

“Metairie Cemetery New Orleans, Louisiana”

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Metairie Cemetery, New Orleans, La.

The cemeteries of New Orleans are among its most novel and interesting features and are in strong contrast to those seen elsewhere in the United States.

They are literally "cities of the dead," with avenues of spacious and stately tombs; streets of less pretentious ones, and by-ways walled by solid blocks of tenement houses. The latter are the oven tombs, and represent the single grave sections of localities where dust can be returned to dust as Nature intended and Hygiene demands.

Here, burial above ground is necessitated by the swampy nature of the site of the city, and its environs. Water stands within two or three feet of the surface at all times, and there is not only a possibility, but a strong probability of an annual overflow in many localities.

Metairie contains about one hundred acres, and is the most important and attractive of the numerous cemeteries, most of which are of small area, and none of which approach the size of the principal ones in northern cities corresponding in importance and population to New Orleans. It is one of a group of comparatively modern origin that

cluster along the canal at a point about midway between the heart of the city and the West End—a resort on Lake Ponchartrain that is in great favor during summer. Metairie is accessible by the "shell road," famous in former days among the drives of America, but which now wears a shabby and neglected air, although not without attractions. These are principally due to the proximity of the distinctly picturesque canal with its channel crowded in places by floating islands of water hyacinths, its overhanging trees, trailing dewberry vines red and black with fruit, and tangles of pretty things growing with the free grace of all unhampered wildlings.

The cemeteries are also easily and quickly reached by steam dummy trains that run at frequent intervals from a point on Canal street, within

a few blocks of the Clay statue,—the hub of the big, rambling town.

The triple-arched entrance to Metairie is distinctive by reason of the clinging cover of *Ficus repens* which clothes it in every part with a close fitting garment. This vine is popularly used in New Orleans for covering plain surfaces, just as Japan Ivy (*Ampelopsis Veitchii*) is used in the north. It clings as the Ivy does, but resembles it in no other respect. In the north the *Ficus* is a greenhouse climber, here it is used extensively as an out of door evergreen. Besides the three arches of the entrance and part of the enclosing wall being covered with it, it is also used on the gate keeper's lodge, a concrete building just inside the entrance, and on the big receiving vault, (through which runs an open arch way with oven-like receptacles on either side from floor to ceiling), the exterior walls of which are hidden from ground to gable by its green covering.

Metairie has an open, spacious air unlike the crowded effect in the older cemeteries. Each tomb stands on its own plat of grass, a little apart from those on either side, and there are vines, shrubbery and flowers about them, while these wider avenues are lined with fine



AN AVENUE OF TOMBS, METAIRIE CEMETERY.

shade trees including Live Oaks, bitter Oranges, (which are much used as street trees throughout the city), Magnolias, etc. A gray stone wall tomb almost smothered in Confederate creeper, (*Rinkesporum*), whitened by loose drifts of snowy star-like flowers is not unusual, and altogether, with its Fig and Oleander trees, vines bright with yellow *Bigonia* blossoms, Pomegranates heavy with a burden of scarlet bloom, and many other plants and flowers unusual to northern eyes, the cemetery seems a Garden city of the Dead—its small white palaces set in unexpected greenery and bloom.

Gardening in Metairie goes on the year round. About the middle of November the winter planting is done, the varieties then set out, or started from seed corresponding with the Spring gardening work of the north.

An important and interesting feature of the cemetery is seen just inside the entrance—the Albert Sidney Johnston equestrian statue of bronze, which surmounts a grassy mound built over the catcombs of the Louisiana division of the Army of the Tennessee, (Confederate). It is a handsome bronze, and is one of the most prominent among southern martial memorial statues. A lengthy epitaph seen inside the tomb is of great literary merit, and has a history. It was written on the battle field by a soldier just after he heard of the General's death, and was found fastened to a board set up on the battle ground, by an officer who recognized its fine character; and when suggestions for a suitable epitaph were called for, this effort was offered and accepted.

There are comparatively few monuments aside from the one above mentioned. However, the most noteworthy are those of the army of the Tennessee and other military organizations.

Owing to the natural conditions prevailing in the locality of New Orleans, most of the interments are made above ground—principally in brick vaults, which are plastered and painted white. This accounts in large measure, for the few monuments to be seen.

The more recent additions to the cemetery are of a much higher class, several costly mausoleums having been erected, while others are in course of construction. The mausoleum of Mr. Howard which stands not far from the entrance, and which contains an ideal figure in marble, forms one of the features of interest.

In the back part of the cemetery stands a curious historic feature that might be called "the restored tree." It is an enormous Live Oak, the trunk of which was partly burned out during the war, but although so much of the life giving bark was destroyed the tree continued to live and thrive, and being so tenacious of life, such a fine specimen and so historically interesting, the hollow trunk was filled with concrete, (some brick being used too, I believe), until the original size and contour were nearly reproduced. The bark and the general exterior were imitated while the material was plastic, and, at first glance at least, the tree now stands

forth complete. Whether so-called "rustic sculpture" is the outgrowth of this attempt at restoration, or this work was the result of a knowledge of that style of handiwork, at all events the progress of decay has been retarded, and the noble old tree bids fair to outlive the generation that had actual knowledge of the desecrations of war. This dignified southerner wearing not only the green symbol of perpetual summer, but draped in a misty mantle of Spanish moss of the tint held dear by the South, seems to typify the proud southern spirit standing silent and stately guard over days, deeds and friends that have passed.

Metairie Cemetery was once a race-course, but Charley Howard, the lottery-man, finding himself unable to gain admission to the Club, retaliated by purchasing the property and putting it into the control of a cemetery corporation.

Where the climatic conditions differ so widely from our northern latitudes, the landscape effects vary, which, added to the conventional ideas locally prevailing, create attractions differing greatly from those common to cemeteries in colder climates, and in

this regard, Metairie Cemetery is of striking interest.

With summer all the year round, so far as vegetation is concerned, the succession of flowering plants is scarcely inter-

rupted, and the white tombs and other structures are set in frames of color which vary as mother nature changes her mood.

The department of Greek and Roman antiquities, British Museum, recently secured by purchase one of the choicest examples of ancient art in solid gold which even that great collection possesses. It is a vase of this metal in its purest condition, without sculptures, measuring nearly eight inches in height and about four inches in diameter. It is of Roman origin, perhaps of the period of Augustus. An inscription on the bottom of the vessel indicates that its weight nearly corresponds to two pounds of troy of the modern scale. It was lately found by a sponge-diver in the sea off the island of Samos, and may be all that remains of a wreck which occurred there nearly 2,000 years ago.



ALBERT SIDNEY JOHNSTON STATUE, METAIRIE CEMETERY.