

**MORTUARY PRACTICE IN SOCIOHISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

**CONTEXTS: TEXAS, 1821-1870**

A Thesis

by

MICHAEL SCOTT CROW

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2004

Major Subject: Anthropology

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Approved as to style and content by:

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Alston V. Thoms  
(Chair of Committee)

---

David G. Woodcock  
(Member)

---

David L. Carlson  
(Member)

---

David L. Carlson  
(Head of Department)

May 2004

Major Subject: Anthropology

**ABSTRACT**

Mortuary Practice in Sociohistorical and Archaeological Contexts: Texas, 1821-1870.

(May 2004)

Michael Scott Crow, B.A., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Alston V. Thoms

Historical accounts of mortuary display during the 19th-century and evidence from archaeological investigations at historic cemeteries can contribute substantially to our understanding of related chronological and social-status issues. An inadequate understanding of mortuary practice in Texas circa 1821 to 1870 frustrates assessment of site chronology and status-related interpretations. While there are numerous studies of individual cemeteries, there is, as of yet, no synthesis of historical and archaeological data pertaining to mortuary practices in early Texas.

In response to this deficiency, this thesis provides a synthesis of mortuary practices and the availability of related paraphernalia in Texas circa 1821-1870. Data from numerous cemeteries are compiled to establish a chronology for mortuary practices and to develop a seriation of select burial furnishings as an aid in assessing status-related variation in mortuary display. Results of the study, as gleaned from archival and archaeological data, indicate that mortuary display in mid-19th-century Texas is not so much a proxy of wealth, as it is a measure of popular cultural trends and economic contexts. These findings are used to reassess cemetery chronologies and

status indices, including several interments at Matagorda Cemetery (1835-present), which serve as case studies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION .....	1
Research Objectives .....	3
Investigations at Historic Cemeteries.....	4
Direction of Data Recovery Efforts at Historic Cemeteries.....	9
Cemetery Investigations in Texas .....	10
Matagorda Cemetery: A Case Study .....	12
Research Methods .....	13
Significance of the Research.....	14
Organization of the Thesis .....	14
CHAPTER II AMERICAN DEATHWAYS .....	16
The Shaping of American Deathways.....	17
American Burial Practices.....	18
Colonial North America: 1492-1776.....	18
Early Independence: 1776-1860.....	21
The Civil War: 1860-1865 .....	23
Post Civil War Funeral Industry: 1866-early1900s.....	26
Summary of Popular Trends in Mortuary Behavior.....	27
The Pervasiveness of the Beautification of Death .....	28
CHAPTER III HISTORIC-ERA BURIAL PRACTICES IN TEXAS .....	30
Frontier Effects on Material Culture .....	31
Early Gravemarkers.....	32
Historic Use of Burial Receptacles in Texas.....	33
Early Texas Burial Receptacles: Shape, Manufacture, and Decoration.....	35
The Frontier and Diffusion of Mortuary-Related Material Culture .....	37
Commercial Infrastructure in Texas: 1821-1870 .....	38

	Page
Cemetery Trends in Frontier Contexts .....	41
Hispanic Cemeteries .....	42
Southern Folk Cemeteries .....	44
German Cemeteries .....	48
Shared Burial Grounds .....	50
Mortuary Practice in Texana Context .....	51
 CHAPTER IV DIAGNOSTIC PROPERTIES OF MORTUARY MATERIAL CULTURE .....	 53
Current Chronological Studies .....	54
Chronological Indices .....	57
Nail Technology .....	58
Decorative Fasteners .....	60
Burial Receptacle Morphology .....	62
Grave Arches and Rough Boxes, and Subterranean Architecture .....	68
Socioeconomic Indices.....	72
Status of Research Regarding Variation in Mortuary Display.....	73
 CHAPTER V MORTUARY DISPLAY IN SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT: BASIC DESCRIPTIONS OF SAMPLED CEMETERIES .....	 75
Texas Cemetery Examples .....	78
Texas State Cemetery .....	78
Morgan Chapel Cemetery .....	78
Laredo Cemetery .....	79
Phillips Memorial Cemetery .....	79
Pioneer Cemetery .....	80
Greenwood Cemetery/Potter's Field Cemetery .....	80
Tucker Cemetery .....	81
Third New City Cemetery .....	81
Freedman's Cemetery.....	82
Choke Canyon Reservoir.....	83
Cemeteries at O. H. Ivie Reservoir.....	83
Varnell Cemetery .....	84
Sinclair Cemetery .....	84
Mission San Juan Capistrano .....	85
Non-Texas Cemetery Examples.....	85
Cedar Grove Cemetery .....	85
Mount Pleasant .....	86
Nancy Creek Baptist Cemetery .....	86



	Page
Elko Switch Cemetery.....	87
Oakland Cemetery.....	87
Weir Family Cemetery.....	88
Grafton Cemetery.....	89
First African Baptist (Eighth and Tenth Street) Church Cemeteries.....	90
Fort Myers Military Cemetery.....	90
Uxbridge Almshouse Burial Ground.....	91
Mt. Gilead Cemetery.....	91
Cross Homestead Cemetery.....	92
Catoctin Furnace.....	92
Walton Family Cemetery.....	93
Eighteenth-Century Family Cemetery in Sussex County, Delaware.....	93
Coffined Graves at San Augustine.....	94
St. Peter/Toulouse Street Cemetery (New Orleans First Cemetery).....	94
African Burial Ground.....	95
Martin's Hundred.....	95
Data Collection Considerations.....	96
 CHAPTER VI METHODS OF ASSESSING VARIATION IN MORTUARY DISPLAY.....	 98
Assessing Stylistic Change within Sociohistorical Contexts.....	99
From Gravemarkers to Burial Furnishings.....	101
 CHAPTER VII RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS.....	 104
Observed Trends.....	106
Factors Influencing Variation in Recovered Mortuary Assemblages.....	109
Time of Interment.....	110
Spatioeconomic Context.....	110
Status-Related Variation.....	112
Aberrations in the Seriation Results.....	115
Unqualified Assessments of Socioeconomic Status.....	116
Neglect of Popular Patterns in Mortuary Display.....	117
Unqualified Comparisons and Neglect of Regional Sociohistorical Contexts.....	118
Texana-Specific Patterns in Mortuary Display.....	121
Concluding Remarks.....	125
 CHAPTER VIII ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT MATAGORDA CEMETERY.....	 127
History of Matagorda Cemetery.....	129

	Page
Archaeological Findings .....	132
Burial Summaries .....	134
Burial Receptacles and Subterranean Architecture .....	140
Coffin Hardware.....	141
Gravemarkers and Grave-Tending Events .....	143
Observations of Traditional Burial Practices at Matagorda Cemetery.....	146
Discussion of Findings.....	147
Site Chronology.....	148
Socioeconomic Profile of Investigated Interments .....	155
Summary of Findings.....	157
CHAPTER IX SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .....	159
Archaeological Investigations at Matagorda Cemetery .....	161
Future Research.....	162
REFERENCES.....	164
APPENDIX A COMPILATION OF BURIAL RECEPTACLE DATA .....	183
APPENDIX B COMPILATION OF DECORATIVE ATTRIBUTES AND RECEPTACLE-PROTECTING INCLUSIONS.....	186
VITA .....	190

**LIST OF TABLES**

	Page
Table 1. Selected Investigations of Historic Cemeteries.....	5
Table 2. Summary Nail Chronology .....	59
Table 3. Occurrence of Grave Arches and Rough Boxes.....	71
Table 4. Summary of Texas and Non-Texas Cemeteries.....	77
Table 5. Correlation Matrix for Summary Measures .....	109
Table 6. Estimations of Age, Sex, and Ethnicity for Burials 2 Through 5.....	148

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
FIGURE 1. Trend in mortuary-related design and utility patents depicting a burgeoning market beginning in the latter half of the 19th century (data used to generate the graph provided courtesy of James M. Davidson). .....	26
FIGURE 2. Photograph overlooking cement gravemarker in Hispanic portion of Lawrence Chapel Cemetery. Note the better-marked Anglo graves across the fence (background) dividing the two sections of the cemetery.....	51
FIGURE 3. Decorative fasteners: (a) common coffin screw (Source: Sargent & Company 1869), (b) “dummy” tack (Source: Markham and Strong 1865), (c) cylindrical-bodied thumbscrew (Source: Sargent & Company 1874), and (d) flat-bodied thumbscrew head (Source: United States Patent Office Design Patent 1875). .....	61
FIGURE 4. Shapes of common burial receptacles.....	64
FIGURE 5. Grave cross section illustrating the process of grave arching over a hexagonal coffin (modified from Crow 2001). .....	69
FIGURE 6. Location of 33 selected historic cemeteries used in this study. ....	76
FIGURE 7. Relative measures of select burial receptacle shapes, decorative hardware types and treatments, and receptacle-protecting implements ordered by mean age.....	105
FIGURE 8. Relative frequencies (i.e., measures of relative popularity) of selected burial furnishings among Texas cemetery investigations ranked by mean age. ....	123
FIGURE 9. Location of Matagorda Cemetery (modified from Thoms 2001b:Figure 2). .....	128
FIGURE 10. Bay City Jr. Historians’ plan view map of Matagorda Cemetery circa 1974 (modified from Stahman 2001). .....	131
FIGURE 11. Photograph of grave shaft fill (at center, right), which is readily distinguishable from surrounding sediments (modified from Thoms 2001d:Figure 15). .....	132

FIGURE 12. Photograph (bird's eye perspective) of excavation area with delineated shaft outlines (from Crow 2001:Figure 21). .....	133
FIGURE 13. Photograph showing possible staining of alternating boards of coffin arch in Burial 2. ....	136
FIGURE 14. Illustration of construction, as modeled, of burial receptacles forms discovered beneath the low mound (modified from Crow 2001:Figure 18). .....	141
FIGURE 15. Photographic plate showing the two types of "dummy" screws discovered beneath the low mound (a and b are views of the head and profile of type 1 and c and d are views of the head and profile of type 2). .....	143
FIGURE 16. Profile of balk wall in central portion of low mound with caretaking episodes identified (modified from Thoms 2001a:Figure 48). .....	145
FIGURE 17. Plan view of grave shaft and burial receptacle dimensions in relation to fence post and shell-crete/brick curb (modified from Stahman 2001a:Figure 32). .....	146
FIGURE 18. Graph of the popular use periods of selected articles discovered beneath the low mound (modified from Thoms 2001a:Figure 46). .....	151
FIGURE 19. Seriation with Matagorda Cemetery mortuary assemblage positioned by mean age. ....	152

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Scattered throughout Texas, historic cemeteries serve as vital links to people and surrounding communities long since vanished. Unfortunately, nature and people have taken a toll on this “priceless legacy of a simpler age” as natural deteriorative processes, vandalism, new developments, and popular affluence continually threaten historic cemeteries (Jordan 1982:123).

Historic cemeteries are time capsules for past lifeways and are an unmistakably important piece of Texas heritage. As such, it is in the public’s best interest to work to preserve them. Non-profit organizations such as Save Texas Cemeteries, Inc. and state sponsored programs such as the “Historic Texas Cemetery Designation” and “Adopt-a-Cemetery” have increased public awareness and participation in cemetery preservation (Texas Historical Commission 2001:11). Cultural resources legislation passed in the last few decades of the 20th century afforded historic cemeteries substantial protection. As a result, cultural resources management (CRM) consultants are increasingly involved in exhumation of historic graves within areas of potential effect within publicly funded or licensed construction projects.

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This thesis follows the style of *Historical Archaeology*.

Much of our knowledge of cemeteries and associated mortuary practices in Texas is derived from legally mandated CRM projects. Substantial information has been published on Native American (Newcomb, Jr. 1958; Suhm 1962; Ray and Jelks 1964; Hsu 1969; Word and Fox 1975; Ferguson 1983; Gill 1987; Reinhard et al. 1989), Spanish Colonial (Fox 1991; Schuetz 1968, 1974; Gilmore 1969; Tennis 2002), post-Civil War and early-20th century cemeteries (McReynolds et al. 1981; Taylor et al. 1986; Lebo 1988; Earls et al. 1991; Dockall et al. 1996a, 1996b; Peter and Clow 2000). Significantly less is known about cemeteries and interments dating to the Texana period in Texas (1821-1870). Despite its importance to Texas history, we know relatively little of mortuary practices during this era because only a few cemeteries dating to this period have been excavated by archaeologists (Fox 1984; Winchell and Moir 1992; Thoms 2001c; Gadus et al. 2002).

The Texana period as herein defined is bracketed by the arrival of Stephen F. Austin's colonists in 1821 and the re-admittance of Texas into the Union following the Civil War in 1870. Although this period represents a short interval in Texas history, it is, nonetheless, historically and culturally significant from both Anglo and non-Anglo perspectives. Accordingly, cemeteries of this era are worthy of study for insights into multicultural and historical issues and to generate a synthesis of archaeologically relevant data regarding 19th-century mortuary practices.

## **Research Objectives**

The goal of this thesis is to compile and synthesize information pertaining to mortuary practices presently available in historical literature, CRM reports, and archival sources pertaining to burial practices in Texas during the Texana Period. An important component of this study is the synthesis and examination of the diagnostic properties of select burial furnishings and mortuary practices. Archaeological investigations of several mid-19th-century burials at Matagorda Cemetery detailed in Thoms (2001c) serve as a case study. Results of this study, though directed toward Texas circa 1821-1870, will be especially useful for future analysis at burial grounds investigated in the course of CRM projects and other historic preservation efforts.



## **Investigations at Historic Cemeteries**

Although archaeologists have been excavating Indian burials for many years, excavation of non-Native American cemeteries is a relatively recent phenomenon, largely beginning in the 1970s (Fox 1984:4; Davidson 1999:2). The impetus for the majority of such projects is federal legislation, including the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and various Executive Orders. This legislation, along with similar statutes at state, county, and municipal levels, effectively mandates excavation by professional archaeologists and/or physical anthropologists of historic interments (i.e., interments more than 50 years old) impacted by publicly-funded or licensed undertakings. Accordingly, the number of cemeteries investigated by archaeologists has increased steadily over the past four decades. Table 1 lists many of such examples.

**TABLE 1. SELECTED INVESTIGATIONS OF HISTORIC CEMETERIES**

Cemetery/Site <sup>a</sup>	State/Province	Time Period	Ethnicity	Economy	Size/Studied	Source
Elko Switch Cemetery	Alabama	1850-1920	Black	Rural	56	Shogren et al. 1989
Cedar Grove Cemetery	Arkansas	1900-1915	Black/free	Rural	80	Rose 1985
Rincon Cemetery	California	1840s-1935	Hispanic and White/mixed	Rural	90/4	Brock and Schwartz 1991
Walton Family Cemetery	Connecticut	1757-early 19th c.	White	Rural	28	Bellantoni et al. 1997
Sussex County	Delaware	1752-1799	White	Rural	7	LeeDecker 1995
Fort Myers	Florida	1841-1865	Undetermined	Military	20	Deming et al. 1993
San Augustine	Florida	ca. 1700-1784	Hispanic/Native American/white	Colonial	25	Koch 1977, 1983
Bethany Cemetery	Georgia	1757-1890	White	Rural	1	Elliot and Elliott 1989
Mount Gilead Cemetery	Georgia	1832-1849	White	Rural	28	Wood et al. 1986
Nancy Creek Cemetery	Georgia	1850-1979	White	Rural	54	Garrow et al. 1985
Oakland Cemetery	Georgia	1866-1927	Black/free	Urban	17	Blakely and Beck 1982
Talbot County Cemetery	Georgia	ca. 1840-1900	White	Rural	6	Garrow and Symes 1987; Garrow 1987
Brunson-Sisson Cemetery	Illinois	1836-1892	White/mixed	Rural	20	Cobb 1999
Cross Homestead	Illinois	1820s-1849	White	Rural	29	Craig and Larsen 1993; Larsen et al. 1995
Grafton Cemetery	Illinois	1836-1892	White/mixed	Rural	246	Buikstra et al. 2000
St. Peter/Toulouse Cemetery	Louisiana	1725-1788	White/Black/mixed	Urban	32	Owsley and Orser 1985

**TABLE 1. CONTINUED**

Cemetery/Site <sup>a</sup>	State/Province	Time Period	Ethnicity	Economy	Size/Studied	Source
Catoctin Furnace	Maryland	1790-1820	Black/slave	Urban	31	Burnston 1997
Uxbridge Almshouse Burial Ground	Massachusetts	1831-1872	White	Rural	31	Elia and Wesolowsky 1991
African Burial Ground	New York	1712-1780s	Black/slave	Urban	427	Perry et al. 2001
McGee Creek Cemetery	Oklahoma	1899-1924	Native American	Rural	11	Ferguson 1983
St. Thomas Anglican Churchyard Cemetery	Ontario	1821-1874	White	Urban	579	McKillop 1995/1995
Applegate Lake Project	Oregon	1880s-1930s	White	Rural	13	Jenkins 1981
FABC 10th Street	Pennsylvania	1810-1822	Black/free	Urban	89	Crist et al. 1997
FABC 8th Street	Pennsylvania	1823-1842	Black/free	Urban	135	Crist et al. 1997; Parrington and Roberts 1990
Millwood Plantation Cemetery	South Carolina	1860-1920	Black/slave and free	Plantation	263	Orser et al. 1987
Mount Pleasant Cemetery	South Carolina	1840-1870 (1860s-1920s)	Black/slave and free	Rural	37	Rathbun 1987; Trinkley and Hacker 1984
Camposanto at Santa Rosa Hospital	Texas	1840-1860	Hispanic/White	Urban	2	Lyle et al. 1999
Choke Canyon Reservoir	Texas	1860-1913	White	Rural	34	Fox 1984
Freedman's Cemetery	Texas	1869-1907	Black/free	Rural	1150	Peter and Clow 2000
Laredo Cemetery	Texas	Late 19th-early 20th c.	Hispanic/White	Urban	22	McReynolds et al. 1981
Matagorda Cemetery	Texas	1850-1870	White/mixed	Rural	4	Thoms 2001c
Milam Renovation Phase I	Texas	1835	White	Urban	1	Tennis 1995
Milam Renovation Phase II	Texas	1848-1853	Hispanic/White	Urban	1	Tennis et al. 1995

**TABLE 1. CONTINUED**

Cemetery/Site <sup>a</sup>	State/Province	Time Period	Ethnicity	Economy	Size/Studied	Source
Mission San Juan Capistrano	Texas	1820-1862	Hispanic/Native American	Rural	92	Schuetz 1968
Morgan Chapel Cemetery	Texas	1891-1937	White	Rural	21	Taylor et al. 1986
O.H. Ivie Reservoir	Texas	1870-1890	White	Rural	13	Earls et al. 1991
Old Settlers Cemetery	Texas	1895	White	Rural	3	Henderson 1996
Phillips Memorial Cemetery	Texas	1885-1927	Black/free	Rural	53	Dockall et al. 1996b
Pioneer Cemetery	Texas	1880-1921	White	Urban	15	Cooper and Peter 2000
Pioneer Cemetery	Texas	1888-1920	Black	Urban	3	Tiné and Boyd 2003
Potter's Field/Greenwood Cemetery	Texas	1878-1911	White	Urban	14	Tiné et al. 2002
San Xavier Missions	Texas	1746-1755	Hispanic/Native American	Rural	11	Gilmore 1969
Sinclair Cemetery	Texas	1850-1880	White	Rural	16	Winchell et al. 1992
Socorro Mission	Texas	1684-1829	Hispanic/Native American	Rural	32	Evans 1989
Texas State Cemetery	Texas	1884-1951	White/mixed	Urban	57	Dockall et al. 1996a
The White Site	Texas	1860-1875	Native American	Rural	1	Suhm 1962
Third New City Cemetery	Texas	1850s-1880	Black/free	Urban	355	Bond et al. 2002
Tucker Cemetery	Texas	1880-1942	White	Rural	16	Lebo 1988
Varnell Cemetery	Texas	1860-1870s	White/mixed	Rural	20	Gadus et al. 2002
Martin's Hundred	Virginia	1625-1650	White	Plantation	23	Noël Hume 1982

**TABLE 1. CONTINUED**

Cemetery/Site <sup>a</sup>	State/Province	Time Period	Ethnicity	Economy	Size/Studied	Source
Weir Family Cemetery	Virginia	1830s-1907	White	Plantation	24	Little et al. 1992 1992
Reynolds Cemetery	West Virginia	1832-1900	White	Rural	31	Bybee 2002
Divide Burial	Wyoming	1868	White	Frontier	1	Gill and Smith 1989
Pioneer Burial at Bordeaux Trading Post	Wyoming	Late 19th c.	White/Native American	Frontier	15	Gill et al. 1984; Gill 1987

<sup>a</sup> Organized alphabetically by State/Province

## **Direction of Data Recovery Efforts at Historic Cemeteries**

Research at historic cemeteries is frequently complicated by the investigation of unmarked or otherwise unidentifiable burials. In these circumstances, recovered osteological and material culture remains are used to tender information about individual and/or group identities. Research themes of investigations at historic cemeteries are ostensibly directed toward diachronic studies of health, socioeconomics, and burial practices. Nonetheless, research at historic cemeteries, exempting few investigations (Rose 1985; Elia and Wesolowsky 1991; Dockall et al. 1996b; Condon et al. 1998; Buikstra et al. 2000), has demonstrated a bias toward osteological analyses much to the detriment of data concerning burial practices and related material culture. Mortuary material culture, when mentioned, is often subject to cursory examination (Bell 1990:28; Davidson 1999:2-3).

Recovered burial furniture and related diagnostic properties typically provide the chronological underpinnings for reconstructing burial ground use histories. A chronology or sequence of interments within a cemetery's use-history is a requisite of diachronic studies of health, socioeconomics, and mortuary practices (Davidson 1999:1). Time-diagnostic attributes of burial receptacles and related decorative furnishings are widely touted and several chronologies based on the appearance of hardware forms in patent records and trade catalogues have been developed and utilized by many cemetery investigations (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984; Lang 1984; Garrow 1987). Recent excavations at historic cemeteries, however, have pushed the limits of these preliminary

studies, such that more detailed inspections of the historical and archaeological records are required to improve chronological precision (Davidson 1999).

Increasingly important, but still rarely explored and nonetheless deserving of increased attention, are relationships between variation in mortuary assemblages and socioeconomic status. Studies of variation in mortuary display have proceeded along the same lines as prehistoric mortuary studies that relate grave wealth to social standing (Bell 1987:15). Drawing on the works of social historians (Habenstein et al. 1995; Mitford 1963; Coffin 1976, Jackson 1977, Metcalf and Huntington 1991), however, researchers have pointed to a popular cultural trend in the late-18th and 19th centuries referred to as the “beautification of death” (Douglas 1975:50; Jackson 1977:62) that can complicate the relation between grave wealth and social standing. This trend is marked by the shedding of ideological and socio-political sumptuary restrictions and the onset of a notable increase in the expense and ostentation witnessed in mortuary assemblages across the socioeconomic spectrum (Farrell 1980). Cemetery landscapes also underwent significant changes in the late-18th and 19th centuries. To date, research addressing the pervasiveness of the beautification of death in rural/frontier contexts is limited (Hacker Norton and Trinkley 1984; Shogren 1989).

### **Cemetery Investigations in Texas**

Texas affords an opportunity, as a more recently settled frontier, to study mortuary practices, in particular, the pervasiveness of popular cultural trends (e.g., the

“beautification of death”), during the early- to late-19th century. Texas can boast of some of the largest cemetery excavations to date including those at Texas State Cemetery in Austin (Dockall et al. 1996a), Third New City Cemetery in Houston (Bond et al. 2002), and Freedman’s Cemetery in Dallas (Peter and Clow 2000) (Table 1). Many of these cemeteries as well as the majority of investigated cemeteries in Texas, however, post-date 1870. The few excavated cemeteries dating to the Texana Period have garnered far less attention.

Present chronologies and established sociohistorical contexts are largely based on the *popular* use of burial furnishings and probably are not well representative of practices in rural and frontier settings. Burial practices and material culture associated with cemeteries in urban economies positioned along established trade networks are likely to reflect greater access to manufactured goods and craftsmen, as well as increased sensitivity to the changing styles of the 19th and early-20th centuries. Access to these goods and services was also likely sensitive to the relative efficiency of particular methods of available transport (i.e., wagon, boat, or train) and frequency (i.e., rate of occurrence) of that transport.

In rural and frontier settings, the availability of many goods was much reduced and/or exhibited a delayed, often extended, period of use (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984; Shogren et al. 1989). The same goods and services available in urban economies were difficult if not impossible to procure in a sparsely populated, undeveloped frontier (Davidson 1999:145). First-hand historical accounts recall the primitive conditions and deprivations suffered by many of the first Anglos settling Texas, and with regard to



burial practices, provide evidence of frontier-demanded humility (Helm 1985 [1884]; Olmsted 1969 [1857]; Smithwick 1983 [1900]).

### **Matagorda Cemetery: A Case Study**

Investigation of several interments dating to the mid-19th century at Matagorda Cemetery, Matagorda, Texas identified numerous burial receptacle forms and relatively modest use of decorative hardware. The burials, likely interred within a relatively short span of time, contained three distinct burial receptacle forms whose periods of use overlapped through much of the 19th century. Similarly, decorative hardware noted within the graves was available throughout the latter half of the 19th century and provided a range of circa 1850 to 1900 (Crow 2001:28-30,34). The dating of personal effects and caretaking episodes suggested a range of 1850-1870 (Thoms 2001a:62-65).

A marked paucity of burial furnishings in these interments was decidedly unanticipated, due to a lack of adequately established social and historical contexts for burial practices in Texas during this period. Constraints at the time of the original investigation precluded such a study, however, the very presence of these modest assemblages in the center of historic Matagorda Cemetery suggested a need for further study.

## **Research Methods**

This study is presented in three phases. The first phase, an overview of American deathways, provides historical and methodological contexts for the present study. It includes: (1) a brief history of mortuary practices in the United States; and (2) a brief history of mortuary practices in 19th-century Texas.

The second phase focuses on the archaeology of historic cemeteries; it refines and synthesizes existing chronological and socioeconomic indices related to reported mortuary assemblages. A component of this phase is a seriation of burial receptacle (coffin/casket) shapes, utilitarian and decorative hardware as well as decorative treatments, and receptacle-protecting implements (e.g., coffin arches and grave boxes) dating from the 17th to the early-20th century. This seriation is used to identify and assess factors influencing variation in mortuary display with a focus on Texas circa 1821-1870. The results of this phase serve to: (1) assess the significance of variation in mortuary display as it relates to chronological and socioeconomic indices (i.e., temporal significance of burial receptacle morphology, select decorative furnishings, and protective inclusions); and (2) identify patterns of mortuary display for Texana Period interments.

The fourth and final phase reassesses the chronology and develops a socioeconomic profile of interments investigated at Matagorda Cemetery. It also places the present study into historical/cultural and CRM contexts and assesses its overall utility.

## **Significance of the Research**

This study contributes to development of a 19th-century sociohistorical context for mortuary behavior and, as such, provides a guide useful to cemetery research conducted in CRM and historic preservation projects in Texas and similar rural/frontier contexts. Through this undertaking, a more complete understanding of the social and historical complexities of mortuary display is achieved.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

The current chapter has introduced the topic and format of this thesis. Chapter II provides a brief examination of general historic trends and changing attitudes towards death witnessed in America from colonial time (i.e., post-1492) up until the early-20th century. Chapter III presents a sociohistorical context for mortuary behavior in Texas. Chapter IV synthesizes and refines current information regarding the chronological properties of select grave artifacts and features pertinent to dating mortuary assemblages observed in several graves at Matagorda Cemetery. Chapter V presents selected cemetery investigations and associated characteristics. Chapter VI discusses seriation theory and methodology, and details methods used in a seriation of burial receptacle forms and select decorative elements from data collected from the sample set introduced in Chapter V. Chapter VI presents results and interpretations drawn from the resulting

seriation. Chapter VIII then summarizes and reexamines the mid-19th century interments at Matagorda Cemetery in light of new information reported in Chapter IV and V. Chapter IX summarizes and draws conclusions from the overall findings.

## CHAPTER II

### AMERICAN DEATHWAYS

Many archaeological investigations at historic American cemeteries are undertaken without profiting from a wealth of resources concerning the history of American deathways (Habenstein et al. 1995 [1955]; Mitford 1963; Coffin 1976; Jackson 1977; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Farrell 1980). The lack of incorporation of these studies into recent investigations at historic American cemeteries is partly a result of social, political, and financial constraints inherent to CRM archaeology and perhaps a general perception held by members of the professional community and public that historic cemeteries, with the exception of human remains per se, possess limited research potential (Bell 1987:10-12). Lacking at times even a basic understanding of wider sociohistorical contexts, written reports of investigations at historic cemeteries and related mortuary research can often be characterized as “synchronic, particularistic, and idiosyncratic” (Bell 1987:10-12). Archaeologists and others involved in such inquiries have perpetuated this cycle of report production by not exploiting previously collected historical and archaeological data pertaining to mortuary practices (Bell 1987:10-12). In response to this criticism and toward establishing an historical framework for assessing mortuary practices in Texas between the years 1821 and 1870, the following sections identify and highlight trends in the evolution of American deathways.

## **The Shaping of American Deathways**

A perusal of scholarly works regarding the history of deathways in America reveals spans of time with particular influence on mortuary practices beginning with the requisite discovery of the New World in 1492, the Protestant Reformation (1517-mid 1600s), the Enlightenment (18th century), the Industrial Revolution ([1750-1830] in England and later [1790-1860] in the United States), the American Revolution (1775-1783), and the Civil War (1860-1865). Most notable during this timeframe is a secular current or “religious liberalism.” It is attributed to ideological transformations surrounding the Protestant Reformation and Enlightenment, which resulted in the relaxation of the social norms that reserved displays of wealth for the elite (Farrell 1980:74).

