



Cities of Silence: A Guide to Mobile's Historic Cemeteries

John S. Sledge, Sheila Hagler

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Cities of Silence is a richly illustrated, evocative study of five of Mobile's historic burial grounds: Magnolia Cemetery, Church Street Graveyard, Old Catholic, Sha'arai Shomayim, and Ahavas Chesed cemeteries. Through the use of historic photographs and maps as well as more than 70 contemporary black-and-white images by photographer Sheila Hagler, John Sledge thoroughly examines the development of these solemn spaces. Briskly paced and absorbing, Cities of Silence moves the reader through a world of mourning and ritual scarcely imaginable today. Sledge probes the meanings and practices of Victorian burials and jazz funerals and explains national trends in cemetery landscaping and funerary sculpture. Hagler's breathtaking photographs document the wealth of sophisticated cast iron and beautiful gravestone art characteristic of these cemeteries. Together they unearth a rich stock of legend and folklore associated with Mobile's hallowed grounds, including the stories of the Boyington Oak, grown from the grave of a falsely accused man, and the enigmatic Goddess of Magnolia, said to summon storms when attempts are made to move her. Mobile's cemeteries have been shaped by pestilence, war, and deep-seated religious beliefs. From the devastation of the 1819 yellow fever epidemic to the persistent sectional loyalty demonstrated by the annual decoration of Confederate Rest, from descriptions of arcane Mardi Gras practices to the variety of foreign inscriptions indicating Mobile's cosmopolitan population, this book serves as an important cultural analysis of the Port City and its peoples. Even more than this, Cities of Silence is a celebration of the human spirit in the face of life's greatest test - death itself.

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