CEMETERY: SPACE FOR THE LIVING

JAMES FINK capstone
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CEMETERY: SPACE FOR THE LIVING

A Design Capstone to the
Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture
of North Dakota State University
By
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Bachelor of Landscape Architecture

Primary Capstone Advisor

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James A. Fink
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ABSTRACT

The typical present-day cemetery is used primarily for burials, however, cemeteries in the past were created to function as parks as well as burial grounds. In order to change the functions of a cemetery, a more important change is needed in the mind-set of the general public. This project explores the possibility of using an existing cemetery as a park, and what we can do to catalyze that change.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

What if we realized the full potential of burial grounds and cemeteries by including them in our public green space strategies?
STATEMENT OF INTENT

Project Typology:
The project typology will be a public cemetery focused on visual aesthetics and multipurpose spaces.

Claim:
A public cemetery can be a desired destination that provides value to its surrounding environment.

Actor:
Church
Private Owner

Action: Supposed improvement of cemetery amenities

The object:
A cemetery

Manner of action:
Master Planning

The Premises:

The actor:
Persons who provide an alternative to the commonplace cemetery will find a new type of cemetery clientele.

The action:
A person’s use of a space is directly related to how they think the space should be used.

The object (acted upon):
The cemetery is an under-utilized entity typically used with a single purpose mind-set.

Manner of action:
Through comparison and experience one will become more aware of the need for an alternative to the commonplace cemetery.

Conclusion:
A cemetery can be a public amenity that adds value to the surrounding environment, making it more than a single purpose destination.
NARRATIVE

Americans tend to have a very specific vision in mind when they hear the word “cemetery”. Often times this vision involves a gated expanse of turf filled with the monotony of repetitive headstones. A generally undesirable destination, especially when the emotions of bereavement are added. There are well over 300,000 cemeteries in the United States, and the majority of them fall into this mundane stereotype. How is it that a space designated for such an emotional event as death can often times be described as emotionless?

Many people do not know that in the early 1800’s cemeteries, such as Mount Auburn in Massachusetts, were actually designed to provide public park space as well as areas for proper burial. These cemeteries are an amenity to the surrounding communities and are a desirable destination for all.

This thesis examines the current practices and problems that are causing modern day cemeteries to take on an emotionless identity with a single use purpose, and how landscape interventions can turn a cemetery into a public amenity.
USER/CLIENT DESCRIPTION

The user/client is consistent with the typical user of a cemetery or public park. The most difficult aspect of this project is breaking the mental habit of the general public to separate the cemetery and the park. This will be achieved through careful analysis and design.

MAJOR PROJECT ELEMENTS

Social-Public - spaces shared by cemetery and park users

Economic - increased property value of surrounding communities

Environmental - sustainable practices, habitat creation
SITE: ST. BONIFACE CEMETERY WINNIPEG, MB
PROJECT EMPHASIS

The scope of the project will cover three emphasis areas: 1 how can a cemetery also function as a successful public park, 2 can we provide an amenity for the surrounding communities, 3 how do the emotions surrounding death and grieving affect design?

PLAN FOR PROCEEDING

Extensive research will be done in order to discover how cemeteries were designed in the past and if those principles are still valid today. A holistic approach will be taken in order to uncover both qualitative and quantitative information.
PREVIOUS STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Second Year
Spring Semester-Mark Lindquist (2006)
  - Manohmen Healthcare Center, Manohmen, MN
  - Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto

Third Year
Spring Semester-Kathleen Pepple (2008)
  - NDSU triangle, Fargo, ND
  - Eco-village, Fargo, ND

Fourth Year
Fall Semester-Mark Lindquist (2008)
  - South Lake Union, Seattle, WA
  - Mercer Street, Seattle, WA
The unifying idea of this thesis focuses on the correlation between the public park and the cemetery. Both typologies have unique and specific programmatic requirements that suggest a need for separation, even though history provides many successful examples of the two sharing space. The research for the unifying idea explores the two, public park and cemetery, and how a successful combination can be accomplished.
RESEARCH

