

Jackson Street Cemetery Listed in the National Register

ATLANTA (October 15, 2009) – The Jackson Street Cemetery (also called Old Athens Cemetery), located on South Jackson Street on the University of Georgia campus in Clarke County, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on October 2, 2009. The nomination was sponsored by the University of Georgia’s Physical Plant Grounds Department.

The cemetery is sited on 2.5 acres of land within the original 633-acre tract deeded to the university by John Milledge in 1803. The property for the cemetery was donated to the city of Athens by the University’s Board of Trustees circa 1810 for use as a public cemetery. The cemetery was used by white residents of Athens and includes graves of farmers, prominent citizens, university students and faculty, and soldiers from the Revolutionary and Civil wars. By 1848 the city announced that no new burials would be allowed due to the crowded conditions of the cemetery. Although burials continued into the 1890s, Jackson Street Cemetery’s time as the official city cemetery ended in September 1855 with the opening of nearby Oconee Hill Cemetery.

During the 20th century, university buildings were constructed on either side of the cemetery, and by the 1970s, the cemetery was deteriorating due to lack of maintenance, erosion, and vandalism. The Friends of the Old Athens Cemetery took over maintenance from 1983 through 2004, when the responsibility was turned over to the university with a small endowment. The university’s grounds department has an ongoing maintenance and preservation plan that includes a boundary survey, marker recordation and assessment, GIS mapping of marked and unmarked burials, and stabilization work. As part of the plan in 2007, students from the university’s Department of Anthropology and Archaeology began the process of locating unmarked burials and historic features through the use of ground-penetrating radar.

The Jackson Street Cemetery was listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its association with the development of Athens in the early 19th century and for its significant examples of 19th-century funerary monuments and ornamental fencing. Decorative grave markers including slab, obelisks, box tombs, headstones, footstones, and ornamental fencing and coping are all representative of the burial practices and funerary symbolism in the 19th century. The cemetery was also listed as significant in historic archaeology for the noninvasive archaeological work completed by the students that yielded important information about unmarked burials and missing features.

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The National Register of Historic Places is our country's official list of historic buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts worthy of preservation. The National Register provides formal recognition of a property's architectural, historical or archaeological significance. It also identifies historic properties for planning purposes and insures that these properties will be considered in the planning of state or federally assisted projects. National Register listing encourages preservation of historic properties through public awareness, federal and state tax incentives, and grants. Listing in the National Register does not place obligations or restrictions on the use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property.

The Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources serves as Georgia's state historic preservation office. Their mission is to promote the preservation and use of historic places for a better Georgia. HPD's programs include archaeology protection and education, environmental review, grants, historic resource surveys, tax incentives, the National Register of Historic Places, community planning and technical assistance.

The mission of the Department of Natural Resources is to sustain, enhance, protect and conserve Georgia's natural, historic and cultural resources for present and future generations, while recognizing the importance of promoting the development of commerce and industry that utilize sound environmental practices.

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