The above-mentioned, and certainly other unmentioned influences, have contributed, albeit in varying degrees, to the shaping of American deathways. The sum total of these influences, in terms of mortuary practices, amounted to a gradual increase in sentimental and material investment in the care of the dead witnessed across the socioeconomic spectrum. Appropriately, this transformation is referred to as the “beautification of death” (Douglas 1975:50; Jackson 1977:62). Bell summarizes,

...the beautification of death was essentially an ideational shift accompanied by social and material transformation. Unlike their seventeenth and early eighteenth-century counterparts, late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Americans viewed death and heaven in romantic and beautified terms. Popular

artifacts associated with funerals and mourning lost the motif of skull and crossbones common in the seventeenth century and in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century incorporated motifs such as willow trees, flowers, and seraphs. Any number of popular decorative styles was followed, but the important emphasis was on creating beautiful objects that commemorated the dead and that recalled a beautified vision of the afterlife (1987:32-33).

### **American Burial Practices**

While burial practices in America owe their origins to a larger and much older Western European tradition, the establishment of these practices in America warrants closer inspection. To convey the importance of time in the development of American deathways, the following section is organized into event-oriented periods in American history.

#### ***Colonial North America: 1492-1776***

The first burials of European settlers in North America were examples of simplicity. That is, they tended to be “coffin-less” owing to a frontier setting lacking access to milled lumber, nails, and skilled artisans, as well as a need for expediency *in lieu* of disease and hostile natives (Coffin 1976:101). Minimally, the corpse was

washed, placed in a shroud, and laid to rest in the bare earth (Habenstein and Lamers 1962:253).

Aside from coffin-less burials, early European settlers were often forced to forgo the use of traditional burial grounds. Many early burials by necessity took place in non-sanctified ground. The desired burial ground in Western tradition during this timeframe was sanctified ground near the church (Ariès 1974). In fact, burial beneath church floors was not an uncommon resting place for many parishioners, though generally reserved for members of the clergy and wealthier ranks of society (McManners 1981:303). Burial in non-sanctified ground was particularly objectionable and regularly regarded as a punishment for social deviants including criminals, heretics, and suicides (Stilgoe 1982:222).

While acknowledging the pervasiveness of a frontier-demanded asceticism, burial practices managed to exhibit some regional variation. For example, northern Puritan tradition, following a belief in the inherent sinfulness and relative equality of humankind, required a simple service devoid of earthly indulgences. Death was viewed as no more of an event than marriage or childbirth. Puritan law in the 17th century went so far as to remove the clergy from this function as it was viewed as a civic rather than ecclesiastical service (Habenstein et al. 1995:123). During this timeframe, gravemarkers were decorated with dark motifs such as death's head (Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966). Compatible with this outlook, coffins and decorative hardware, where applied, likely reflected an exercised humility.



At the turn of the 18th century, the theocratic organization of the New England colonies was weakened by an influx of immigration heterogenizing the once heavily Puritan population. Funerals returned to the ecclesiastical realm and took on a distinctively social character. Cherubs and willow trees soon replaced the once popular gravestone motif of death's head (Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966) and religious sumptuary restrictions of the display of sentiment associated with death were gradually overlooked. An increase in sentimental and material investment associated with mortuary behavior soon followed (Habenstein et al. 1995:122-124).

In contrast to the ideologically-constrained reflections of death in early northern Puritan tradition, funerals in the southern colonies were reported as achieving a festival-like atmosphere similar to that found at "horse races and weddings" (Habenstein and Lamers 1962:212). Few, if any, legal, moral, and/or religious prohibitions existed in the application of mortuary-related paraphernalia including burial receptacles and decorative furnishings. The early use of these materials was likely a factor of their availability and relative expense rather than any religious or civic ordinance (Habenstein and Lamers 1962:212; Rauschenberg 1990).

In either setting, north or south, ideological and/or access-related influences resulted in reticently decorated burial receptacles in early colonial America. The common coffin prior to 1800 is described as a hexagonal box, plainly finished and fashioned as the occasion dictated by local craftsmen (Larkin 1988:99). A variety of woods was used in coffin construction and where estimated can be used as a measure of status. The wider availability and professed workability of pine, however, made it a

popular material in coffin construction complicating measures of status (Larkin 1988:99). Decorative hardware, including handles, tacks, plaques (or plates), and hinges, occasionally applied, was necessarily imported from England due to a lack of metal industry in colonial America. This placed these objects beyond the reach of all but a privileged minority (Mitford 1963; Rauschenberg 1990; Habenstein et al. 1995).

Boycotts and embargos of English manufactured goods during the American Revolution (1775-1783) came to cast a shadow of modesty over the use of mortuary-related goods, regardless of socioeconomic position. Shortages of mortuary goods especially decorative hardware and funeral offerings including gloves, scarves, and rings soon ensued (Rauschenberg 1990:28-29). While certain goods were undoubtedly available to a restricted few, funeral announcements during the Revolution advertised the patriotic obligation and strict adherence to a boycott of English mortuary-related goods. Soon after the Revolution, funerals, as advertised in Charleston, South Carolina, returned to “their former lavish states” (Rauschenberg 1990).

### ***Early Independence: 1776-1860***

While coffins are referred to regularly in colonial North American contexts, a ubiquity of burial receptacles in America is not reported until the late-18th century (Dowd 1921:258; Mitford 1963:196; Larkin 1988:99). By this time, coffins, as reported in sales ledgers in the late-18th and early-19th centuries, were available to enslaved African-American and Native Americans (Larkin 1988:99, Rauschenberg 1990:36-37;

Habenstein et al. 1995:159). During this period, coffin manufacture (previously provided by family and local craftsmen) began to shift to mass production in lumberyards and factories (Habenstein and Lamers 1962:256-257). Local manufacture declined most dramatically in the late-19th century, though, notably continuing well into the 20th century in more rural and remote settings (Chapter III).

Prior to 1800, little had been done to improve “the function, style, and composition” of the burial receptacle (Habenstein et al. 1995:162). The commercial production of burial receptacles and increased sensitivity to popular consumer trends resulted in the offering of a number of designs satisfying a wider consumer base. Correspondingly, burial receptacles in the mid-19th century experienced a distinction in form (at least as advertised) with the introduction of the “casket”.

The terms *coffin* and *casket* are often used interchangeably, although they refer to two distinct burial receptacle forms. A *coffin* refers to a form that more or less conforms to the shape of the body (i.e., hexagonal-shaped, taper-to-toe, etc.). A *casket*, a term coined following the mainstream adoption of a rectangular-shaped receptacle, does not attempt to conform to the body. It is more abstract and believed to stem from a growing distaste for the anthropomorphic coffin (Habenstein and Lamers 1962:270; Lang 1984:2; Davidson 2000:254). As noted by Shogren et al. (1989:160), the term “casket”, probably refers more to a pattern of increased decorative embellishment than to actual receptacle shape.

Cemetery landscapes were also undergoing significant transformation during this period. By the beginning of the Victorian Period (ca. 1831), the declining state of many

urban burial grounds made them no longer fit for use. Inner-city and churchyard cemeteries, boxed in on all sides with little to no room for expansion, were often reported as overcrowded and frequently associated with unpleasant odors and pestilence. They lose favor with many Europeans and Americans in the late-18th and 19th centuries (Puckle 1926:147; Farrell 1980:99; Stilgoe 1982:225).

In the early- to mid-19th century, a resulting trend in America and Western Europe was the migration of cemetery locations from the inner city to suburban settings. Conjuring up themes of natural symbolism (a popular theme in the antebellum United States) rural, and later lawn-park cemeteries, appealed to people with aversions to the deplorable condition of many urban cemeteries (Harris 1977:103-104). Moreover, cemeteries became canvases for Victorian artistic expression and places for social gathering and individual reflection. Rural and later lawn-park cemeteries, more than intended for the dead, developed into “a source of assurance, succor, and moral instruction” for the living (Jackson 1977:230).

### ***The Civil War: 1860-1865***

During the Civil War (1860-1865), the bloodiest of the nation’s wars, over 600,000 soldiers lost their lives (Laderman 1996:89). Adding to the torment of many families, particularly those in the North, was a lack of intimacy associated with this loss. The battlefield deaths of their loved ones essentially deprived them of a significant aspect of coping with such loss. The deficiency was powerful enough to cause many to

suffer great pains and expense to retrieve their dead from battlefield graves in the South (Laderman 1996:109).

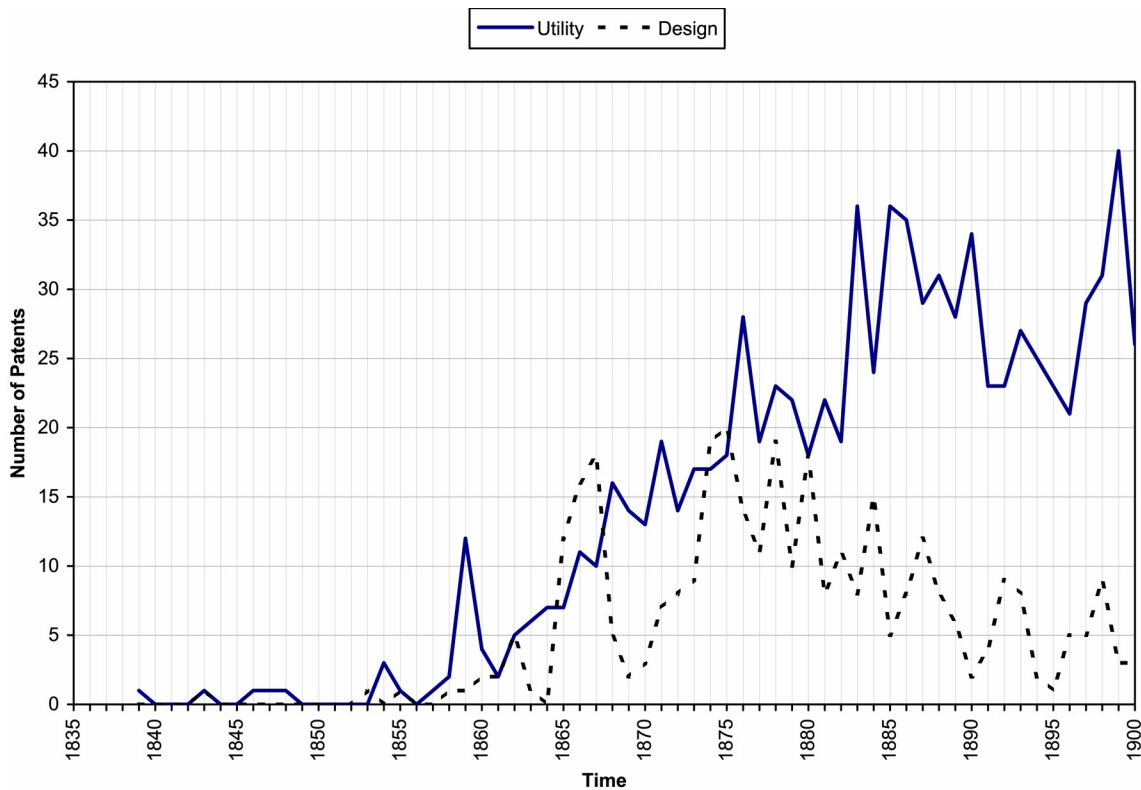
Upon the location and recovery of the remains, the long journey home and the unpleasantness of decay necessitated the use of specialized burial receptacles and/or preservation methods. Metallic and metal lined coffins, rubber bags, preservative solutions, and various wrappings and resins provided the means necessary to transport the deceased. Unfortunately, the limited availability and costs of such items compounded by the expense of transport prohibited many families from bringing home the bodies of their loved ones (Laderman 1996:112). Later in the war, a more affordable alternative was exploited. Many turned to embalming, using arsenic and other early concoctions, which masked the effects of or sufficiently slowed the rate of decay, allowing the transport of the body without the extra expense of specialized receptacles and treatments (Jackson 1977:231; Laderman 1996:113).

Such recovery was indeed rare and limited to a wealthier few, yet pervasive enough to have imbued embalming and other treatments with higher status value resulting in efforts to emulate them within society. Cannon (1989) identifies similar cycles of elite innovation followed by non-elite emulation in Victorian-to-modern England, historic Northeast Iriquoia, and ancient Greece.

An acceleration of a preexisting pattern during the Civil War, increased material investment in the dead was recurrent. The rhetorical strategies of Lincoln and his cabinet, though not expressly prompting or subsidizing such retrieval efforts, but recognizing the importance of placating the families of the deceased, portrayed those

dying in the cause to reunite the nation as martyrs (Laderman 1996). Moral and religious constraints on material indulgences succumbed to the desire to “properly” honor and memorialize national heroes. Responding to this pattern of increased investment (emotionally and financially) in the dead and a burgeoning market for mortuary-related goods, manufacturers during the 1860s and 1870s introduced and patented an increasing number of innovations in the design and utility of burial receptacles, decorative accoutrements, and related implements (Figure 1).

Design patents here reflect changes made to the appearance or design of a particular burial furnishing (e.g., decorative styles and motifs), whereas utility patents reflect structural or functional improvements made to an article (e.g., process for manufacturing a burial receptacle) (United States Patent and Trademark Office 2003). The trend in the frequency of design patents, given that such patents more closely reflect changing fashions in burial receptacle embellishment than do utility patents, are a better measure of the beautification of death.



**FIGURE 1. Trend in mortuary-related design and utility patents depicting a burgeoning market beginning in the latter half of the 19th century (data used to generate the graph provided courtesy of James M. Davidson).**

***Post Civil War Funeral Industry: 1866-early1900s***

The practice of embalming and the growing credibility of science and sanitary movements in the 19th and early-20th centuries ascribed undertakers with “semi-scientific status” (Farrell 1980:8). Consequently, the outfitting of the corpse for the afterlife grew in such complexity that family members were no longer qualified to

provide such care that now demanded the expertise of a rising undertaking profession (Mitford 1963, Farrell 1980, Habenstein et al. 1995).

By the end of the 19th century, a male dominated profession of undertakers, later changing their title to that of Funeral Director, had firmly established their role in the care of the dead. Aided by an ever-expanding consumer base, the funeral industry blossomed. Consolidating and professionalizing their practice, these “dismal traders” cornered a market servicing surviving family and friends while actively guiding the development of deathways in the late-19th and 20th centuries (Mitford 1963:199-200).

### **Summary of Popular Trends in Mortuary Behavior**

To set the stage for the current study it is important to review the historic pattern of increased attention (e.g., greater material investment) paid the deceased in 19th-century America. The beautification-of-death trend, fostered by secular currents, mass production, mass consumerism, and the professionalization and consolidation of the death care industry, culminated in the widely witnessed increase in the embellishment of burial furniture and the reorganization of cemetery landscapes accommodating growing populations while maintaining acceptable aesthetic and hygienic standards. At the end of the Victorian Era (ca. 1910), however, elaborate mortuary display begins a decline.

Hacker-Norton and Trinkley (1984):48 note a general loss of ornate detail in burial furnishing styles in the early-20th century America. Cannon (1989) identifies patterns of elite abandonment of elaborate mortuary display in the early-20th century in



favor of a more streamlined appearance. Cannon characterizes this shift in style as an evasive move conducted by the elite in an attempt to distinguish themselves from the masses following the emulation of earlier elaborate mortuary display. This overall pattern can be identified in archaeological contexts (Little et al. 1992; Chapter VII).

### **The Pervasiveness of the Beautification of Death**

Popular currents in American deathways, as well as regionally-specific histories, provide a framework for non-Indian cemetery research. By the beginning of the 19th century, the diffusion of innovations in mortuary-related goods was restricted primarily to developed eastern populations (Bell 1990:54). Isolative conditions retarded the diffusion of these practices along the frontier and burial paraphernalia available in the east would have been “all but impossible to procure in a frontier setting” (Davidson 1999:145). Additionally, dispersed settlement patterns in rural and frontier settings, compounded by limited mobility, inhibited conformance to mainstream cemetery movements (Stilgoe 1982:229). The result was the continued use of family and plantation cemeteries in rural and frontier contexts well after the popular introduction of rural and lawn-park cemeteries in the northeastern United States.

To provide a more holistic account of mortuary practices in the United States, it is useful to examine the development and diffusion of those practices along the margins of American civilization. Texas in the early- to mid-19th century provides such a

context, insofar as the region retained its frontier status (at least portions thereof) well into the late-19th century.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **HISTORIC-ERA BURIAL PRACTICES IN TEXAS**

Lifeways in Texas between the years 1821 and 1870 reflect the cultural diversity of early settlers and hardships they endured. Hispanics, Anglo Americans, enslaved Africans and African Americans, and Europeans converged on Texas in the early-19th century. They endured primitive conditions characteristic of life along the margins of the North American frontier, including limited access to resources and occasional Indian depredations. Moreover, early Texans experienced little reprieve from the tribulations associated with multiple revolutions and wars. Between 1821 and 1870, flags flown over Texas, in sequence, include those of Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the United States, the Confederate States, and again, the United States.

Isolation and political instability in much of 19th-century Texas had a considerable influence on everyday life, effectively primitivizing lifeways, but the results of these conditions on mortuary practices and related material culture have been overlooked and understated. In any case, the few studies of cemeteries (or portions thereof) in Texas dating between 1821 and 1870 do not relate mortuary practices and related material culture to this particular sociohistorical context.

Early-19th century Texas, before significant population growth and commercial development, was comparable to the environment encountered by the first European settlers in North America. It too demanded a degree of simplicity when burying the dead. Many of the first non-Indian interments in Texas soil, rich or poor, lacked the

sanctity of a church and, in many instances, the luxury of a coffin. Nonetheless, when the occasion permitted, observance of contemporary practices and use of related material culture, albeit markedly attenuated, was not uncommon (Fox 1984; Winchell et al. 1992; Gadus et al. 2002).

The present chapter addresses effects of the Texas frontier on the distribution of mortuary material culture and transformations in cemetery landscapes. The first section establishes an historical context for mortuary display prior to the introduction of rail lines in the 1870s. The second portion discusses burial grounds in general, but focuses on two aspects: (1) the extended use of traditional burial grounds during popular transformations in cemetery landscapes; and (2), a survey of select diagnostic properties of traditional burial grounds.

### **Frontier Effects on Material Culture**

The harshness of a frontier setting unquestionably affected lifeways of early Texas settlers, acting, in a manner, as a class-leveling mechanism. The effects of the frontier can be witnessed in many facets of life in early-19th century Texas, including the artifacts associated with death. Historical accounts of 19th century Texas pioneers and travelers attest to the primitive conditions suffered by early Texans (Olmsted 1969 [1857]; Helm 1985 [1884]; Smithwick 1983 [1900]). The frontier's effect on mortuary-related material culture is also documented in many of these narratives and social histories concerning Texas during the early-mid 19th century.

The sociopolitical backdrop and undeveloped frontier that Texas presented in the first half of the 19th century was hardly facilitative of the immediate transplantation of popular burial practices and associated material culture. Admittedly, elaborate burial furnishings were available to those who could afford them and their discovery in the archaeological record is most certainly representative of elevated socioeconomic standing. The Texas frontier, however, likely inhibited the distribution of mass-produced burial furnishings, resulting in a pattern of seemingly modest mortuary display reflected in the graves of the rich and poor. Accordingly, interpretations based on analysis of these assemblages require an understanding of the pervasiveness of popular trends in burial practices (e.g., the beautification of death) and their related material culture.

### *Early Gravemarkers*

Early Texas gravemarkers constructed of easily weathered materials, such as wood or surface-collected fieldstone, can best be characterized as “ephemeral remembrances” (Stanley-Blackwell 2001). Accordingly, many of the graves representing this period were rendered unmarked as a result of damage sustained by gravemarkers as a result of the ravages of Mother Nature and humankind.

A popular style of Anglo gravemarker in 19th-century Texas used by many Anglos was a rounded tablet, though there were other forms including inverted Vs and figures resembling a human above-waist profile (Jordan 1982:41). If made of wood,

these tablets would have been fashioned out of a 1 x 6 or 1 x 10 inch plank (Jordan 1982:41). A cross, made of wood, stone, or metal, was a popular gravemarker in many Hispanic and German Catholic cemeteries (Jordan 1982).

The overall quality of markers improved in the last few decades of the 19th century with the increased distribution of stone more resistant to weathering and the immigration of masons and stonecutters. The poor, however, were limited to less expensive, inferior materials including wood, fieldstone, and later, concrete (Nawrocki 1991). Understandably, their graves are more frequently unmarked today.

### *Historic Use of Burial Receptacles in Texas*

Although burial receptacles were widespread throughout the United States by the end of the 18th century, their use is not reported in Texas until the early-19th century. Coffins are reported at Spanish missions in New Mexico as early as 1754 (Evans 1989:8), but are not documented in Texas until the early-19th century. Coffins have been excavated from the church floor at Mission Refugio dating as early as 1820 and perhaps as early as 1817 (Tennis 2002:158). In San Antonio, coffins were used at Mission San Juan in the early to mid-1800s (Schuetz 1974:31).

The first use of coffins by Anglo-Americans in Texas is documented in accounts given by Mary S. Helms, wife of surveyor and cofounder of Matagorda, Texas, Elias Wightman. She reports, following the death of her in-laws in Matagorda 1829-1830,

that lumber aboard the *Little Zoe*, which brought the first families to the mouth of the Colorado, was used, as intended, to fashion their coffins (Helm 1985 [1884]:25).

Access to milled lumber in Texas during the early-19th century was often limited, yet historical accounts document the resourcefulness of Texas pioneers and the great effort put forth to provide a coffin for the deceased while lacking adequate tools and supplies. The coffin of a victim of cholera in Gonzales, circa 1833, was constructed from the door of the deceased's dwelling (Kite 1990:98, citing Davis 1966:9,43). Near Harrisburg in 1834, the coffin of a small child was fashioned from a large dry-goods box (Harris 1900:104). All five victims of an Indian attack near Marlin in 1839, known as the Morgan Massacre, were placed in the bed of a wagon and buried on the Morgan homestead (Wilbarger 1985 [1889]). An account of the first burial in Boonville Cemetery, Brazos County, Texas dating to 1846 recalls the funeral of Brazos County Sheriff, William Vess:

“His was the first grave in the cemetery, and he was given a true pioneer funeral. Two of his friends went to nearby Carter Creek, cut down two trees, and fashioned a crude coffin. Colonel Harvey Mitchell dug his grave with a short-handled chop axe and used a wooden paddle to throw the dirt out of the grave” (Wilcox 1952:17, cited in Van Bavel 1986:89).

While these accounts imply coffins, or some semblance thereof, were routine at a respectable burial ceremonies, coffins were far from ubiquitous in the first half of the

19th century in Texas. An account from Frederick Law Olmsted's (1969 [1857]), *A Journey through Texas*, suggests that coffined burials (and clergy for that matter) were rarities in the area surrounding Eagle Pass circa 1853. Olmsted, inquiring about the state of a funeral begins: “[w]as there a sermon preached?” I asked, thinking the chaplain of the post probably officiated. ‘Oh, no, there ain’t no parson here; there weren’t no ceremonies, but they had a coffin fixed up for him; first time I ever saw a coffin out in this country’” (1969 [1857]:318-319).

### ***Early Texas Burial Receptacles: Shape, Manufacture, and Decoration***

All identifiable burial receptacles from interments dating between 1820 and 1862 at Texas missions, with the exception of one “kite-shaped” (or hexagonal) coffin at Mission San Juan, are described as rectangular boxes (Schuetz 1974:28; Tennis 2002). A painting depicting a mid-19th-century funeral procession in San Antonio clearly shows the use of a hexagonal coffin (Kendall and Perry 1974:27,83). The extended popularity of hexagonal receptacles following the introduction of rectangular forms is at odds with the established transition from coffin to casket discussed in the previous chapter, where hexagonal coffins are reported as popularly replaced by rectangular caskets after the mid-19th century. Some, however, attribute the earlier use of rectangular receptacles (straight-sided receptacles) to the relative efficiency of their production, not requiring as much time and effort as the manufacture of hexagonal, octagonal, and similarly complex forms (Bell 1987:53).



Burial receptacles discussed above and as well as the vast majority of others in Texas during the first half of the 19th century were either homemade or manufactured by local craftsmen. Prior to the 20th century, better-settled communities in Texas were likely supplied by small-scale manufacturers and imported coffins from factories in the east. The first wholesale coffin manufacturers did not arrive in Dallas until 1906 (Davidson 2000:271). This late arrival is probably indicative of when wholesalers established their presence in the rest of the state.

Despite the developing commercialization of receptacles and other mortuary implements in popular America, local manufacture of coffins remained common in much of Texas well into the late-19th century (Fox 1984). Coffin makers plying their trade are reported in towns such as Canadian in 1887 and Warda in 1884 (Anderson 2002; Garrett 2002). Local manufacture continued in rural Texas well into the early-20th century before succumbing to mass-produced burial receptacles (Taylor et al. 1986:43).

While coffins were locally manufactured in much of North America throughout the 19th century, mass-produced, decorative metal hardware could often be purchased from local merchants (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984; Rauschenberg 1990). Decorative hardware, restricted to a few forms during the mid-19th century and diversifying throughout the latter half of the 19th century, included handles, inscribed plaques (or plates), and decorative screws and tacks. Many burial receptacles in Texas prior to late-19th century, however, were modestly decorated. Archaeologically investigated interments in Texas dating prior to the 1870s often contain little else than

decorative screws and/or tacks on the tops of plain, wooden coffins (Fox 1984; Winchell et al. 1992; Thoms 2001c; Gadus et al. 2002).

### **The Frontier and Diffusion of Mortuary-Related Material Culture**

The Texas frontier presented a formidable barrier---not impenetrable, yet clearly inhibitive---to the introduction of mass-produced goods. Material culture studies at 19th-century Texas settlements, such as that conducted by Carter and Ragsdale (1976:114) at the Biegel settlement (founded ca. 1832), note the rarity of manufactured goods prior to the coming of improved transportation links (e.g., maintained roads and rail lines) in the late-19th century. It can be inferred that the diffusion of burial receptacle and decorative hardware forms in much of the 19th century was positively influenced by the advent of improved transportation links (Fox 1984; Taylor et al. 1986).

Poorly understood relationships between commercial infrastructure and the diffusion of mortuary material culture in Texana Texas warrant greater attention. Diffusion of innovations in form and style of burial receptacles and decorative furnishings was unquestionably hindered by a lack of or underdeveloped commercial infrastructure characteristic of much of Texas between 1821 and 1870. A brief examination of commercial infrastructure in Texas during this period provides insight into the limited introduction and diffusion of non-essential material culture.

### *Commercial Infrastructure in Texas: 1821-1870*

Until the railroad boom, which began in mid-1870s, people traveled and goods were transported in and out of Texas via waterways and roads. Prior to the founding of Matagorda (in 1826) there were no ports available to Anglo-American settlers along the Texas coast, as per Mexican government policies that prohibited Anglo settlers from settling within ten leagues of the coast (Barker 2002). However, Indian attacks necessitated a safer point of entrance for colonists and a petition calling for an exception to the prohibition resulted in the founding of Matagorda at the mouth of the Colorado River in 1826 (Stieghorst 1965:10). The early use of the port for anything other than the landing of incoming settlers and few essentials is unlikely based on the accounts of Matagorda residents. For example, the first cook stove, a seemingly requisite household item, is not reported in Texas until 1835, over a decade after sanctioned settlement. It belonged to the well-to-do wife of the surveyor and resident of the town of Matagorda, Elias Wightman (Helm 1985 [1884]:7).

After the Texas Revolution and an end to Mexican rule in 1836, Texans were free to settle along coastal shores. Seaports during the mid-late 19th century including those at Galveston, Velasco, and Indianola thrived as a result of the influx of incoming settlers and regular trade of Texas commodities such as cotton and cattle among many Gulf and Atlantic ports (The Handbook of Texas Online 2003).

### River transport

Texas rivers, including the Red, Brazos, and Colorado, were used, albeit limitedly, in the transport of settlers and goods. As of 1835, the steamboat *Yellow Stone* is reported on the Brazos transporting cotton as far upriver as Washington-on-the-Brazos (Burkhalter 2002). Fluctuating water levels and obstacles such as sand bars and log rafts, however, often inhibited river travel.

Rafts, natural “dams” consisting of logs, stumps, and other upstream debris, along their courses (Olmsted 1969 [1857]:44; Clay 1948:28), obstructed navigation of the Red and Colorado Rivers prior to the late-19th century. The raft in the Colorado was approximately 20 miles upriver of Matagorda and that in the Red River was located just below Shreveport. Ingenuity prevailed, however, and these obstacles were often forded, as were falls. While traveling on the Red River in 1853, for example, Olmsted and his companion depart one vessel below the falls at Alexandria and board another above it (1969 [1857]:44). In similar fashion, vessels are reported operating above the raft in the Colorado as early as 1846 (Connor 2002). Cargo, upon reaching the obstruction, was packed around to another vessel waiting on the other side of the raft. Above the raft, the Colorado was navigable between LaGrange and Austin (Stieghorst 1965:46).

### Dependence on roads

Despite accounts of river navigation and trade, the transport of goods in much of 19th-century Texas was dependent on “plodding oxen-driven wagon trains” (Steighorst 1965:10). Before wider regulation of roadways by the State at the end of the 19th century, able-bodied community members were obligated to contribute to the maintenance of roads (Carter and Ragsdale 1976:72). Despite this attention, poor road conditions and slow rates of travel along them are well documented. For instance, Olmsted, encountering a teamster stuck in the mud, recounts the teamster reported that a “best day’s work was ten miles” (1978 [1857]:239).

The scarcity of mass-produced goods and difficulties associated with procuring even the most common household articles is figured into Olmsted’s assessment of the “extraordinarily high” cost of living in Austin during his visit in the 1850s (Olmsted 1978 [1857]:115). He attributed the high costs to the fact that “freight is wagoned by mules and oxen from both Houston and Indianola” (Olmsted 1978 [1857]:115). Geography also played a key role in the diffusion of mass-produced burial furnishings in the mid-19th-century Texas, with the magnitude of difficulties generally increasing from east to west (Olmsted 1978 [1857]). This concept, as it relates to mortuary practice and related paraphernalia, however, has been poorly assessed to date.

