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PRESERVATION, RESTORATION AND INTERPRETATION PLAN

FOR

REST HILL CEMETERY

LEBANON, TN

BY

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Brief History of Rest Hill Cemetery

The Rest Hill Cemetery on Trousdale Ferry Pike in Lebanon was included on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 for its significance in the development of the African-American community in Lebanon during the Reconstruction era. Established in 1867-69, the burials reflect the original African-American community in Lebanon, which grew with the assistance of the Freedman's Bureau, and the racial segregation of the Jim Crow period. Rest Hill served as the only African-American burial ground in Lebanon from 1869-1933 when blacks were banned from burial in the city cemetery.

Only within the last half-century have scholars come to appreciate the interdisciplinary significance of African-American burying grounds such as Rest Hill Cemetery in Lebanon. As scholar John Michael Vlach notes, an example of material culture such as Rest Hill Cemetery reveals a total "lifeway of a group of people including their verbal, material, and spiritual forms of expression," something Vlach labels as *folklife*.¹ Reconstruction era African-American cemeteries reflect a particular time and place. Rest Hill Cemetery is entirely unique to Lebanon, Tennessee. His work on African-American cemeteries stresses the "continuity" of African traditions and European influences, which is "proof of strength and testimony of cultural stamina and endurance in the face of sometimes brutal oppression."²

In contrast to pre-Civil War slaves, free African-Americans who died during the Jim Crow days of Reconstruction were most often buried in all-black cemeteries. Due to economic and social hardships, the graves were often marked with little more than a stone or wooden marker. Unlike Euro-American cemeteries of the same period, these are not landscaped and do "not attempt to romanticize death nor create an artificial landscape."³ Graves typically appear randomly situated or in rectangular family plots, with unmarked mounds and depressions dotting the landscape.

As in other Tennessee communities at the end of the Civil War, African-Americans in Lebanon took advantage their new freedom by forming churches, cemeteries, and social organizations, and acquiring property. Ben K. Owens sold a 16-acre lot on the east side of Lebanon to B.B. Manson, Nicholas Manson, Joseph Provine, and Thomas Stokes in 1867. By 1869, three acres of this land were given to another group of trustees for the formation of an African-American cemetery.

During Reconstruction, an African-American community formed on the east side of Lebanon. It was during the racially divisive days of Jim Crow that many Lebanon African-Americans formed organizations for financial and social support; fraternal organizations flourished after the Civil

¹ Ibid., xv.

² John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 1.

³ "African-American Cemeteries." Center for Historic Preservation, MTSU.
<www.mtsu.edu/~then/Cemetery/page7.html> (10 October 2002).

War. Several individuals buried at Rest Hill Cemetery joined these organizations. Ann McKinney, for instance, who died in 1909, was a member of the Household of Ruth, a women's organization that typically provided funeral insurance for African-Americans and offered them a trusted network of friends. Her grave marker includes the organization's insignia. Other markers indicate membership in other organizations. These include Dr. Joseph Turner (died 1914) and Porter Caruthers (died 1928), members of the Knights of Pythias, and the Scruggs family, who was associated with the Grand Lodge.

Several people buried at Rest Hill attained prominence within the community. B.B. Manson (died 1914), a local businessman, was an original trustee of the Rest Hill land. Jake Owen, who died 1901 and has an impressive grave marker at Rest Hill Cemetery, was delegate to both the Congressional district and the state Republican conventions in 1898. Similarly, Martin Manson (1905) served as a delegate to the state convention in 1888. They are each buried in family plots on the east side of the cemetery.

Beginning in the 1920s and continuing today, citizens formed various cemetery committees to raise funds and oversee the upkeep of the property. As noted in the 1992 nomination form, it is the only remnant of the original African-American community of Lebanon. Since its formation, the cemetery has remained central to Lebanon's African-American identity as is evident in the continued concern of residents to obtain city/county support for the cemetery. With the cooperation and assistance of the Rest Hill Preservation Committee, the City of Lebanon assumed control of the cemetery in October 2002.

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Assessment of Current Conditions

Introduction

Rest Hill Cemetery is situated on a 7.7-acre tract of land at the eastern city limits of Lebanon, Tennessee, on Trousdale Ferry Pike. It is bordered on the north by an industrial park, on the south by Trousdale Ferry Pike, and on the east and west by residential lots. A three-foot high rock wall defines the southern property line along Trousdale Ferry Pike, and there are two entrances to the cemetery defined by openings in this wall. Rest Hill is generally arranged in rectangular family plots and has no chronological pattern.