Cemeteries and burial grounds have always had a significant influence on humans. These spaces are seen as sacred and are a place apart from the everyday landscape. Throughout history, humans have raided and colonized pre-existing settlements. Often times the structures built for the living were destroyed or adapted, but the burial places were left untouched. This respect for grave yards and grave sites has generally been a constant in the human existence. [Worpole, 2003. pg.18]

An appreciation of landscape is largely based on a mixture of human imagination, learned visual responses, and social perception: part historical, part aesthetic, and part psychological. It is an active, dynamic relationship between the seen and the thing seen. Yet with regard to the emotions and thoughts that are stirred by the sight and experience of burial places, there is an obvious impulse that dominates all others: our sense that we too are destined for death... [Warpole, 2003. pg.21]

This respect for the dead lead to the cemetery being a vital component of the urban fabric and public green space. The resting place for heroes, villains, ancestors and friends became a symbol for the city and a source of pride. In the late nineteenth century, a proposal to close a Paris cemetery and move the bodies to newly created cemeteries outside of the city limits lead to mass hysteria. The crowds cried, “Pas da cimitiere, Pas de cite!” (No cemetery: No city). [Worpole, 2003. pg. 30]
More recently, the cemetery has fallen out of our urban planning models and green space strategies. One of the main reasons for this is our changing burial practices and cemetery economics. In the Victorian cultures, which produced many cemetery/parks, the general public was willing to spend large amounts on funerals, burial plots, headstones and mausoleums. This large inflow of money provided the capital for the new cemeteries of the nineteenth century to seek the good design that would require high-quality levels of maintenance. Therefore, these cemeteries were amenities for the city and destinations for the general public to enjoy.

In the second half of the twentieth century, partly due to the rise of cremation as a cheaper alternative to a traditional burial, the general public stopped spending large amounts of money on death. This meant cemeteries had less money to spend on land which pushed new cemeteries further from the city core. This led to the monotonous, turf-covered expanse of land we recognize as a typical modern cemetery. This also meant there was less money for the existing urban cemeteries to keep up with high-quality maintenance. [Worpole, 2003. pg.8]

This change has lead to a surplus of under-utilized cemeteries that have become a single use destination. Many of these cemeteries occupy valuable land within the urban fabric and could, once again, become an amenity for the surrounding community and city. Yet until we take the issue of cemeteries functioning as an amenity for the public within the urban environment seriously, we risk a future of cities in denial of death and without memories.
Studies published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* show that human contact with nature can have significant positive effects on health and well-being. One study suggests that the cognitive processes involved and evoked from time spent in the natural environment are largely involuntary, which suggests natural environments provide rest from mental fatigue. These restorative environments do not need to be secluded or unusual, but need only to contain certain elements in order to provide restorative benefits.

Kaplan identifies four necessary components of the restoration environment: *being away-conceptually*, the shift from one environment to another frees up mental activity that would otherwise require directed attention; the new environment must have *extent*, that is, it must provide a coherent other world that allows directed attention to rest; *fascination*- recovery from directed attention fatigue through involuntary or effortless attention, and there must be *compatibility* between the kinds of activities applicable in the new environment and the individual’s purpose or inclinations. [Gross, 2007. pg. 226]

The components of restorative environments can easily be provided in many of our under-utilized urban cemeteries. By using cemeteries as park space, there will be more opportunities for the public to take part in leisure-time physical activity, which is becoming more important as our reliance on motorized transportation increases along with the creation of sedentary jobs. The benefits of park facilities and services are seen at the individual, social, economic and environmental levels.
According to the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, the physical benefits of public park space are due to the opportunities to take part in physical activity. The article, *The Significance of Parks to Physical Activity and Public Health*, states that regular physical activity has been shown to decrease many diseases including cancer, high blood pressure and depression, while maintaining healthy bones, muscles, and joints. Other factors in park space that positively influence physical activity include the presence of enjoyable scenery and the frequency of seeing others exercise. By sharing space with others, a park can facilitate social interactions that help build and maintain community cohesion and pride. This social and physical interaction contributes to the important psychological benefits of parks and park use. Studies have found that park users report lower levels of anxiety and sadness after visiting parks. Other studies have shown that people living within the surrounding community of a park have strong feelings of attachment and receive the biggest amount of pleasure from knowing the park is there.

