Gravemarkers: Affirmation of Life Within Two San Antonio Communities

Cemeteries legitimize death. They allow people to recognize, to accept, to particularize, to memorialize, even to celebrate death. Yet death has no meaning, no significance, without life.

Living people maintain cemeteries. Living people design and erect gravemarkers. Living people cut and trim grave-sites, they maintain fences and roads and dumpsters and water pipes and signage. And living people visit cemeteries to remember the dead and recall the life that they once shared.

The cemeteries tell us, the living, much about life. Cemeteries affirm the life that still exists within the communities that surround them—the communities that spawned and then cared for them.

The cemeteries tell us what architecture styles the community prefers, which rocks and stones it prefers, what artwork it practices, which stonecarvers sign their artwork—and which carvers prefer which art form. They tell us what plant life the local community favors. They tell us about the community's heroes—especially its warriors. The cemeteries tell

us which lodges and insurance carriers the community utilizes.

They tell us about family relationships; what the community

finds endearing about friendship. They tell us which

mythological creatures people praise and which ones they fear.

They tell us which religions the local community celebrates.

And cemeteries tell us about language usage within the

surrounding community—language usage at present and language

usage in the past.

Gravemarker messages, especially the epitaphs, have

received excellent scholarly analysis. English language epitaphs

beginning as early as 1641 have undergone such analysis

(Wilheit).

The actual dialogues between the gravemarkers and cemetery

visitors, however, have gone virtually unstudied. The daily

communication between the cemetery and the surrounding

community—the affirmation of life through grief—nonetheless,

rewards close scrutiny.

San Antonio: cemeteries and life

A cursory glance at San Antonio, Texas, cemeteries will

verify the longtime relationship between Texas and Mexico--the

longtime mixture of English and of Spanish.

250 years ago the Catholic Church provided the only

religious functions in San Antonio. The Church's main building,
San Fernando Cathedral, provided the setting for funeral
services. Originally the dead were interred within the walls of
the secular Presidio--today known as the Alamo.   As the
population of San Antonio grew, the Catholic Church officials
moved the human remains from the Presidio to either the
Cathedral itself or to a nearby cemetery in present-day Ben
Milam plaza.

In 1850 the Milam space proved insufficient, so a new
cemetery, now referred to as San Fernando Cemetery #1, opened on
the near West Side of the city. A drainage ditch separated San
Fernando #1 from the downtown area.

Still an active cemetery today, with deceased members being
buried in family plots, the cemetery has about 3,500 readable
gravemarkers. On a daily basis and usually in small numbers,
living relatives of the deceased visit the San Fernando Cemetery
#1 to converse with each other, with the dead, and with the
messages on the gravemarkers.

These gravemarker messages communicate in five languages,
dating back to the 1850s. In addition to the expected Spanish
(Figure 1.1) and English (Figure 1.2), one can find German
(Figure 1.3), French (Figure 1.4), Italian (Figure 1.5) and
Arabic (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.1: San Fernando Spanish Language Gravemarker

ENRIQUE ARZOLA

NACIO EN 1892 GUERRERO

TAMAULIPAS FALLECIO EN

ESTA CUIDADAD EL DIA

11 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 1915

A LA EDAD
DE 22 ANOS Y 7 MESES

Figure 1.2: San Fernando English Language Gravemarker

LOUIS O. SENNET

BORN ST. JAMES PARISH

LA. APRIL 24, 1866

MURDERED IN SAN

ANTONIO MAY 29, 1897

OH FOR THE TOUCH

OF A VANISHED HAND

OR THE SOUND OF A

VOICE THAT'S GONE

Figure 1.3: San Fernando German Language Gravemarker

PAUL GOTTMAN JOSEPH

STRAUCH

GEB. 24 MARZ 1895

IN KENDALL CO. TEX.