For this assessment, Rest Hill Cemetery has been divided into thirds from west to east. The first section extends from the stone wall defining the west edge of the property to the driveway, and from the rock wall on the south edge of the property to the rear of the cemetery in the north. The second section is contained within the driveway loop. Lastly, the third section extends from the eastern driveway to the chain link fence defining the east property line, and from the rock wall on the south edge to the rear of the property in the north.

Since the City of Lebanon assumed control and maintenance of Rest Hill in October 2002, work crews have been making alterations to the property. Within the last few months they have cleared the overgrown brush along the western property line, filled in several depressions, placed several trash receptacles along the driveway, planted a few small trees along the driveway, erected two small metal signs regarding emergency information, and stabilized several fallen markers.

West Section

The west quadrant of the cemetery appears to be the least populated of the cemetery's three sections. All markers and plots are oriented toward the east. The stone wall surrounding the front section of this plot is missing a number of stones near the far west corner of the cemetery. The stone wall continues along the cemetery's westernmost boundary, although it is almost totally obstructed by overgrown shrubs. The City has begun to clear this area to give greater visibility to the stone wall.

The west quadrant's southernmost region is heavily populated with family plots. A number of family plots are designated by low stone or concrete boundaries, which separate them from other plots in the area. Four primary family plots are distinguished by small square pillars set very low in the ground, engraved with the first letter of the family's last name. Each family plot contains a similar poured concrete headstone engraved with the family's last name. It appears that the same maker created the vast majority these stones. Primary exceptions to this include marble crosses for military veterans of World War I and World War II. Individual plots are marked with smaller concrete markers, which appear to be constructed during the 1900s through the 1930s, based on the interment dates on the stones.

The following family plots and distinctive markers are contained within this front area:

McCullough: 1 family stone
4 individual markers
Whitico: 1 family stone
5 individual markers
Everitt: 5 individual markers including one World War II marker
Johnson: 1 family stone
6 individual stones

The central section contains fewer family plots, but has more vegetation, including both large and small trees. A small section of trees divides this area from the back portion of the quadrant. The most distinctive marker in this area is a small obelisk that is almost illegible. It appears to contain an inscription for A. S. Beard, who died in 1878. Additional older gravestones in this area belong to Millie and S.F. Ward, born in 1865 and 1856 respectively. This stone has been broken off at the base but can still be read.

The following family plots and distinctive markers are contained in the middle section:

52 individual markers
Killies Carter died 1878
James Price died 1889
Sherrell: 1 family stone
John William Douglass was a private in the 303rd Pioneer Infantry during World War I.
McDaniel: 1 distinctively carved family stone

The back section has a significantly fewer number of marked plots. The following family plots and distinctive markers are contained in the back section:

Ward: 4 individual stones
3 fallen stones
1 small tree shelters this family plot.

The rear area has numerous depressions but no actual markers.

Center Section

A walking inspection of Rest Hill Cemetery middle section reveals a pattern of family plots marked off by borders with dates of interment starting at the front then proceeding deeper into the middle of the cemetery. Early plots were marked at each corner with small blocks inscribed with the initial of the family name. This practice did not seem to persist into the twentieth century, as only the very front plots share this feature.

Size of headstones and material used for plot borders indicate a variance of income within the black community. Only a few borders are solid-pour concrete, such as for the Sweat family plot; some borders are mortared limestone, while most were free-stack limestone. A few families

apparently made due with what materials they could, such as concrete building blocks or railroad ties.

Very little cemetery art exists, and then the most common feature is a statue of a lamb, indicating that at least some of the black families of Rest Hill were willing to bear additional expense for the death of a child. Probably the most frivolous concrete art, for Rest Hill cemetery, is a small bird feeder within the Caruthers family plot. This plot also has two very old American Boxwoods, which at some time were thoughtfully limbed up and shaped into pyramids. Interestingly, not all the members of the Caruthers family are buried within the family plot, for errant headstones appear deeper into the middle section of the cemetery, such as that of Porter Caruthers, 1892-1928. The dates of his life, spanning the turn of the twentieth century, are typical of others in this middle section, again, with the earliest graves at the front. Also inscribed on Porter's headstone is "K of P," for Knights of Pythias, a fraternal order.

Another notable headstone is that of Oscar Belcher, died October 18, 1930, honoring his service in the 804 Pioneer Infantry, a segregated black unit of the U.S. army. There are some others who served in the Pioneer Infantry buried in Rest Hill.

