



CHAPTER FOUR

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Ownership and Stewardship

Oakland Cemetery is a municipal cemetery and park owned and operated by the City of Atlanta. Since its incorporation in 1976, Historic Oakland Foundation (HOF) has assisted in the stewardship and preservation of the cemetery. This stewardship includes helping city and lot owners with the preservation and maintenance of the privately-owned plots (approximately 80% of the site), and working with the City of Atlanta to maintain the public areas (approximately 20%). The grounds and infrastructure are governed by a variety of federal, state, and local regulations.



Legal Responsibilities

The burial plots within Oakland are privately owned, and therefore are subject to all private property laws inherent in state and federal laws, and the United States Constitution. Though the individual families that own the private lots, or their descendants, are responsible for maintenance and upkeep, the reality is that many of the private lots have not been maintained or are abandoned and the responsibility for their care has fallen to the City of Atlanta and/or HOF.

There are also a few unused plots that have been abandoned. If all efforts to locate the legal owners or the heirs have failed, there is a legal process by which ownership of unused, abandoned lots can be transferred to another entity, such as the City of Atlanta, but it involves complicated and often protracted legal proceedings. Currently the city does not own any unused burial spaces. If the city chooses to reclaim unused spaces, Georgia state

law discusses forfeiture of abandoned cemetery lots, proceedings necessary for reclamation, subsequent sale, and disposition of the proceeds.

Except for the burial plots, which are privately owned, Oakland Cemetery is owned by the City of Atlanta and is operated as a city park. The city, therefore, is responsible for the operation of Oakland, including the grounds, walkways, drives, paths, structures, utilities, public services, security, and infrastructure. Additional maintenance responsibilities for the City of Atlanta include mowing the grass, as well as tree and leaf removal. The City of Atlanta is also responsible for trash pick-up at Oakland, which currently occurs three times a week. These scheduled times include removal of trash and debris throughout the cemetery. Currently the City of Atlanta operates a recycling program, however there is not a recycling program in place at Oakland. This is currently being undertaken on an ad hoc basis by HOF volunteers.

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Historic Oakland Foundation serves as a steward to support the City of Atlanta. In 2008, it worked cooperatively with the Woodruff Foundation and the City of Atlanta to purchase a one-acre lot outside the main gates. Prior to this effort, Oakland focused strictly on preservation, restoration, and promotion of the cemetery within the 48 acres. Increasingly, HOF has taken proactive steps to engage its surrounding neighbors and promote the cemetery as part of the community fabric.

Oakland as a Historic Site

Oakland Cemetery is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. While this offers no specific protections, it acknowledges Oakland's significance to Atlanta and the region.

Oakland Cemetery is protected at the local level by Chapter 20-E of the City of Atlanta Ordinances which designates Oakland Cemetery as a City of Atlanta Landmark District. Specific guidelines instruct the preservation and restoration of the cemetery. Like other locally designated properties, a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) must be issued by the Atlanta Urban Design Commission



View southwest in the Old Cemetery of the Old Jewish Burial Grounds.

(AUDC) for any changes to the structures, the infrastructure, or the landscape within Oakland. This ensures that future changes are compatible with Oakland's historic character. It also specifies that city personnel cannot initiate any change to the physical appearance or the functional character of Oakland without the approval of the AUDC.

HOF is committed to the long-term preservation of the site. The foundation has developed historic and landscape preservation guidelines consistent with nationally accepted standards to guide restoration and enhancement efforts. This includes frequent coordination with City of Atlanta staff including the Department of Parks and Recreation and the AUDC.

Oakland as a Public Green Space

Oakland is part of a network of public open spaces and recreational facilities that are popular in-town destinations for many visitors and residents of Atlanta. The City of Atlanta has made a concerted effort to increase the visibility of these facilities, and emphasize their importance as assets in their respective neighborhoods.

The Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is the city entity responsible for maintaining Oakland Cemetery. The city appoints a sexton to oversee operations of the site, a tradition that dates back to the beginning of the cemetery. The current sexton employs four permanent and four seasonal workers who help

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to maintain Oakland's appearance. The sexton's office is in the Bell Tower and grounds staff and equipment are housed in the Carriage House.

DPR has a Parks Design Committee that meets monthly to review proposed park improvements. Any changes to Oakland beyond simple maintenance are reviewed by the Design Committee, as well as the Urban Design Commission. HOF staff work with the sexton, his staff, and DPR to coordinate improvements.



Tunes from the Tombs in June 2017.

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Oakland as a Programmed Event Space

Key components of HOF's education mission are programming and special events. Programming helps educate others to the importance of the cemetery and special events such as Sunday in the Park help raise funds for operations. The following is an overview of HOF's current education and outreach efforts.