GEST. 25 NOV. 1918

LEMONS, FRANCE

Figure 1.4: San Fernando French Language Gravemarker

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                   FRANCOIS GIRAUD

               NE A BORDEAUX, FRANCE

                LE 7 OCTUBRE 1786

               DECEDE A SAN ANTONIO

                 LE 19 MAI 1855

                    R.I.P.
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Figure 1.5: San Fernando Italian Language Gravemarker

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ETERNO RIPOSO              ETERNO RIPOSO

F. RIZZO                   S. RIZZO

NATO IL                    NATO IL

24 SEPTTEMBRE 1891         23 MARZO 1890

MORTO IL                   MORTO IL

19 NOVEMBRE 1918           1 DICEMBRE 1918

SPEZZANO GRANDE PROV       SPEZZANO GRANDE PROV

COSENZA ITALIA             COSENZA ITALIA

PACE                       PACE

FAMIGLIA ADDOLOROTA        FAMIGLIA ADDOLOROTA
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Figure 1.6: San Fernando Arabic Language Gravemarker

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JOSEPH YAMIN               MARY YAMIN

BORN 1867                  BORN 1868

DIED JAN 10. 1914          DIED JULY 2, 1919

FATHER                     MOTHER
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[ARABIC INSCRIPTION]   *[ARABIC INSCRIPTION]*

YAMIN

Awareness of Community Boundaries

A close look at the first five of these gravemarkers in San Fernando #1 provide further evidence of the close connection between cemeteries and their surrounding communities. Note the mention of territory on the Spanish Arzola, English Sennet, German Strauch, French Giraud, and Italian Rizzo gravemarkers.

The territory mentioned in all five cases indicates a <u>place</u> of birth or a <u>place</u> of death. Louis O. Sennet was born in St. James Parish, Louisiana and died in San Antonio; Enrique Arzola was born in Guerrero Tamaulipas [Mexico] and died in this city [San Antonio], Paul Gottman Joseph Strauch was born in Kendall County, Texas [not Bexar County, where San Antonio is located] and died in Lemons, France; Francois Giraud was from Bordeaux, France, and died in San Antonio; while both F. and S. Rizzo were born in Cozenza Providence, Italy.

Socio-biological rites of passage: from life to death

The presence of these written accounts of birth places and death places seem to indicate a universal, non-cultural and non language specific, sense of community. In short, the presence of territory information on a gravemarker is not determined by any linguistaic culture but by biological, perhaps sociological,

rites of passage.

Louis Sennet, Enrique Arzola, Paul Strauch, Francois Giraud, and the two Rizzos, while buried in San Fernando #1, were not life-long members of the San Antonio community. The family members and/or friends of these six people chose to inscri "separate community" information on the five gravemarkers.

The presence of these place references appears to stem from a socio-biological rite of passage. If one can assume that a cemetery reflects life within its surrounding community, then the socio-biological rite of passage would be birth into and then death-removal from that surrounding community.

What one cannot predict is the presence of intruders in a community. One cannot predict the movement of someone from outside a given community, in other words, into a new community. Nor can one predict the sense of helplessness on the part of family members who must preside over the rite of passage—the movement from life to death—in a cemetery-community that represents a location other than the community in which the deceased was born.

For that reason, some gravemarkers reinforce the claim that each cemetery reflects its surrounding speech community-and that

"outsiders" feel "out of place" in these communities.

Attachment to and Defense of Community

In 1966, Robert Ardrey, the playwright/biologist advocated the theory of evolution in an extremely provocative book, Territorial Imperative. Ardrey argues that the study of evolution "has presented us with a means to demonstrate that our attachment for property is of an ancient biological order" (Ardrey, 102).

In San Fernando #1, then the early settlers placed their own territory names as *signposts* on the new Texas territory. The gravemarkers serve as an attachment to the new place, the new community. The first Giraud was buried in 1853, the first Lemburg in 1856, the first Henfy and the first Twohig in 1876.

Yet even a century later, new signposts appear. The first Bapessius was buried in 1966, the last in 1973. The first Pappas was buried in 1969. The first Colias as late as 1984--she was born in Anhialos, Greece. If the early settlers were marking new territory, then what were these latecomers marking? One could easily argue the latecomers were simply posting signposts to indicate a lack of hostility and to indicate their awareness that they were not established members of the new community. Ardrey thinks that such behavior in newcomers is acceptable and

common—even necessary. "What territory promises is the high
probability that if intrusion takes place, war will follow"
(Ardrey, 244). The entomologist Timothy Myles (Myles 408),
zoologist Donald Broom (Broom 197), and sociobiologist Edward
Wilson (Wilson 261), in varying degree of emphasis support
Ardrey's contention.