[Bedimo-Rung, 2005. pg. 161]

In the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, the article *Religion and place attachment: A study of sacred places*, states that religion can endow certain places with a symbolic meaning which differentiates them from ordinary spaces. When dealing with sites tied to religion or a religious belief, they have the capacity to foster certain attachment and devotion that is different from secular spaces. In some instances, this religious connection between people and place can provide a unique support system for projects that deal with restoration or improvement. [Mazumdar, 2004. pg. 387]
Even though the emotions associated with the cemetery are sometimes negative, it does not negate the fact that landscapes of the dead are always, simultaneously, landscapes of the living. This is why cemeteries were created to successfully function as public parks throughout history.

CASE STUDIES

MOUNT AUBURN CEMETERY, MA
EVERGREEN CEMETERY, ME
OAKLAND CEMETERY, GA
CASE STUDY: MOUNT AUBURN CEMETERY, MA

Mount Auburn Cemetery was a large improvement over the typical cemetery of its time. Built in 1831, Mount Auburn was one of the first cemeteries designed for the casual visitor. The typical cemetery of the time consisted of bodies piled upon one another. The odor alone was enough to deter the public from entering, let alone spending any amount of leisure time within its boundaries. The pastoral landscape of Mount Auburn Cemetery soon found itself associated with the Erie Canal and Niagara Falls as one of the top tourist attractions of the decade. Mount Auburn still functions as both a successful park and cemetery and is an amenity for the surrounding community. Mount Auburn Cemetery holds many events, from information sessions that teach the community about cremation, to winter tree and shrub intensification workshops.
CASE STUDY: MOUNT AUBURN CEMETERY, MA
CASE STUDY: EVERGREEN CEMETERY, ME

Evergreen Cemetery is the second largest publicly-owned open space in the City of Portland. Established in 1854, this 239 acre cemetery was designed by Charles H. Howe and was modeled after America’s first rural cemetery, Mount Auburn. Evergreen Cemetery provides its visitors with winding paths, ponds, gardens, wooded wetlands, art and sculpture. It is filled with wildlife and is considered a premier bird-watching sanctuary. Along with the walking trails, Evergreen is a popular destination for joggers, bikers, cross-country skiers, and those looking to give their pets exercise. The cemetery continues to perform funeral services and a simple, “be mindful and respectful” policy has been sufficient for the mixing of park and cemetery activities.
CASE STUDY: EVERGREEN CEMETERY, ME
CASE STUDY: OAKLAND CEMETERY, GA

Originally called the Atlanta Graveyard, Oakland Cemetery started as a six acre plot of land for the growing city of Atlanta in 1850. By the year 1872, the cemetery had grown to 48 acres due to the increasing deaths caused by the Civil War. In the late 19th century, Oakland Cemetery became a very popular destination for picnics and carriage rides. Oakland was even the site for Atlanta’s first greenhouse, which was established in 1870. After 65 plus years of neglect and occasional vandalism, the Historic Oakland Foundation was founded in 1976. Since then, the foundation has done much to stabilize the cemetery, bringing it back to the desirable destination it was over a century ago. Today, Oakland is a popular destination for the community and is home to many public events, including the “Run Like Hell” 5k race.
CASE STUDY: OAKLAND CEMETERY, GA
HISTORY

The area of St. Boniface, home to the largest French speaking Canadian population outside of Quebec, was established in 1818 by Fr. Joseph - Norbert Provencher and was annexed by the city of Winnipeg in 1972. St. Boniface Cemetery is located in Central St. Boniface and lies across the Red River from The Forks.