Within the middle section, there are several sunken graves, numbering ten or eleven. These are not within a family plot and have no headstones. Thus, identification of all the names of those buried in Rest Hill is impossible. Also, even within in a family plot, each burial is not necessarily marked with a headstone. The following is, therefore, an incomplete list of those buried in the middle section, by family name:

Allen, Ballard, Belcher, Bell, Caruthers, Crutchfield, Davis, Gordon, Harris, Harvey, Helms, Hill, Mercer, Moore, Neal, Newby, Parris, Petty, Robertson, Sanders, Skillon, Sweat, Tippit, Vantrease, Wharton, Waters, Weir, Well, Whitley, Woods.

Eastern Section

The eastern portion of the cemetery contains the most burial markers. Legible or mostly legible markers number about 77 in this section, with numerous unidentified stones and depressions. While an exact count of burials could not be determined with this particular survey, this eastern section is nearly full. Depressions and markers are scattered through all parts of this section, from the stone wall in the south, along the chain link fence on the east, and to the north property line.

The cemetery has no chronological order due to the arrangement of rectangular family plots. In the eastern section alone, there are 10 visible family plots. These plots are marked in a variety of ways: cut stone, wooden railroad ties, cement blocks, and a small chain link fence. A prominent and well-defined plot in this section is the Owen (or Owens) family parcel, which is surrounded by crumbling cement blocks. One of the cemetery's founding trustees, B.B. Manson, is also buried in a family plot in this eastern section. Furthermore, veterans of World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam are buried in this section. At least two markers mention a social organization of which the deceased was a member. For example, Ann McKinney (d.1909) was a member of the Household of Ruth, and Dr. Joseph Turner (d. 1914) was a member of the Knights of Pythias.

The majority of markers in this eastern section fall within the dates of Jim Crow segregation. Stones with death dates from the early 1900s, 1910s, and 1920s are especially common as this

was the only African-American cemetery in Lebanon at that time. Although another African-American cemetery, Greenwood, opened in 1933, many continued to use Rest Hill Cemetery.

Since the field survey completed in 1992 by the Center for Historic Preservation, several more individuals have been buried at Rest Hill. While most of these recent burials are clustered at the far northeast portion of the cemetery, some are scattered amongst early burials and in family plots. Several of these recent burials are marked by small, metal temporary markers.

Earth and grass have partially covered the stones outlining many family plots in this eastern section. Grass grows unevenly; some areas are overcome with weeds while other parts are absent vegetation. Trees are concentrated in the southern half of the cemetery near the entrance. Among the scattered markers include at least 9 tree stumps.

Summary of three sections

The cemetery has many quality characteristics that make it unique. Numerous rectangular family plots, large and small, are concentrated mostly in the southern half of the cemetery and are a significant feature of Rest Hill. African-American graveyards did not usually recognize family groupings. The cemetery is situated in a residential setting and retains its integrity and historical feeling. Furthermore, its location on the east side of Lebanon just blocks from both State Highway 141 and U.S. Highway 70N is beneficial for potential heritage development.

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Rest Hill Cemetery Restoration Proposal

To restore the front wall, scrape sediment away from base and seek an estimate from a professional stone mason or landscape architect for rebuilding damaged sections. This estimate needs to address the possible need to bring in additional rock to match and the desire to match as closely as possible the dark (dyed?) mortar originally used. There are two sections (twenty linear feet and ten linear feet) in need of rebuilding to a height between two-and-a-half and three feet. If a proposed sign incorporates rock, it should be native limestone to match wall.

The cleaning of the entrance pillars could help to brighten and accentuate Rest Hill's entrance. However, an expert in cemetery preservation should be consulted. Most often nothing stronger than clean water and a natural, soft-medium bristle brush is recommended. Websites such as www.arkansaspreservation.org or www.oregoncemeteries.org can help locate an expert in the field of cemetery preservation.

After addressing the entrance, it is recommended that the next priority is to re-gravel the driveway. It is thin at best and down to mud ruts in some places. A minimum of two (2) loads of crush-and-run gravel (twenty tons per load) is needed to resurface a single layer of gravel. Of course, twice as much would be advised if budget allows. Once dumped by delivery trucks, the gravel can be spread with a Bobcat-type skid-loader. (Please see recommendations for filling sunken graves below.)

For the dozen or so sunken graves which need to be refilled, it is recommended to choose a uniform manner of marking the corners with metal pins, first, as many of these graves are not marked with headstones. Ideally, use metal spikes with a flat, rounded head, so as not to risk puncture of lawn equipment tires.