## **Cemetery Trends in Frontier Contexts**

Settlement patterns in Texas during the early- to mid-19th century, mirrored that witnessed with the European settlement of North America. Dispersed settlement in Texas resulted in increased numbers of family or homestead cemeteries (Jordan 1982). Popular cemetery types popular in urban centers, such as churchyard, city, and later rural and lawn-park cemeteries, were slow to establish themselves in frontier Texas. Family cemeteries remained common practice well into the 20th century in parts of rural Texas (Fox 1984).

Noted for their conservative nature and resistance to change, cemeteries are capable of providing a wealth of information about the populations they serve and are in certain measures, culturally distinct. Accordingly, traditional burial grounds provide an excellent measure of the cultural diversity in early Texas and are indicative of the settlement patterns of Texas pioneers. Three cemetery traditions in Texas are especially distinct: Hispanic, German, and southern folk, including enslaved Africans and African Americans, Anglo-Americans, and southeastern Native Americans (Jordan 1982:10).

Following summaries of these traditions draw heavily on the works of Jordan (Jordan 1976, 1981, 1982), Jeane (1978, 1992), and McGuire (1988). For the sake of brevity, these summaries emphasize traits significant in determining ethnicity and interpreting the spatial relationships of interments within burial grounds. Many of these traits are later related to interments investigated in Matagorda Cemetery (Chapter VIII).

### *Hispanic Cemeteries*

The decidedly Catholic religious orientation of Hispanic America is a relic of former Spanish colonial power. Catholic burial practices were introduced following the Spanish settlement of Texas via the process of missionization, which began in the late-17th century. Early Catholic custom among Hispanics in Texas, similar to customs practiced Western Europe during the same period, was to inter the dead within church floors, or in *camposantos*, sanctified cemeteries adjacent to the chapel. Burials beneath the church floor, especially locations nearest the altar, were generally reserved for members of the clergy and affluent society (Benrimo 1966:1). With exceptions, including many Christianized Native Americans, the graves of individuals of lower socio-economic standing were restricted to *camposantos* (Jordan 1982:66). These practices have been confirmed by archaeological investigations at several Texas missions including the San Xavier Missions (Gilmore 1969), Mission San Juan (Schuetz 1968), Mission Rosario (Gilmore 1974), and Mission Refugio (Tennis 2002).

Secularization of mission lands following the political weakening of the Catholic Church in the late-18th century, along with Mexican Independence in 1821, effectively dispersed mission populations and resulted in an increase in family, community, and ranch cemeteries (Jordan 1982:66-67). Notably withstanding the admixture of Anglo-American practices in the post-Mexican era, certain traits distinguish later Hispanic folk cemeteries in Texas. These traits are ordered into three categories: sanctity, decoration, and spatial patterning.

Church floors and *camposantos* at missions continued to be used well after the mid-19th century despite secularization and a royal edict issued by the Spanish crown in 1798 that prohibited additional burials within the church due to concerns for public health (Jordan 1982:66). Burials have been identified within churches at Mission Refugio dating to the early-19th century and as late as 1862 at Mission San Juan (Schuetz 1974; Tennis 2002). Many Hispanics, however, were forced from the missions. No longer associated with sanctified church grounds, sanctity at late Hispanic folk cemeteries was “announced by a saintly name and a large public cross” (Jordan 1982:67).

Decoration at Hispanic folk cemeteries is especially distinctive. Copious amounts of Catholic iconography are often evident on headstones and monuments throughout the cemetery. Further, combinations of paint, flowers, and decorative tiles produce a “riot of color” in marked contrast to the more reserved use of color in southern Anglo-American and German cemeteries (Jordan 1982:80-83).

In Hispanic folk cemeteries, Jordan (1982:70-72) noted a lack of adherence to any one particular grave orientation and an emphasis of the individual over the family unit. Interments within Hispanic churches typically aligned toward the altar, as if waiting to rise for mass (Schuetz 1974; Tennis 2002). The orientation of graves at many later Hispanic cemeteries, lacking such a reference point, is often influenced by one or more local structures, roads, monuments, or dictated by the efficient use of space resulting in the frequent observation of multiple axes (Jordan 1982:70).



The arrangement of graves, as they relate to the identification of sanguine or affine relationships, is often complicated. With an emphasis on the individual, fences (*cerquitas*) and other constructs are commonly found delineating individual graves rather than designating family groupings. Specific sections dedicated solely for the interment of children further frustrate efforts of determining biological relations in Hispanic folk cemeteries (Jordan 1982:71-72).

### ***Southern Folk Cemeteries***

Anglo-American settlement in Texas did not begin in earnest until sanctioned by the Spanish crown in 1821. The Spanish, discouraged by hostile natives and isolation, were largely unsuccessful in populating Texas. Hispanic populations in Texas circa 1815 numbered only some 5,000 and they were concentrated around mission settlements at San Antonio, Goliad, Nacogdoches, and the Rio Grande valley (Jordan 1981:1). The Spanish crown hoped that controlled immigration of Anglo-American settlers would shore up its frontier border, develop an economy, and subdue hostile natives. Beginning this enterprise, Stephen F. Austin in 1821 was the first *empresario* to introduce Anglo-American settlers into Texas. Between 1821 and 1824, he settled 300 families in his colony along the Brazos and Colorado Rivers. Other *empresarios* soon followed including Green Dewitt in 1828, Martin de Leon in 1834, and Sterling Robertson just before the Texas Revolution in 1835. The numbers coming to Texas steadily increased. Mary Helm, an early settler, reported the population of Texas in 1828 at 10,000,

factoring in “negroes, friendly Indians and all” (Helm 1985 [1884]:3). By 1870 that number had grown to 819,000, primarily as a result of in-migration of southern Anglo Americans and their African-American slaves (Jordan 1981:6-7). Among the influx of settlers arriving from the southern United States, two distinct subcultures have been noted: the Upper and Lower South (Jordan 1981).

Upper southerners, originating from the Mid-Atlantic States including Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, Arkansas, and rural Virginia and North Carolina, are characterized as,

the source of much that later came to be thought of as typically American—the log cabin, covered wagon, and long rifle; the independent family farm, livestock barn, and isolated farmstead; the Corn Belt and Wheat Belt; the “melting pot” in which varied ethnic groups met and mingled; and perhaps even the “American English” dialect (Jordan 1981:10).

Upper southerners held a slight advantage in Texas, roughly composing over 50 percent of the total population, prior to Texas independence in 1836. Following independence and the removal of Spanish/Mexican slavery prohibitions, however, lower southerners, originating from Georgia, North and South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana, quickly overran the upper southerners. Preferring the more fertile soils of the coastal plain for the cultivation of cotton and other cash crops, lower

southerners came to inhabit the larger river valleys, restricting the upper southern populations to inland and smaller tributary valleys (Jordan 1981:12).

Transplantation of lower southern lifeways was so quick and successful that plantations and associated lifestyles in Texas are reported as rivaling those found among contemporary southern states. Marr (1928:126-127), in *The History of Matagorda County*, citing the *Matagorda County Tribune*, March 21, 1913 boasts of the luxuries of planters and merchants in Texas during the days of the Republic (1836-1845). Among the luxuries noted are “palatial” homes, carriages and drivers, and ability to send their sons to Harvard or the University of Virginia, and daughters to seminaries in Virginia or the Carolinas.

Among the many aspects distinguishing the upper and lower southern subcultures, are their respective burial traditions. The traditional European churchyard burial ground was readily transplanted to the lower south. English and contemporary European traditions were, Jeane (1992:112) writes, “diffused with the early settlers to America, and the Lowland South burial grounds, dominated by the Anglican Church, were virtual carbon copies of their English counterparts”.

What is uncertain, however, is how well these practices were transplanted in Texas. Dispersed settlement and plantation life, as noted earlier, was not always conducive to the churchyard burial ground. Comprehensive studies of this transplantation, however, have not been undertaken to date. Burial practices of the greater upper southern subculture are much better studied, however (Jordan 1976, 1981, 1982; Jeane 1978, 1992; McGuire 1988)

Mortuary practices in the upper south strayed from the centralized churchyard burial ground. The upper south is credited as the source of the southern folk cemetery complex, “well-established across much of the South by the 1830s” (Jordan 1982; Jeane 1978, 1992:112; McGuire 1988). The southern folk cemetery or upland south folk cemetery, documented in Texas (Jordan 1982) and elsewhere in the southern United States (Jeane 1978, 1992), is characterized by a number of traits crossing ethnic bounds including, but not limited to, unsanctified ground, scraped earth, mounded graves, east-west orientation of graves, and family clustering.

With accord to “English dissenter Protestant tradition” and in contrast to Hispanic and German folk cemeteries, southern folk cemeteries are not sanctified burial grounds (Jordan 1982:33). Although attributable to secular currents, frontier practicality offers a practical explanation for this lack of sanctity. As discussed in the previous chapter, many rural burial grounds pre-date the actual founding of the local church. Even while churches were present, dispersed settlement in the rural south and poor roads were not conducive to the transport of the deceased long distances to a churchyard cemetery (Jordan 1982:33; Laderman 1996).

Scraping and mounding of graves has been documented at cemeteries throughout central and east Texas (Jordan 1982) and elsewhere in the southeastern United States (Jeane 1978, 1992). The motivations behind these practices are not certain but were implemented in Texas “Anglos, blacks, and Alabama-Coushatta Indians” (Jordan 1982:16). Beyond the continued attention and respect paid the deceased, such maintenance practices are believed to have had practical value as well. Removal of

grass and weeds (i.e., scraping) reduced the likelihood of damage caused by burrowing animals, livestock, and grass fires. Scraping was also practiced around homes of the time, affording similar protection (Winchell et al. 1992:26). For reasons long since forgotten, grass in a graveyard is seen as a sign of neglect and disrespect (Jordan 1982:14). In many instances, concrete slabs and false-crypts have since replaced these practices and reduced the amount of time and effort spent tending graves (Jordan 1976:154).

Within the cemetery, graves are almost without fail aligned along an east-west axis. This orientation is believed to facilitate the rising of the individual toward Jerusalem on the Day of Judgment (Puckle 1926; Fox 1984). Deviation from this alignment (e.g., a north-south) may signify the burial of someone who died unworthy of forgiveness, such as a suicide victim, criminal, or heretic (Stilgoe 1982:222).

Within the cemetery, family members and near relations are commonly buried in close proximity and the area is demarcated by a fence or border of some sort. Husband and wives are often interred along side of one another. The wife, following the belief that Eve was created from the left side of Adam, is often found to the left or north of the husband (Jordan 1982:30).

### ***German Cemeteries***

Germans were in Texas as early as the 1830s, but significant settlement did not begin in earnest until the 1840s (Lich 1981:22). Germans in Texas circa 1860 numbered

about 20,000, fairly localized within the central portion of the state (Staff of The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures 1970). Within the same decade, the German population in Texas more than doubled and by 1890 is estimated at 48,000 (Staff of The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures 1970). Many Germans settling Texas in the 19th were middle class peasants capable of financing their way. They included landowners, artisans, and intellectuals unhappy with the state of affairs in Germany, including overpopulation, government censorship, and a failing economy. Germans burial customs were readily transported to Texas by the influx of German settlers (Jordan 2002).

Like early Hispanic cemeteries, the German graveyard in the Old World was situated adjacent to the church. Conditions suffered by the earliest Germans in Texas, however, were not conducive to this practice. Given the many obstacles faced, the private, non-sanctified cemetery became the necessarily popular, alternative. Such obstacles included, but were not limited to, the bankruptcy of the *Adelsverein*, the commandeering of resources otherwise intended for incoming Germans by the Army during the war between the United States and Mexico, and difficulties encountered while settling a frontier. Following the mid-late 19th century and improved conditions for Germans, however, churchyard cemeteries regained their earlier popularity (Jordan 1982:90-92).

The main characteristic distinguishing German folk cemeteries from Hispanic and southern folk cemeteries is an appeal to internal order. In contrast to both Hispanic and southern folk cemeteries, the internal arrangement of the German folk cemetery is

extremely ordered. Burials are often interred sequentially and greater care is taken to align gravestones. Because of the sequential order of interment and separate quarters for the interment of children, family or husband-wife clustering is indiscernible. All graves are oriented along a shared axis, but unlike the Anglo-American southern folk cemetery, this alignment does not necessarily reflect an east-west orientation. More often graves were aligned according to the orientation of nearby roads and structures (Jordan 1982:95-97).

### **Shared Burial Grounds**

On occasion one finds “minority” ethnic groups, including Hispanics (now composing a majority in Texas [United States Census Bureau 2003]) and African Americans interred within the same burial grounds as Anglos and Germans. This issue is interesting from a multicultural standpoint and clearly evidences of racial prejudices. Often, the graves of these minorities are located outside the main burial population, an intentional placement that reaffirms their “inferior” position. Moreover, they are easily distinguished, in fashion and expense of materials used to mark and decorate the graves, from southern Anglo and German graves (Figure 2; Jordan 1982:41).



**FIGURE 2. Photograph overlooking cement gravemarker in Hispanic portion of Lawrence Chapel Cemetery. Note the better-marked Anglo graves across the fence (background) dividing the two sections of the cemetery.**

### **Mortuary Practice in Texana Context**

The present chapter provides an historical perspective of the primitivizing effects of rural/frontier settings in Texas between 1821 and 1870, and includes an assessment of the influence these settings had on the diffusion of mortuary material culture and transformations in cemetery landscapes. To summarize, the pervasiveness and timing of



the introduction of popular mortuary practices in Texas were clearly inhibited by its remote setting. Interpretations of site chronology and socioeconomic status based on recovered mortuary assemblages during this period, therefore, require an understanding of burial practices in such a context. Studies of mortuary material culture and established chronological and socioeconomic indices are based on *popular* currents. To the present, the pervasiveness of popular patterns in mortuary display has seldom been tested in rural and frontier settings.

Texas, circa 1821-1870, provides a unique vantage in the study of burial practices providing insight into multicultural and economic issues unworthy of neglect. The following chapters present an inspection of these indices, synthesizing data and findings concerning selected mortuary material culture recovered over the course of numerous cemetery investigations.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DIAGNOSTIC PROPERTIES OF MORTUARY MATERIAL CULTURE**

Archaeological investigations of historic cemeteries frequently task investigators with recovering information regarding the time of death and identity of those interred. Deterioration of and/or damage to gravemarkers, compounded by unkempt and/or incomplete archival records, often frustrate such efforts. Under these circumstances, investigators are forced to extract relevant information from artifacts preserved in the grave.

Those encountering this scenario have long touted the potential of artifacts within the grave to contribute to the dating of interments and, given certain caveats, a general understanding of social and economic contexts. Yet, only within the last two decades has the significance of burial furnishings, as temporal and socioeconomic indicators, been explored in any detail within CRM contexts.

This chapter presents a survey and analysis of the diagnostic properties of burial receptacles and associated furnishings. It is not intended to provide a complete examination of all potentially diagnostic materials, but an overview of select examples and associated features relevant to the spatial and temporal focus of this thesis.

## Current Chronological Studies

To date, the most pressing use of artifacts within historic graves (e.g., burial furnishings and personal effects) has been to aid in the chronological reconstruction of burial events within cemeteries. Several studies of funeral industry histories, trade catalogues, patent records, and archaeological research demonstrate the time-diagnostic significance of particular burial furnishings and are used by the CRM industry at large to apply relative ages to unmarked interments (Lang 1984; Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984; Garrow 1987; Davidson 1999).

The earliest of the examples presented is Lang's 1984 MA thesis, *Coffins and Caskets: Their Contribution to the Archaeological Record*. This work marks the first attempt at a chronology specific to the design and functional attributes noted in the evolution of the burial receptacle. This work consists of a synthesis of information documenting the transition from coffin to casket in the 19th century. The end result of her study is the development of a chronology based on the introduction and/or use periods of a number of innovations noted in the evolution of the burial receptacle (Lang 1984:Figure 27). Because of an emphasis on patent records, the work is characterized as "coarse grained" and of limited practical utility, given that many patented designs are limitedly represented, if at all, in the archaeological record (Davidson 1999:4). Despite this criticism, Lang's study succeeds in documenting the beautification of death, an increased ostentation witnessed in mortuary assemblages, as observed in the progression from coffin to casket during the mid-late 19th century.

In the same year Hacker-Norton and Trinkley published, *Remember Man Thou Art Dust: Coffin Hardware of the Early Twentieth Century*, a chronology primarily based on the dating of decorative coffin hardware recovered from an early-20th century general merchandise store in rural South Carolina. Dates for artifacts in the collection are primarily derived from similar examples and stylistic motifs observed in mortuary trade catalogues dating to the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Hacker-Norton and Trinkley (1984) were able to document the conservative, yet “shrewd”, purchasing patterns of rural merchants, which explained the delayed and extended use of earlier hardware forms observed within the collection and commonly evidenced among rural burial populations.

In 1987, Garrow published a paper titled, “A Preliminary Seriation of Coffin Hardware Forms in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Georgia”, in *Early Georgia*. His study was based on artifact observations at two historic cemeteries--Nancy Creek and Talbot County--and existing (as of 1987) chronological indices established by earlier works (Blakely and Beck 1982; Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984). Hardware recovered from marked interments at the Nancy Creek Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery was used to supplement and refine existing indices and apply relative dates to the remaining unmarked interments at Nancy Creek and Talbot County cemeteries based on comparative mortuary assemblages (Garrow 1985; Garrow and Symes 1987).

By far the most ambitious chronological reconstruction at an historic cemetery undertaken to date is Davidson’s 1999 thesis, *Freedman’s Cemetery (1869-1907): A Chronological Reconstruction of an Excavated African-American Burial Ground*,

*Dallas, Texas*. Noting the limitations of earlier studies including those by Lang (1984), Hacker-Norton and Trinkley (1984), and Garrow (1987) and toward dating an unprecedented number of interments (n=1150), he undertook a study of mortuary material culture. His study of the time-diagnostic properties of select burial furnishings involved the most extensive examination of patent records and trade catalogues of 19th and early-20th-century mortuary material culture to date. He constructed a database of all mortuary-related design and utility patents between 1839 and 1907 and examined 61 funerary trade catalogues. By comparison, studies by Lang and Hacker-Norton and Trinkley utilized only 14 and 16 trade catalogues, respectively. While the scale of his work is unprecedented, it is intentionally narrowed in scope enabling the dating of 1150 interments within a timeframe of 39 years (1869-1907) and detailing burial furnishings pertinent to his dating schema.

Significant contributions to our understanding of the temporality of technological and stylistic innovations in mortuary material culture have been made by each of the works mentioned above. However, each work has its limitations. From the perspective of the present study, these limitations include an inadequate understanding of burial furnishings in Texas interments dating prior to the late-19th century.

This present study recognizes the nascency of this particular field of research and is yet another attempt at supplementing and refining our understanding of mortuary practices from the early- to late-19th century. Continued excavation of historic cemeteries will unquestionably generate a larger database from which to further refine our understanding and the precision of chronological as well as socioeconomic indices.

## **Chronological Indices**

Artifacts and features in this section are discussed in order of their likelihood of occurrence in the grave. Accordingly, this section begins with an overview of technological innovations in nail manufacture insofar as the diffusion of nails, relative to other time diagnostics (e.g., decorative hardware, burial receptacle shape, etc.) was rapid and widespread. The rapid diffusion of different nail forms is attributable to successive innovations resulting in increased efficiency in nail manufacture and the production of less expensive nails. These newer processes did not necessarily result in a superior product, but they did lower costs associated with their manufacture and thereby out-marketed nails made using earlier production methods (Edwards and Wells 1993:2-3).

Introduction and diffusion of technological and design innovations in decorative hardware and burial receptacles are more problematic. If mortuary practices according to Kroeber (1927:314) are indeed “of a kind with dress, luxury, and etiquette”, then variation in the timing of their introduction and popular acceptance in a particular locale can complicate their use as temporal markers. Nails, however, serve a practical purpose in the construction of the burial receptacle. Decorative hardware, or particular combinations thereof, is not necessarily a requisite (though often implied) in the construction of a burial receptacle and therefore not as ubiquitous as the nail. Burial receptacles, while very much a requisite to a burial in much of 19th-century America, were very frequently manufactured by local artisans prior to the late-19th and early-20th

century, and therefore, their form subject to local fashion complicating their use as a widely-applied temporal measure.

### *Nail Technology*

Most nails can be placed in one of three categories based on manufacturing techniques: hand-wrought, cut, or wire nails. Prior to the early-19th century, hand-wrought nails were the dominant form. Remarkably, the manufacturing technique used to produce hand-wrought nails has not changed significantly since biblical times. Innovations in the nail industry between the late-18th and late-19th centuries, however, marked an era of significant development in the evolution of the nail (Edwards and Wells 1993:2).

In the late-18th century, machines that cut nails from plate metal were invented in the United States and England. Yet, despite the introduction of this innovative manufacturing technique, the production of hand-wrought nails remained popular (Nelson 1968:8-10).

The introduction and evolution of machine-cut nails during the late-18th and early-19th centuries is especially temporally significant (Table 2) as earlier manufacturing processes left distinctive markers. These include distinctions made between hand-fabricated vs. machined nail heads, transverse vs. longitudinal shaft grains, the location of burrs on opposite vs. same sides of a nail shaft. Machine-cut nails popularly replaced hand-wrought nails within the first two decades of the 19th century.

During the 1830s, a perfected machine-cut nail, with machined head and longitudinal shaft grain, became the dominant form (Nelson 1968). Manufacture of cut nails remained relatively unchanged until the 1870s when they were first annealed, to eliminate the grain, which prevented breaking during the process of clinching (Fontana and Greenleaf 1962:55).

Introduced as early as mid-19th century in the U.S., wire nails do not begin to challenge the popularity of machine cut nails until the early 1890s. They do so rapidly. By 1892, half of the nails made in the U.S. were wire (Edwards and Wells 1993:18). Cut nails continue to be used in certain applications (e.g., roofing, attaching wood to cement, concrete, or plaster [Fontana and Greenleaf 1962]) but were reduced as of 1920 to eight percent of the U.S. market (Edwards and Wells 1993:18). The widespread and rapid distribution of wire nails is evidenced by their appearance in mortuary contexts dating as early as 1888 in Oregon (Jenkins 1981) and 1894 (Fox 1984:40) and 1899/1900 in Texas (Davidson 1999).

**TABLE 2. SUMMARY NAIL CHRONOLOGY**

Date Range	Nail Technology
ca. 1810s-1820s	Machine-cut nails popularly replace hand-wrought nails. Hand-wrought nails remain in use in special purpose markets (Edwards and Wells 1993:17).
ca. 1830s-1890s	Machine-cut nails with machined heads and an in-line grain become the dominant form (Nelson 1968:9).
ca. 1870s-present	Machine-cut nails are annealed to prevent rupture during clinching (Fontana and Greenleaf 1962:55).
ca. 1890s-present	Wire nails overwhelm cut nails. By 1892 half of the nails manufactured in the U.S. are wire (Edwards and Wells 1993:18).

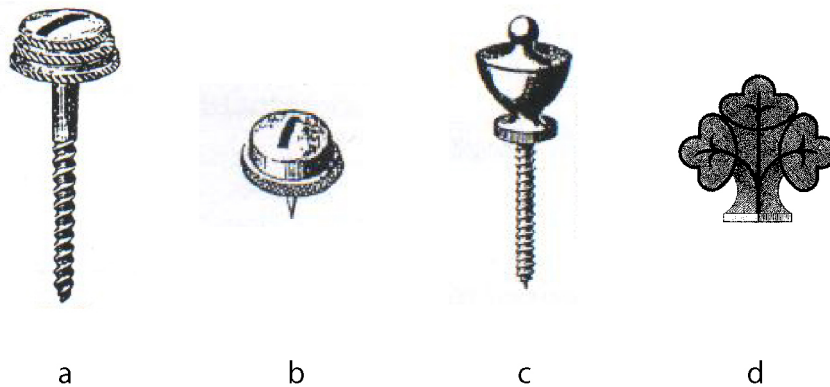


### *Decorative Fasteners*

There are many temporally diagnostic forms of decorative hardware in 19th century mortuary assemblages. A detailed examination of basic decorative hardware forms provided below, however, is limited to those artifacts pertinent to the dating of interments at Matagorda Cemetery and interments elsewhere in Texas prior to the introduction and availability of other decorative hardware types. Other latter day and elaborate hardware types, including handles, escutcheons, studs/tacks, hinges, plaques/plates, and bust windows, merit greater discussion, but such detail is beyond the scope of this study and already accomplished in other works (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984; Davidson 1999, 2000).

Coffin screws appear to be the most common form of decorative hardware in Texana interments (Winchell et al. 1992; Thoms 2001c; Gadus et al. 2000). Coffin screws were gradually replaced following the introduction of thumbscrews in the 1860s and 1870s. Coffin screws and thumbscrews, frequently used to secure the lid of the burial receptacle, consist of a cast metal heads, usually made of white metal (i.e., plated by silver, zinc, nickel, etc.), set atop a gimlet screw body (Figure 3:a). The earlier of these two decorative screw types, the coffin screw, is characterized by a rounded, cap-like head often slotted on top to receive a screwdriver. Decorative styles typically

consist of one or more bands of raised filigree (e.g., dimpled, dotted, “rope-like”) along the circumference of the head (Bell 1987:115-128).



**FIGURE 3. Decorative fasteners: (a) common coffin screw (Source: Sargent & Company 1869), (b) “dummy” tack (Source: Markham and Strong 1865), (c) cylindrical-bodied thumbscrew (Source: Sargent & Company 1874), and (d) flat-bodied thumbscrew head (Source: United States Patent Office Design Patent 1875).**

Coffin screws are advertised in trade catalogues as early as 1853 but are likely in use a number of years prior to that time (Davidson 2000:238). Poor preservation and a tendency of the heads of coffin screws to detach from the screw body make it difficult at times to distinguish between coffin screws and “dummy” screws, or tacks (Figure 3:b) which mimic coffin screws (Gadus et al. 2002:40-41). Dummy screws consist of

similarly cast metal heads placed atop a tack or small nail and were used along the perimeter of the coffin lid to hide the heads of utilitarian fasteners (Hacker Norton and Trinkley 1984:11). Fortunately, the use of dummy screws, as noted by Davidson (2000:268), appears to mirror that of coffin screws.

Coffin screws were still circulating, as advertised in catalogues, in the early 1900s (Hacker Norton and Trinkley 1984:50; Davidson 2000:244). Their use, however, diminishes following the introduction of thumbscrews during the late 1860s and early 1880s (Davidson 2000:264). The thumbscrew differs from the coffin screw with the loss of a slotted head and a tendency toward a flat-bodied head ideal for grasping between the thumb and index finger.

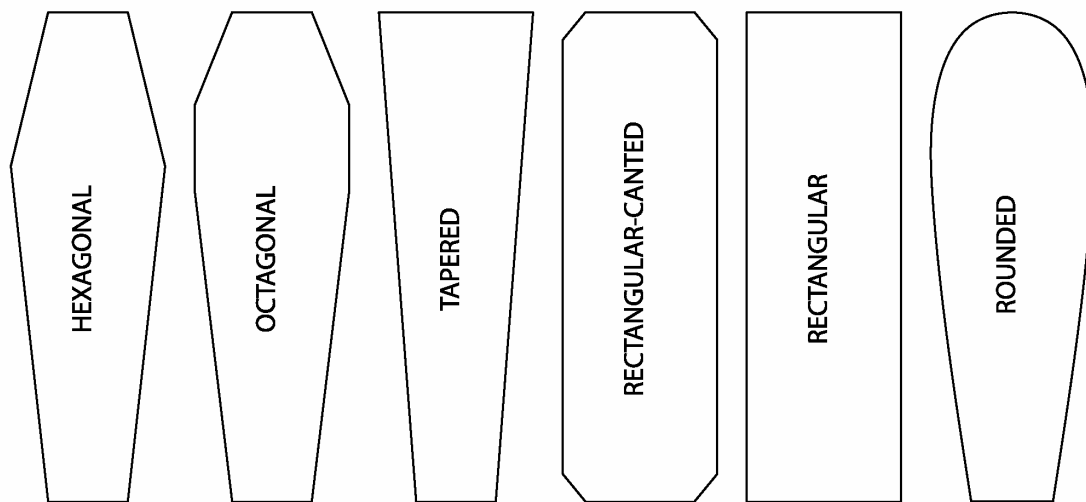
Early on, so-named thumbscrews closely resembled coffin screws or morphological variants thereof. Following, these early thumbscrew forms, cylindrical-headed and flat-bodied are introduced as early as the late 1860s (Davidson 1999:150). Davidson (1999:150) suggests a *terminus post quem* of circa 1870 for cylindrical-headed thumbscrew forms (Figure 3:c) and circa 1875 for flat-bodied forms (Figure 3:d). Thumbscrew prices in the 1860s and 1870s, however, were higher and thus were likely to have inhibited immediate widespread utilization (Davidson 2000:242).

### ***Burial Receptacle Morphology***

Lang (1984), Blakely and Beck (1982), Habenstein and Lamers (1995), and Davidson (1999, 2000) have documented that the hexagonal coffin was replaced after

the mid-late 19th century by a rectangular casket. This transition has been used frequently to assess relative ages of interments citing initial appearances of particular forms in patent records and trade catalogues. Several authors, however, have suggested that coffin shape is a limited temporal indicator noting overlap in the use of the hexagonal and rectangular receptacles resulting from factors including market-to-consumer lag, rural conservatism, and prohibitive costs of shipping, ethnic and economic discrimination, and the relative ease of constructing straight-sided receptacles (Piper and Piper 1987; Shogren et al. 1989; Davidson 1999, 2000). An examination of the occurrence of hexagonal and rectangular burial receptacles in archaeological contexts (Chapter VII) supports this assessment and highlights the need for a better understanding of the morphology of burial receptacles with respect to time.

Descriptions of distinctive burial receptacle forms (Figure 4) and brief discussions of their age are presented below.



