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DAMAGE ASSESSMENT TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR STORM DAMAGED HISTORIC CEMETERY REPAIRS

The Memorial Day tornado resulted in the loss or damage of structures and properties throughout the Butler, Buchanan and Blackhawk County area. Damages are being assessed to homes, commercial structures, schools and community facilities. Often overlooked in this process is damage to cultural landscapes such as historic cemeteries.

The Chicora Foundation offers an online guide to assessing storm-related wind and water damage to historic cemeteries. It can be accessed at:

<http://www.chicora.org/disaster%20planning%20for%20cemeteries.htm>

Community volunteers and historic preservationists are advised to make a careful assessment and documentation of storm-related damages. Communities may be eligible for Federal and State funding for repairs, so documentation of the damages will be important to access funding for restoration.

Chicora Foundation General Assessment Tips

- Photograph damage
- Keep vehicles on roads to prevent further damage
- Use canvas covers or timber cribs to seal off damaged areas
 - Consult a certified arborist for tree damages
- Save or recover all fragments to damaged stones, fences, lighting fixtures

Wind Damage

- Downed braches
- Uprooted trees
- Stone breakage or toppling
- Fence breakage or toppling
- Moved or removed headstones

Chicora Foundation Assessing Wind Damage

- Number of broken stones
- Number of missing stones
- Number of collapsed box tombs
 - Number of downed trees
 - Number of topped trees
 - Number of downed limbs

Water Damage

- Clogged drains from debris may exacerbate problems
 - Sink holes
 - Mud and trash deposits
 - Damage to vaults
- May require professional engineering and stone conservator services

Dr. Heidi Hohmann of Iowa State University's College of Design recommends the Michigan Historic Cemetery Preservation Manual ("Michigan Historic Cemetery Preservation Manual, King, Gregg G., Kosky, Susan, Glynn, Kathleen, and Saborio, Gladys, McNaughton and Gunn, Inc., 2004) as one of the most comprehensive compilations of cemetery repair and restoration guidelines. It can be downloaded at: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal_mhc_shpo_Cemetery_Guide_105082_7.pdf

The 203-page Michigan Historic Cemetery Preservation Manual includes guidance on documentation, monument types, fencing design, other common cemetery building structures, landscape features, metalwork, and conservation techniques for cleaning, repairing and resetting headstones. The manual has many useful illustrations to identify types of headstones and decorative features.

Some tips from the Michigan Historic Cemetery Preservation Manual include a list of typical historic cemetery features that volunteers and preservationists may wish to be mindful of in assessing the tornado damage:

Michigan Historic Cemetery Preservation Manual Cemetery Features

- Planned vistas
- Perimeter trees
- Central avenues
- Memorial or formal planting gardens
 - Water features
 - Vegetation
 - Mausoleums
 - Obelisks

- Elaborate statuary
- Decorative fencing
- Ethnic markers
- Homemade or mail order markers
 - Signage
 - Gates
 - Lighting
- Interesting monument forms or repeating motifs

The Michigan Historic Cemetery Preservation Manual (pg. 21) also offers the following safety precautions for volunteers and preservationists undertaking an assessment of cemeteries.

Michigan Historic Cemetery Preservation Manual Eight Safety Tips

Before anyone is allowed to work in the cemetery it is a good idea to have written, specific rules and regulations. Specifying “dos and don’ts” protects workers, the project coordinator and the historic property. Some guidelines for volunteers are:

1. Never go into the cemetery alone. There is always the possibility of a falling limb or other unforeseen accident.
2. Bring a first aid kit and cell phone, and tell the person in charge what project will be done and when it will be done.
3. Wear long pants, a long sleeve shirt, gloves, and sturdy shoes to prevent harmful plants, insects and other wildlife from harming you. Bring insect repellent and put anti-bee sting medication in the first aid kit.
4. Be on guard for broken glass, sharp stones, and rusty metal. In the case of any injury that breaks the skin, a tetanus shot needs to be updated if the last one was over five years ago.
5. If possible point out any known toxic plants in the cemetery. Poison ivy and oak especially like to grow on fences and trees. An awareness of what they look like and protective clothing are helpful.
6. Avoid working during the hottest part of the day, wear sunscreen, and have water available.
7. Pay attention to the area traversed. A sunken grave, wet stones or vegetation in the path might precipitate a fall.
8. Use proper lifting techniques when working with stones. For heavy stones use a tripod with heavy-duty chain, winch and straps.

OTHER WEB-BASED RESOURCES

There are several websites that offer useful information about historic cemetery preservation. These include:

The Association for Gravestone Studies:

<http://www.gravestonestudies.org/>

The website includes preservation techniques and a resource library.

The State Association for the Preservation of Iowa Cemeteries:

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~iasapc/>

The website includes Iowa's cemetery laws and a cemetery survey assessment form.

The National Park Service's National Center for Preservation Technology and Training

<http://www.ncptt.nps.gov/NCPTT-Notes/Issue-39/Stopping-the-Hands-of-Time-9-Tips-for-Cemetery-Preservation.aspx>

This article includes tips for planning a cemetery preservation project.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation:

<http://www.preservationnation.org/>

First Stop for all Iowa Historic Preservation efforts:

Iowa State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

<http://www.iowahistory.org/>

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