In refilling the depressions, it is highly recommended that large earth-moving equipment not be allowed onto grass areas, to prevent potential damage to headstones and terrain. Using the pile of dirt at the back of cemetery, a Bobcat-type skid-loader can move the dirt staying on the gravel to points along the driveway nearest the depressions. The skid-loader, there, can dump bucketloads into two or three side-by-side wheelbarrows immediately off the driveway, which can be wheeled to depressions with little impact to the grounds or graves. Granted, this will require human labor, but is the best recommendation for the site. Additionally, the soil should be graded by hand with hard rakes, making sure the metal corner markers are exposed. In season, grass seed, Kentucky 31 Fescue, should be applied to the bare spots.

Family plot borders should be cleared of overgrowth and soil build up with flat-head shovels and/or weed eaters with shield guards.

Prune out new growth trees and scrub brush.

Take out tree stumps unless removal risks disturbing graves or stones.

Cut down dead trees and haul away.

Limb up Hackberry near front in the Sweat family plot.

Fence lines should be cleared of overgrowth and maintained.

Cut vines out of Boxwoods in Caruthers family plot.

In warm weather, grass should be cut at least every two weeks. Weedeating along plot borders can keep down weeds and prevent overgrowth.

Fallen gravestones should be straightened. Where rocks have become dislodged from borders, they should be reset.

Severe cracking has occurred in some gravestones, and possible repair can be addressed through an expert in the field of cemetery preservation. However, it is recommended not to clean any gravestones.

It is recommended that a few benches be installed in suitable places, such under a large tree or at the crest of the hill. If new trees are installed, their mature growth size should be noted for proper placement (for example, not close to the driveway, or where above-ground roots could disturb gravestones).

It is recommended that if the City plans to allow additional burials within the cemetery that they first hire a professional archaeologist to conduct a ground-penetrating radar survey to determine the presence of unmarked graves. Additional questions should be referred to Nick Fielder, Director of the Tennessee Division of Archaeology, at 615-741-1588 ext. 13.

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Rest Hill Cemetery Preservation Proposal

It may be challenging to implement all recommended action items for Rest Hill Cemetery at once. To assist in this process, the Preservation Plan for Rest Hill Cemetery contains 2 phases of recommendation action items.

Phase 1:

Cemetery Clean-Up

The City of Lebanon has provided an initial cemetery clearing. Additional clean-up should be scheduled with the city on a regular basis. Clean-up should include regular mowing, weed removal, and careful pruning of existing trees and shrubbery. Install small, unobtrusive metal trash receptacles in back corners of the cemetery. Ensure that these are emptied by the City on a regular basis. Regular removal of artificial flowers and dirt piles in rear of cemetery is recommended to maintain the cemetery grounds.

Marking Grave Depressions and Rock Removal

In many cases, unmarked depressions are actual grave sites. Whenever possible, it is recommended that these depressions are left undisturbed. If the depressions are filled for easier cemetery maintenance, the following actions are recommended. Because not every grave has a marker, all depressions should be marked in some way before being filled. The best option is to bury metal spikes at head and foot of each grave. Upon marking, depressions may be filled with dirt. Rocks may be removed for easier mowing if desired. However, it is recommended that existing rocks be left whenever possible as they may mark an otherwise unmarked grave site.

Stone Masonry

A professional stone mason should be hired to repair and rebuild the two broken areas in the cemetery's front wall. The stone mason may also be used to properly repair the fallen and broken monuments and gravestones.

Security

The Cemetery's proximity to Trousdale Pike and neighborhood residence provides limited existing security. The City of Lebanon has installed two signs that outline the cemetery's hours and a contact number in case of emergencies. It is recommended that these signs be moved to a less obtrusive location near the cemetery's two entrance pillars but outside the rock wall perimeter. Continued demonstration that the cemetery is being maintained will also assist in deterring vandals and after-hours visitors. Additional security measures should include contacting the City of Lebanon regarding placing a street light on either side of the cemetery outside the existing stone wall perimeters. The City of Lebanon police department should be contacted to put the cemetery on the local police patrol route to inspect the area on a regular basis.

Phase 2:

Cemetery Documentation and Marker Survey

The Rest Hill Cemetery Preservation Committee should conduct a general survey of the cemetery to document it with distinguishing characteristics including existing vegetation, individual marker documentation, and photographs. Once this is complete, the Committee should make an extensive survey of existing graves and conduct in-depth research to locate additional burials whose markers no longer exist in order to compile a complete list of internments. Once these are completed, it will be easier to implement additional interpretive efforts.