Heroes.

War, of course, is the ultimate defense of a territory.
And war brings out an obvious outpouring of heroes who are proud
of where they were born and where they died. This pride
accounts for the few gravemarkers that refer to the local
community as both a birth and death place. Figure 1.7 shows one
of a dozen such gravemarkers San Fernando Cemetery #1--the only
remaining cemetery present when the Alamo became the symbol for
Texas' becoming its own territory:

Figure 1.7: The Defender

Don Juan Ximenes

Born in San Antonio de Bexar 1810

Veteran in the Texas War

For Independence, 1835-1836

One of the storming party at Bexar

December 5, 1835

An Honored Citizen, Soldier and Ranger

of Texas

                    Died July 22, 1877

              ERECTED BY THE STATE OF TEXAS

Affirmation of Life Within a Community.

     When modern researchers walk through South Texas
graveyards, they are impressed with how few of the markers have
either birth or death places marked on them. On the majority of
markers, those with no territory marking, one tends to think
that the deceased belong here. This is their territory; their
stories we are reading; their lives we are trying to
reconstruct.

     When place names do appear, however, one pauses to think of
territory itself. Some of the place-name information identifies
defenders of the territory, as we saw above. Some place-name
information identifies early setters who were proud of that
fact: I died here and I was born in San Antonio in 1809
("Natural de San Antonio de Bexar"). Some of the place-names
draw attention both to a death in San Antonio but life within an
extended San Antonio home-range territory: McNeil, Texas;
Texas; Mexico; En Mier Tamps, Mex.

     Still other place-names, however, leave strong signals that
even though the deceased died in San Antonio they were born
outside even the home-range territory: Charleston, S.C.;

Marrietta, Ga.; Pine Bluff, Ark; Pinesville, La.; Kentucky.

New York; Shannon, Il.; Chicago, Il.; Morgan Co. Ind.;

Tennessee.

Ardrey apparently finds this mixture of signals normal

within his understanding of territory and of the imperative to

defend and cross it: "An innate compulsion to defend one's

property lies, of course, at the heart of the territorial

principle; but just as close to its heart lies recognition of

the rights of the next animal" (Ardrey, 249).

Wilson also recognizes the sociobiological tension between

stable coexistence and elimination: "Interspecific competition

is one of the prime movers of social evolution. When two

ecologically similar species first meet, either they coexist

stably or one eliminates the other from the zone of overlap"

(Wilson, 276).

The Dutch social anthropologist Jeremy Boissevain even

suggests that the movement of outsiders into a territory is,

itself, normal social behavior: "Instead of looking at man as a

member of groups and institutional complexes passively obedient

to their norms and pressures, it is important to try to see him

as an entrepreneur who tries to manipulate norms and

relationships for his own social and psychological benefit"

(Boissevain, 7).

The social psychologists Sommer and Becker argue that "...[territorial] markers reserve space and receive their legitimacy from people in the area (neighbors) and potential intruders. Psychologists have paid little attention to boundary markers in social interaction, perhaps because such markers were regarded as physical objects relegated to the cultural system (the province of the anthropologist) rather than an interpersonal system which is the true province of the social psychologist" (Weitz, 261).

Data Analysis

The study of physical markers to measure such an unpredictable constraint as the presence or absence of place names is not limited to gravemarkers. Boissevain definitely thinks that "Pattern, process and momentum must be viewed as the cumulative result of decisions made by persons interacting with each other who are faced by similar constraints. These can be analysed" (Boissevain, 9). As for the presence of such markers even during the past decade, Arbrey has his own opinion: "You must live in a [community], I suspect, for ten or twenty generations before you find yourself equal to it" (Ardrey, 187).

The anthropological linguist, Edward Hall, wrote two widely used books on cultural differences in the use of time (Hall 1959) and of space (1966). In his book on space, Hall noted

that in a cursory analysis of a dictionary, almost five thousand terms referred to space. "This is [20 percent] of the words listed in the pocket Oxford dictionary. Even deep familiarity with my own culture had not prepared me for this discovery" (Hall, 1996, 87).

Hall's theory of proxemics proposes three levels. The *infracultural* level is biological. The *precultural* level is physiological. The *microcultural* level is culture specific and varies from culture to culture and within a culture over time.

