All Saints Day Visit Protected

Sheriff Charles A. Foti again has come to the rescue of SOC efforts in the cemeteries. Deputies will be dispatched to the Basin Street square of St. Louis I, all three squares of St. Louis II and Lafayette I on Sunday and Monday, October 31 and November 1.

Chief of Police Henry Morris will further reinforce safety for families wishing to visit their tombs. Police cars will patrol all the areas.

Residents of the Iberville Project will be encouraged to form an active "Neighborhood Watch" to assist in safe trespass to visitors and families coming into these cemeteries. By these methods the ancient ritual of All Saints Day may be revived, encouraging care and attention for our historic cemeteries.

Helen Schnaidau, All Saints Day Chairman, welcomes SOC members and friends to give out cemetery information and SOC membership invitations at the cemetery gates on October 31 and November 1. Assisting her will be Fannie Garcia, Mary Morrison, Peachy Villere, Connie Griffith, Buddy Frazar, Pat Rittiner, Joan Lennox, Kitty Barnett, Roulhac Toledano, Robert Brantley, Allen Belicki, Marie Cahn, Tom Henderson, David Perrin, William Hyland, Gilbert Maury, George Perez, Sr., Eugene Guignard, and many more. A complete list of the volunteers will appear in the next newsletter.
October, 1982

Wall Vaults to be Saved

Despite extensive deterioration the wall vaults of St. Louis II can be restored. Archbishop Philip M. Hannan has appointed a committee to raise funds for and to oversee the restoration. J. Garic Schoen, who chaired an earlier committee to study the efforts for renovation, has been named chairman of this new committee which will work hand in hand with Save Our Cemeteries, Inc. (SOC). The President of SOC, Fontaine Martin; Acting Director, Mary Louise Christovich; and Board Member, Tina Freeman, will serve on the committee. The committee will be comprised of approximately 15 interested, dedicated citizens of all denominational backgrounds.

The final roadblock to the restoration of the wall vaults was cleared this year when the Louisiana Legislature passed into law a bill, drafted through the efforts of the Archdiocese and SOC, to allow the Archdiocese, as owner of the cemeteries, the right to restore the abandoned vaults. Archbishop Hannan said "for some years now I have been concerned about the continuing deterioration of one of New Orleans most historic sites, St. Louis Cemetery II. I have been particularly distressed about the condition of the wall vaults in the three squares of this cemetery because these structures are unique in the United States and contain the remains of many who helped to build this city during its formative years. But time and the elements, soil erosion and vandalism have taken their toll."
Schoen said the entire restoration project will cost in excess of $1 million. The wall vaults run for a total of approximately 2700 linear feet in the three square blocks bounded by N. Claiborne, Iberville, N. Robertson and St. Louis Streets. But, he said, "nearly half of the vaults require only a minimum amount of renovation work, which includes renewing mortar joints and weatherproofing."

Schoen added that Save Our Cemeteries has already completed the removal of marble tablets which have fallen from the wall vaults over the years. These have been marked for identification and placed in storage. They will be replaced on the vaults as the restoration work in each area is completed.

Archbishop Hannan said the entire project should take approximately one year to complete. "With literally millions of visitors due here for the World's Fair in 1984, we anticipate that many of them will be drawn to the site during their stay in our city," he said.

The archbishop and SOC appreciate Walk, Haydel and Associates, engineering consultants; Kessels-Diboll-Kessels, architects; Eustis Engineering Co., soil and foundation consultants; Gandolfo, Kuhn, Luecke and Associates, land surveyors; and Claiborne Builders, Inc., general contractors; for their exhaustive study of the perimeter walls and wall vaults in the cemetery.

"The great detail in which the study was presented, together with a list of alternatives available to us in proceeding with this project, has been the single most important factor in allowing us to move forward with this program" the archbishop said.
Funds were requested by SOC to plan and prepare proposals to the National Endowment for the Humanities in the field of archeology for excavations in St. Louis II. For the past 150 years the wall vaults, serving as perimeter walls to St. Louis II have enclosed approximately 3,900 linear feet of the cemetery aisles. The aisles immediately in front of the vaults have been filled through the years with tomb tablets, river sand, shells, and cemetery memorabilia. In order to discover the complete socioethnic types and origins of those buried within, it is essential to recover this material. A test dig revealed stonecutters unknown, decorative tomb details, bottles, coins, ceramic pieces and other remnants of objects placed on or in front of vaults.