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Rest Hill Cemetery Interpretation Proposal

Install a Cemetery Marker:

Erect a plain carved or engraved stone marker. This should be placed within the existing stone wall at the front of the cemetery in the central section between the existing posts. If possible, this marker should be made of the same or similarly colored stone as the existing stone wall. This marker should not be more than 1 foot taller than existing wall. The following information is recommended to be included in the sign:

Rest Hill Cemetery

Established 1868

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992

This type of marker will be somewhat resistant to vandalism and the elements. It will be distinctive, while maintaining the character and integrity of the cemetery. Because of the signs placed by the City, which list cemetery hours and emergency numbers, additional information is not necessary on this sign.

Interpretive Kiosk:

A small kiosk may be placed in the east quadrant along the stone wall to provide additional information to cemetery visitors. The kiosk should be placed against the eastern wall near the middle of the section to avoid detracting from the cemetery's atmosphere and design. It is recommended that the kiosk contain a map of family cemetery plots and a list of interment locations to assist genealogists and family members in locating plots. The kiosk should include additional information regarding the cemetery's origins and history, the history of African-Americans in Lebanon, historic African-American cemeteries in general, additional Middle Tennessee African-American historic sites, and contact information for the Rest Hill Cemetery Preservation Committee.

Development of Interpretive Website and Distribution Materials

Contact a local university or Chamber of Commerce for assistance in creating an interpretive website and brochures about the Cemetery. Interpretive brochures should be placed in the County Archives as well as local libraries and schools.

Directional Markers Within the City Limits

Directional markers help visitors traveling through Lebanon to visit this resource. Contact the City of Lebanon to inquire about posting a directional sign on Highway 141.

Contact the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development

Contact this department to inquire about listing the cemetery on a heritage trail tour.

Community Involvement

Local initiatives generate increased awareness of historic sites, as well as demonstrating to the community that the cemetery is a place that many people are committed to maintaining, promoting, and preserving.

Develop an annual “Rest Hill Cemetery Preservation Work Day” to clean up trash and weeds in the cemetery. This workday will also generate community awareness of this historic resource as well as help instill a sense of pride within the neighborhood and community.

Conduct an annual Rest Hill tour, highlighting significant figures in local history buried in the cemetery, location of family plots, military history, and history of the cemetery itself.

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Funding Resources

1. The City of Lebanon should continue to fund basic maintenance, mowing, and trash pickup. Furthermore, the City should consider cosponsoring workshops for basic masonry repair and historic cemetery maintenance. Additional sponsors may include the National Trust for Historic Preservation or other state/regional preservation or tourism agencies.
2. The City should support the formation of a not-for-profit advocacy group, such as the “Friends of Rest Hill Cemetery,” which would be eligible for local, state, and federal funds for preservation projects. National Register status, which Rest Hill Cemetery attained in 1992, will benefit the applications to various preservation funding agencies.
3. The group may be eligible for grants from preservation organizations. The National Trust for Historic Preservation and various state agencies may offer funds for heritage and community development programs.
4. The not-for-profit group could contact various churches and social organizations, such as the Knights of Pythias and the Grand Lodge, represented in the cemetery as well as the descendants of those buried at Rest Hill.
5. As a potential tourist destination, the advocacy group should contact the Chamber of Commerce and any prospective corporate sponsors.

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Bibliographic Sources

The following page lists several sources for graveyard preservation and enhancement. Increasingly, quality websites appear on the Internet and many of them are included in this bibliography. They cover an array of topics that include improving cemetery maintenance, conserving fallen gravestones, interpretation, and researching and surveying historic cemeteries. In addition, many of these websites include information regarding funding, conservation assistance, and links to other related websites. Several key books outline much of this same information more thoroughly. Lynette Strangstad, author of *A Graveyard Preservation Primer*, is a noted authority on the subject and many other sources refer to her book. Also included in the bibliography are sources solely on historic masonry. It is essential to properly maintain the rock walls and various styles of markers because they create the essence of Rest Hill Cemetery. Furthermore, because Rest Hill is an historic African-American burial ground, the bibliography includes sources related to African-American material culture and funerary traditions. John Michael Vlach, for example, has written extensively on African-American decorative traditions, architecture, and folk culture. Rest Hill Cemetery could be an excellent educational site for all ages. Therefore, the bibliography also includes sources regarding the interpretation of historic places.

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