The South Texas gravemarkers indicate the presence of all three of Hall's levels of proxemic levels. One cannot predict which markers will or will not have a place name on written them. However, when place names do occur they articulate the awareness of territory—they affirm the existence of life outside the confines of the cemetery.

This awareness, whether it is to defend or pass through, is the realization of a biological, infracultural level of proxemics. The gravemarkers themselves and the spaces around them realize the physiological, or precultural level of that biological need. Since the need is so predictable, the proxemics cannot be cultural. The various languages, the various codes, provide a microcultural variation that "culturally" is predictable.

Simply put, if a language code is present on a marker with a place-name on it, the place-name will be written in a culturally specific language code—be that English, German, Polish, Czech, Spanish, French, Italian, Chinese, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, or any mixture of these languages.

San Fernando and Place-Names.

As mentioned above, the actual number of gravemarkers with place names is quite small. In fact, only about four percent of the gravemarkers in San Fernando Cemetery #1 have places of birth and/or places of death inscribed upon them. (See San Fernando #1, Table 1.1: Percentage of markers that contain death/birth place semantic bits.)

Table 1.1: Percentage of markers that contain death/birth place semantic bits

LANGUAGE	TOTAL MARKERS	BIRTH/DEATH PLACE INFO	PERCENT
English	1416	73	05%
Spanish	1646	48	03%
French	12	10	83%
TOTALS	3074	131	04%

In addition to the 73 English, the 48 Spanish, and the 10 French language markers displayed in Table 1.1, San Fernando #1 also has two mixed-code Spanish/English markers, one mixed-code French/English, and one German language marker, all with birth or death place information. By implication, the persons being

memorialized are non-native San Antonians.   At the very least,
these 135 individuals' families/friends felt that the presence
of these bodies marked the inclusion of outsiders; people who,
perhaps belonged in a different territory/community.

Attempts to find a statistical pattern among the inclusion
of birthplace (only) or the inclusion of death place (only) or
the inclusion of both death-and-birth places yielded no insights
whatsoever—other than the obvious expectation that the death
places (San Antonio) were not inscribed as much as birthplaces.
(See Table 1.2: Distribution of Birth Place only, Death Place
only, and combined Birth and Death Places by Language.)

**Table 2: Distribution of Birth Place only, Death Place
only, and combined Birth and Death Places by Language**

	Birth Place Only	Death Place Only	Death & Birth	Totals
English	58 (79%)	04 (05%)	11 (15%)	73
Spanish	20 (44%)	07 (16%)	18 (40%)	18
French	03 (30%)	00 (00%)	07 (70)	10

Birth places ranged from San Antonio and D'Hanis in Texas; to
Los Angeles, South Carolina, and Kentucky, in the United States;
to real "outsider" places such as Mexico, Italy, Ireland, and
France.   Death places included San Antonio, France, Kentucky,
and Rio Grande City.

Attempts to find a statistical pattern among the death
dates, however, produced a significant concentration of place-

names from 1840-1920--during the forty-year period with the turn

of the twentieth century in the middle. (See Table 1.3:

Occurrence of birth/death place info between 1880-1920.)

Table 3: Occurrence of birth/death place info between 1880-1920, by Language

Dates	Spanish	English	French	Totals
Before 1880	04	14	02	20
1880-1920	37	51	08	96
After 1920	07	07	00	14
TOTALS	48	72	10	130

Among the 130 English/Spanish/French markers, 96 (or 74 %) of

the Place Name markers bear death dates during these four

decades. Only 20 (15%) of the markers were erected during the

thirty years before 1880; only 14 (11%) have been erected during

the eighty years since 1920. None have been erected during the

last forty years, that is none since 1960.

Importantly, the pattern raises questions, of course. The

pattern does though raise questions about the hypothesis that

the intrusion of outsiders into a cemetery community must

address innate biological/sociological instincts. Certainly

the forty-year span from 1880-1920 would bolster the cemetery-

as-community theory, with the 96 markers and their place-names.

What, however, happened to this territory imperative after 1920?

Or before 1880?

The Before-1880-Question may have to await further inquiry. At present, the assumption is that the actual number of <u>all</u> burials in San Fernando was sparse until the 1880s.