**FIGURE 4. Shapes of common burial receptacles.**

### Hexagonal

Often referred to by other names (e.g., toe pincher, truncated diamond, etc.), this form consists of an oblong, six-sided receptacle, widest at the shoulders and tapered toward the head and foot end. Jones (1967: 74) notes this particular “taut” shape for its maneuverability up and down stairs and through passageways. The origins of this shape, however, are probably more representative of symbolic meanings than any practical need to navigate domestic environments. Olmert (Olmert 2001) suggests the hexagonal shape is influenced by the significance of the number six in Christian ideology. Frequently observed in Christian art and architecture, the six sides of the hexagon symbolically represent the six days of creation (Olmert 2001).

Hexagonal burial receptacles are widely cited as the most common receptacle form prior to the mid-19th century (Jones 1967; Coffin 1976; Lang 1984; Larkin 1988:99). During the mid- to late-19th century, marketing and production of rectangular receptacles gradually challenged earlier forms including hexagon-shaped receptacles. Hexagonal receptacles are determined “obsolete” as of 1927 (Farrell 1980:170), though they are available, albeit limitedly, to consumers today (Healy 2004). The fact that the hexagonal form is still popular in populations post dating the mid-19th century (Cooper and Peter 2000, Bond et al. 2002, Condon et al. 1998), and particularly in rural populations (Fox 1984; Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984; Rathbun 1987; Shogren et al. 1989), significantly weakens their use as a “*terminus ante quem*” (Davidson 1999:211).

### Octagonal

This particular coffin shape closely resembles the hexagonal coffin with the exception of two additional joints contributing to the bends at the shoulders (Figure 4). Like the hexagonal form, its outline is oblong with widest dimension at the shoulders, and tapered at the head and foot end.

A former employee of the National Casket Company cited by Blakely and Beck (1982:188) places the octagonal form as the successor of the hexagonal form. This contradicts Habenstein and Lamers (1995:160) as they claim the octagonal as the earliest of the forms in America. In cemeteries excavated to date in America, the claim made by Habenstein and Lamers appears unfounded. Octagonal coffins have been found in low

frequencies at the Grafton Cemetery in Massachusetts dating circa 1836-1892 (Buikstra et al. 2000), Freedman's Cemetery in Texas dating circa 1869-1907 (Davidson 1999), Oakland Cemetery in Georgia dating circa 1866-1927 (Blakely and Beck 1982), and Tucker Family Cemetery in Texas dating circa 1880-1942 (Lebo 1988). Given the close resemblance of octagonal and hexagonal forms, it is probable that the occurrence of octagonal coffins in the archaeological record is sometimes misreported. To date, no clear archaeological evidence exists to suggest that the octagonal form was the earliest form as Habenstein and Lamers claim.

### Tapered

The tapered form, resembling a trapezoid in outline, is straight sided with the head end a measure wider than the foot end resulting in, as the name implies, a tapered appearance (Figure 4). The tapered form has been discovered in interments dating to the 17th-century in Virginia (Noël Hume 1982); 18th-century in Florida (Koch 1977), Louisiana (Owsley et al. 1985), and New York (Perry et al. 2001); 19th-century in Massachusetts (Elia and Wesolowsky 1991) and Texas (Taylor et al. 1986; Earls et al. 1991; Dockall et al. 1996; Gadus et al. 2002); and early-20th-century in Arkansas (Rose 1985).

Curiously, it has been argued that the tapered form may represent a transition form in the shift from coffin to casket or simply an attempt by those with limited means (e.g., restricted access to skilled artisans or a need for expediency) to produce something

resembling the then popular hexagonal form (Davidson 2000:245). Two lines of evidence, however, suggest otherwise. Firstly, repeated examples of tapered receptacles from archaeological contexts have been identified as possessing gabled or rounded lids (Noël Hume 1982; Owsley and Orser 1985). It is reasonable to assume that if patrons so requested, artisans with skill enough and time enough to gable or round a coffin lid could produce a hexagonal coffin. Secondly, a tapered form with canted corners, bust window, and other late-19th/early-20th century casket furnishings was encountered at the Morgan Chapel Cemetery, Bastrop County, Texas (Taylor et al. 1986). Certainly, the presence of tapered forms with gabled or rounded lids in 17th and 18th century interments (Noël Hume 1982; Owsley and Orser 1985) as well as elaborately decorated tapered forms in the late-19th/early-20th century indicates a market and perhaps consumer preference for tapered coffins at one time or another. Further, the presence of tapered receptacles with gabled or rounded lids in archaeological contexts dating as early as the 17th and 18th century and as late as the late-19th/early-20th century is not suggestive of a transitional form within the shift from coffin to casket (cf., Davidson 2000:245).

### Rectangular

The rectangular form of burial receptacle consists of four straight sides with opposite sides running parallel to one another. Variations of this shape include forms with canted or rounded corners (Figure 4).

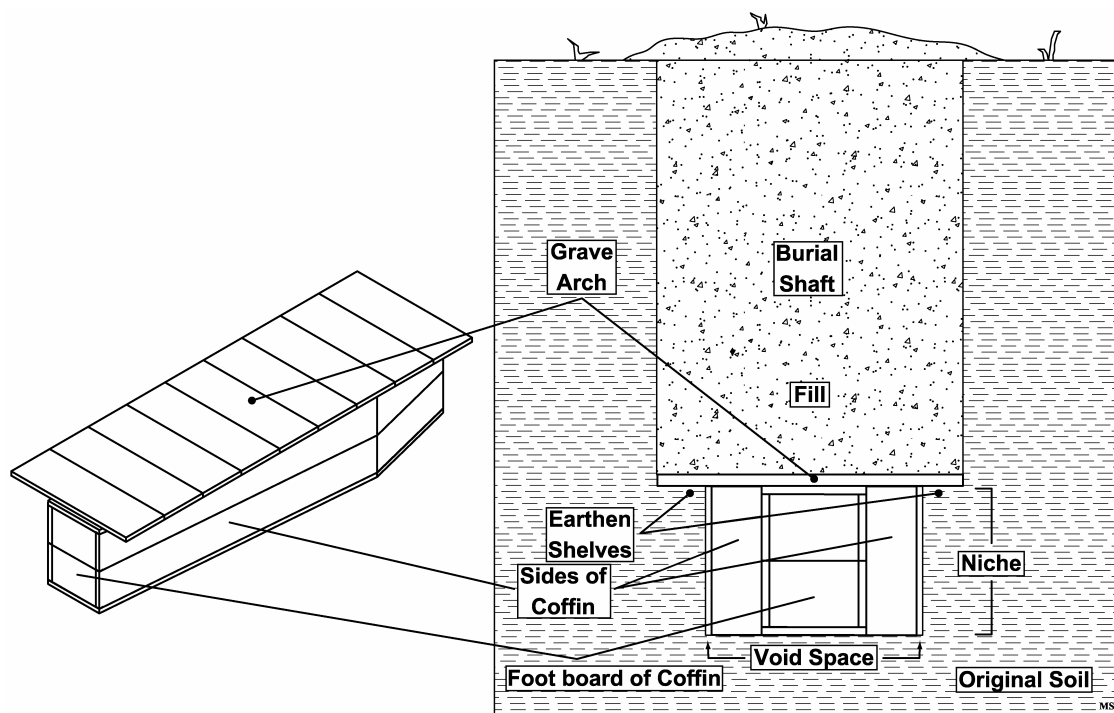


Lang (1984:33) notes claims of the introduction of the rectangular casket as early as 1830. Others including Davidson (1999), Habenstein and Lamers (1995), Coffin (1976), and Jones (1967) have pointed to a mid-19th century introduction. Rectangular burial receptacles, however, are not a mid-19th century innovation. They are reported at the African Burial Ground on Manhattan Island, New York (Perry 2001) and the church and hospital of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad in San Augustine, Florida (Koch 1983), both of which date to the 18th century. They also occur at Mission Refugio, Refugio, Texas as early as 1820 (Tennis 2002), at Mission San Juan, San Antonio, Texas as early as the 1830s (Schuetz 1974), and at Seminole War Cemetery, Tampa, Florida by 1842 (Piper and Piper 1987). Interestingly, in the latter example, the earlier presence of rectangular receptacles was attributed to their relative ease of manufacture as compared to more complex shapes such as hexagonal or octagonal forms (Piper and Piper 1987). Straight-sided receptacles are also evidenced in the interments of subadults during the same period when hexagonal receptacles were popular for adult interments (Fox 1984, Condon et al. 1998, Bellantoni et al. 1995).

### **Grave Arches and Rough Boxes, and Subterranean Architecture**

Grave arches and rough boxes have been documented at a number of sites (Table 3). It is widely established that their presence in the grave was of practical importance in that they serve to preserve the burial receptacle and protect it from the crushing weight of the grave shaft backdirt.

The use of grave arches requires special preparation of the grave shaft. Prior to completing excavation to the intended depth, the sidewalls of the shaft are stepped inward or terraced leaving a narrower, secondary shaft closely tailored to the dimensions of the burial receptacle (Figure 5). Once the receptacle is deposited in this space, a series of planks arranged to create a platform, roughly the length of and a measure wider than the burial receptacle, are then placed across the surface created by the lid of the burial receptacle and the terraced shelves. After backfilling the grave, the weight of the fill dirt is distributed across the platform and onto these shelves.



**FIGURE 5. Grave cross section illustrating the process of grave arching over a hexagonal coffin (modified from Crow 2001).**

Rough boxes--wooden outer crates--were commonly used during the mid-late-19th century to protect mass-produced burial receptacles during shipping. Following their shipping role, rough boxes were frequently placed in the grave shielding the burial receptacle from the elements (Habenstein and Lamers 1995:193). Rough boxes were simply constructed with parallel walls and a lid/bottom consisting of eight or nine boards arranged perpendicular to the midline of the receptacle (Powell and Dockall 1996:133).

Grave arches and rough boxes when encountered have been used to supplement other temporal measures. For instance, their presence has been used to suggest local manufacture, common prior to the mid-19th and late-19th century in rural America (Taylor et al. 1986; Davidson 1999, 2000). However, the practice reportedly continues into the early-20th century. Blakely and Beck (1982:188), citing a personal communication from Jane Dillon, report the replacement of wooden coffin arches, after 1930, by metal supports. Rough boxes, although probably in use in the early half of the 19th century, appear more frequently in cemeteries after the mid-19th century (Table 3). In one occurrence reported at the Morgan Chapel Cemetery in Bastrop County, Texas, both grave arches and a rough box were discovered within a single grave (Taylor et al. 1986).

Massed-produced burial receptacles, where represented by the presence of a rough box, appear more frequently in cemeteries located nearer urban centers, likely reflecting increased proximity to manufacturing sources, lumber, and/or

wholesalers/retailers (Table 3). Conversely, coffin arches are more frequently reported at rural cemeteries in the mid-late 19th century in the absence of rough boxes.

**TABLE 3. OCCURRENCE OF GRAVE ARCHES AND ROUGH BOXES**

Cemetery	Location	Period	Ethnicity/ Status	Economy	Grave arch	Rough box	Source
Ravenscraft Site	PA	early 19th c.	Undetermined	Rural	x		Swauger 1959
Cross Homestead <sup>a</sup>	IL	1829-1849	White	Rural	x		Larsen et al. 1995
Mt. Gilead	GA	1832-1849	White	Rural	x		Wood 1986
Uxbridge Almshouse	MA	1831-1872	White/pauper	Rural	x		Bell 1987; Elia 1989 and 1991
Grafton	IL	1834-1873	White	Urban	x		Buikstra et al. 2000
Sinclair	TX	1855-1880	White	Rural	x		Winchell et al. 1995
Varnell	TX	1860-1889	White	Rural	x		Gadus et al. 2002
Oakland	GA	1866-1927	Black/free	Urban	x		Blakely and Beck 1982
Elko Switch	AL	1850-1920	Black/free	Rural	x		Shogren 1989
Choke Canyon Reservoir	TX	1860-1913	White	Rural	x	x	Fox 1984
Freedman's	TX	1869-1907	Black/free	Urban	x	x	Davidson 1999
Greenwood	TX	1878-1911	White/pauper	Urban		x	Tine et al. 2001
Pioneer	TX	1880-1921	White	Urban		x	Tine et al. 2002
Phillips Memorial	TX	1885-1927	Black/free	Rural <sup>b</sup>		x	Dockall et al. 1996
Morgan Chapel	TX	1891-1937	White	Rural	x	x	Taylor et al. 1986
Texas State	TX	1884-1951	White	Urban		x	Dockall et al. 1996

**x** Denotes occurrence of feature.

<sup>a</sup> Presence of grave arches inferred from description of grave shafts.

<sup>b</sup> Phillips Memorial Cemetery is located between Galveston and Houston, a position likely affording ready access to mass-produced furnishings.

## Socioeconomic Indices

Materials used in the construction of a burial receptacle (e.g., type of wood, metal, glass, etc.), the quality of workmanship, and the decorative accoutrements adorning a receptacle can provide insight into the socioeconomic status of the deceased (Rauschenberg 1990). It also follows, however, that burial furnishings are subject to trends in fashion capable of complicating interpretations of socioeconomic status (Cannon 1989:437). The most popular and by far best studied of such trends is the 19th century “beautification of death” (Douglas 1975:50; Jackson 1977:62). During this period, mass production and mass consumerism resulted in the increased availability and affordability of finer decorative burial furnishings among a wider segment of society thereby blurring distinctions between rich and poor in the grave. Interpretations of socioeconomic status based on recovered mortuary assemblages, therefore, require an understanding of such trends as they influence mortuary display.

Pervasiveness of the beautification-of-death trend, as reflected in the wider distribution of mass-produced burial furnishings, within *popular* American culture during the mid-late-19th century is well-reported (Farrell 1982; Bell 1990; Little et al. 1992). Its timing in frontier and remote settings, however, is poorly studied, as noted in Chapter III. Contextual setting, as exemplified by Texas from 1821 to 1870, unquestionably conditioned the observance of popular mortuary practice and diffusion of mass-produced burial furnishings. Research at historic cemeteries, nevertheless, often proceeds along the lines of prehistoric mortuary studies wherein processual models

directly relate socioeconomic status to grave wealth while neglecting the benefits of historical documentation that provides wider as well as local sociohistorical contexts (Bell 1990:50; cf., Winchell et al. 1992:173; Larsen et al. 1995:142). Investigators at the Sinclair Cemetery (1850-1880) near Cooper, Texas (Winchell et al. 1992) and at Cross Cemetery (1829-1849) near Springfield, Illinois (Larsen et al. 1995), each documenting a paucity of decorative mortuary hardware recovered, interpreted the assemblages as evidence of limited economic means. Closer examination of archeological and historical information pertaining to mortuary display, however, reveals that austere mortuary display was a characteristic shared by many mid-19th-century interments, rich and poor alike.

### **Status of Research Regarding Variation in Mortuary Display**

Recently, researchers, sparked by post-processual and interpretive archaeological theory, have emphasized the careful consideration of sociohistorical contexts in interpretations of socioeconomic status based on recovered mortuary assemblages (Cannon 1989; Little et al. 1992, Buikstra et al. 2000). In line with this view, Bell writes,

Where the quality and quantity of coffin decoration was often obviously a function of what those responsible were able and willing to pay, the embellishment, per se, of a coffin with fancy hardware does not necessarily correlate with prominent social or economic status of the interred individual.

The presence or absence of coffin hardware in a particular grave is a function of a complex chain of events related to date of burial, technological innovation, marketing and supply, stylistic change, and consumer preference (Bell 1990:69).

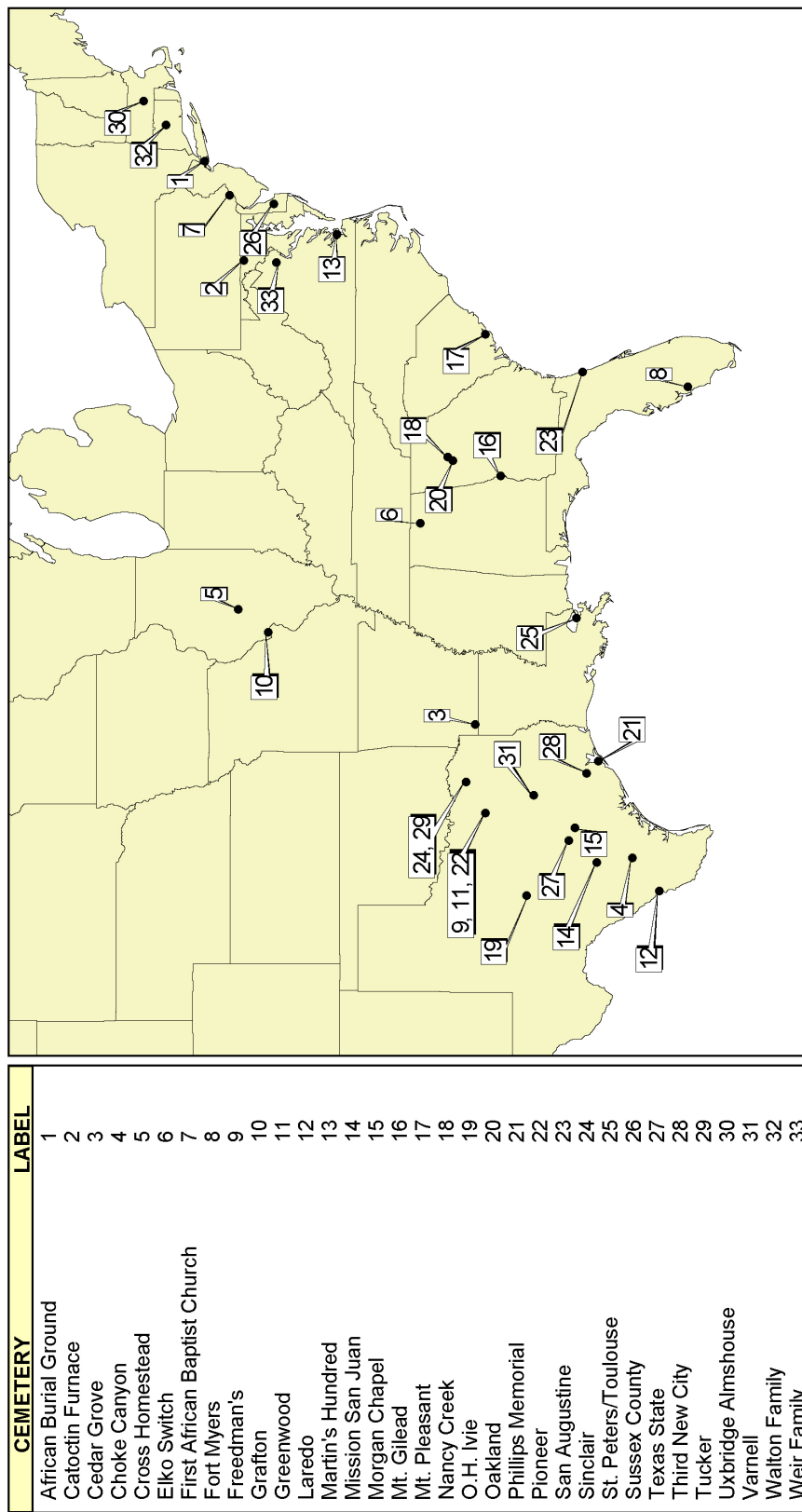
Our understanding of mortuary practices in Texas during much of the 19th century is especially susceptible to inadvertent misinterpretation that results from neglect or under emphasis of social and historical contexts. Chapters II and III emphasize the importance of analyses of these contexts and present plausible explanations, other than varied socioeconomic status, for observed variation in mortuary assemblages. These include variation attributable to popular cultural trends in mortuary display (e.g., the beautification of death) and variation as it relates to differing proximities to manufacturing and distribution centers. These influences can greatly affect the precision of chronological and socioeconomic indices, and neglect of any of them can result in unqualified and haphazard interpretations.

Noting such issues, recent interpretations of variation in mortuary assemblages observed at historic cemeteries integrate archaeological findings with more detailed inspections of available documentation on historical and social contexts (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984; Cannon 1989; Bell 1990; Little et al. 1992; Buikstra et al. 2000). Following such efforts, and contributing to an improved understanding of mortuary display in Texana-Period Texas, 1821-1870, the following chapter documents inter-cemetery variation in mortuary display.

**CHAPTER V**  
**MORTUARY DISPLAY IN SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT: BASIC**  
**DESCRIPTIONS OF SAMPLED CEMETERIES**

Data pertaining to recovered burial furnishings were compiled from cemetery investigations in Texas and elsewhere in the United States with the objective of identifying patterns in the variation of mortuary display among multiple and diverse (economically and culturally) cemetery populations. Thirty-three investigations documenting 37 cemeteries, 17 Texas and 20 non-Texas examples, were selected for this study. Note that three cemeteries (i.e., Morgan, Yarbrough, and Byrne cemeteries) at Choke Canyon Reservoir are treated as single group. Two cemeteries (Boothill and Coffey cemeteries) at O. H. Ivie reservoir are grouped as a single unit as well. This sample, though not exhaustive, is probably representative of the bulk of investigated cemeteries. That said, the selected examples afford an opportunity, through inter-group comparison, to assess the pervasiveness of popular trends in mortuary display (e.g., beautification of death) in multiple and diverse sociohistorical contexts. Geographic distribution of the selected cemeteries is shown in Figure 6. Table 4 summarizes several of their attributes.





**FIGURE 6. Location of 33 selected historic cemeteries used in this study.**

**TABLE 4. SUMMARY OF TEXAS AND NON-TEXAS CEMETERIES**

<b>Cemetery</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Pop. Size</b>	<b>Economy</b>	<b>Cemetery type</b>
Texas State	TX	1884/1907-1951	57	Urban	City
Morgan Chapel	TX	1891-1937	32	Rural	Churchyard
Tucker	TX	1880-1942	16	Rural	Family
Laredo	TX	1890-1920	23	Urban	Churchyard
Cedar Grove	TX	1900-1915	79	Rural	Churchyard
Phillip's Memorial	TX	1885-1927	53	Rural <sup>a</sup>	City
Pioneer	TX	1880-1921	15	Urban	City
Greenwood	TX	1878-1911	14	Urban	City
Mt. Pleasant	SC	1860-1920	37	Rural	Plantation
Third New City	TX	1875-1905	446	Urban	City
Freedman's	TX	1869-1907	1150	Rural	City
Choke Canyon Res.	TX	1860-1913	34	Rural	Family
Nancy Creek	TX	1850-1921	56	Rural <sup>b</sup>	Churchyard
Elko Switch	AL	1850-1920	56	Rural	Churchyard
O. H. Ivie Res.	TX	1870-1886	13	Rural	Family
Oakland	GA	1866-1884	17	Urban	City
Varnell	TX	1860-1889	20	Rural	Family
Weir	TX	1830-1907	24	Rural	Family
Sinclair	TX	1855-1880	16	Rural	Family
Grafton	IL	1836-1892	252	Urban	City
Fort Myers	FL	1841-1865	20	Rural	Military
Uxbridge Almshouse	MA	1831-1872	32	Urban	City
Mission San Juan	TX	1820-1862	92	Frontier	Churchyard
Mt. Gilead	GA	1832-1849	28	Rural	Churchyard
Cross Homestead	IL	1829-1849	29	Rural	Family
FABCC	PA	1810-1842	224	Urban	Churchyard
Catoctin Furnace	MD	1790-1840	35	Urban	Slave
Walton	CT	1757-1830	28	Rural	Family
Sussex County	DE	1752-1799	7	Rural	Family
St. Peter/Toulouse	LA	1725-1788	13	Urban	City
African Burial Ground	NY	1712-1780	427	Urban	Slave
San Augustine	FL	1700-1784	7	Frontier	Churchyard
Martin's Hundred	VA	1625-1650	5	Frontier	Plantation

<sup>a</sup> Phillips Memorial Cemetery is located between Galveston and Houston, a position that likely afforded ready access to mass-produced furnishings.

<sup>b</sup> Nancy Creek Baptist Cemetery is listed as rural though, as a suburb of Atlanta, it was probably closer to popular currents than the typical rural community was.

## **Texas Cemetery Examples**

### *Texas State Cemetery*

Impending cemetery renovations necessitated the excavation of a portion of the Texas State Cemetery in Austin, Texas containing the graves of Confederate veterans, significant Texas figures, and many of their spouses. In 1995, fifty-seven graves dating from 1884 to 1951 were exhumed and relocated elsewhere within the cemetery (Dockall 1996b:xi). All of the burial receptacles recovered were rectangular with the exception of one hexagonal receptacle dating to 1884 (relocated to Texas State Cemetery in 1995). Decorative hardware adorning the receptacles included handles, thumbscrews, escutcheons, caplifters, studs/tacks, plaques/plates, and bust windows (Dockall 1996b).

### *Morgan Chapel Cemetery*

Excavation of the Morgan Chapel Cemetery in Bastrop County, Texas in 1984 preceded the transfer of the property to the City Public Services of San Antonio and anticipated lignite mining. Excavations at the cemetery, once serving a surrounding white community, unearthed twenty-one marked and unmarked interments dating between 1891 and 1937 (Taylor et al. 1987:1). Burial receptacles found among the graves included hexagonal, tapered and taper-canted, rectangular, and rectangular-canted

forms. Coffin hardware identified included handles, coffin screws, thumbscrews, escutcheons, studs/tacks, plaques/plates, and bust windows (Taylor et al. 1987).

### ***Laredo Cemetery***

Twenty-three interments dating to the late-19th and early-20th centuries were identified in an old, thought previously relocated, cemetery in Laredo, Texas during installation of a subterranean fuel storage unit in 1980 (McReynolds et al. 1981:1). The cemetery is believed to have served Anglo and Hispanic residents. Burial receptacles, with one exception, a rounded or petal-shaped receptacle, were hexagonal in shape. Coffin hardware noted included handles, thumbscrews, escutcheons, studs/tacks, caplifters, and a bust window (McReynolds et al. 1981).

### ***Phillips Memorial Cemetery***

Construction along the right-of-way of State Highway 3 in 1991 exposed several unmarked graves associated with the Albert J. Phillips Memorial Cemetery located in La Marque, Texas. Subsequent investigations in 1991 and 1992 identified 53 burial features many of which had been exhumed prior to the construction of the highway in 1927 (Dockall et al. 1996:iv). Phillips Memorial Cemetery served a rural population of African Americans from 1884 to as late as 1927 (Dockall et al. 1996:iv). Burial receptacles identified include hexagonal, tapered, rectangular, and rectangular-canted

forms decoratively clad with any combination of handles, escutcheons, thumbscrews, and plaques/plates (Dockall et al. 1996:iv).

### ***Pioneer Cemetery***

Fifteen unmarked graves were exhumed during cultural resource investigations preceding construction of an expansion of the Dallas Convention Center near Pioneer Cemetery located in Dallas, Texas in 1999. The graves are believed to be those of white Dallas residents interred between 1884 and just after 1910 (Cooper et al. 2000:xi). Hexagonal and rectangular burial receptacles were recovered along with a wide range of decorative hardware including handles, thumbscrews, caplifters, studs/tacks, plaques/plates, and bust windows (Cooper et al. 2000:81). This particular section of the cemetery was part of the Order of Oddfellows section of the cemetery and the costs of interment were likely supplemented as a benefit of membership within this fraternal organization (Cooper et al. 2000:110).

### ***Greenwood Cemetery/Potter's Field Cemetery***

Fourteen unmarked graves were identified prior to improvements along Clyde Lane bordering Greenwood Cemetery in Dallas, Texas in 2001. The graves are attributed to white paupers interred between 1878 and 1911 (Tiné et al. 2002:xi). Fourteen hexagonal and rectangular burial receptacles along with decorative hardware

including handles, thumbscrews, escutcheons, plaques/plates, and bust windows were reported (Tiné et al. 2002:67).

### ***Tucker Cemetery***

Investigations conducted at Tucker Cemetery in 1986 identified 16 graves, 10 of which were unmarked (Lebo 1988). The cemetery, now inundated by Cooper Lake near Cooper, Texas, served white homesteaders between 1878 and 1942 (Lebo 1988). Recovered burial receptacles were identified as octagonal or rectangular and decorative hardware reported includes handles, thumbscrews, escutcheons, studs/tacks, hinges, plaques/plates, and bust windows (Lebo 1988).

### ***Third New City Cemetery***

The Third New City Cemetery was rediscovered during an urban revitalization project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Bond et al. 2002:x). The burial ground is positioned within an area known historically as a freedmen's town settled by freed African-American slaves in the late-19th century. Four-hundred-and-forty-six burial features were identified, and though predominantly attributed to individuals African American descent, likely included a number of individuals of American and Hispanic descent (Bond et al. 2002:130). Excavations between 1996 and 1998 recovered burial furnishings including hexagonal, rectangular,

and indeterminate shaped burial receptacles and a wide range of hardware types including handles, thumbscrews, caplifters, escutcheons, studs/tacks, hinges, plaques/plates, and bust windows (Bond et al. 2002:151). Based on historical documents and recovered articles, two date ranges, the first 1875-1883 and the second 1890-1905, were estimated for the original interment of the excavated burials (Bond et al. 2002:175).

### *Freedman's Cemetery*

Excavations at a portion of Freedman's Cemetery, an historic African-American cemetery located in Dallas, Texas dating from 1869 to 1907, were initiated by expansion of the North Central Expressway. The initial estimates for the number of interments in the area to be impacted were 20 to 30; however, excavations undertaken between 1990 and 1994 identified 1,150 graves containing the remains of 1,157 individuals within the 1-acre impact zone (Clow 1999:219, 227). Burial receptacles including hexagonal, rectangular, octagonal, and indeterminate forms and decorative hardware including handles, coffin screws and tacks, thumbscrews, caplifters, escutcheons, hinges, studs/tacks, plaques/plates, and bust windows recovered among the many interments were used to develop an internal chronology for the interments (Davidson 1999, 2000).

### ***Choke Canyon Reservoir***

Preceding the completion of the Choke Canyon Reservoir in south Texas, five small, rural white family cemeteries containing the graves of 34 individuals were exhumed between 1981 and 1982 (Fox 1984:iii). Collectively, the years of active use for these cemeteries ranged from 1860 to 1913 (Fox 1984:53). Burial furnishings reported were limited to hexagonal and rectangular burial receptacles and decorative coffin screws (Fox 1984).