Arts and Oakland

In May of each year, HOF partners with local artists who interpret Oakland Cemetery's unique history and natural beauty through art. Arts at Oakland began in 2015 with The Cryptophonics Tour, a sound art installation produced in partnership with ROAMtransmissions. In 2016, gardener and artist Cooper Sanchez produced *Illumine: An Evening of Art & Light in the Gardens*. In 2017, artist Sanithna Phansavanh's life-size acrylic on canvas works reflected themes of spring and rebirth, utilizing a vibrant palette of pinks, blues, purples, and yellows that contrast with Oakland's natural hues. This event was attended by approximately 1500 guests.

Tunes from the Tombs

In June, HOF celebrates Tunes from the Tombs, a one-day musical festival with a focus on local and regional artists. Now in its seventh year, Tunes from the Tombs invites visitors to enjoy live music in one of Atlanta's most unique music venues. During the event visitors can also meet some of Oakland's residents and explore the artists market. This event is attended by approximately 3000 guests.

Sunday in the Park

Sunday in the Park, Oakland's Victorian-themed fall festival, offers an afternoon full of activity for all ages. Now in its 39th year, the 2017 Sunday in the Park celebrates HOF's 40th birthday and is held annually on the first Sunday of October. Throughout the cemetery, attendees can link back to Oakland's Victorian past with a number of activities including: a Victorian costume contest, living history demonstrations, storytelling, guided walking tours, book signings, restoration presentations, carriage rides, burial records research, and much more. This event is attended by approximately 3000 guests.

Run Like Hell 5K

HOF's Run Like Hell 5K is the largest cemetery run in the country, is one of Atlanta's favorite neighborhood 5K fundraisers, and is a Peachtree Road Race qualifier. The race begins and ends in Oakland Cemetery and the route explores Oakland's surrounding neighborhoods. A new course in 2017 takes runners down Memorial Drive to the Georgia State Capitol on a faster, flatter course than in previous years. This annual 5K, now in its 10th year, attracts runners, joggers, walkers, strollers, and dogs. Awards are presented in a prize-giving ceremony that also features a costume contest. Capacity for the race is capped at 1600 runners.

Capturing the Spirit of Oakland Halloween Tours

Held over seven nights at the end of the October, Capturing the Spirit of Oakland Halloween tours are meant to enlighten not frighten, as guests explore the cemetery after dark and meet some of Oakland's best and least-known residents, played by actors. Now in its eleventh year, Capturing

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the Spirit of Oakland is an annual fall tradition in Atlanta and this year 7000 tickets for the event were sold. In 2016, Capturing the Spirit of Oakland won the Roger K. Warlick Local History Achievement Award from the Georgia Historical Society.

Tours

Historic Oakland Foundation offers a diverse range of guided tours to educate, engage, and entertain the general public throughout the year. The Sights, Symbols, and Stories of Oakland general tour takes visitors to several of the cemetery's character areas and provides an overview of Atlanta history. Visitors can dive into history with one of HOF's 18 thematic tours that explore a variety of topics, from Atlanta's African American history to Victorian symbolism and beyond. The general tour and thematic tours are available to private groups. More than 5,000 visitors come to Oakland each year to take a tour.

School Tours

For thousands of school children, Oakland Cemetery serves as an outdoor classroom to

learn about Atlanta's history, Victorian culture, and the cemetery's historic gardens. HOF offers a diverse line-up of educational opportunities that include guided tours with knowledgeable docents, field trip experiences, and homeschool programs. Educational resources and lesson plans are available online and can be used to enhance an Oakland learning experience.

Ticketed Programs

Several ticketed programs are held throughout the year. Visitors listen to stories of love and loss during the Love Stories of Oakland program, which is held on Valentine's Day weekend and throughout the year. During Malts and Vaults: Where Beer Meets History, visitors learn about the history of brewing in Atlanta and enjoy a post-tour tasting of local brews. A Victorian Holiday at Oakland is a unique holiday tradition that features an exclusive tour of the cemetery's magnificent mausoleums, a holiday market, storytelling and carols, and a Victorian craft area for younger visitors. Ticketed programs bring in between 1,500 and 2,000 visitors every year.

Oakland Education

HOF offers a variety of educational resources and entertaining activities for visitors of all ages to engage with Oakland Cemetery. The Historic Oakland Cemetery mobile application allows visitors to uncover the stories of eternal residents on their own time. Hundreds of teams participate in self-guided scavenger hunts held in the spring and fall every year. The Foundation also offers free tours for Black History Month, the Phoenix Flies celebration of historic sites in March, and National Preservation Month in May.

In summary, Historic Oakland Foundation continues to be a collaborative partner with the City of Atlanta to advance the preservation of Oakland Cemetery. A growing staff supported by expanded programs and restoration efforts have helped secure the cemetery as one of the most visited and loved places in the region. The following chapters identify specific opportunities and strategies to further HOF's mission.