During this pre-1880 time, nonetheless, according to sociologist Michael Kear, the funeral profession was emerging— basically as a blending of "…sideline activities of a number of occupations (Kearl 275)". The stonecutters, cabinet makers, liverymen, and preachers began working with specialists, the "undertakers," who began perfecting "the laying out, the coffining, and the transporting of the body to the grave" (Habenstein and Lamers 249, in Kearl 176).

The American Civil War brought about the beginnings of the practice of embalming bodies for transporting purposes. Before that war, embalming was used sparingly to avoid the spread of some types of epidemics. During the Civil War, however, the "fluids and methods for their injection were improved upon and employed to ship soldiers' remains home" (Kearl 276).

In San Antonio, the expense of embalming bodies and the expense of transporting those bodies back to birthplaces— especially transporting the bodies via railroad—became more and more affordable. Thus by the 1920, many families could afford to transport bodies back to their birth-communities for burial. Such a practice bolsters the territorial imperative argument, in

that people could now easily return bodies to home communities
for burial.

A look at the commercial advertising for present-day
Funeral Homes and Directors erases any doubt about this huge
business in trafficking bodies: In the Greater San Antonio
Yellow Pages, for Southwestern Bell, 2000-2001, are found:
Shipping (Hilcrest Funeral Home; *International Arrangements*
(Loewen Group Int. Inc); *Shipping Services* (Memorial Funeral
Home); *Traslados a Mexico $1,250.00 (Incluye Ataud)*
[Transportation to Mexico $!,250.00 (including coffin)]
(Castillo Mission Funeral Home); *Shipping* (The Angelus Funeral
Home); *Global Shipping* (Hillcrest Funeral Home); *Shipping
(Transportaciones)* (M.E. Rodriguez Funeral Home).

Michael Kearl has a delightful description of caskets that
are especially made for aircraft transportation: "One learns
that burial occurs in a coffin equipped with an exhaust-pipe-
like *burper valve* (so that the casket does not explode in a
depressurized aircraft compartment)—not in a body bag or burial
shroud" (Kearl 273).

A second major development in allowing for the return of
bodies for burial in home-territory cemeteries has occurred in
the increased popularity of an old means of removing bodies from
sight: cremation.

According to Kearl, "On the West Coast, for example, more than a third of deaths are cremated" (Kearl 282). Cremation allows families to place ashes in any convenient container and leave them for years, if necessary, before the family can transport the remains back to the home territory for burial.

Another quick appraisal of the San Antonio Yellow Pages, reveals that three-fourths (18 of 24) block-advertisements for Funeral Homes and Directors promise the existence of crematories and/or promise the ability to perform *cremations*. Included in those yellow-page advertisements is Puente & Sons Funeral Chapels, *Direct Cremation $495.00 "San Antonio's Cremation Specialist."*

Clearly by the 1920s the need to bury a person in alien, "hostile" soil no longer matched that need which San Fernando Cemetery #1 so clearly demonstrated with the concentrated number of Place Names during the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century.

Affirmation of Life Within a Non-Catholic Cemetery

By definition, though, San Fernando #1 serves the needs of a specialized community--the Catholic Community, within the larger San Antonio community.

A natural question, then, would concern the possible

uniqueness of Catholic Church practices as opposed to non-
Catholic practices. A raised eyebrow here, an askance glare,
and lots of direct questions "Oh, but you're only using Catholic
data?" raise enough doubt to justify sampling comparable data
from a non-Catholic cemetery.

San Fernando Cemetery #1, located just west of downtown San
Antonio, is separated from a series of thirty-two City
Cemeteries, located just east of downtown San Antonio.   While
not excluding the Catholic population, the City Cemeteries have
historic ties basically with Protestant churches or with
Fraternal Lodges affiliated or with the city of San Antonio
itself.

In 2000, Trinity University student Jennifer Purcell tested
data from one of these city cemeteries, City Cemetery #2.
Purcell had already documented the 538 gravemarkers for a class
project, so was familiar with the data.

Figures 1.8 through 1.11 illustrate these data.