SOC Seeks Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

This one-year project is the first effort to conduct a systematic archeological investigation and analysis of the material culture in an American cemetery—St. Louis II in New Orleans, established 1823—thus expanding the scope of previous studies which have focused on tombstones and other surface artifacts. (Notice of the extensive recordation project was reported in the first newsletter, March, 1982). Excavation of cultural deposition in the aisles fronting burial wall vaults of this cemetery will test hypotheses about changes over time in funeral artifacts, patterned activities and variabilities traceable to ethnic groups. (All human remains are interred above ground and will not be touched.) After a 12-week excavation phase, materials will be
analyzed using interment records, local historical records and informants knowledgeable in ethnic group practices. The goal of the project is a scholarly publication to be written by local scholars knowledgeable in regional history, architecture, decorative arts and archeology.

It is the sincere hope that SOC will receive a favorable response to this grant proposal.

The following people were extremely helpful in the research effort for gathering material for this grant: representing The Historic New Orleans Collection, Robert Brantley, Dr. Alfred Lemmon, Florence Jumonville, John Lawrence, John Mahé, Dode Platou, and Peggy Corrona; from the Louisiana State Museum Historic Center, Rose Lambert and Aline Morris; from the New Orleans Public Library, Collin Hamer and Wayne Everard. Tulane University Library sources were investigated thoroughly by Dr. Lemmon. The extensive files of Architectural Historian Samuel Wilson, Jr. were of tremendous assistance.

Mayor Morial's Task Force

A final report on the Iberville-Cemeteries Area task force was issued in June. The goals and objectives are summarized and recommendations for implementation are projected. Tina Freeman of SOC represented the organization and M. L. Christovich has been invited by the Mayor to assist on the Youth Education Committee. Again, the city is cooperating to make neighborhood awareness coincide with SOC's goals for cemetery safety.
Myldra Costa is arranging training sessions for young people from the Iberville Project to act as guides in St. Louis I and II. These new guides will work with James Isenogle, head of Jean Lafite National Park Service. Park rangers currently conduct tours in the cemeteries and will assist in teaching the neighborhood youths.

Mrs. Costa is also translating birth, death and marriage certificates from the French and Spanish records at the Ursuline Convent. When the translations are complete, the names will be indexed, and the translations published.

Tina Freeman is working toward the production of a photographic portfolio of St. Louis I and II pictures. These will be issued in a limited edition and will be museum quality, "Instant Collector Items."

Ms. Freeman continues to investigate the best and most inexpensive method of reproducing her Art Film of St. Louis I and II, commissioned by SOC. This was narrated by T.V. personality Mel Leavitt from a script written by M. L. Christovich. SOC would like to make the film available to the local public schools in a continuing effort to illustrate the true beauties of these cemeteries.

Ms. Karen Kingsley and her Tulane School of Architecture class is studying cemetery architecture, Greek Revival, Gothic, and New Orleans vernacular styles in St. Louis II. SOC president Fontaine Martin is assisting them while leading a prisoner detail to clean up for All Saints Day.
That timeless reminder of the human condition, the commonality of the afterlife, is portrayed with downright physical implications in our oldest cemeteries. In marked contrast to the prim format of New England church yards, for instance, the unstudied mingling of wall vaults and bulky whitewashed shapes with marble family sepulchres and monumental structures of the various confraternities is a product of regional history and of the topographical circumstance, our scarce, saturated land.

In spite of the eighteenth-century background of an aristocratic hierarchy, the nineteenth-century burial arrangement seemed to reflect the engagingly easy-going attitudes that prevailed in this populous medley, still largely suffused with lingering traces of a French, Catholic, colonial seaport. In the St. Louis cemeteries the remnants of religious or ethnic variants are gathered in their special corners or groupments but there are no apparent demarcations. It all brings to mind an anecdote recently recorded by Malcolm Muggeridge in *New York Review of Books*: of how General DeGaulle, who had always tried to see his mongoloid daughter every day until she died in her early twenties, had said at her graveside, "Maintenant elle est comme les autres" ("Now she's like all the others").

While daily business of the living city is housed in mushrooming towers, the close quarters and multilevels of earlier burial sites are virtually abandoned in favor of outspread cemeteries, infrequently visited these days and so of benefit to no one, outside the funerary industry. It would make sense to
encourage the reuse and reduplication of simple structures for multiple interment, considering that anticipated populations is not likely to diminish the demand for ever-decreasing space.

The burial industry insists that the old tunnel cumbales are no longer of adequate size to receive modern interments, but reason strongly suggests that not people, but coffins have become oversized. Who will undertake to search for designers and makers of containers scaled to their purpose, and to the commonality of the afterlife?

