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Book Review - Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery: An Illustrated History and Guide

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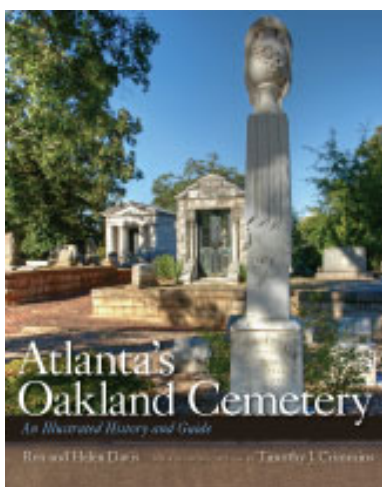
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Off the SHELF

Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery: An Illustrated History and Guide, by Ren and Helen Davis, with an introduction by Timothy J. Crimmins (The University of Georgia Press, 2012: ISBN 978-0-8203-4313-6, \$24.95)

Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery: An Illustrated History and Guide, co-authored by Ren and Helen Davis, offers a well researched look at Atlanta's most historical cemetery. Ren Davis is a native of Atlanta and his knowledge of Atlanta history as well as its culture is evident throughout. Equally evident is the authors' past experience with writing travel books as this volume can be read as a travel book, complete with nicely mapped walking tours. With its large numbers of beautifully done photographs, this volume would make for a nice coffee table book as well.



Although the book is not meant to be a comprehensive history of the cemetery, it provides a well-rounded discussion of the cemetery from its founding in 1850, a history of Oakland's place in the rural garden cemetery movement, and introduces the reader to its funerary art and architecture. The authors do a good job of illustrating how the layout of the cemetery mirrors in many ways the history of Atlanta both as a southern and formerly segregated city and as a city that has risen from the destruction of civil war. There are detailed discussions of the separate sections of the cemetery set aside for African Americans, confederate soldiers, and for the Jewish population of Atlanta.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first two chapters cover the cemetery's history and

the rural garden cemetery movement. The third chapter makes up the bulk of the book and includes walking tours of each of the nine sections of cemetery from the original six acres to Potters' Field, to the area referred to as Hogpen Corner and Greenhouse Valley. Each walking tour provides a very brief history of the section of the cemetery covered as well as a map of, photos of, and descriptions of notable inhabitants and structures within each section. Photos, both archival and contemporary, are interspersed throughout the book highlighting funerary symbolism, epitaphs, the people of historical importance buried within the cemetery, and funerary art and architecture in Oakland. The fourth and final chapter attempts to explain the importance of the cemetery as a gathering place more akin to a public park than a cemetery to the population of Atlanta with descriptions of some of the events, festivals, and races that are held in the cemetery every year. The book is finished with three appendices on funerary symbols found in the cemetery, a map of the cemetery broken down by numerical sections for burial records research, and, finally, a list of state and city leaders buried in the cemetery.

This book is recommended for both public and academic libraries or for anyone interested in funerary art or architecture, the history of rural garden cemeteries, and the history of Atlanta and the neighborhoods surrounding Oakland cemetery.

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