### ***Cemeteries at O. H. Ivie Reservoir***

Exhumation of Boothill and Coffey cemeteries in 1989 and 1990 preceded completion of the O. H. Ivie Reservoir. Both cemeteries served white family homesteads between the 1870s and 1880s (Earls et al. 1991:30, 67). Boothill Cemetery consisted of 11 graves and the Coffey Cemetery contained two. Hexagonal, tapered, and rectangular burial receptacles and decorative hardware including handles, coffin screws and tacks, thumbscrews, caplifters, escutcheons, studs/tacks, and bust windows were present (Earls et al. 1991).



### *Varnell Cemetery*

Varnell Cemetery consisted of 20 graves relocated in 2001 due to impending expansion of the Jewett Mine in Freestone, County, Texas (Gadus et al. 2002:1). It is believed to have served white homesteaders between the 1860s and 1880s. Recovered burial receptacles were identified as hexagonal, tapered, and rectangular and decorative hardware including handles and coffin crews and tacks were reported (Gadus et al. 2002).

### *Sinclair Cemetery*

The Sinclair Cemetery excavated in 1989 consisted of 16 individual interments serving a small rural community near present-day Cooper, Texas. Interments dated to the 1850s and early 1880s and were attributed to Anglo-Americans, but four individuals exhibited dental traits characteristic of Native American, Asian, or Hispanic ancestry (Moir et al. 1992:172). Fifteen hexagonal and a rectangular burial receptacle were simply decorated with coffin screws and several contained evidence of interior lining. Investigators suggest, based on this observation and comparisons with other cemeteries, that the graves at Sinclair Cemetery were those of individuals representative of the lower socioeconomic tier (Moir et al. 1992:173-175).

### ***Mission San Juan Capistrano***

Ninety-two coffined burials were excavated from the floor of the present chapel at Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1974 preceding renovations to church grounds. All identifiable burial receptacles, with the exception of one “kite-shaped” (hexagonal) coffin, are described as rectangular boxes (Schuetz 1974:28). The individuals, predominantly missionized Native Americans, were interred as early as the 1830s and as late as 1862 (Schuetz 1974:49). With the exception of cut nails, no other hardware was reported (Schuetz 1974).

### **Non-Texas Cemetery Examples**

#### ***Cedar Grove Cemetery***

Cedar Grove, a rural African-African cemetery, was rediscovered during revetment construction along the Red River in Lafayette County, Arkansas. The portion of the cemetery excavated in 1982 yielded 79 graves containing various burial receptacle forms reported as hexagonal, tapered-to-feet, tapered-to-head, rectangular, and indeterminate. The investigated portion of the cemetery is believed to date between 1890 and 1927 (Rose 1985:v); however, this range, according to, has since been refined to 1900-1915 (James M. Davidson, pers. comm. cited in Tiné 2000:465). Decorative hardware, including combinations of handles, coffin screws and tacks, thumbscrews,

caplifters, escutcheons, studs/tacks, hinges, plaques/plates, and bust windows, was common among the graves, with the notable exception of burials of children between 0-2 years of age (Rose and Santeford 1985:135). Such limited investment in the interments of younger children was interpreted as evidence of impoverished groups suffering increased infant mortality rates (Rose and Santeford :135).

### ***Mount Pleasant***

Prompted by the development of a subdivision north of the U.S. 17/701 by-pass in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, the remains of an unmarked African-African cemetery dating from 1860 to 1920 (originally dated 1840-1870 [Rathbun 1987]) were excavated, studied, and reburied between 1984 and 1985 (Trinkley and Hacker-Norton 1984:1). The site consisted of 37 interments in wood “toe-pincher” (hexagonal) coffins (Trinkley and Hacker 1984:4). Hardware found among the coffins included handles, coffin screws and tacks, thumbscrews, escutcheons, studs/tacks, and plaques/plates (Trinkley and Hacker-Norton 1984).

### ***Nancy Creek Baptist Cemetery***

Excavation of interments at the Nancy Creek Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery was undertaken prior to construction of a segment of a mass transit rail line in Chamblee, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta (Garrow 1987:19). A total of 56 graves dating

between circa 1850 and 1979 was excavated and reported on between March and May 1985 (Garrow 1985:i). Burial receptacles recovered included hexagonal, rectangular, and indeterminate forms. Decorative hardware reported included handles, coffin screws and tacks, thumbscrews, escutcheons, studs/tacks, hinges, and plaques/plates (Garrow 1985). Three post-1921 interments are omitted from the tabulated data to avoid skewing the temporal range of the reported assemblages.

### ***Elko Switch Cemetery***

Elko Switch Cemetery, an historic African-American cemetery (1MA305) near Huntsville, Alabama, was excavated in 1987-1988 by contract of the State of Alabama Highway Department. A total of 56 interments within the cemetery was excavated and based on coffin hardware and grave goods dated from 1850 to 1920 (Shogren 1989:iii). Burial receptacles reported include hexagonal, rectangular, and several indeterminate forms. Thirty burials contained decorative hardware including handles, coffin screws, thumbscrews, escutcheons, studs/tacks, caplifters, and/or plaques/plates (Shogren 1989:31-32).

### ***Oakland Cemetery***

Archaeological investigations were conducted within a 5.7-acre (2.3 ha.) section of Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta, Georgia in 1978 to assess the impacts of proposed

cemetery renovations (Blakely and Beck 1979:286). The site was estimated to contain as many as 7,575 interments. Of these, 17 graves representing different areas within the studied tract were chosen for excavation revealing 17 wood coffins including hexagonal, octagonal, and rectangular forms. Dates assigned to recovered burial receptacle forms, a bust window, and other decorative furnishings (not described but evidenced in the accompanying photographs [Blakely and Beck 1979:306-308]), including handles and escutcheons, were consistent with the time range of 1866-1884 established by archival research (Blakely and Beck 1982:180-181, 188). Skeletal analysis of four well-preserved individuals, material culture encountered during grading, as well as informant reports suggest those interred in this portion of Oakland Cemetery were “less affluent black Atlantans” (Blakely and Beck 1982:186).

### ***Weir Family Cemetery***

The Weir family cemetery, located in Manassas, Virginia, consisting of 24 marked and unmarked graves was excavated and relocated nearer the antebellum family house between 1989 and 1990 at the request of descendent family members due to the threat of encroaching urban sprawl and vandalism (Little et al 1992:398). The excavated remains are representative, as established by bioarchaeological and historical data, of a particularly wealthy family. As such, the collection of recovered material culture is believed representative of popular American mortuary material culture during the mid-late 19th century (Little et al. 1992:412). Burial receptacle shapes at the site included

hexagonal, rectangular, and an indeterminate form (iron casket). They also included a wide range of decorative hardware including handles, coffin screws, thumbscrews, escutcheons, studs/tacks, caplifters, plaques/plates, hinges, and bust windows that when ordered chronologically, mirrors patterns reflected in material transformations reported for the beautification of death (Little et al. 1992:412-414).

### ***Grafton Cemetery***

The Grafton Cemetery located near the former town of Grafton, Illinois was excavated in the summer of 1995. It consists of 252 graves dating from 1836 to 1892 (Buikstra et al. 2000). The cemetery served the town and wider area population solely until 1873 when overcrowding likely necessitated the establishment of a new cemetery (Buikstra et al. 2000). Many interments were exhumed and relocated to the new Scenic Hill Cemetery following the relocation of the town and cemetery sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency due to of Mississippi River flooding (Buikstra et al. 2000). Nevertheless, burial furnishings and personal articles as well as skeletal material from 164 individuals remained interred within the cemetery. The burial furnishings reported include 246 burial receptacles including hexagonal, rectangular, and indeterminate forms and associated decorative hardware including handles, coffin screws, thumbscrews, escutcheons, studs/tacks, hinges, plaques/plates, and bust windows (Buikstra et al. 2000).

### ***First African Baptist (Eighth and Tenth Street) Church Cemeteries***

Excavations at the Eighth Street dating 1824-1842 and Tenth Street (1810-1822) locations of the First African Baptist Church were prompted by two large-scale development projects in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Eighth Street Cemetery, excavated in 1983 and 1984, and the Tenth Street Cemetery, in 1990, yielded 135 and 89 individual interments respectively (Crist et al. 1997:25). All coffins were reported as “pinch-toe” (hexagonal) in shape with flat and gabled lids (Parrington and Roberts 1984:30-31). Almost all receptacles were unadorned with the exception of decorative metal stripping and plating noted on several coffins (Parrington and Roberts 1990:154).

### ***Fort Myers Military Cemetery***

Investigations at a military cemetery in Fort Myers, Florida dating from 1841 to 1865 were conducted prior to local road improvements. Due to previous relocation of the cemetery and little remaining skeletal material in the 20 graves investigated, ethnicity could not be determined. Investigators were able to discern the shapes of 11 unadorned wood burial receptacles including nine hexagonal and two rectangular forms (Deming et al. 1993). No decorative hardware is reported (Deming et al. 1993).

### ***Uxbridge Almshouse Burial Ground***

Excavations in 1985 at the Uxbridge Almshouse Burial Ground in Uxbridge, Massachusetts were prompted by highway construction (Elia and Wesolowsky 1991:iv). Investigators exhumed the graves 32 white paupers interred between 1831 and 1872 (Elia and Wesolowsky 1991:iv). The individuals were buried in hexagonal and rectangular receptacles most of which (n=28) were decorated with some form of coffin screw, studs/tacks, hinge, and/or bust window (Bell 1990:61).

### ***Mt. Gilead Cemetery***

The site consisted of 31 graves discovered during the construction of the Carmouche Firing Range at Fort Benning, Georgia in 1983. Two burials attributed to later use at the site are excluded from this study, in an effort to limit skewing the time range to the period under study in the present thesis. This cemetery was believed to have served a predominantly white population from 1832 to 1849 (Wood et al. 1986:ii). Reported burial receptacles include hexagonal, rectangular, and indeterminate forms and hardware observed were limited to cut nails and brass upholstery tacks (Wood et al. 1986:78-81).



### *Cross Homestead Cemetery*

The site, discovered in 1991 during the development of a housing subdivision near present-day Springfield, Illinois, is believed to have served a family of white tenant farmers between 1829 and 1849. A total of 29 graves and 26 hexagonal wood coffins was identified (Larsen et al. 1995:140). The three coffinless interments were those of children less than six years of age. Hardware was limited to utilitarian fasteners, e.g., nails and screws. Based on the paucity of artifacts and three coffinless burials at the site, investigators suggest that the interments are indicative of those of lower socioeconomic status (Larsen et al. 1995:142).

### *Catoctin Furnace*

Highway construction near the Catoctin Furnace State Historic District in Frederick County, Maryland prompted the excavation of approximately one-third of an unmarked cemetery for enslaved African-Americans who worked at the Catoctin Iron Furnace complex during the late-18th and early-19th centuries (Burnston 1997:93). Between 1979 and 1980, thirty-five graves containing the remains of 36 individuals dating from 1790 to 1840 were exhumed, each buried in a “pinchtoe” (hexagonal) coffin devoid of decorative hardware (Burnston 1997:94-95).

### ***Walton Family Cemetery***

Remains of a family cemetery were discovered eroding from an embankment at a sand-and-gravel mine in Griswold, Connecticut, which prompted the salvage excavation and reburial of 28 graves between 1990 and 1992 (Bellantoni et al. 1997:132,139, 150). Historic research tied the land to the Walton family who purchased the lot for use as a family burial ground in 1757. It served as a cemetery until the early-19th century and probably no later than the 1830s as no cut nails were observed. The deceased were interred in hexagonal, rectangular, and indeterminate-shaped receptacles. Interestingly, all of the rectangular receptacles were found among the burials of subadults (Bellantoni et al. 1997:139). Nails and hinges were the only hardware reported (Bellantoni et al. 1997).

### ***Eighteenth-Century Family Cemetery in Sussex County, Delaware***

A small, family cemetery consisting of seven graves was identified during excavation of prehistoric site preceding the dualization of U.S. Route 113 near Redden in Sussex County, Delaware (LeeDecker et al. 1995:1). Excavation of the historic cemetery was conducted in 1992 (LeeDecker et al. 1995:1). A time range between 1752 and 1799 was assigned to the cemetery based on nails and buttons recovered from the graves. All of the seven interments were buried in hexagonal coffins with no decorative hardware reported (LeeDecker et al. 1995:50).

### ***Coffined Graves at San Augustine***

Ten coffined burials were identified during the examination of 30 burial features at the church and hospital of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad in San Augustine, Florida identified by the 1977 Florida State University Archaeological Field School. Seven of the coffined burials were attributed to the English occupying San Augustine between 1763 and 1784 (Koch 1979:286-287, 293). Three Spanish burials dating prior to English occupation of the site were buried in rectangular and tapered receptacles decorated with brass and iron tacks. The seven English burials were placed in hexagonal receptacles adorned with decorative metal hardware including any combination of handles, brass and iron tacks, and tin and iron plates (Koch 1983:223).

### ***St. Peter/Toulouse Street Cemetery (New Orleans First Cemetery)***

During construction of a housing development in the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana, portions of a cemetery (32 individual interments) dating between 1725 and 1788 were rediscovered (Owsley and Orser 1985:4). Ethnicity of those interred is reported as Anglo, Black, and mixed ancestry. All were interred in wood tapered burial receptacles with flat, gabled, or rounded lids. No decorative hardware is reported, with the exception of a single receptacle possessing wood handles (Owsley et al. 1985).

### ***African Burial Ground***

The remains of an historic African-American cemetery were rediscovered on Manhattan Island in New York City, New York in the course of construction of a federal office building. The cemetery, possibly in use as early as the 17th century, is first mentioned in historic records as of 1712. The last reported interments were in 1796 (Blakely 1998). Ninety-four percent of 401 graves excavated during investigations of a portion of the cemetery contained burial receptacles. The shapes of 245 of these were discernable and classified as hexagonal, tapered, or rectangular. Decorative hardware including handles and tacks were recovered from seven graves (Perry et al. 2001:148).

### ***Martin's Hundred***

Investigations in the 1970s at Site A of Martin's Hundred, a 17th century Virginia plantation along the banks of the James River, identified the graves of 23 individuals. Many of these early settlers were subject to hardships in the New World including Indian attacks, starvation, and diseases were inhumed less a coffin. Coffins are only evident in five interments at the site which dates between the 1630s and 1640s, although, some evidence suggests a date as early as 1625 (Hume 1982:318, 324). No decorative hardware was recovered but the coffin lids are believed to have been gabled (Hume 1982:38).

## **Data Collection Considerations**

Differences in excavation and collection strategies as well as approach to classification and reporting of material culture recovered in the course of cemetery investigations frustrate attempts at quantification, and present the most daunting obstacle to studies of the present kind. All data herein were collected, to the best of the author's ability, from related sources and are restricted to more robust (i.e., in a preservation sense) and/or more common classes of artifacts/decorative treatments (e.g., handles, coffin screws and tacks [a.k.a., "dummy" screws], thumbscrews, caplifters, studs/tacks, plaques/plates, hinges, bust windows, paint, and interior lining). In addition, because the integrity of the reported quantities of particular artifacts/treatments within an interment (e.g., number of coffin screws or handles) is sometimes questionable, only their occurrence within an interment is noted.

Occurrence of particular burial furnishings, including distinct burial receptacle forms (e.g., hexagonal, octagonal, tapered, rectangular, rectangular-canted, rounded, and indeterminate), select decorative elements (e.g., handles, coffin screws, "dummy" screws, thumbscrews, decorative studs/tacks, caplifters, plaques/plates, hinges, bust windows, painted exterior, and interior lining [where it can be inferred from remaining cloth, fill, and/or tacks]), and supplemental grave features (e.g., "rough" boxes and grave arches), was tabulated in Excel spreadsheets (Appendices A and B). Note that escutcheons, often reported in conjunction with coffin screws and thumbscrews, are not

included in this study, as their reported occurrence would appear as redundant. Also included in Appendix B are counts of burial receptacles with at least one decorative artifact/treatment reported, as well as the number of decorative artifacts/treatments classes reported within each assemblage. Analysis and interpretation of resulting data is presented in the following chapters as a complement to historical information pertaining to mortuary display provided in Chapters II and III.

## CHAPTER VI

### METHODS OF ASSESSING VARIATION IN MORTUARY DISPLAY

To illustrate the influence of particular sociohistorical contexts on mortuary display, as reflected in assemblages recovered from cemeteries listed in Table 4, the present study draws heavily on seriation methodology developed and employed in the relative chronological ordering of prehistoric assemblages. Seriation, as explained by Ford (1962:39-43), is based on the premise that the popularity (or relative frequency) of any cultural type over the course of its history follows a unimodal distribution. This distribution is often displayed graphically as a series of horizontal bars, whose widths reflect relative frequencies of a cultural type at different points in its history, centered and distributed along a vertical axis. The resulting pattern resembles a battleship-shaped curve. Chronological ordering of assemblages of otherwise unknown age, following this premise, is accomplished by positioning assemblages so that the relative frequencies (i.e., horizontal bars) for each represented type best fit a battleship-shaped curve.

In addition to subscribing to seriation's basic premise, there are, in the absence of absolute temporal and formal control, certain conditions that assemblages must meet for a valid seriation, which depicts a relative chronological ordering of assemblages. Restated from an earlier synthesis by O'Brien and Lyman (1999:117-119), these conditions require that assemblages: (1) be of similar duration to insure that the positions of particular assemblages in an ordering are the result of their age and not their duration; (2) come from the same local area to insure that what is being measured is

variation in time rather than difference in geographic space; and (3) all belong to the same cultural tradition to insure that what is being measured is variation among related artifact types rather than difference in geographic space and/or cultural traditions.

### **Assessing Stylistic Change within Sociohistorical Contexts**

This type of seriation, frequency seriation, has also found utility in the study of historic-period material culture (Phillips et al. 1951; Mayer-Oakes 1955; Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966). Arguably the best known of these studies is Deetz and Dethlefsen's seriation of three distinct decorative motifs witnessed among early New England gravemarkers (Deetz and Dethlefsen 1965, Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966, Deetz 1977).

Dethlefsen and Deetz (1966) demonstrated that stylistic change in motifs depicted on gravemarkers, from death's head to cherubs and later, urns and willow trees between about 1680 and 1820, corresponded to broader, historically-documented trends. In that case, the decline of orthodox Puritanism and the Great Awakening, culminated in what is characterized as a softening of New England religious ideology. Making use of temporal and formal controls offered by gravemarkers, Deetz and Dethlefsen presented a controlled and repeatable test of seriation's basic premise. They found that measures of the popularity of the three decorative motifs through time produced the expected battleship-shaped curves at cemetery after cemetery across New England (Deetz 1977:68-69).



While their findings support seriation's basic premise, use of objects with known histories, they add, can potentially contribute to a refinement of seriation and related interpretation (Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966:502). Deetz and Dethlefsen, drawing on the rigid temporal and formal control allowed by gravemarkers and inter-cemetery comparison, were able to demonstrate that stylistic change occurred at different rates along a spatiotemporal continuum. Deetz (1977:72--78), in a later work noted: (1) "delayed" peaks in popularity of particular motifs in New England cemeteries that followed similar peaks that occurred in England as much as half a century earlier; and (2) delays in the popular acceptance of introduced motifs increased along a trajectory of increasing distance from New England cosmopolitan centers.

Such observations are particularly relevant to the present study. Making use of the temporal and formal control allowed by assemblages of known age and fairly short duration, the limitations inherent in the seriation of prehistoric assemblages become the very means by which variation in archaeological assemblages can be interpreted as the result of particular sociohistorical contexts. That is, if assemblages studied are not from the same local area or cultural tradition, they are, for the very reason they are excluded from seriation of prehistoric assemblages, likely to result in a visible deviation from the expected battleship-shaped curve. Multiple assemblages may exhibit deviation from expected patterns, and if sites yielding these assemblages share common traits (e.g., social histories, spatioeconomic contexts, socioeconomic statuses, cultural preferences), it is reasonable to infer that this deviation, at least to some degree, is attributable to those shared traits.

Building on the works of Deetz and Dethlefsen, the following section presents a refinement of seriation methodology using data collected on selected burial furnishings from the cemeteries listed in Table 4 (also see Appendices A and B). As presented in Chapter VII, the result of this analysis is a visual tool that facilitates interpretation of fluctuations in the expected patterns (or battleship curves) representative of the popularity of particular burial furnishings between the 17th and early-20th centuries in what is now the United States.

### **From Gravemarkers to Burial Furnishings**

Methods employed in the present study, and interpretations made herein, depend on temporal control allowed by the assemblages studied. Admittedly, the assemblages used here do not provide the same degree of temporal control allowed by gravemarkers, but they nonetheless, span enough time to be used to order them chronologically. Temporal control is achieved by ranking the selected cemetery assemblages according to a mean age calculated for each example using the following equation:  $(\text{begin date} + (\text{end date} - \text{begin date})/2)$ .

Particular care is taken to satisfy seriation's first requirement: that assemblages be of similar duration to insure that the positions of particular assemblages in a seriation are the result of their age and not their duration. While gravemarkers often provide an exact date of death, and it can be reasonably assumed that they were placed within a relatively short period following an individual's death, the assemblages used here were

amassed throughout a cemetery's period of use. Length of time a cemetery remains active (i.e., its duration) varies considerably among the selected examples with a range of 15 to 84 and mean of 43.97 years. It is assumed, however, for the purposes of this study, that the rate of cemetery use, over time, resembles a unimodal distribution, and that all of the selected cemeteries, albeit unlikely in every instance, are used continuously throughout their history. The relative frequencies of select burial furnishings amassed over the span of a cemetery's use, it can be argued, are representative of that period. Accordingly, when arranged chronologically, these frequencies can be used to assess mortuary display in as many contexts as are represented. This topic is readdressed in Chapter VII where statistical testing of several measures is undertaken to identify any trends and/or correlations that could otherwise invalidate later interpretations.

Burial furnishings reported in Appendices A and B represent types or classes of burial furnishings tabulated in Chapter V. One of these classes, burial receptacle shape, is subdivided in an effort to assess burial receptacle morphology, and to many, will resemble the typical seriation. Shapes studied include hexagonal, octagonal, tapered, rectangular, rectangular-canted, rounded, and indeterminate (Figure 4). In the case of burial receptacle shape, the sum of relative frequencies of the different shapes within a row equals 100 percent. Decorative attributes studied, include handles, coffin screws, "dummy screws", thumbscrews, caplifters, studs/tacks, plaques/plates, hinges, bust windows, painted exterior, and interior lining (Chapter IV; Davidson 1999:Appendix A). These attributes, however, could be subdivided as well into types and subtypes. For

example, the class handles can be divided into three types: bail, short bar, and extended bar. Bail handles can then be divided further into subtypes: single and double lug. Occurrence of rough boxes and grave arches is tabulated as well. All of these measures, regardless of how they are divided or subdivided, reflect the popularity of a type or class of types within a particular sociohistorical context. The expected pattern when ordered chronologically is still a battleship-shaped curve.

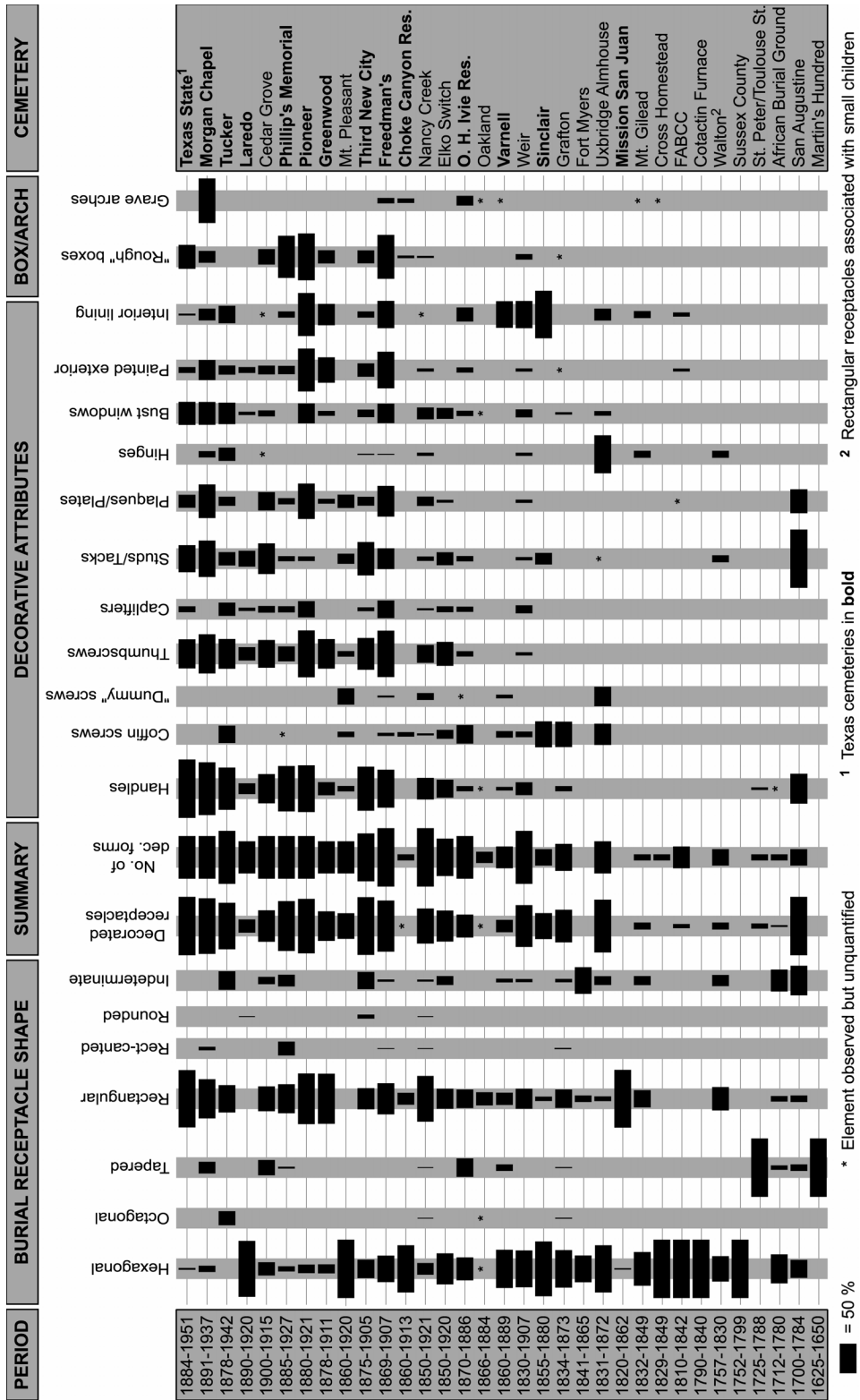
Also included in analysis are two measures, termed “summary measures”. “Decorated receptacles”, the first of these, is a count of burial receptacles exhibiting one or more of the selected decorative attributes (Appendix B). Note, however, that due to poor preservation and inconsistent reporting, the attributes painted exterior and interior lining are excluded from this measure. The second, “number of decorative forms”, is a count of the number of different decorative attributes (n=11) reported among each cemetery example. It is assumed that these summary measures provide a fair representation of decorative embellishment of burial receptacles during the beautification-of-death trend during the 19th and early-20th centuries.

## CHAPTER VII

### RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Analysis of select burial furnishings documented in the course of archaeological investigations at Texas and non-Texas cemeteries, as presented in this chapter, demonstrate that reliable interpretation of variation in mortuary display requires examination of wider and site-specific sociohistorical contexts (Bell 1990:68; Little et al. 1992). Tabulation and ordering of artifactual data pertaining to burial furnishings from multiple cemetery investigations makes possible the establishment of a baseline and visually demonstrates the pervasiveness, relative to time and space, of the beautification-of-death trend providing insight into the influences of particular sociohistorical contexts on mortuary display. While the area of focus of the present study is Texas between 1821 and 1870, its results have significant implications for the study of burial practices throughout much of 19th-century America.

Figure 7 presents the overall results of the seriation of various grave attributes identified in Chapter VI. Widths of individual bars represent the relative frequencies of each furnishing/decorative treatment within a particular cemetery population. Where the frequency of an attribute cannot be calculated, but its presence is reported, an asterisk is used in place of a bar. Measures are then arranged and centered within a column of like furnishings noted for each cemetery population. Each column is scaled identically to the other, such that a given bar representing a relative frequency of 50 percent is the same length in any column.



**FIGURE 7. Relative measures of select burial receptacle shapes, decorative hardware types and treatments, and receptacle-protecting implements ordered by mean age.**

## Observed Trends

The beautification-of-death trend is clearly discernable in Figure 7. A marked increase in ostentation of mortuary display is reflected in the greater use and embellishment of burial furnishing beginning in the late-18th century and continuing throughout much of the 19th century. The influence of the beautification of death is evident in: (1) a shift from coffin to casket clearly seen when comparing the decline in hexagonal frequencies to increase in rectangular frequencies over time; (2) wider distribution of burial furnishings within populations reflected in the increasing frequencies of burial receptacles with some form of decorative embellishment; and (3) increased embellishment of burial receptacles with one or more decorative elements reflected in the number of decorative types/attributes.

Furthermore, elite abandonment of elaborate mortuary display in favor of a streamlined appearance, which marked the end of the beautification-of-death trend, may be reflected in the diminishing frequencies for particular decorative furnishings in cemeteries dating to the early-20th century. This is apparent for thumbscrews, caplifters, decorative stud/tacks, and plaques (Figure 7). This same pattern (i.e., relative austerity followed by increased ostentation in mortuary assemblages and a later streamlining) has been identified amongst the marked graves of wealthier individuals at the Weir Family Cemetery (Little et al. 1992).

Notwithstanding the bias reflected in the select cemetery examples, impoverished status of the cemeteries investigated, the seriation presented appears to capture the

essence of the beautification of death as reflected in popular trends in burial furnishings. To further test this observation and identify any correlations that could limit inferences made using the developed seriation the following variables were assessed:

1. RANK (values of one to 33 assigned to each cemetery based on the ranking of burial populations by mean age),
2. POPSIZE (i.e., the number of receptacles),
3. DURATION (end date minus begin date for a cemetery),
4. DECREC (relative frequency of decorative receptacles excluding the attributes painted exterior and interior lining),
5. DECFORM (number of reported decorative types).