The cathedral at St. Boniface was built in 1862 to replace the small log chapel that was built in 1818. The architectural company who designed the French Romanesque stone structure was Marchand and Haskell. The ornately carved cathedral served as the place of worship in St. Boniface until a fire consumed everything but the facade and outer walls in 1968.

In 1972 architect Etienne Gaboury designed a modern church building that sits within the walls of the old cathedral. The old remaining walls still hold the tombs of bishops who have served at St. Boniface. The cemetery grounds include the graves of many interesting historical Canadian figures, including Louis Riel, the founder of Manitoba. [Huebert, 2009]
PROJECT GOALS

1 Investigate how to successfully combine a park with an existing cemetery.

2 Investigate what influence the emotions involved with death and grieving have on design.

3 Investigate the opportunity of including urban farming in a public park/cemetery.

4 Determine how landscape architects can contribute to a change in the public mind set regarding acceptable cemetery use.

SITE: ST. BONIFACE CEMETERY
WINNIPEG, MB
Downtown Winnipeg and St. Boniface are visually and physically connected by the Provencher Bridge.

St. Boniface Cathedral is an important symbol for the surrounding community. Many families have lived in the area for generations and feel invested in the site and its future.
SITE: ST. BONIFACE CEMETERY
WINNIPEG, MB

SITE PHOTOS
The entire site is covered in poorly maintained turf-grass which struggles to grow under the large amount of shade trees.
No physical boundary allows entry to the site from any point. This eliminates the important hierarchy of the main entrance.
A strip of well-maintained turf will reinforce the linear, main entry and tie into the axial connection to The Forks.
An expansive mulch cover will provide a better medium for new and existing vegetation.

The new mulch will allow for easy integration of user-defined path systems.
A wall around the site provides a defined border and effectively reinforces desired access points.
Lighting the site allows for extended hours of use and helps eliminate stereotypes of nighttime cemetery activity.
Convincing the public to use a cemetery as a park will take more than a new design. A new mind set is needed to break current perceptions of cemetery use.
Portable, raised planter boxes provide opportunities for community-building activities.

Studies show that activities such as gardening can relieve stress and help people deal with the feelings of loss and grieving.
A stone wall reinforces the site boundary and leads visitors to entrances. Various plants and flowers are used to highlight prominent gravestones.
The main walkway functions as the physical connection, from West to East, and the visual connection, between St. Boniface and The Forks.
Secondary pathways throughout the site allow access to gravestones and provide alternative routes to enjoy the park.
The paved area near the cathedral entrance provides a space for raised planter boxes as well as opportunities for community gatherings.
Lighting allows for extended hours of use and creates a visual connection between St. Boniface and downtown Winnipeg.
In the UK there are an estimated 20,000 cemeteries and burial grounds, and North America has over 300,000. Some of these cemeteries represent up to half of all the open green space in its region. These are just two examples of the many countries not utilizing cemeteries and burial grounds as functioning public parks.

There exists an exciting opportunity to sustainably create new spaces without actually creating new places. Imagine if we realized the full potential of burial grounds and cemeteries by including them in our public green space strategies.
FINAL THOUGHTS

This project started out as a quest to seek a formula that could successfully bring park use to our under-utilized urban cemeteries. After much time researching and conceptualizing, every attempt ended with the same conclusion: this problem did not start with design, it started with a mind set. In the western world, we are currently stuck in the mind set that a cemetery is a single use space, and because of this, we use cemeteries as such. The few exceptions that do exist are leftovers from a time when we knew our cemeteries were dynamic places designed for numerous activities. In order to return to this mind set, the public will need some persuading. The fact is, almost any cemetery can become a park as soon as the user decides it is, and design and maintenance can only help facilitate that decision. This means that in order to change the way the public views and uses our urban cemeteries, we as landscape architects must provide the vision on how this change can happen.

As my project developed, I decided the best way for me, a landscape architecture student, to approach the project was to persuade the people of St. Boniface and Winnipeg that change is possible as well as positive.
REFERENCE LIST


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