

9 More Tips for Cemetery Preservation

NCPTT offered Stopping the Hands of Time: 9-Tips for Cemetery Preservation in 2007 (<http://ncptt.nps.gov/2007/stopping-the-hands-of-time-9-tips-for-cemetery-preservation/>). It largely focused on issues such as planning and community involvement. We were asked to develop a similar, simple handout that dealt with repair tips and hope this document will be useful.

1. Portland cement and mortars made from Portland cement are too hard and impermeable for historic fabric. Better choices include natural hydraulic limes and lime putty. See <http://www.chicora.org/pdfs/AGS%20Conservation%20Talk%20-%20OCP.pdf>.
2. As a corollary of 1 above, no stone should ever be laid or set directly in Portland cement. It is far too hard and will eventually cause the historic stone to break. This method of “resetting” should never be used. Alternatives include creating a new socket for a broken stone or creating a slant support for a broken stone, but in both cases the stone is attached only once the Portland cement has cured. Examples of these techniques can be found at <http://www.chicora.org/resetting.html>.
3. Wire brushes, sand blasting, pressure washing, and similar harsh and abrasive cleaning techniques have no place in a historic cemetery. They erode old stone, remove the patina, and promote additional weathering. Always use the gentlest means possible for any cleaning. That may mean that water alone will be adequate. Other choices may include D/2 Biological Solution for biologicals or Vulpex for soiling. See <http://www.chicora.org/pdfs/AGS%20Conservation%20Talk%20-%20Abrasives,%20Pressure%20Washing.pdf>.
4. If you can purchase it at a local hardware store, it is very likely unsuitable for use in preserving old stone. Examples of inappropriate products widely available include various adhesives like construction glues, cleaners like bleach, and waterproofing materials.
5. Latex or acrylic bonding agents or additives in repair materials are generally inappropriate since they reduce the vapor permeability of the repair.
6. “Simple epoxy repairs” of broken stones generally provide an ineffective load transfer. Simply put, the repair is unable to support the weight of the stone, and fails. See <http://www.chicora.org/pdfs/AGS%20Conservation%20Talk%20-%20Simple%20Epoxy%20Repairs.pdf>.
7. Monument companies can (but don’t always) provide good service dealing with modern stones – their “bread and butter.” They rarely understand the mechanics, science, or handling of old stone or marble. Their repair techniques are inappropriate for old stone and often do far more harm than good.
8. While landscape maintenance issues may seem distinct from stone repair issues, the two are inextricably intertwined. Much damage is done to historic stones and other cemetery fixtures (like fences) by mowing too close, mowing too aggressively, using mowers that are too large for the cemetery, allowing the grass to grow too tall before mowing, using

herbicides, failing to prune trees, failing to remove volunteer plants, and failing to understand proper maintenance procedures. If you want “bang for your buck,” begin by improving maintenance activities.

9. Blind pin repairs of stones are very complex and require a great deal of both training and skill (see <http://www.chicora.org/pdfs/AGS%20Conservation%20Talk%20-%20Pins%20&%20Epoxy.pdf>). It is a repair technique that should only be used by trained conservators. An alternative is the creation of new sockets or slant tops (as in #2 above).