The results of this assessment are presented in Table 5 and include both Pearson's and Spearman's Rank Correlation values and corresponding p-values for the discussed data sets. Only the Spearman's Correlation values and p-values are included in the discussion, as the majority of the data sets are not normally distributed.

Based on values presented in Table 5, the strength of correlation for POPSIZE and DURATION when compared to RANK is statistically weak ( $r_s = 0.2411$ ,  $p \leq 0.1765$ ;  $r_s = 0.1053$ ,  $p \leq 0.5597$ ). This would appear to indicate that there is no linear trend present for POPSIZE and DURATION that could otherwise account for the gradual increase in relative frequencies evidenced in Figure 7.

Positive correlations between DECFORM (i.e., the number of decorative attribute types) and POPSIZE and DURATION were expected as larger values of



POPSIZE and DURATION represent larger cachement sizes and longer cachement periods. Results are such, however, that there appears only a weak correlation (i.e.,  $|r_s| \leq 0.5$ ) between DECFORM and both POPSIZE ( $r_s = 0.2279$ ,  $p \leq 0.2021$ ) and DURATION ( $r_s = 0.2197$ ,  $p \leq 0.2193$ ) (Table 5). Meanwhile, the strength of correlation for DECFORM and DECREC when compared to RANK can be classified as moderate (i.e.,  $0.5 < |r_s| < 0.8$ ) with  $r_s$  values of 0.7329 ( $p \leq 0.0000$ ) and 0.6083 ( $p \leq 0.0002$ ) respectively (Table 5). The strength of correlation between DECFORM and DECREC is statistically strong (i.e.,  $|r_s| \geq 0.8$ ) with an  $r_s$  value of 0.8308 ( $p \leq 0.0000$ ). As noted in Chapter VI, these relationships (i.e., those between summary measures and each compared to rank) are expected products of the beautification-of-death trend reflected in the increased elaboration of burial receptacles through time.

To summarize, as shown in Table 5, the gradual increases in the frequencies of summary measures in FIGURE 7 are more strongly correlated to their chronological order (RANK) than population size (POPSIZE) or years of active cemetery use (DURATION). No significant correlation among population size or cemetery duration can be identified that would inhibit the application of the developed seriation (Figure 7) in this study and any inferences made herein.

**TABLE 5. CORRELATION MATRIX FOR SUMMARY MEASURES**

<b>Pearson Correlations</b>	RANK	POPSIZE	DURATION	DECREC	DECFORM
RANK	1.0000	0.0389	-0.0992	<b>0.5858</b>	<b>0.7359</b>
POPSIZE		1.0000	-0.0083	0.1873	0.2804
DURATION			1.0000	0.2932	0.1862
DECREC				1.0000	<b>0.8058</b>
DECFORM					1.0000

<b>Pearson Probabilities</b>	RANK	POPSIZE	DURATION	DECREC	DECFORM
RANK		0.8298	0.5827	<b>0.0003</b>	<b>0.0000</b>
POPSIZE			0.9636	0.2966	0.1140
DURATION				0.0978	0.2995
DECREC					<b>0.0000</b>
DECFORM					

<b>Spearman Rank Correlations</b>	RANK	POPSIZE	DURATION	DECREC	DECFORM
RANK	1.0000	0.1055	-0.0913	<b>0.6060</b>	<b>0.7329</b>
POPSIZE		1.0000	0.2011	0.1005	0.2169
DURATION			1.0000	0.2782	0.1768
DECREC				1.0000	<b>0.8222</b>
DECFORM					1.0000

<b>Spearman Rank Probabilities</b>	RANK	POPSIZE	DURATION	DECREC	DECFORM
RANK		0.5589	0.6134	<b>0.0002</b>	<b>0.0000</b>
POPSIZE			0.2618	0.5779	0.2253
DURATION				0.1170	0.3250
DECREC					<b>0.0000</b>
DECFORM					

### **Factors Influencing Variation in Recovered Mortuary Assemblages**

By examining Figure 7 and fluctuations of relative frequencies therein, it is possible to isolate and assess factors influencing the degree of ostentation in mortuary assemblages observed among the selected cemetery populations, including time of

interment, economic setting, and status-related influences. In addition, Figure 7 reveals differences observed in the mortuary assemblages of culturally- and economically-unique burial traditions.

### ***Time of Interment***

As has been noted by others (Garrow et al. 1985, 1987; Bell 1987, 1990; Little et al. 1992), time of interment appears the most significant factor in determining the level of ostentation in mortuary assemblages. A clear transition from hexagonal to rectangular burial receptacles (a.k.a., the shift from coffin to casket) and an overall increase in the embellishment of burial receptacles with decorative furnishings and treatments, as shown in Figure 7, provide ample evidence of the temporal sensitivity of mortuary display. This sensitivity is a product of the beautification-of-death trend, which resulted in an increased distribution and availability of decorative burial furnishings and treatments, even among disparate economic statuses and contexts.

### ***Spatioeconomic Context***

Economic context of the population studied also shows considerable influence on the types and number of interments exhibiting decorative embellishment. Populations in urban economies, tend to show marked increases in the frequencies of rectangular receptacles, number of decorated receptacles, number of different decorative attributes,

and number of mass-produced receptacles (i.e., as indicated by rough boxes) relative to rural contemporary cemetery examples. This pattern can be seen among urban cemeteries, including Texas State, Phillip's Memorial, Pioneer, Greenwood, Third New City, Freedman's, Grafton, and Uxbridge Almshouse (Figure 7). In each example, there are clear increases in the relative frequencies for most all the measured elements when compared to rural contemporaries. The pattern holds true even among indigent or otherwise socioeconomically-disadvantaged populations in urban (or near urban) economies regardless of ethnicity, as shown for the following cemetery populations: Phillips Memorial, Greenwood, Third New City, Freedman's, and Uxbridge Almshouse (Figure 7). In each instance, the frequencies represented by these examples are greater than those of their respective rural or frontier contemporaries. For example, Cedar Grove, Mt. Pleasant, Choke Canyon Reservoir, Elko Switch, O. H. Ivie Reservoir, Varnell, Sinclair, Mt. Gilead, and Cross Homestead.

Several other investigations also note the retention of older types or style forms of burial furnishings among rural burial populations. Shogren et al. (1989:160) documents the extended use of traditional forms of burial containers and decorative hardware among rural populations in Georgia. Hacker-Norton and Trinkley (1984) note similar findings in rural South Carolina and document the shrewd business practices of rural merchants in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, including the purchase of large volumes of older, cheaper stocks of burial furnishings. Similar observations have been among rural cemeteries in Texas (Fox 1984). As discussed in Chapter III, retention of

older styles is readily attributable to limited access to manufacturing centers and improved transportation links.

### ***Status-Related Variation***

As noted, the measures of burial furnishings and decorative treatments correspond to the number of interments in which they occurred. Unquestionably, more can be said concerning the quality and quantity of furnishings in individual interments. Resulting measures, however, succeed in producing recurrent patterns in mortuary display as they relate to cemeteries serving populations whose socioeconomic status can reasonably be estimated.

The beautification-of-death trend and the resultant production of relatively inexpensive burial furnishings are often reported as contributing to the blurring socioeconomic divisions within the grave (Bell 1990:55). Indeed, indigent cemetery populations in urban economies show that particular care was taken to bury even the poorest of the dead in a respectable fashion. Significant frequencies of decorated receptacles are reported for white paupers at the Uxbridge Almshouse burial ground and the Potter's Field at Greenwood Cemetery (Figure 7). There are, however, perceptible contractions in the frequencies of almost every measured decorative element noted for the Potter's Field at Greenwood Cemetery when compared to nearby neighbor and contemporary, Pioneer Cemetery where more affluent community member were buried (Figure 7; Tiné et al. 2002).

Further observations can be made with respect to the practice of the using older stocks (i.e., otherwise out of fashion and available at lower costs) in the interments of indigents and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. Davidson (1999:127), while researching the history of undertaking in Dallas, Texas, discovered a contract dating to 1895 between the city of Dallas and local undertakers prescribing the use of traditional (plainly finished) hexagonal coffins for paupers. This contract, however, does not appear to have a negative influence on the frequencies of rectangular receptacles recovered from the graves of white paupers at Greenwood Cemetery (i.e., looking at the trend, the frequencies reported appear to fit the overall trend). The same cannot be said for African-American interments. Decreases in frequencies of rectangular receptacles occur at several black cemeteries (e.g., Phillip's Memorial, Third New City, and Freedman's) relative to white contemporaries (e.g., Pioneer and Greenwood; Figure 7). Frequency increases in rectangular receptacles, though subtle, occur at Pioneer and Greenwood cemeteries relative to Cedar Grove, Phillip's Memorial, Mount Pleasant, as well as Freedman's and Third New City cemeteries (Figure 7).

The trends in relative frequencies for burial receptacle forms imply retention of hexagonal burial receptacles in the burials of freedmen and their descendants (Figure 7). Davidson reports evidence of the use of older or outdated materials at Freedman's Cemetery, an African-American cemetery in Dallas, Texas. He notes hexagonal coffins constructed with cut nails (i.e., manufactured prior to 1890) found in conjunction with wooden outer boxes constructed using wire nails (dating after 1890) suggesting the use of cheaper, outdated stocks (Davidson 1999:371).

Socioeconomic distinctions are less discernable among whites and blacks when inspecting the frequencies of decorative attributes (Figure 7). Again, it is important to reiterate that the present study only measures the presence of a general type of decorative element and not the details of motifs or materials used in the design or application of that element which might have an associated cost/status value. Provided this caveat, in comparing assemblages of black and white burial populations in similar settings (urban settings for instance), there are no obvious indications of differential mortuary display. Judging from the frequencies of decorated receptacles at Freedman's and Third New City Cemetery, blacks in urban economies appear to have had ready access to mass-produced burial furniture. Frequencies of decorative elements recovered at Freedman's are comparable to those at Pioneer and significantly more ostentatious in comparison to the burial assemblages of white paupers at Greenwood.

When comparing the frequencies of decorative elements at the cemeteries of whites and free blacks in rural and frontier economies, the results appear to suggest that both populations were subject to similar environments that dictated a particular level of austerity. As time passed, however, white assemblages tend to surpass those of blacks in terms of the degree of ostentation witnessed. This trend is subtle, and perhaps difficult to distinguish, earlier on. Comparing assemblages at O.H. Ivie and Elko Switch cemeteries (Figure 7), one is hard pressed to find much difference between white and black burial assemblages despite the historic persecution and impoverished status of blacks in the given timeframe. The ending date of cemetery use at Elk Switch is more than 30 years more recent, however, suggesting that blacks in this particular locale did

not have comparable access to burial furnishings. Assemblages collected from a white cemetery of an almost identical age support this argument. For example, there are more reported rectangular receptacles and decorated receptacles at Nancy Creek than at Elko Switch, as well as a greater number of decorative attributes at the Nancy Creek Cemetery. This presumably ethnically driven pattern is more pronounced when comparing Tucker and Morgan Chapel cemeteries to Cedar Grove, as also shown in (Figure 7).

### ***Aberrations in the Seriation Results***

Several findings in the present study appear as aberrations in the overall trends depicted in Figure 7 and are worthy of discussion. Mortuary display at Hispanic and English burial grounds differ substantially from contemporary Anglo-American examples, although the small sample size precludes definitive conclusions. The first of these aberrations, as discussed in Chapter IV, occurs at Hispanic cemeteries where rectangular and tapered forms appear to have been preferred at a time when hexagonal coffins are otherwise popular. Rectangular and tapered receptacles were recovered from graves belonging to 18th century Spaniards at San Augustine (Koch 1983). All but one of the receptacles recovered at Mission San Juan, were rectangular (Schuetz 1974). At the Laredo Cemetery, no rectangular receptacles were reported, although given the period represented, some are expected to be present (McReynolds et al. 1981). In truth, the trend in 19th century Hispanic burial receptacles use appears reversed or



significantly delayed with straight-sided receptacles replaced by a later preference for hexagonal coffins.

Further examples of aberrant mortuary display are seen at the church and hospital of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad in San Augustine, Florida and the Newton Cemetery, Barbados (Handler and Lange 1978) in the 18th century. In San Augustine, seven English interments contained burial receptacles decorated with handles, brass tacks, and plates. In Barbados, slaves were buried with coffin accoutrements including handles (Handler and Lange 1978:151).

Often, such examples are cited as a point of reference for early (e.g., 18th and early-19th centuries) mortuary display in the New World (Koch 1983; Handler and Lange 1978). Data presented in Figure 7 suggest, however, that such assemblages were not characteristic of 18th-century mortuary display in America and in fact, such embellishment is not characteristic of American examples until the late-19th century.

### **Unqualified Assessments of Socioeconomic Status**

Returning to the examples presented in the introduction of this chapter, an absence or paucity of decorative burial furnishings recovered within two cemetery populations is directly related to lower socioeconomic status. Moir et al. (1992:175) argued that the assemblages recovered from the Sinclair cemetery dating 1855-1880 “suggest a lack of economic resources rather than one of market access”. Larsen et al. (1995:142) argue similarly that the paucity of coffin furniture documented at the Cross

cemetery (1829-1849) is indicative of limited economic means. Data collected for the present study, however, indicate that other factors, especially market access, have particular sway on the quantity and type of burial furnishings available in 19th century mortuary assemblages. Complicating assessments of status, a paucity of decorative hardware appears to fit a popular pattern in mid-19th century mortuary assemblages.

### *Neglect of Popular Patterns in Mortuary Display*

For the period of time represented by Sinclair and Cross Homestead cemeteries, the lack of decorative hardware is more likely related to popular, temporally-sensitive patterns in mortuary display. Winchell and Moir (1992:154) identify this influence when attempting to explain the paucity of decorative hardware recovered at Sinclair Cemetery. They fail however, to place the recovered mortuary assemblages within the proper sociohistorical framework. Given the history of the market for mortuary material culture during the mid-19th century, as discussed in Chapter II, the popularity and wider distribution of mass-produced burial furniture had yet to be witnessed, not occurring until the 1860s and 1870s.

Mortuary assemblages reported within the marked graves of the wealthy evidence similar patterns of austerity during the mid-19th century. For example, at Nancy Creek Baptist Cemetery located just outside Atlanta, Georgia, William Johnston (d. 1855), deacon, wealthy planter, and county coroner, was interred in a hexagonal coffin decorated only by silver-plated hinges and coffin nails with white metal heads

(Garrow 1985:17-20). Similarly, modest assemblages have been identified in mid-19th century graves at the Weir Family Cemetery located in Manassas, Virginia. The Weir Family Cemetery offers a look at the burial practices of a wealthy family spanning the mid-late 19th century, at a time when earlier, plainly finished hexagonal receptacles were gradually replaced by rectangular forms increasingly embellished with various decorative elements (Little et al. 1992).

### ***Unqualified Comparisons and Neglect of Regional Sociohistorical Contexts***

An inadequate understanding of patterns in mortuary display and more narrowly-defined sociohistorical contexts can yield spurious interpretations derived from inter-cemetery comparisons. In relating the recovered assemblages at Sinclair Cemetery, Dallas, Texas, to limited economic means, Moir et al. (1992:173-175) rely on data from graves at two 18th century cemeteries, a burial ground in Florida utilized by the Spanish and English soldiers and a slave cemetery in Barbados (Koch 1983; Handler and Lange 1978). Both cemetery included coffin handles. These items were not present in the Sinclair Cemetery assemblage. Because the two cemeteries selected for comparison date to the 18th century (i.e., they are predecessors) and these decorative elements are reported in the graves of slaves, Moir et al. (1992:173) imply that these assemblages represent a norm for mortuary display in the 18th century. They then, using this line of evidence, interpret the paucity of burial furnishings recovered at Sinclair as indicative of “limited economic means rather than one of market access” (Moir et al. 1992:175). As

stated earlier, however, the burial populations chosen by Moir et al. represent aberrant patterns of mortuary display when compared to contemporary American examples (Figure 7).

Mortuary assemblages of the English in San Augustine and slaves in English-controlled Barbados during the 18th century were representative of a larger pattern of mass-production and mass-consumerism yet to take hold in much of America. As discussed in Chapter II, embargos before and after the American Revolution (1775-1783) restricted the import of English-made goods, including many decorative burial furnishings (Rauschenberg 1990). Further, given the suppression of industry in the colonies, infrastructure necessary to manufacture such goods in any significant quantity was generally wanting. Consequently, a wide distribution of mass-produced burial furnishings (English or American) in America, much less in Texas, prior to the mid-19th century is doubtful.

Winchell and Moir (1992:154) further note the paucity of decorative furnishings on coffins at Sinclair Cemetery as compared to reported assemblages at neighboring Tucker Cemetery (McReynolds et al. 1981). They present a plausible explanation for the limited assemblage, noting the earlier age of the Sinclair Cemetery, relative to the beautification-of-death trend (Winchell and Moir 1992:154). In their assessment of the socioeconomic profile for Sinclair cemetery, however, Moir et al. (1992:175) underestimate the influence of market access. During the intervening time between the use of Tucker and Sinclair Cemetery, rail lines and fraternal societies were established in Texas. Rail lines introduced in Texas beginning in the 1870s allowed more rapid and

relatively inexpensive transport of material culture. Introduction of improved transportation infrastructure is likely to have contributed to a marked improvement in the distribution and lower costs of burial furnishings. Fraternal societies, also introduced to Texas in the late-19th century often guaranteed that even the poorest member was buried in a respectable manner (Earls et al. 1991).

These introductions unquestionably resulted in an appreciable amount of variation in mortuary display within a relatively short period. For this reason, interpretations made by Winchell and Moir based on comparisons to examples dating to this period are especially suspect. Market access or a lack thereof, is clearly a likely explanation for the paucity of decorative burial furnishings recovered at Sinclair Cemetery. Likewise, it is reasonably plausible, insofar as Larsen et al. (1995:143) consider early-19th century Illinois a frontier setting, that the paucity of decorative burial furnishings reported at the Cross Homestead Cemetery in Illinois is attributable to a limited market access to particular burial furnishings.

Inter-cemetery comparisons are clearly valuable to the study of mortuary material culture, but must always pay careful attention to their sociohistorical contexts. Examination of the positioning Sinclair and Cross Homestead cemeteries in Figure 7 indicates that their associated assemblages are representative of their respective periods within the established trend. The relative frequencies of burial receptacle shape and decorative attributes are consistent with those of their contemporaries, including Choke Canyon Reservoir, Varnell, and Mt. Gilead cemeteries. The paucity or absence of

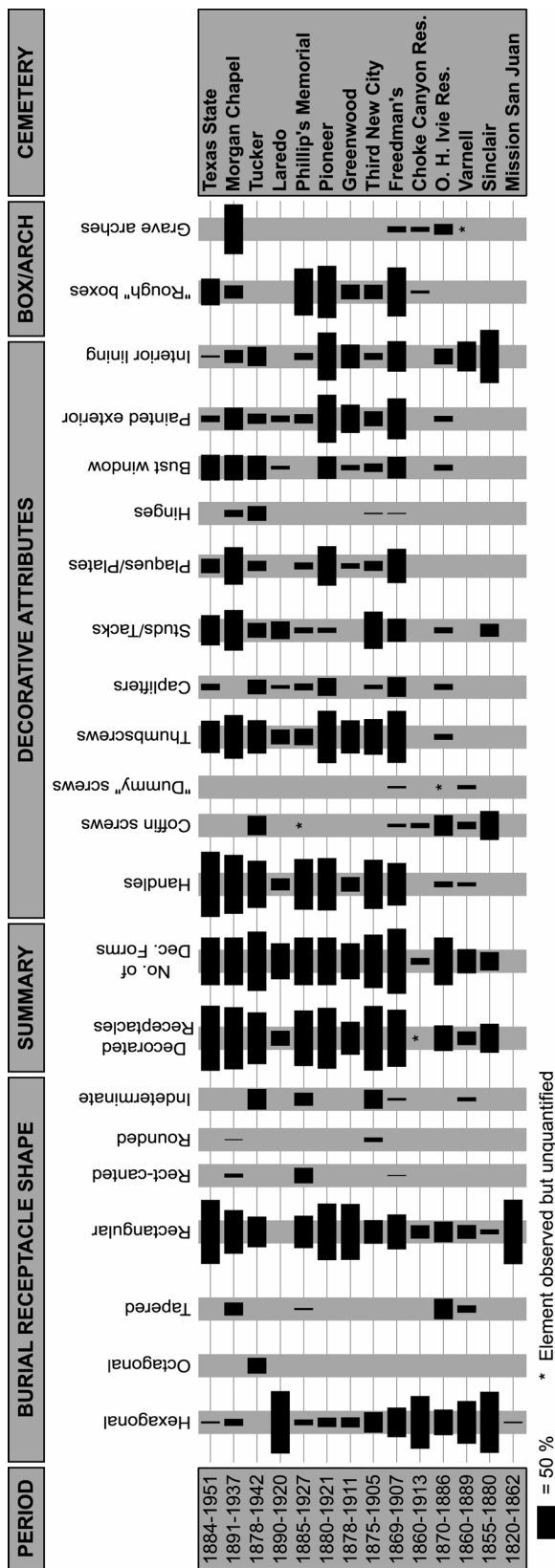
decorative burial furnishings could be a product of frontier-demanded austerity or a reflection of popular practice during the mid-19th century, or both.

Poverty, however, is also a likely explanation for the mortuary assemblages reported at Sinclair and Cross Cemeteries, insofar as many pioneers were so clearly looking to improve upon their economic condition. This explanation is haphazard, however, in the absence of an adequate understanding of popular patterns in mortuary display and the pervasiveness of these patterns in certain economic contexts. For the period represented by these two populations, a lack of decorative burial furnishings does not necessarily indicate poverty, considering the cemeteries rural settings and age with respect to the beautification-of-death trend.

### **Texana-Specific Patterns in Mortuary Display**

Mortuary display in Texas cemeteries dating 1821-1870 are especially susceptible to misinterpretation, as already well demonstrated in the case of Sinclair Cemetery. As noted, few attempts have been made to assess mortuary display within holistic sociohistorical frameworks and even fewer attempts have been made to assess mortuary display as it relates to particular sociohistorical contexts.

Austerity in mortuary assemblages appears to characterize a pattern reflected by examples in Texas dating to the mid-19th century (Figure 8). This austerity pattern persists in rural mortuary assemblages well into the late-19th century (Fox 1984). Take for example, a south Texas doctor's grave, dating to 1894, which is arguably that of an individual of comparatively elevated social standing (Fox 1984:12). The reported mortuary assemblage consisted of a rectangular coffin decorated with white metal coffin screws. All recovered burial furnishings were available as early as 1850, as were other decorative items not found (e.g., handles, studs/tacks, plaques/plates, etc). In the absence of chronological data and knowledge about presumed social status, lines of argument made by Moir et al. 1992 (1992) and Larsen et al. (1995), would indicate that the austere assemblage was representative of an individual of limited socioeconomic standing. As noted, however, a paucity of recovered burial furnishing does not necessarily equate to lower socioeconomic status.



**FIGURE 8. Relative frequencies (i.e., measures of relative popularity) of selected burial furnishings among Texas cemetery investigations ranked by mean age.**



Analytical and interpretive results presented here illustrate the significance of temporal, spatioeconomic, status-related, and culturally-related variation in the development and application of chronological and socioeconomic indices pertaining to mortuary display. These results also identify a patterned signature for Texana (1821-1870) mortuary display:

- Burial furnishings commonly reported for this period are simple hexagonal coffins constructed with cut nails and decorated with coffin screws and/or tacks with white-metal heads.
- Other types of decorative furnishings prove nonexistent or scarce in Texana interments.
  - Thumbscrews and caplifters are not found, at least as shown by the present study, in Texas interments prior to the 1870s (Figure 8).
  - Handles, often located on the sides and occasionally the ends of burial receptacles, have proven to be far from common use in Texas interments during the early-19th century. Following the commercialization and mass production of decorative hardware beginning in the mid-19th century their use intensifies and many popular motifs are patented and available for purchase through trade catalogues and merchants/wholesalers. Despite this increased availability, handles are rare in Texas interments prior to the late-19th century.

- Other forms of decorative hardware (e.g., plaques/plates, studs/tacks, and hinges) found in limited numbers in early- to mid-19th century interments elsewhere in America are similarly scarce in Texas interments prior to the late-19th century.

A direct relation between status and grave wealth is difficult to find in the data presented in this chapter. A paucity of decorative furnishings, though admittedly often characteristic of impoverished status, is equally, if not more so, attributable to popular fashion trends and the pervasiveness and timing of these trends in particular sociohistorical contexts. The pervasiveness of the beautification-of-death trend, as reflected in a greater distribution of inexpensive burial furnishings and increased embellishment of burial receptacles, is poorly represented in Texas between 1821 and 1870, if at all. Judging from archaeological findings dating to this period in Texas, it would not be until circa 1870 that this trend was readily apparent (Figure 8).

### **Concluding Remarks**

As others have suggested (Cannon 1989; Bell 1990; Little et al. 1992; Buikstra et al. 2000) and this study emphasizes, sociohistorical context is a requisite consideration of an assessment of socioeconomic status based on recovered mortuary assemblages. Patterns in mortuary display were very much influenced by competitive mortuary behavior. The rise of mass production and mass consumerism in the mid-late-

19th century resulted in the increased distribution of relatively inexpensive burial furnishings. Because of increased availability and competitive mortuary display, divisions of socioeconomic status were increasingly blurred. Further confusing such divisions, abandonment of elaborate mortuary display by the elite at the end of the Victorian Period in the early-20th century resulted in the loss of ornate detail in favor of a streamlined appearance (Figure 7).

Onset of the beautification-of-death trend in rural/frontier settings, as manifested in the pattern of increased embellishment of burial receptacles, is noticeably delayed in Texana Texas. Moreover, this delay is clearly demonstrated when comparing cemetery assemblages from rural/frontier economies to those in or near urban centers. If this delay is not recognized, rural/frontier mortuary assemblages, when compared to the assemblages of individuals of similar socioeconomic standing living in urban economies, would incorrectly indicate an impoverished state. That said, comparisons of assemblages collected from rural/frontier cemeteries to those in urban settings, warrant careful consideration of factors influencing variation in mortuary display.

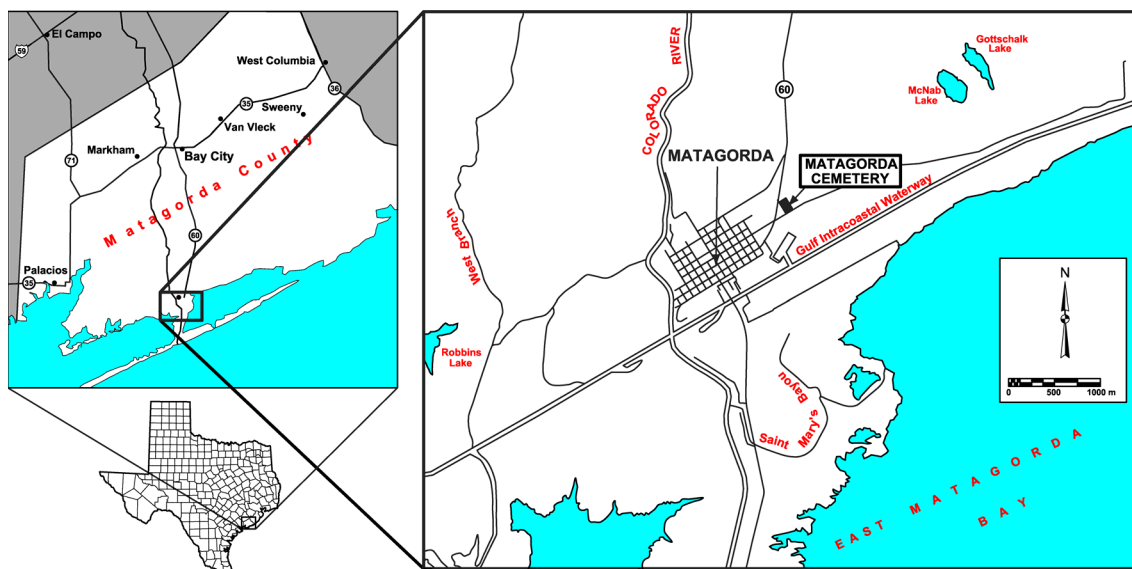
## CHAPTER VIII

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT MATAGORDA CEMETERY

In July 2000, the Matagorda Cemetery Association approached the Center for Ecological Archaeology (CEA), Texas A&M University asking to help identify the contents of a low, earthen mound near the center of Matagorda Cemetery, Matagorda, Texas (Figure 9). Local lore held that the mound in question was a mass grave containing victims of one of three catastrophes: an 1826 conflict between Anglo settlers and Karankawa Indians, an 1862 yellow fever outbreak, or an 1863 Confederate boating tragedy. The mound, according to local informants, had long since been unmarked, but nonetheless had been maintained by members of the community for more than 100 years (George Deshotels, pers. comm. cited in Thoms 2001b).

Provided adequate demographic information could be gleaned from historical documents listing the victims of the three catastrophes, an examination of the remains of the individuals beneath the low earthen mound should result in the positive identification of those interred. It was with such hopes in mind that the Matagorda Cemetery Association funded the CEA's investigation of the low mound in the fall of 2000. Resulting research could not match any of the individuals buried beneath the low mound to demographic profiles of victims of any of the three catastrophes, but investigators concluded that they were unknown citizens of the surrounding community (Thoms 2001b:1).

Though investigations did not reveal the identities of those interred, the opportunity offered a wealth of information concerning Texas burial custom, including evidence of a near 150-year-long history of caretaking at the site (Thoms 2001a:62-66). Additionally, the investigation sparked interest within the community and presented a privileged opportunity to work with community members, several of whom descended from those interred within the cemetery. All materials, with the exception of a tooth collected from each adult for future DNA analysis, were reburied following the study (Thoms 2001b:3-7).



