

Discover History at the Old City Cemetery Brownsville, Texas

VISITOR'S GUIDE



E. Madison & E. 5th St. Brownsville, Texas
Parking is also available on 6th St. and Madison St.
Cemetery open 7 days a week. 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.



Additional information for historic tours is available by calling (956) 541-5560 Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. or visit our website www.brownsvillehistory.org.

While visiting, please preserve and protect this nationally recognized historic site by properly discarding waste and reporting acts of vandalism to the Brownsville Police Department at (956) 548-7000.



Welcome to the Old City Cemetery

The old Brownsville City Cemetery was established in 1853. Today it is recognized as an outstanding historical landmark by the Brownsville Historical Association, Texas Historical Commission, and the National Register of Historic Places.

The Texas Historical Commission marker at the cemetery entrance reads, “The Brownsville City Cemetery reveals much of the city’s history. Victims of wars, gunfights, yellow fever, and cholera are buried here, and their graves are evidence of early conditions in the border town.”

The earliest burials date from 1853, but there are a few markers dated from 1848, which were moved from the first city cemetery which was located next to the 1912 Cameron County Courthouse (Dancy Building). In 1868, after the location had been used as a burial site for 15 years, Charles Stillman, Brownsville’s founder, deeded the land to the City of Brownsville for the cemetery.

Buried in the Old City Cemetery are veterans of every war except for the American Revolutionary War. Soldiers from the Eastern States and many foreign lands came with General Zachary Taylor to fight in the U.S. -Mexico War (1846-1848). After the war, they returned to settle on the land won from Mexico. Many soldiers brought their families to Brownsville, while others married into local families. After the American Civil War (1861-1865), soldiers again felt the lure of the area and many settled here. Together they helped Brownsville become a booming and vital city on the Rio Grande.



History can be found in the markers of steamboat captains, mayors and judges, trackers and surgeons, prosperous merchants, owners of Spanish land grants, ranchers, and land developers. Many markers are testimony to the adventurers from foreign lands who came to Brownsville looking for a place to make their fortunes.



Markers also tell the story of the harshness of life in early Brownsville, such as the deaths of yellow fever epidemics that ravaged the area year after year. The romance of the city can be seen in the blending of many names on the tombstones reflecting marriages between cultures.

The ethnic character of Brownsville is very evident in the adornment of grave sites. While the cemetery contains exquisite examples of marble cemetery art, there are humble markers expressing local folk customs and crypts of local brick and architecture typical of the area.

Early on, the cemetery became a place of true beauty for locals and visitors alike. It took on the look of a New Orleans style cemetery with ornate cast iron fences and gates marking the areas set aside for organizations and societies.

Many families enclosed their plots with marble, granite, and ironwork. The above-ground crypts were kept painted. Most were white, but occasionally pastel colors would liven the view.

The city has the early cemetery Sexton’s records which show about 30,000 burials from 1853 to 1937. These records have been computerized and published by the Brownsville Historical Association. They show name, age, date of death, cause of death, and place of birth. These records have been helpful to researchers preparing dissertations dealing with causes of death after 1850 and for genealogical research.

As you look around the cemetery, you realize that you cannot see 30,000 burial plots. Upon researching a particular lot and block number, it was found there can be as many as seven or eight burials for a particular plot.

Even though the cemetery no longer sells plots, families are still reusing their plots when they wish a child to be buried with its mother or a wife with her husband. This custom is found throughout Mexico and Europe, and was prevalent in New Orleans’s oldest cemetery.