Figure 1.8: Southern States as Territory

Edward Hall	Marcissa Brahan
Cunningham	wife of
born July 7, 1835	Ed. H. Cunningham
in Van Buran Ark	dau. of R. W. Brahan
died Aug. 27, 1912	& Martha Haywood

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San Antonio Texas          born Mar. 12, 1842

                           in Panola Miss

                           died Apr. 19, 1907

                           San Antonio Texas
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born in Arkansas and Marcissa born in Mississippi. Both people
died in San Antonio. Figure 1.9: East Coast as Territory honors
Jacob Harrison, who was born in Virginia but died in San
Antonio.

Figure 1.9: East Coast as Territory

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              Jacob Hayne

               Harrison

            Harrisonburg Va.

             Apr. 26, 1851

           San Antonio Texas

             Jan. 22, 1922
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Figure 10: Dual Outsider Territory tells us of the interesting
story of Lillian Brutsche, who was born in Mexico and who died
in Virgina. One can infer many stories about Lillian, but
central to all those stories, her burial in San Antonio
associates her with the San Antonio community.

Figure 1.10: Dual Outsider Territory

```
            Lillian Wiggins

              Brutsché
```

Monterrey, Mexico

March 6, 1895

Alexandria, Virginia

May 29, 1986

Finally, Figure 11: Overseas Territory tell the story of Rudolph Brandt, who was born in Germany—with no death place given, therefore assumed to have died in San Antonio.

Figure 1.11: Overseas Territory

Rudolf. B. Brandt

Born March 17, 1860

at Ragnil East Prussia

Germany

died

Oct. 7, 1903

Rest in Peace

husband of

Mary Biesenbaer Blair

The 538 gravemarkers have two languages written on them: 17 in German and 521 in English. Among those 538 markers, 22 (or 04%) contain place-names.

The four percent (4%) coincided exactly with the four percent (4%) of gravemarkers with place-names, located in San Fernando #1.

The largest number of place-name markers were erected
during the same forty-year period as were the largest number of
place-name gravemarkers erected in San Fernando #1, that is
between 1880-1920. (See Table 1.4) In fact, in City Cemetery
#2 no place-name gravemarkers were erected before 1884 (the

**Table 1.4: Occurrence of birth/death place info
between 1880-1920, City Cemetery #2**

> Before 1880 00
> 1880-1920 20
> After 1920 02

oldest marker among the 538 bears a death date of 1872). Only
two place-name gravemarkers have death dates later than 1920.

Therefore, the affirmation of life within the non-Catholic
City Cemetery #2 matches the affirmation of life with its
companion Catholic cemetery across San Antonio, a couple of
miles away. Outsiders marked their status consistently in both
San Antonio cemeteries during a forty-year period at the turn of
the nineteenth into the twentieth century. (See Table 1.5)

**Table 1.5: Comparison of San Fernando (Catholic) with
City Cemetery #2 (Protestant)**

Dates	Catholic	Protestant	totals
Before 1880	20 (15%)	00 (00%)	20
1880-1920	96 (73%)	20 (91%)	116
After 1920	16 (12%)	02 (09%)	18
TOTALS	132 (100%)	22 (100%)	154

Only one anomaly mars a perfect match. (See Table 1.6) No

place-name gravemarkers in City Cemetery #2 bear a death date

Table 1.6: Comparison of earliest and latest "Place" markers, by cemeteries

> Catholic . . . . .   1859 – 1960
> Protestant . . . .   1884 – 1922

later than 1922; whereas the latest death date on a place name marker in San Fernando #1 shows a date almost forty years later: 1960.

While the explanation may prove to be too simple, the Catholic Church's stance on cremation does provide a possible reason for that difference. As argued above, cremation, in contrast with embalming, has allowed for easier transporting of remains to home communities. The Catholic Church, however, did not grant approval of cremation, at least in the United States, until the late 1970s (Kearl 282). The reluctance to use cremation, then, would reduce the number of people who could afford to transport bodies back to birth-communities. Even during the 1960s, one would expect a few place-name gravemarkes in San Fernando #1.

At any rate, for the past 40 years, place-names have not appeared on any of the gravemarkers in the Catholic San Fernando #1 nor on any of the markers in the non-Catholic City Cemetery #2—both cemetery/communities located in San Antonio, Texas. Both cemeteries, in other words, continue to affirm the presence

of life within the San Antonio community—but with no sign of

outsiders. Those outsiders have, for the most part, returned to

affirm life in their own communities.

- # -

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