**FIGURE 9. Location of Matagorda Cemetery (modified from Thoms 2001b:Figure 2).**

## History of Matagorda Cemetery

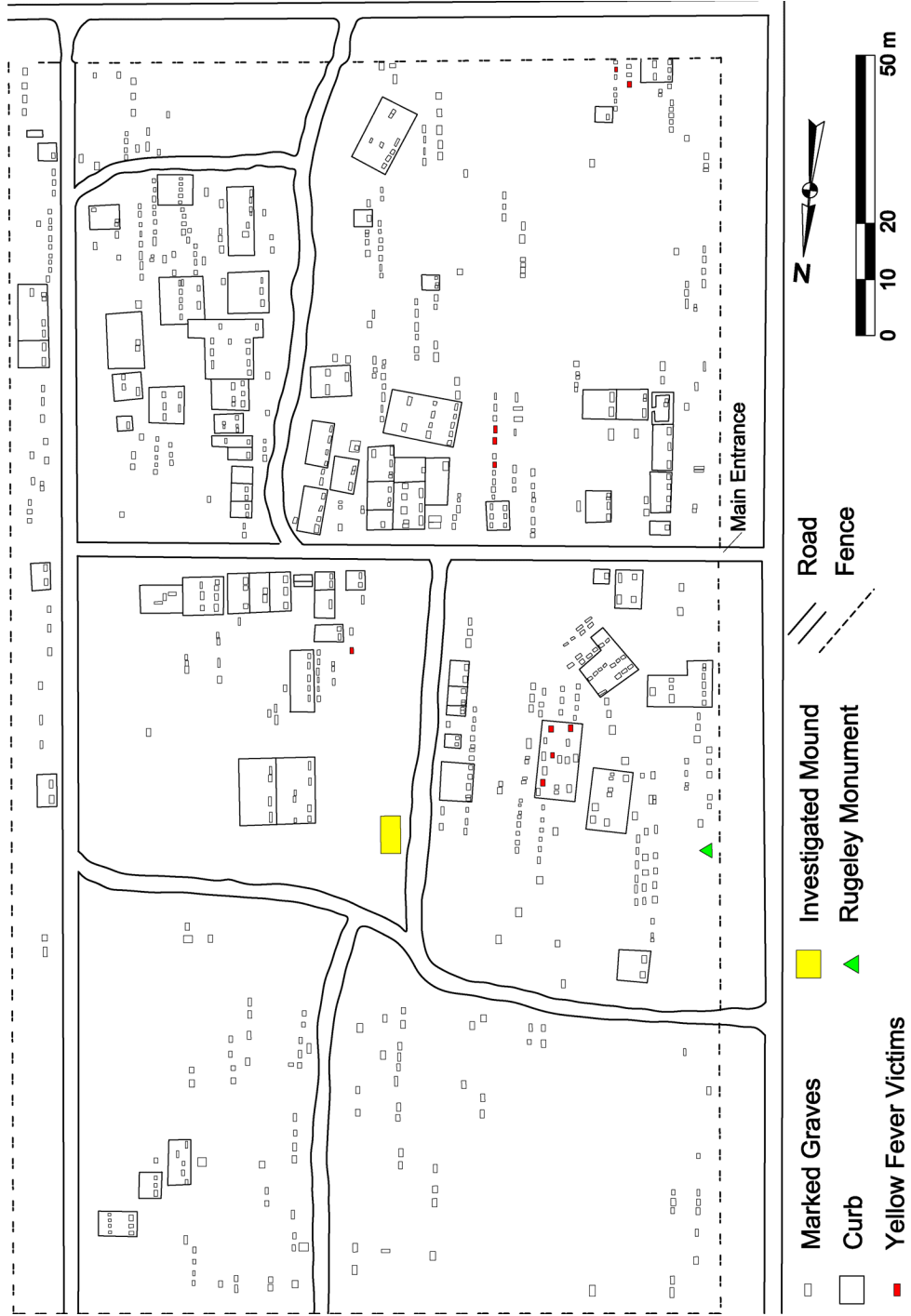
In May of 1822, the *Only Son* landed at the mouth of the Colorado River introducing Stephen F. Austin's colonists to Texas (Kleiner 2002a). Shortly after their arrival, problems with Indians arose. While the settlers reconnoitered inland, resident Karankawas plundered the expedition's supplies and killed several men left behind to guard them (Kleiner 2002a). In light of similar misfortunes and subsequent skirmishes with Indians, the need for a secure entry point for recruited colonists became exceedingly clear if the colony was to succeed. Mexico, however, prohibited Anglo settlements within ten leagues of the coast (Barker 2002). Austin succeeded in petitioning the Mexican government for an exception to this prohibition and the port town of Matagorda was founded in 1826 (Kleiner 2002a).

Elias Wightman, co-founder and planner of the town of Matagorda, procured Matagorda's first residents from New York and the greater New England area (Kleiner 2002b). Wightman and his family accompanied by a party of 52 families, landed January 1829 at the mouth of the Colorado River via the *Little Zoe* (Stieghorst 1965:10-11).

Shortly after their landing, Wightman's parents fell fatally ill and were soon buried, his mother in 1829 and his father in 1830, at the base of a mesquite tree (Kite 1990:99; Reeves 1998:9). In 1835, Matagorda officials designated that location as Matagorda Cemetery (Matagorda City Council 1863).

The cemetery serves the surrounding community to the present day. In 2001, Ms. Geraldine Havard of the Matagorda Cemetery Association reported approximately 1,211 marked interments within the cemetery (pers. comm., cited in Stahman 2001b:11). It is believed as many as 350 unmarked interments are located within the cemetery property lines (Texas Historical Sites Atlas 2003; Figure 10).

Among those interred within the cemetery, are persons participating in the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Texas Revolution, and the American Civil War. Victims of the three catastrophes mentioned in the introduction of this chapter are also present within the cemetery. Exact whereabouts of many of these victims are unknown, although, locations of several yellow fever victims are marked on a 1974 plan view map developed by members of the Bay City Jr. Historians, along with the Rugeley monument, a tribute to victims of the Confederate boating tragedy (Figure 10).



**FIGURE 10. Bay City Jr. Historians' plan view map of Matagorda Cemetery circa 1974 (modified from Stahman 2001).**



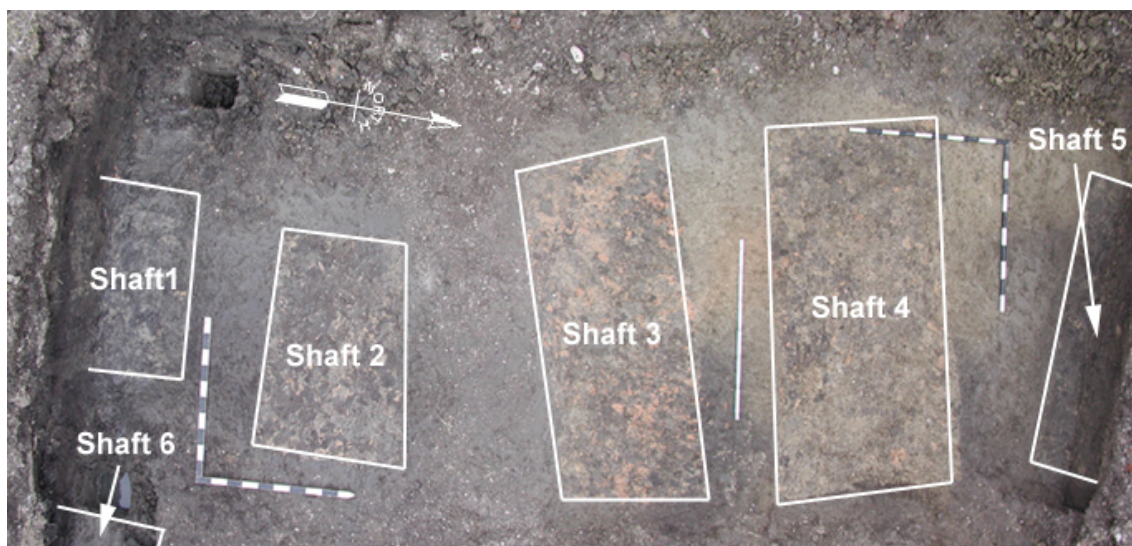
## Archaeological Findings

Anticipating a mass grave, expectations were that excavation of the low earthen mound would reveal one large pit containing the remains of a number of individuals laid to rest shoulder to shoulder. Mechanical scraping of the mound surface to a depth of approximately 0.50 m, however, revealed the rectangular outlines of six individual burial shafts. Shafts were distinguishable from surrounding soils by their mottled color resulting from the mixing of soil horizons (i.e., A, Bt, and C horizons) in the back dirt (Thoms 2001d:23; Figure 11).



**FIGURE 11.** Photograph of grave shaft fill (at center, right), which is readily distinguishable from surrounding sediments (modified from Thoms 2001d:Figure 15).

These graves were designated, from south to north, as Shafts 1 through 5. The corner of a possible grave shaft was later discovered while cleaning up the walls at the SE corner of the excavation and designated Shaft 6 (Crow 2001:30-31; Figure 12).



**FIGURE 12. Photograph (bird's eye perspective) of excavation area with delineated shaft outlines (from Crow 2001:Figure 21).**

### ***Burial Summaries***

Of the six shafts identified (heretofore referred to as Burials 1 through 6), Burials 2, 3, 4, and 5 were selected for excavation in the hopes of that they might provide clues as to the sex, age, cause, and timing of death, of those interred. Burial 1, due to its size, was identified as that of an infant. Difficulty determining sex from an infant's skeletal remains and an often-reported lack of time-diagnostic artifacts precluded further investigation. Burial 6, of which only a corner was exposed within the excavation unit, was also not investigated further (Thoms 2001d:26).

Shaft depths, measured to the bottom of exposed burials, ranged from 5.5 – 6.2 ft (1.7 – 1.9 m). Shaft fill consisted of densely packed backdirt. All depths were measured from a site datum on the modern surface. The nearest reference elevation was United States Geological Survey monument number 755, which lies at 9.0 ft (2.73 m) above mean sea level (Crow 2001). Summaries of each burial, modified from Crow (2001), are provided below.

#### **Burial 1**

Burial 1 was evidenced as a small rectangular, readily visible, area of fill measuring 2.9 x 1.6 ft (0.85 x 0.50 m). Based on its size, it was assumed to hold an infant burial, and therefore, was not further investigated as it was unlikely to contribute

useful information regarding the sex or time of interment. Accordingly, grave-shaft depth remains unknown, as does the type of burial receptacle contained therein.

### Burial 2

Located approximately 1.5 ft (0.45 m) north of Burial 1, the shaft of Burial 2 was also rectangular in shape, measuring 4.3 x 2.6 ft (1.30 x 0.80 m). The size of this grave shaft suggested that it contained the remains of a small child.

At a depth of approximately 5.5 ft (1.68 m), crew members encountered wood remnants forming a roughly rectangular pattern. Further excavation revealed a poorly preserved tapered coffin placed within a closely-fitted niche at the bottom of the shaft. Spanning across the top of the coffin, and resting on the remaining unexcavated surfaces at the bottom of the shaft, lay a series of boards or coffin arches (Figure 5). The arches, at some point, had failed under the weight of the fill. The coffin lid had collapsed, crushing and disarticulating the skeletal remains within. Coffin walls (side and end boards) had imploded, filling every empty space with soil.

“Dummy” screws were found immediately above the exposed burial remains. Other than these and machine cut nails, no additional metal hardware was found inside or outside of the coffin. Initially, this was thought to imply that the coffin was hastily constructed, but it does appear that time was taken to stain the wood. Coffin arches above Burial 2 exhibited alternating light/dark patterning, possibly resulting from wood stain treatments (Figure 13).

Burial 2 contained the poorly preserved remains of child approximately 2-3 years in age. Other than materials related to the coffin, three white porcelain buttons were found in the pelvic region (Derrick 2001:40-42; Thoms 2001a:62).



**FIGURE 13. Photograph showing possible staining of alternating boards of coffin arch in Burial 2.**

### Burial 3

Located 1.3 ft (0.4 m) north of Burial 2, Burial 3 was identified as a rectangular outline measuring 6.6 x 2.6 ft (2.0 x 0.80 m) with a depth of 6.2 ft (1.90 m). Approximately 3 ft (0.91 m) below the present surface, crewmembers encountered what were initially thought the uppermost portion of the head and footends of a coffin. Upon further inspection, however, the boards, positioned well above the coffin within the shaft, were attributed as gravemarker remnants, whose above ground sections had long since disappeared. What remained was a 1 x 10 in plank at the west end of the shaft and a 1 in thick plank of undetermined width positioned at the east end.

Approximately 4.5 ft (1.37 m) below the present surface, traces of wood forming a rectangular outline were visible within the shaft. Careful hand excavation continued, revealing coffin arches like those discovered above the coffin in Burial 2. Similar to Burial 2, the coffin arches within Burial 3 exhibited alternating light/dark patterning. These arches were more substantial than that those in Burial 2, and had retained some rigidity. Once the wooden arches were removed, the outline of a hexagonal-shaped coffin was clear. Decorative "dummy" screws, similar to those in Burial 2, were found laying on top of the remains within. The only other metal hardware recovered consisted of machine-cut nails.

Because of the grave arches, remains in Burial 3 were the best preserved of the investigated interments, with voids (air pockets) intact inside the coffin. No other interment contained such voids. While the best preserved, coffin remains nonetheless

exhibited some implosion and crushing. Portions of the coffin sides were splayed inward, due to external pressure exerted upon them by the coffin vault and the fill above it. Remains in Burial 3 were somewhat disarticulated as a result of coffin failure and repeated exposure to the water table.

Burial 3 contained the comparatively well-preserved remains of a male, probably of Euroamerican descent, in his early 20s. An ambrotype photograph, consisting of two glass plates, a punched metal mat, and wooden frame, was found positioned near his left hand (Stahman 2001a:54-57). A gold ring, possibly a wedding band, was found between the glass and wooden back (Derrick 2001:42-43).

#### Burial 4

Burial 4 lay 1 ft (0.30 m) to the north of Burial 3, with shaft dimensions measuring 6.9 x 2.6 x 5.7 ft (2.10 x 0.80 x 1.70 m). As with Burial 3, excavated simultaneously, the remains of a probable wooden gravemarker at the west end of the shaft were initially mistaken for the headboard of the burial receptacle. This gravemarker remnant also consisted of an upright 1 x 10 in plank.

Continued excavation of burial 4 revealed the wooden lid of a rectangular outer receptacle, or "rough" box, enclosing a hexagonal-shaped coffin. Other than machine cut nails, no metal hardware was present on either receptacle. Both the rough box and hexagonal coffin exhibited the same pattern of implosion detailed above, subjecting their contents to the crushing forces of the fill above.

Excavations were not extensive enough to determine the shape of the bottom of grave shaft 4, but it is suspected that it was flat bottomed. Given the presence of an outer "rough" box and lack of grave arches, it is unlikely that the sidewalls of the shaft were stepped inward (Chapter IV).

Burial 4 contained the remains of a male in his early 30s, possibly of Hispanic or Native American descent, indicated by the shoveling trait observed on central incisors (Derrick 2001:43-44). A single wooden button was found in the pelvic area (Thoms 2001a:64).

#### Burial 5

Burial 5, located at the north end of the low mound, consisted of a shaft measuring 5.9 x 2.6 x 6.3 ft (1.80 x 0.80 x 1.90 m), at the bottom of which sat a simple rectangular coffin constructed with machine cut nails. Other than possible staining of the wood, no decorative treatments were evident. Weight of overlying fill had compressed and deformed the lid such that it appeared to drape over the deceased (Crow 2001:34). Here, too, excavations did not permit inspection of the shape of the shaft bottom. Given the presence of a rectangular receptacle and absence of grave arches, however, it is reasonable to assume the sidewalls of the shaft were not stepped inward.

Burial 5 contained the remains of a female, probably of Euroamerican descent, in her late 20s to early 30s. A pair of gold pendant earrings were discovered immediately to the left and right side of the skull (Derrick 2001:44-45).



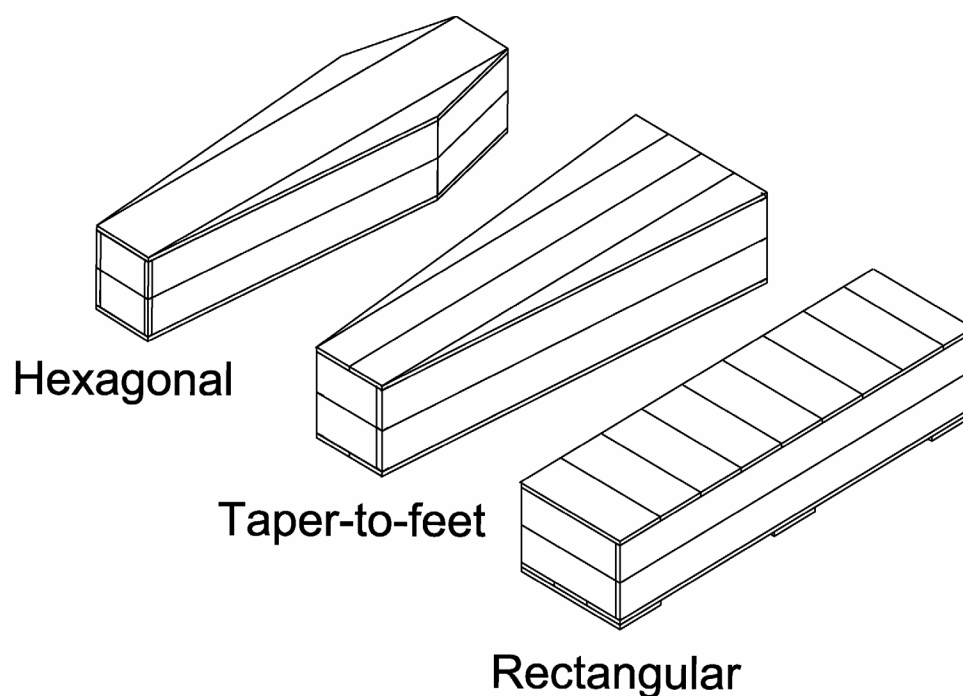
### Burial 6

One end of an apparent grave shaft, designated Burial 6, was discovered in the southeast corner of the excavated area along with a portion of a likely gravemarker. Further excavations were not undertaken at grave shaft 6 due to time constraints. Given that Burial 6 extended well beyond the low mound and the shellcrete/brick curb, it does not appear to have been part of the same plot(s) that contained Burials 1 through 5. Its presence, however, suggests that still other unmarked graves may be present in the area near the low mound (Thoms 2001a:65).

### *Burial Receptacles and Subterranean Architecture*

The four burials chosen for excavation revealed four wooden burial receptacles of three different styles: taper-to-feet, hexagonal, and rectangular forms constructed of hardwood pine, probably loblolly or longleaf (Dr. J Philip Dering, pers. comm., cited in Crow 2001:28; Figure 14). The receptacles in Burials 2, 3, and 4, on which coffin arches were evidenced, were likely manufactured locally. The burial receptacle in Burial 5, however, was enclosed within a rough box suggesting more common with mass-produced receptacles. All of the burial receptacle styles discovered were evidenced throughout the 19th-century America, though the combination of a

rectangular receptacle and rough box in Burial 5 suggest a post-1850 interment date (Figure 8).



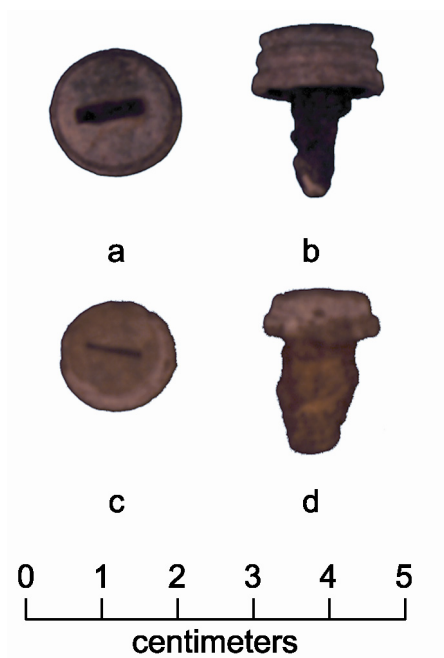
**FIGURE 14. Illustration of construction, as modeled, of burial receptacles forms discovered beneath the low mound (modified from Crow 2001:Figure 18).**

### *Coffin Hardware*

The burial receptacles contained only a limited array of coffin hardware, notably machine-cut nails and finishing tacks, found within Burials 1 through 5, and "dummy"

screws, found within Burials 2 and 3 (Figure 15). Machine-cut nails date circa 1830 to the 1890s, when popularly replaced by wire nails. Finishing tacks, probably evidence of a cloth-lined coffin interior, found in at least two interments appeared to have been machine cut and are likely of similar age. "Dummy" screws, were found in association with the lids of receptacles in Burials 2 and 3. As discussed in Chapter IV, this type of fastener was commonly used to decorate the perimeter of the lid and is actually a tack disguised as a screw. The types of "dummy" screws found within Burials 2 and 3 (Figure 15) were among those advertised in mail-order catalogs that circulated from the mid-late-19th century, including catalogs for Sargent & Company, H.E. Taylor & Company, and Peck and Walter Manufacturing Company (Davidson 2000:238).

Unexpected at the time (i.e., before the present study), no handles were discovered on any of the burial receptacles. Initial impressions were that the limited amount of recovered decorative hardware was suggestive of poverty or a hastily-performed interment.



**FIGURE 15. Photographic plate showing the two types of “dummy” screws discovered beneath the low mound (a and b are views of the head and profile of type 1 and c and d are views of the head and profile of type 2).**

### *Gravemarkers and Grave-Tending Events*

During investigations of the low mound, the significance of the cemetery to the community of Matagorda was evident in the willingness and eagerness of the community members to contribute their stories and at times pick up a shovel to help with investigations. The most powerful demonstration of this significance, however, manifested itself in the archaeological record and consisted of evidence of some 150

years of caretaking of the graves, much of which was performed after the graves became unmarked.

Examination of the earth that covered the graves yielded remnants of gravemarkers, fence posts, and an enclosing curb (Figure 16). Fragments of flower vases and libation bottles were found within the mound fill as well (Thoms 2001a:66). Evidence of gravemarkers, either positioned at the head or footend of a grave, at Matagorda Cemetery was found in Burials 3, 4, and 6. As noted, headboards consisted of planks, about the dimensions of a 1 x 10 in, placed at the floor of the shaft against the west (head) end of the coffins (Burials 4 and 6) and originally must have protruded 2-3 ft above the surface. Fragments of a slightly narrower plank were uncovered at the east end of Burial 3 and likely represent a footboard (Crow 2001:34). Judging from the width of the remnant bases of the gravemarkers, it is quite possible that they could represent the popular tablet form common in southern folk cemeteries prior to the late-19th century (Jordan 1982:41).

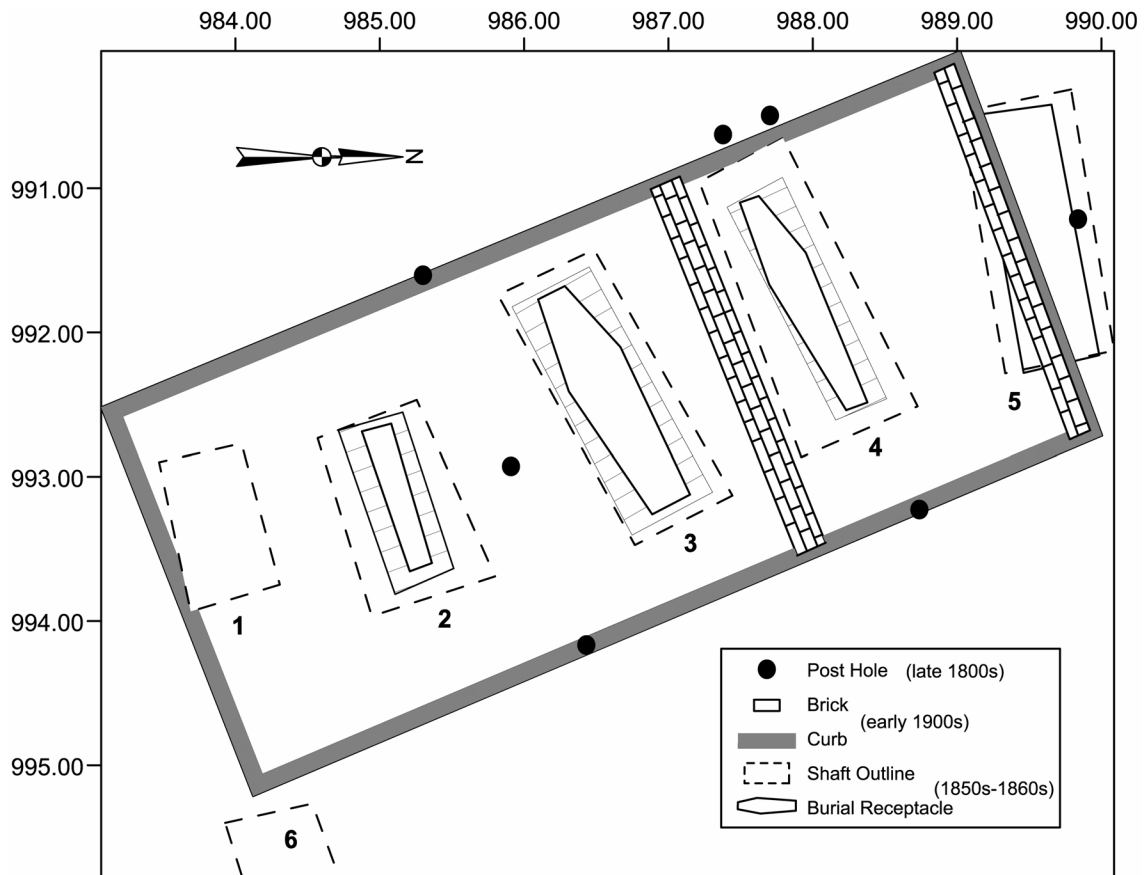
Sometime prior to construction of a shellcrete/brick curb in the early-20th century, the wooden gravemarkers probably fell victim to insects, decay, grass fires, flood, and/or storm surges. It is reasonable to assume that the original position of one or more graves had been lost by the time a fence was constructed around several of the graves, insofar as one of the postholes for the fence had been dug into the shaft for Burial 5 (Figure 17). This fence eventually fell victim to fire, judging from the fact that several of the postholes contained the charred remnants of wooden fence posts (Thoms 2001d:21-23). With the addition of a shellcrete/brick curb in the early-20th century,

three or more of the grave shafts (i.e., those of Burials 1, 4, 5) were cross-cut, suggesting that their original position had been lost by that time (Thoms 2001a:66).



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Original topsoil (early 1800s)                         | 6. Large shells and shell-rich soil, part of curb episode (same time frame as #6) |
| 2. Burial Shaft #3 (ca. 1850s)                            | 7. Mound building over curbed area (mid 1900s)                                    |
| 3. Shell-rich layer covering grave shaft (mid-late 1800s) | 8. Geocloth (capping layer #7) (1975-1985)  |
| 4. Black topsoil layer (late 1800s-early 1900s)           | 9. Shell-rich fill (same time frame as geo-cloth)                                 |
| 5. Shell-crete/brick curb (early 1900s)                   |   |

**FIGURE 16. Profile of balk wall in central portion of low mound with caretaking episodes identified (modified from Thoms 2001a:Figure 48).**



**FIGURE 17. Plan view of grave shaft and burial receptacle dimensions in relation to fence post and shell-crete/brick curb (modified from Stahman 2001a:Figure 32).**

### *Observations of Traditional Burial Practices at Matagorda Cemetery*

The burials beneath the low mound, as well as many of the surrounding examples within the cemetery, share many traits associated with the southern folk cemetery complex. Among these is the practice of scraping and mounding of graves. This, as discussed earlier in Chapter III, was replaced in the 20th century with the

surfacing of graves with rock, shell, or concrete. The mounding of earth above the interments at Matagorda Cemetery stands as a prime example of such practices.

The most notable of practices at southern folk cemeteries, however, is the shared east-west alignment and family clustering of graves within the cemetery (Figure 10). Provided the graves beneath the low mound are representative of wider patterns evident throughout most of Matagorda Cemetery, the close proximity of these graves to one another suggests a shared (sanguine or affine) relation.

### **Discussion of Findings**

As noted, demographic data garnered from osteological analysis could not positively match those interred beneath the low mound to any of the victims of the three catastrophes (Derrick 2001:45-46). However, data were obtained, in most cases, for age, sex, and ethnicity for Burials 2 through 5 (Derrick 2001:41-45; Table 6). All of the individuals appeared moderately healthy with no evidence of traumatic injury or disease that might be related to death. Interestingly, the skeletal remains of the adult individuals lacked evidence of the physical trauma associated with hard physical labor, probably evidence of a “sedentary occupation” (Derrick 2001:46).



**TABLE 6. ESTIMATIONS OF AGE, SEX, AND ETHNICITY FOR BURIALS 2 THROUGH 5**

Grave	Age (in years)	Sex	Ethnicity
2	2-3	Indeterminate	Indeterminate
3	Early 20s	Male	European American
4	Early 30s	Male	European American
5	Late 20s to mid 30s	Female	European American

Data source: Derrick 2001

Relationships shared by the individuals beneath the low mound and possible descendents within the community of Matagorda have not been established to date. As noted, one tooth from each of the adult individuals was collected for future DNA analysis that may tender additional clues as to their identities. Until that time, however, what is known of those interred beneath the low mound is limited to the results of the osteological analysis (Derrick 2001) and supplemented by our understanding of 19th-century burial practices.