*Retired Professor of Architecture, Tulane University, author and SOC board member.

**SOC Achieves** by S. Frederick Starr*

Save Our Cemeteries is so distinctive an organization that a brief description of its dramatic history is in order. It was incorporated in 1974 as a non-profit tax-exempt organization, appearing as a response to the rapid decay and request for demolition of sections of the historic "above ground" mortuary cities of New Orleans. The goal of its founders was to inform and educate the public about the need to preserve these unique cultural cemeteries.

To accomplish this, systematic information on the cemeteries had to be assembled for the first time. A major step in this direction was the publication in the early spring of NEW ORLEANS ARCHITECTURE: THE CEMETERIES (New Orleans, 1974). The authors
of this valuable study all joined in the work of SOC, giving the new organization a scholarly cast from the outset. Even while it addressed the urgent needs of preservation, the SOC continued to encourage research by helping such scholars as Professor Edward Bryant of Colgate University and Professor Edward Cunningham of Tulane University conduct research on New Orleans cemeteries. Professor Peggy McDowell, a departmental chairman at the University of New Orleans and co-author of the 1974 study, was enlisted as a consultant to SOC and remains active in that role.

The present archeology proposal marks an important stage in the development of concern for the sociological and anthropological dimension of the cemeteries. While its patronage of such study might suggest a movement away from the public participation in the work of the SOC, precisely the opposite occurred. SOC membership expanded rapidly, soon reaching 2,000. In addition to the expected group of civic spirited persons from upper income groups, SOC attracted scores of lower income New Orleanians and members of minority groups. Indeed, much of SOC's recent success can be traced to such participation. The extraordinary composition of the membership roster reflects a basic fact of the cemeteries themselves: they were, and are, the central physical symbol of the collective life of groups as diverse as Italians, Black Creoles, Portuguese, and Santo Domingans, as well as New Orleans White Creoles.

The rise of SOC reflects and promotes such groups' awareness of their own cultural past. The fact that New Orleans predominately Black Union brick masons offered the contri-
bution of over $40,000 worth of time for restoration in a single year is a testimony to this living process. When both children and adults from the Iberville Housing Project, heretofore renowned only as one of the city's more dangerous slums, began volunteering to help in the documentation effort at St. Louis Cemetery II, they, too, were witness to the vitality of this process of self-discovery by minorities.

SOC has fought against formidable odds. It has succeeded, in obtaining National Register status for five historic cemeteries, in putting through state legislation to facilitate restoration (1979 and 1982). It gained court restraining orders against those wishing to demolish wall vaults in one of the earliest cemeteries, and attracted federal (E.D.A.), State (Dept. of Culture, etc.), and private grants to carry on its work. Its workers have been robbed of cameras and field notes at gun point (August, 1981) and threatened with mugging, forcing the request for city assistance to continue the work of documentation. This has proceeded under armed guards provided by Sheriff Foti and the mayor of New Orleans (whose black ancestors are among those buried in the early cemeteries).

The grant request for archeology work in the aisles fronting the wall vaults in St. Louis II is absolutely essential to the further work of recapturing for New Orleans cemeteries their central place in the life of the community. For just as anthropologists have come to stress the cemetery as a type of civic space and ceremonial setting, so have New Orleans researchers come to appreciate the need to understand precisely this dimension of the cemeteries. Archeological investigation offers the sole means of deter-
mining the range of ethnic diversity in funereal practice, the process of Americanization in the design of funereal objects (beaded wreaths, vessels, iron objects, etc.), and the process of decline in funereal ceremonial over time. In another vein, such excavation will reveal essential information on the identity and dating of early burials in those hundreds of cases where identification plaques have fallen from wall vaults or been deliberately removed and then buried amidst the in-fill.

Rarely has historic archeology had a more happy coincidence of fundamental problems of research and urgency on the part of a large and highly diverse audience. Without compromising its scholarly integrity, such research offers to place the humanities at the vital center of the lives of thousands of people in this region of the country that has received relatively little support from The National Endowment for the Humanities.

*Author in residence, Historic New Orleans Collection; Professor of History, Tulane University.
Time to Renew Membership

This is the first year that SOC, since its founding in December, 1974, is able to look forward to an active positive program toward restoration.

Please renew your membership and help us keep you informed of the progress. We, the citizens of New Orleans, are on the verge of a major breakthrough in cemetery preservation. Everyone has promised cooperation, Mayor Morial, Archbishop Hannan, and a forceful, dedicated committee. Rejoin SOC for 1982-83. Membership form is enclosed with a return envelope for your convenience.

Don't leave us now!