



RIP GUARDIAN PROGRAM

Cemeteries are important keys to Texas' past. They are reminders of settlement patterns and reveal information about historic events, religion, lifestyles and genealogy. Unfortunately, historic cemeteries are subject to long-term deterioration from natural forces such as weathering, uncontrolled vegetation, development pressures, vandalism and theft. Today, historic cemeteries are most threatened by indifference. Circumstances can change quickly — a cemetery considered maintained and safe can quickly become neglected and endangered. Our best course of action is to foster a strong sense of stewardship for our historic burial places.

What We Do

The letters RIP are commonly found carved on gravemarkers, bidding the deceased an earthly wish for eternal rest in peace. RIP is also one of the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) cemetery preservation initiatives: Record, Investigate, Protect. The RIP Guardian program provides technical assistance and education to a statewide network of cemetery preservation volunteers and empowers them with proper preservation and conservation techniques to share with others.

What RIP Guardians Do

Cultural neglect is the product of vandalism, encroachment, development and sometimes even removal of markers to use the site for other purposes. Natural neglect results in overgrown vegetation and natural deterioration of a variety of types of gravemarkers and other features. Both types of neglect have the potential to endanger historic cemeteries.



Volunteers photograph a cemetery in Travis County.

RIP Guardian cemetery preservation volunteers battle these forces and resulting neglect by encouraging community support, preservation planning and sensitive maintenance. Successful groups are diverse with broad-based representation from the community, including volunteer groups, civic organizations, business owners and local elected officials. Volunteers interested in preserving the history of their community protect historic cemeteries and the individually unique stories they tell.

RIP Guardians help historic cemeteries by:

- Continuing research and survey efforts
- Planning for the future of the site
- Practicing sensitive maintenance
- Increasing community awareness and involvement

Program Description

RIP Guardians follow statewide cemetery preservation guidelines and standards (located at www.thc.state.tx.us, select Cemeteries). An RIP Guardian contact representing a volunteer group, whether small or large, signs the Code of Ethics, abides by the standards and guidelines and agrees to share educational materials and tools with participants. Successful groups are diverse with broadbased representation from the community. Local RIP Guardian programs coordinate preservation projects for the adopted site. Once local programs have recruited volunteers, sponsors and supplies, the THC will provide training, educational and promotional materials and will help seek sponsors for basic supplies.

After signing and returning the Code of Ethics, RIP Guardian contacts receive the RIP Guardian kit. The kit contains information and educational material to help chart success and physical tools to assist with survey and conservation techniques. The kit is organized by measures – steps taken to strengthen the results of historic cemetery preservation volunteers. RIP Guardians address a minimum of two measures a year, which can transform an occasional maintenance event into a lasting positive impact on a precious historic resource. RIP Guardian measures can be addressed in any order, and include:

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|------------|---------------|
| ■ Research | ■ Organize |
| ■ Survey | ■ Fund |
| ■ Secure | ■ Communicate |
| ■ Plan | ■ Educate |
| ■ Maintain | ■ Conserve |

RIP Guardian contacts share their group's accomplishments and challenges by completing a report in the spring and fall. This reporting process helps RIP Guardians track the number of volunteer hours worked and provides an opportunity to suggest future training topics.

Become An RIP Guardian

To become eligible for participation in the RIP Guardian program, potential volunteers must have submitted a Historic Texas Cemetery (HTC) designation application and supporting materials for the adoptive site. Sites that have previously received the HTC designation meet the eligibility requirement. To determine if a cemetery has been designated, consult the Texas Historic Sites Atlas online at www.thc.state.tx.us, select Atlas, or contact a cemetery preservation program staff member at 512.463.5853.



A cemetery covered in bluebonnets in Fayette County.

RIP Guardians have the opportunity to preserve local history while sharing and learning within a statewide network. By becoming part of the network, cemetery preservation volunteers will positively influence local preservation efforts and lower the number of endangered cemeteries across the state threatened by neglect.

Download the RIP Guardian Introduction form and submit a signed RIP Guardian Code of Ethics to get started.

How to Reach Us

Staff members are available to answer questions and provide preservation assistance. Please contact us at:
Phone: 512.463.5853
Fax: 512.463.5750
Email: history@thc.state.tx.us



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