at Natchez in 1729, the city built a ditch, which served as a moat and was located along Dauphine Street. This technically placed the cemetery outside the city limits and could only be reached by a winding road from the end of Orleans Street.

NEW EVIDENCE

Although a city plan from 1725 shows the cemetery only covering half the distance from St. Peter Street to Toulouse Street, five coffins discovered Friday by an unidentified woman bottle collector at a construction site at Burgundy and Toulouse, indicate that the cem
tery was later extended to cover the entire area from St. Peter to Toulouse Streets.

The cemetery, being the city's only burial place, continued to grow until in 1742, under the direction of Father Peter Street Cemetery as it was called then, served the city.

New Orleans continued to grow during this period from a small village to a sizable little city. During this period the boundaries of the city were also extended past Dauphine to Rampart Street, placing the cem
tery within the city limits.

This was to later become the downfall of the city's first cemetery. In 1788 the city was besieged by an overflowing river, a great fire which destroyed 856 houses and laid waste four-fifths of the city, and a serious epidemic.

During that same year, the Cabildo, realizing that the cemetery was filled and fearing another outbreak of pestilence due to the close proximity of the cemetery to the city, ordered the cemetery closed and a new cemetery, further away from

CITY PLANS from June 1, 1801, show the city's first cemetery (M) which was closed at the time the map was made and the "new cemetery" outside the "walls" of the town, which is now St. Louis No. 1. The first ceme

tery was shown on city plans as early as 1725 and was ordered closed in 1784 because of its proximity to the city. The original cemetery was bounded by Burgundy, Rampart, Toulouse and St. Peter Streets.

Charles, Capuchin Rector of the St. Louis Church, was surrounded with a five foot brick wall.

Money for the wall was contributed by the wealthier people inhabiting the city at that time, with the poorer classes contributing their labor. The wall was dedicated on All Saints' Day in 1743.

CONTINUED GROWTH

For nearly 70 years the St.

the city to be established.

Thus St. Louis Cemetery No.

1 came into existence.

Although the new cemetery was founded shortly after that, burials in the St. Peter Street Cemetery continued for some years.

One incident that occurred in 1797 indicates that the people of the city still treasured their "first" cemetery.

BORROWED BRICKS

At that time Don Almonaster Rojas was building a new church (the St. Louis Cathedral) at his own expense. He thrifty

made use of bricks from the wall of the old cemetery leaving the burial place open to not only people, but also animals.

According to Sam Wilson, people of the city raised such a fuss the Cabildo ordered the old cemetery fenced with pickets. Both Huber and Wilson believe that some of the bricks from the first cem

tery are still present in the Cathedral of St. Louis which was largely rebuilt in 1830.

Following the closing of the cemetery, a majority of the bodies was moved to St. Louis No. 1. However, several local historians speculate that the bodies were left in the St. Peter Cemeteries.

WAREHOUSE BUILT

From a cemetery, the property at Burgundy and Toulouse, became the foundation for a warehouse, that was first owned by James Pitot, the first elected Mayor of New Orleans.

During the 1830s the Comma
gere Brothers gained control of the property and continued to use the warehouses on the site.

The property was later divid

ed into 12 lots with the property still being used commercially.

Both Wilson and Huber be

lieve that the construction work

ers will continue to find more coffins, possibly of influential people who lived in the city during the 1700s and 1800s.