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Harmony Grove Headstones Restored

Buckhead Heritage Society repairs markers at historic cemetery

Posted by [Louis Mayeux](#), September 15, 2011 at 09:46 AM

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The [Buckhead Heritage Society](#) recently completed headstone repairs at the historic Harmony Grove Cemetery.

Dustin Hornsby, restoration manager at the Historic Oakland Foundation, worked with the society on the project, which began in January and was completed in August, according to the heritage society.

The first phase included repairs to the "false crypt" of James H. "Whispering" Smith, who was one of the largest landowners in the Buckhead community when he died in 1872, the heritage society said. He owned large portions of what are now Tuxedo Park, Argonne Forest and the Arden/Habersham neighborhoods.

According to an e-mail from heritage society Executive Director Erica Danylchak, Smith's false crypt had shifted and cracked severely. The repair work included disassembling the crypt, pouring a stable concrete base for the structure, reassembling the pieces and holding them together with stainless steel pins and color-matched epoxy.

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The hollowed, raised false crypts were an evolution in the mounding practice common in the South at the time. "Some folk traditions believed that if dirt sunk into a grave too quickly, it was a sign that another family member would soon die," Danylchak said. "Mounding dirt protected against this phenomenon. The false crypt was a sort of 'permanent' mound that was a more expensive form of burial and was restricted to the upper classes."

The first phase of work also included the repair of August Krause's and Miss R.A. Ervin's headstones, which had broken into multiple pieces.

These repairs were all completed over the course of a weekend in February through donations from Buckhead Heritage members.

A second phase of repairs, carried out over weekends in May and August, included the stabilization of the Smith family monument, which perched precariously on a base of stacked stones.

"Buckhead Heritage was concerned that the monument could topple over and be irreparably damaged," Danylchak said.

Hornsby lifted the monument with a chain hoist and put it aside. He removed the stacked stones and poured a concrete slab to serve as a stable foundation. He then reassembled the stacked stones and adhered them to the slab with mortar to stabilize the base. He then reinstalled the monument.

The second phase also included securing and stabilizing the slabs of Martha Smith's and Mary John's gravestones in their bases. Hornsby also repaired a second false crypt in the Smith family plot — the marker of James H. Smith's infant son, whose 1870 burial is the first one documented in the cemetery, according to the heritage society.

The second phase was funded by donations from neighbors of the cemetery along West Paces Ferry and Chatham roads, the society said.

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