### *Site Chronology*

#### Overall age of interments

Assuming the efficient use of cemetery space, location of the graves near the center of the cemetery is probably indicative of an earlier age, (Thoms 2001a:62). Given the age of the cemetery, all of the interments necessarily post-date 1830. Burial

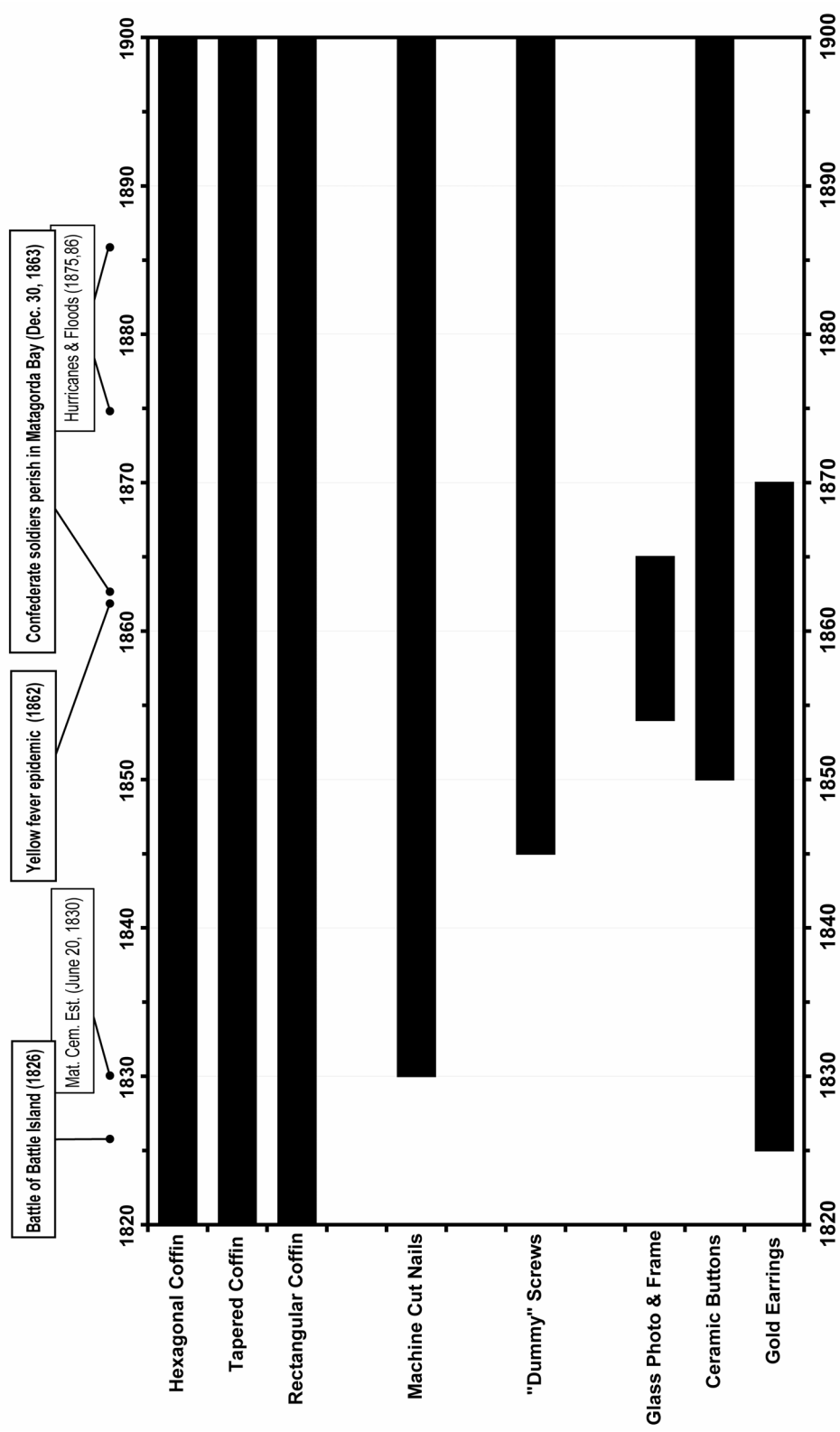
receptacle types observed were all in use during the 19th century. Use of grave arches and shipping of coffins in rough boxes dates from the mid-19th century to the early-20th century. Cut nails used in the construction of the burial receptacles and fence surrounding one or more of the graves provide a range of ca. 1830 to the 1890s. “Dummy” screws were introduced in the mid-19th century and lost favor by the end of the century. The combined intervals suggest interment dates sometime between 1850 and 1900.

This age assessment is supported and refined by the ages of several personal effects observed, including porcelain buttons in Burial 2 dating from 1850 to 1920, an ambrotype photograph produced between 1854 and 1865 placed in Burial 4, and gold earrings in fashion from 1825 to 1870 found in Burial 5 (Stahman 2001a:53-57). The initial manufacturing dates for all artifacts within the grave are pre-1860 (Thoms 2001a:62; Figure 18). Given the age of the ambrotype, dating circa 1854 to 1865, and the young age of the man interred in Burial 4, it is reasonable to assume that this particular interment occurred prior to the mid-1880s (Thoms 2001a:64).

Building on results presented in Chapter VII, patterns in popular use of burial furnishings observed in the interments suggest an earlier age. That is, the patterned signature produced by the mortuary assemblages reported for the interments beneath the low mound, when positioned by mean age (determined from a conservative age range of 1850 to 1880 based on findings in Thoms 2001c), appear to fit relatively well within the overall popularity (battleship-shaped) curves in the resulting seriation (Figure 7), as

shown in Figure 19. Elaborating, wellness of fit within these curves is evident when inspecting:

1. percentages of each observed burial receptacle shape (note the greater use of hexagonal coffins, an earlier popular form),
2. percentages of burial receptacles exhibiting some form of decorative embellishment (note similar measures at Varnell and Sinclair Cemeteries),
3. percentages of different decorative furnishings represented within the overall assemblage (note that lower values correspond to earlier age),
4. types of furnishings observed among the graves (note the relative frequencies of “dummy” screws compared to later assemblages; like coffin screws, “dummy” screws exhibit declining popularity following the introduction of thumbscrews post late 1860s),
5. ratio of grave arches to rough boxes (assuming that grave arches are indicative of local manufacture, an earlier practice as discussed in Chapters III and IV, also presents evidence for an earlier age).



**FIGURE 18. Graph of the popular use periods of selected articles discovered beneath the low mound (modified from Thoms 2001a:Figure 46).**

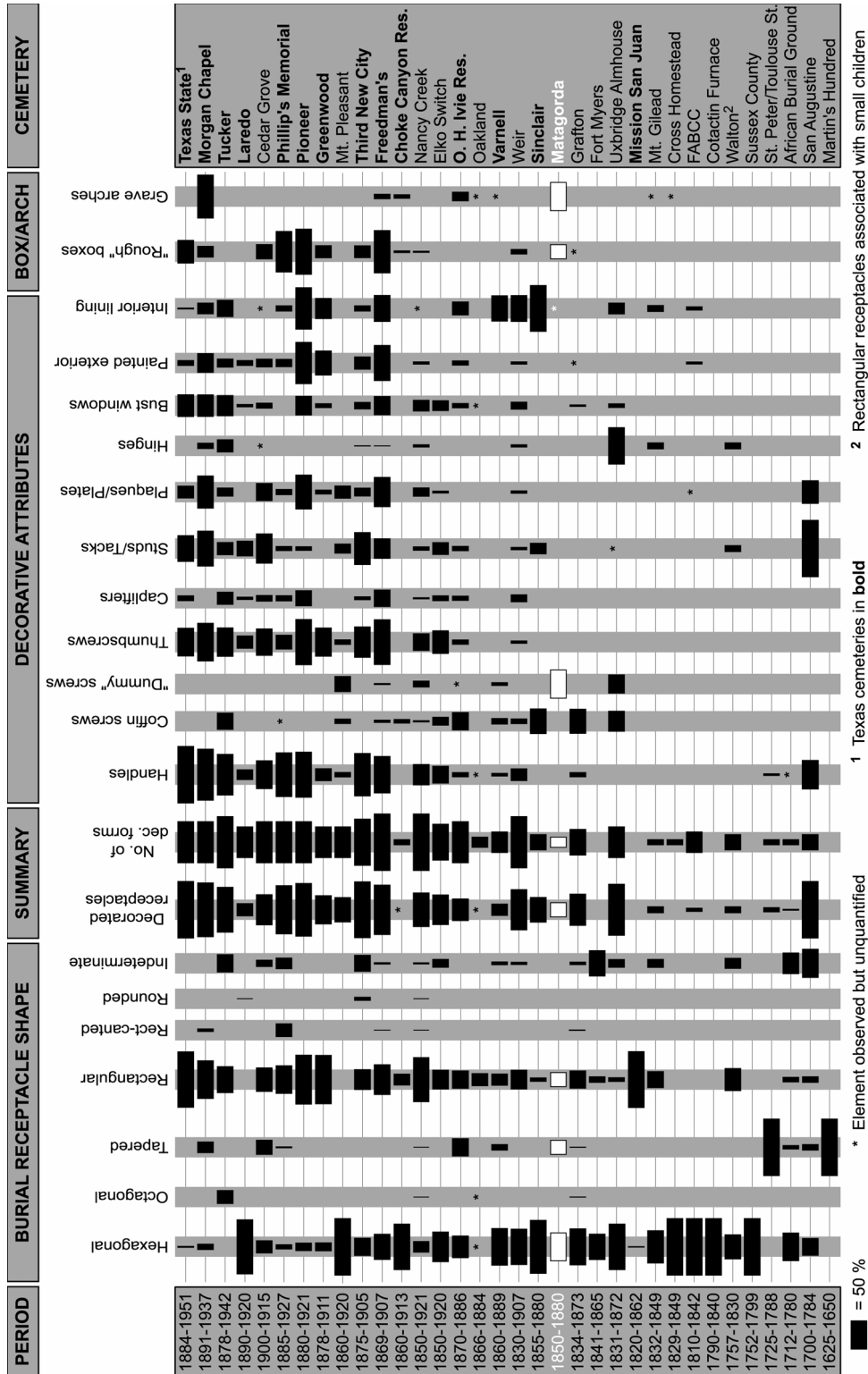


FIGURE 19. Seriation with Matagorda Cemetery mortuary assemblage positioned by mean age.

Overall, the observed assemblage of burial furnishings reflects, judging from contemporary examples, a pattern of relative austerity characteristic of an earlier age. Certainly, some or all of these measures can be argued the result of some influence other than their age, say impoverished status. As noted in the preceding chapter, however, time of interment appears, in almost every instance, the greatest influence in observed variation in mortuary display.

#### Interment sequence

More information relating to site chronology can be gleaned from an inspection of slight variation observed in the directional orientation and spacing of the identified grave shafts. It can be reasonably inferred that burials exhibiting differing orientational axes and inconsistent spacing correspond to discrete interment episodes (Noël Hume 1982:36; Riordan 1997:30-34). The argument holds to the premise that the excavator(s) of graves made efforts to maintain a degree of precision in their practice. It follows that each shaft was, in all probability, excavated with an awareness of the location of adjacent graves, such that adjacent graves were arranged in relatively neat line and none of the grave shafts intrude upon another. Sufficient time had passed, however, for weathering of the boundaries of the shafts, as delineated by mounding of graves surfaces, fencing, etc., rendered them less discernable. Subsequent interments were, as

the argument follows, positioned as best could be approximated at the time, resulting in varied alignments and distances between each successively excavated shaft.

Based on this inference and observations of grave shaft alignment, two or more discrete burial episodes may be indicated among the investigated burials. Grave shafts 3 and 4, with nearly identical axes (as well as similar shaft depths), may have been excavated within a relatively short time of each other, as may have burials 1 and 2. Given their proximity to one another and same overall orientation, it seems likely that the burials occurred over a reasonably narrow span of time sometime between the 1850s and mid-1880s.

It is tempting to speculate that, due to shared attributes (e.g., alignment, relatively evenly distributed spacing, coffin arches, etc), Burials 2, 3, and 4 represent a single episode or multiple, immediately occurring episodes. Following this line of evidence, suggests that Burial 5, containing the only rectangular receptacle and rough box, represents an episode unique to the other burials.

In Crow's (2001:36-37) original assessment, the investigated burials were chronologically ordered: 3, 4, 2, 5 insofar as tapered receptacles were argued to constitute a possible transitional form between hexagonal and rectangular forms (Davidson 2000:245). This assessment, in light of the findings presented in Chapters IV and VII, is probably inaccurate. Straight-sided burial receptacles (e.g., tapered and rectangular) were commonly employed in the interment of infants, well before such receptacles were popularly used for adult interments. Moreover, Figure 8 clearly depicts an earlier (essentially coeval) popular use of tapered and hexagonal coffins,

weakening the argument that the popularity of tapered forms followed that of hexagonal forms as a transitional form en route to the later preferred rectangular form. Given these findings, it is estimated that the burials were interred in the following sequence: 2, 3, 4, 5. This timing happens to correspond to the linear order of the grave in the ground, arguably further support for the given sequence.

### ***Socioeconomic Profile of Investigated Interments***

Given the limited material culture observed, the many interpretive complexities, and lack of synthesized information on the subject, however, no attempt was made by Crow (2001) to relate material culture to socioeconomic status. Examination of the skeletal remains, however, provided some insight into the socioeconomic status of the individuals (Derrick 2001). Osteological analysis indicated that the adult individuals had access to good nutrition. Further, the analysis found no physical evidence of trauma associated with hard physical or repetitive labor. It was suggested that these people owned or were employed by local businesses or held some other “sedentary occupation” (Derrick 2001:46).

In the present study, as shown in Figure 19, assemblages observed in interments beneath the mound compare to those at Sinclair Cemetery. Interpretations made by Moir et al. (1992) and Larsen et al. (1995), as noted, have attributed such assemblages to limited economic means. As discussed in Chapter VII, however, there are alternative and arguably, equally valid explanations for such mortuary assemblages, including



popular trends in the degree of ostentation witnessed in mortuary display and modest use of decorative furnishings as a product of limited access to related markets. Labeling the economy in Matagorda after the mid-19th century a frontier may be inaccurate (Marr 1928). Nonetheless, its distance from manufacturing sources and relative isolation from mainstream fashion trends likely resulted in a limited supply of and demand for particular mass-produced burial furnishings. Judging from contemporary examples in Figure 19 and information presented about burials of wealthier individuals in Chapter VII (Little et al. 1992; Garrow 1985:17-20), the Matagorda Cemetery mortuary assemblages are not uncommon for the graves of individuals of elevated socioeconomic status.

Although no definitive conclusions were reached regarding the socioeconomic profile of the individuals interred beneath the low mound, initial impressions of the paucity of observed burial furnishings as an indication of poverty or hastily performed interment appear unfounded. Material culture would appear to indicate that these individuals (or at least those that buried them) had some access to then popular burial furnishings (e.g., “dummy” screws). Although few personal effects were observed, the presence of an ambrotype photograph in Burial 3 and gold pendant earrings in Burial 5 are not indicative of poverty.

## Summary of Findings

Investigations of the graves beneath the low mound revealed remains of four individuals, a 2-3 year old child, a male in his 20s, a male in his 30s, and a female in her late 20s or early 30s. They were likely interred within one or two decades of each other in the 1850s and 1860s.

Archaeological investigations at Matagorda Cemetery did not identify the individuals interred beneath the low earthen mound. It is hoped, however, that this study has made some progress toward that goal while contributing to a larger body of knowledge concerning mortuary practices in Texas circa 1821-1870. Results of the present study contributed to a refinement of the site burial chronology and the addition of a socioeconomic profile based on osteological analyses and supported by observed material culture.

From all accounts, they enjoyed a lifestyle that kept them from hard physical or repetitive labor. Exactly how they passed is uncertain, but after death, they were buried in modest burial receptacles likely characteristic of the time and place. A fence was later constructed enclosing one or more of their graves, and various offerings including flowers and possible libations were left at the graves by attendants. Sometime near the end of 19th century, the exact location of these graves was lost as a result of damage sustained to gravemarkers attributable to rot, grass fires, or storm surges related to one of several hurricanes in the late-19th century (Figure 18). Despite the loss of their identity of those interred there, members of the community continued upkeep of the area

that evolved into the low mound. In the early-20th century, the community constructed a shell-crete curb around the graves. Additional improvements were made to the area up until the 1980s. Ultimately, community members contracted the Center for Ecological Archaeology, to identify the individuals beneath the mound in the hopes that some contribution could be made to the story of their lives and the history of the surrounding community.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The primary objective of this thesis has been to provide an historical overview and synthesis of archaeological data pertaining to mortuary display with an emphasis on Texas circa 1821 to 1870. This study began with a summary of popular patterns in mortuary practice in America with particular respect to related material culture and cemetery landscapes (Chapter II). In particular, the beautification-of-death trend in the late-18th and early-19th centuries is credited with resulting in increased sentimental and material investment in the dead. Results of this trend included a widely witnessed increase in the embellishment of burial furniture and a reorganization of cemetery landscapes to accommodate growing populations and maintain acceptable aesthetic and hygienic standards.

The pervasiveness and timing of the beautification-of-death trend is assessed for the Texana Period, 1821-1870, when Texas, while privy to popular trends, was subject to the primitivizing effects of life in rural and frontier settings (Chapter III). Accordingly, introduction and diffusion of popular currents in mortuary display and cemetery landscapes were delayed in much of Texas prior to the introduction of improved transportation systems in the late-19th century.

Review and synthesis of existing chronological and socioeconomic indices, developed primarily from CRM cemetery studies, were presented in Chapter IV. As noted, the present study focused on a refinement of chronological indices related to

mortuary practices and material culture used by Crow (2001) for dating investigated interments at Matagorda Cemetery.

To gain a better understanding of the relation between mortuary display and socioeconomic standing in Texana-Period Texas, a synthesis of archaeologically excavated mortuary assemblages was undertaken to develop a seriation reflecting the popularity of particular burial furnishings among multiple and diverse burial populations (Chapters V, VI, and VII). The resulting seriation provides an index of the influence of particular sociohistorical contexts on mortuary display. From this seriation, it was possible to demonstrate the complexities and the hazards of applying such indices to inter-cemetery analyses without an adequate understanding of regional- and site-specific contexts.

Results show that mortuary display is influenced by a number of factors, including popular trends, economic contexts, and cultural preference, that can complicate assessments of socioeconomic status. Findings presented herein are far from original, but the resulting seriation facilitates the identification and assessment of factors that influence mortuary display. At the same time, and of particular use in future cemetery studies, the seriation makes possible identification of a signature for mortuary display with respect to a period and place of study.

For Texana-Period Texas, the signature for mortuary display is a relatively modest one, with limited use of mass-produced burial furnishings. Economic constraints inherent in the frontier setting of 1821-1870 arguably limit status differentiation as a result of limited access to mass-produced burial furnishings.

Similarly, modest assemblages are present in the identified graves of wealthier individuals in better-settled populations dating within the same timeframe. Results of this study indicate that modest mortuary assemblages do not necessarily denote lower socioeconomic status.

### **Archaeological Investigations at Matagorda Cemetery**

A secondary objective of the present study has been to reassess, in light of the foregoing synthesis, results of archaeological investigations at Matagorda Cemetery in 2000 (Thoms 2001c). This reassessment entailed a detailed inspection of time diagnostics and development of a socioeconomic profile for investigated interments. Excepting the slight refinement of the conjectural sequence of interments, results presented in Chapter VIII essentially corroborate the originally established site chronology. Investigation of select traits relating to traditional burial practices allowed inferences to be made concerning a clear cultural affiliation within the southern folk cemetery complex.

The resulting seriation in Chapter VII, osteological evidence summarized in Chapter VIII from Derrick (2001), and observed personal effects were then used to assess the socioeconomic profile of those interred. Modest burial assemblages originally believed to be characteristic of an impoverished state or hastily performed burial were shown to have occurred with some frequency in the graves of well-to-do

individuals who lived near manufacturing and distribution centers, as discussed in Chapter VII.

### **Future Research**

While Davidson's (1999) work at Freedman's Cemetery clearly demonstrates the degree of chronological control achievable through a rigorous search of trade catalogues and patent records, research is still wanting on the pervasiveness of mass-produced burial furnishings in different sociohistorical contexts. Bell (1987:58) writes, "[a] connection between the arrival of the beautification of death and the appearance of ornate coffins needs to be reinforced with data on the timing of the introduction of these artifacts and their popularity within regions—a job for which archaeology is ably suited". Mortuary display prior to the beautification of death and wider distribution of mass-produced burial furnishings in the mid-late-19th century are also areas in need of greater attention. Beyond refinement of chronological and socioeconomic indices, such studies of mortuary material culture have the potential to sort through the many complexities associated with the transmission and absorption of popular fashions. In other words, results of mortuary-display studies also provide a proxy measure for the development, economic and otherwise, of particular sociohistorical contexts.

Factors influencing the degree of ostentation witnessed in mortuary assemblages identified through the seriation of archaeologically-recovered mortuary assemblages demonstrate that measures of mortuary display are more complex than to warrant a

direct relation to socioeconomic standing. Mortuary display is indeed subject to the influence of sociohistorical contexts (Cannon 1989; Little et al. 1992). Accordingly, development of an improved seriation, bolstered by documented histories detailing mortuary behavior in popular cultural contexts as well as marginal contexts, is a worthy endeavor capable of providing insights into various aspects of American culture.

This thesis has established a baseline from which the pervasiveness and timing of the beautification-of-death trend can be assessed in different sociohistorical and regional contexts. It is important to emphasize that the resulting seriation provides an index of the influence of particular historical and economic contexts on selected burial furnishings and treatments. It would greatly benefit from refinement afforded by additional investigations and closer inspections of sociohistorical contexts. Moreover, inspecting a greater number of burial furnishing, specific designs, and decorative motifs can offer further refinement.

Incomplete documentation and reporting of investigated mortuary material culture, as noted in Chapter IV, frustrated this and similar quantitative studies. The results of this thesis, nevertheless, should be of practical value to future archaeological and archival investigations at historic cemeteries. Suffice it to say that thorough documentation and research well serves the preservation of cemeteries and their contents as cultural resources.



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## APPENDIX A

## COMPILATION OF BURIAL RECEPTACLE DATA

Cemetery	Location	Begin date	End date	Mean Age	Hex	Oct	Taper-toe	Taper-head	Rect	Rect-Canted	Rounded	Ind	Total
Texas State	TX	1884	1951	1917.5	1	0	0	0	56	0	0	0	57
Morgan Chapel	TX	1891	1937	1914	2	0	4	0	14	1	0	0	21
Tucker	TX	1880	1942	1911	0	3	0	0	6	0	0	4	13
Laredo	TX	1895	1925	1910	22	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	23
Cedar Grove	TX	1900	1915	1907.5	17	0	14	6	33	0	0	9	79
Phillip's Memorial	TX	1885	1927	1906	4	0	1	0	26	12	0	10	53
Pioneer	TX	1880	1921	1900.5	2	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	15
Greenwood	TX	1878	1911	1894.5	2	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	14
Mt. Pleasant	SC	1860	1920	1890	37	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	37
Third New City*	TX	1875	1905	1890	98	0	0	0	113	0	18	91	320
Freedman's	TX	1869	1907	1888	513	0	0	0	607	1	0	29	1150
Choke Canyon Res.	TX	1860	1913	1886.5	25	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	31
Nancy Creek	TX	1850	1921	1885.5	9	0	0	0	37	0	0	1	47

## APPENDIX A: CONTINUED

Cemetery	Location	Begin date	End date	Mean Age	Hex	Oct	Taper-toe	Taper-head	Rect	Rect-Canted	Rounded	Ind	Total
Elko Switch	AL	1850	1920	1885	30	0	0	0	19	0	0	8	57
O. H. Ivie Res.	TX	1870	1886	1878	5	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	13
Oakland	GA	1866	1884	1875	*	*	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Varnell	TX	1860	1889	1874.5	13	0	2	0	4	0	0	1	20
Weir	TX	1830	1907	1868.5	15	0	0	0	8	0	0	1	24
Sinclair	TX	1855	1880	1867.5	15	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	16
Matagorda	TX	1850	1880	1865	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
Grafton	IL	1836	1892	1864	156	1	1	0	75	2	0	11	246
Fort Myers	FL	1841	1865	1853	9	0	0	0	2	0	0	9	20
Uxbridge Almshouse	MA	1831	1872	1851.5	25	0	0	0	2	0	0	4	31
Mission San Juan	TX	1820	1862	1841	1	0	0	0	91	0	0	0	92
Mt. Gilead	GA	1832	1849	1840.5	16	0	0	0	8	0	0	4	28
Cross	IL	1829	1849	1839	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26
FABCC	PA	1810	1842	1826	224	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	224
Catoctin Furnace	MD	1790	1840	1815	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31
Walton	CT	1757	1830	1793.5	12	0	0	0	11	0	0	5	28

**APPENDIX A: CONTINUED**

Cemetery	Location	Begin date	End date	Mean Age	Hex	Oct	Taper-toe	Taper-head	Rect-Canted	Rect	Rect-Canted	Rounded	Ind	Total
Sussex County	DE	1752	1799	1775.5	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
St. Peter/Toulouse	LA	1725	1788	1756.5	0	0	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
African Burial Ground	NY	1712	1796	1754	196	0	25	0	0	33	0	0	147	401
San Augustine	FL	1700	1784	1742	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	5	10
Martin's Hundred	VA	1625	1650	1637.5	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5

\* denotes presence of an element when quantity could not be tabulated

**APPENDIX B**

**COMPILATION OF DECORATIVE ATTRIBUTES AND RECEPTACLE-PROTECTING INCLUSIONS**

Cemetery	Location	Begin Date	End Date	Mean Age	# Of Containers	# Decorated Receptacles	# Of Dec. Forms	Handles	Coffin Screws	Dummy Screws	Thumbscrews	Caplifiers	Studs/Thumb Tacks	Plaques/Plates	Hinges	Viewing Glass	# With Paint	Lining	Outer Box	Grave Arch
Texas State	TX	1884	1951	1917.5	57	57	8	57	0	0	28	5	26	12	0	22	5	1	23	0
Morgan Chapel	TX	1891	1937	1914	21	20	8	21	0	0	14	0	13	12	2	8	7	4	4	16
Tucker	TX	1880	1942	1911	13	11	10	13	4	0	7	3	3	2	3	5	2	4	0	0
Laredo	TX	1895	1925	1910	23	5	6	23	0	0	5	1	6	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
Cedar Grove	TX	1900	1915	1907.5	79	32	8	79	0	0	37	8	41	24	0	7	11	*	20	0
Phillip's Memorial	TX	1885	1927	1906	53	46	8	53	*	0	13	5	4	5	0	0	7	5	38	0
Pioneer	TX	1880	1921	1900.5	15	14	8	15	0	0	12	4	1	9	0	5	11	11	12	0
Greenwood	TX	1878	1911	1894.5	14	7	6	14	0	0	7	0	0	1	0	1	6	5	3	0

## APPENDIX B: CONTINUED

Cemetery	Location	Begin Date	End Date	Mean Age	# Of Containers	# Decorated Receptacles	# Of Dec. Forms	Handles	Coffin Screws	Dummy Screws	Thumbscrews	Capliffers	Studs/Thumb Tacks	Plaques/Plates	Hinges	Viewing Glass	# With Paint	Lining	Outer Box	Grave Arch	
Mt. Pleasant	SC	1860	1920	1890	37	16	6	37	3	10	3	0	6	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third New City*	TX	1875	1905	1890	320	317	9	320	0	0	173	17	181	45	2	38	70	30	67	0	
Freedman's	TX	1869	1907	1888	1150	1006	11	1150	46	24	913	337	399	596	1	371	716	530	861	92	
Choke Canyon Res.	TX	1860	1913	1886.5	31	2	1	31	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	
Nancy Creek	TX	1850	1921	1885.5	47	28	11	47	1	5	14	1	3	7	2	9	2	1	1	0	
Elko Switch	AL	1850	1920	1885	57	30	7	57	8	0	23	5	12	2	0	10	0	0	0	0	
O. H. Ivie Res.	TX	1870	1886	1878	13	5	8	13	4	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	3	0	2	
Oakland	GA	1866	1884	1875	14	3	2	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	0	0	0	0	
Varnell	TX	1860	1889	1874.5	20	4	4	20	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	*	





## APPENDIX B: CONTINUED

Cemetery	Location	Begin Date	End Date	Mean Age	# Of Containers	# Decorated Receptacles	# Of Dec. Forms	Handles	Coffin Screws	Dummy Screws	Thumbscrews	Capliffers	Studs/Thumb Tacks	Plaques/Plates	Hinges	Viewing Glass	# With Paint	Lining	Outer Box	Grave Arch
FABCC	PA	1810	1842	1826	224	11	4	224	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	12	0	0
Catoctin Furnace	MD	1790	1840	1815	31	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Walton	CT	1757	1830	1793.5	28	3	3	28	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	2	0	0	0
Sussex County	DE	1752	1799	1775.5	7	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
St. Peter/Toulouse	LA	1725	1788	1756.5	32	1	1	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
African Burial Ground	NY	1712	1796	1754	401	7	1	401	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
San Augustine	FL	1700	1784	1742	10	10	3	10	0	0	0	0	10	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Martin's Hundred	VA	1625	1650	1637.5	5	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

\* denotes presence of an element when quantity could not be tabulated

## VITA

Michael Scott Crow, 311 N. Dick Dowling, San Benito, Texas 78586

### EDUCATION

- M.A., Anthropology, May 2004, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, 3.93 GPR
- Thesis: *Mortuary Practice in Sociohistorical and Archaeological Contexts: Texas, 1821-1870*
- Historic Preservation Certificate, May 2004, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
- B.A., Anthropology, 2000, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, 2.95 GPR

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Graduate Research Assistant, Center for Ecological Archaeology, Texas A&M University, Spring 2000 to present
- Archaeological Technician, HRA Gray & Pape, LLC, 2003
- Freelance Graphics Specialist, book in press, Dr. Carolyn Boyd, School of Expressive Culture, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, 2003
- Archaeological Technician, HTS Inc., Consultants, 2002
- Work Study Employment, Center for Ecological Archaeology, Texas A&M University, Fall 2000

### PUBLICATIONS

- Crow, Michael S. and Alston V. Thoms  
2003 *Field Investigations at the Morgan Family Cemetery, Falls County, Texas*. Manuscript on file. Center for Ecological Archaeology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.
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