

Ohio State Hospital Cemeteries

Background: State hospital cemeteries, interment sites for many patients from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-1970s, are located on land currently owned by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS, formerly ODMH) in Athens, Cincinnati, and Columbus. State hospital cemeteries in Dayton, Lima, Tiffin, and Toledo remain in place on land previously owned by OhioMHAS.

In the past, several of Ohio's current state departments (OhioMHAS, Department of Developmental Disabilities, Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, etc.) were combined agencies and shared facilities and cemeteries. Over time, the agencies evolved into separate departments and institutions were apportioned among these agencies. Furthermore, as the understanding of and care for people with mental illness progressed, the need for long term hospitalization lessened and the state psychiatric hospital system closed and consolidated facilities. As a result, buildings and land, including cemeteries in several locations, were transferred to new owners.

Pursuant to ORC 5122.44 through 5122.47, OhioMHAS has compiled designated information about the people buried in these cemeteries and deposited copies of those compilations with the Ohio History Connection (formerly the Ohio Historical Society) and the State Library. The compilations include information for cemeteries located on land currently owned by OhioMHAS, and for cemeteries in Dayton and Toledo, on land previously owned by the department.

Cemetery Management and Restoration

The cemeteries at Athens are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a "contributing element" to the historic value of the Athens State Hospital site. While not listed on the registry yet, other state hospital cemeteries also have historic value. The National Park Service publishes standards for the preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of historic sites which are offered as guidelines for such work. The following links provide an overview of the federal standards for treatment of historic properties:

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/treatment-preservation.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/treatment-rehabilitation.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/treatment-restoration.htm>

The standards are meant to provide a framework for informed decision-making when seeking to preserve, rehabilitate, or restore a historic property and will be a significant consideration when evaluating any work on the state hospital cemeteries. A primary theme of these standards is retention of the original materials and character of a site.

Cemetery Reclamation Efforts: Through a volunteer effort, OhioMHAS, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) -- Ohio affiliates, community organizations, consumers and family members have been working together to preserve and restore some of the state hospital cemeteries. At this time, there are active cemetery reclamation groups in Athens, Cincinnati, Columbus and Toledo. These volunteer groups have dedicated countless hours to beautifying the cemeteries by resetting grave markers, improving the landscape, and adding signs identifying the lands as the final resting places of those who lived and died in state hospitals. OhioMHAS, after consultation with its reclamation partners and consideration of the guidelines referenced above, retains final approval relating to maintenance and improvements undertaken on the cemetery grounds under its control. Additionally, with regard to maintenance and improvement efforts proposed for cemetery grounds that have been transferred to new owners, OhioMHAS will work in cooperation with those owners to apply the same or similar standards for maintenance and improvements undertaken on those cemetery grounds.

OhioMHAS and the cemetery reclamation groups are committed to preserving the historical qualities of the state hospital cemeteries, including preservation of and focus on the original headstones (where still available). Much of the work of the cemetery reclamation groups has been to reset, and where necessary replace, original headstones. Other reclamation work has involved general grounds restoration and improvement, such as clearing and maintenance of pathways and stairs, installation of benches and clearing of brush. Finally, OhioMHAS has undertaken some general site improvements, such as placement of memorial markers and perimeter fencing and gates. However, OhioMHAS, thus far, has honored family member's requests to permit placement of supplemental markers in a manner that minimizes interference with the original character of the cemetery.

Proposals for Cemetery Projects: Proposals from other individuals or groups for cemetery projects and improvements may be submitted to OhioMHAS, through its Bureau of Capital Planning and Management. Proposals should detail the scope of the project or improvement, including timeline, budget, anticipated funding sources and work plan, as well as a discussion of how the project or improvement contributes to the preservation effort and any impact it may have on the historical integrity of the cemetery. OhioMHAS will consult with reclamation partners and experts at the Ohio History Center regarding the proposed project.

Requests for Supplemental Markers: Specific proposals for the placement of supplementary individual grave markers may be submitted by family members of the deceased. Approval of such requests will be conditioned upon the following:

- Supplemental markers must be flush with ground surface, and may be no larger than eight inches by sixteen inches in size, or must be flush with ground surface and provided by the U.S. Veterans' Administration, not to exceed twelve inches by twenty four inches in size.
- Family members of the deceased must provide a notarized statement of their relationship to the deceased, as well as information on the monument proposed for installation, and the proposed process for installation.
- The original grave marker shall not be removed or altered in any way.
- Installation of an approved supplemental marker must be on an appropriate concrete or compacted base and must be performed under the supervision of an OhioMHAS designee. To submit a request for authority to place a supplemental marker and to coordinate placement of an approved supplemental marker, contact the OhioMHAS Bureau of Capital Planning and Management at: 614-466-3473 or Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Bureau of Capital Planning and Management, 30 E. Broad Street, 11th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215.