

## New Orleans: Burying the Dead

If one is not cremated and you die and get buried in New Orleans, you will not be buried underground. New Orleans is slightly below sea level, which means that the water table is quite high. During floods or high-water table levels, caskets can be pushed to the top of the ground. If people weigh down the burial box with rocks or other weights, chances are the decomposing corpse could create unsanitary conditions. Therefore, burial above ground is the solution.

The first designed above ground cemetery was Louis #1. It opened in 1789. The model for the cemetery came from Paris, France. New Orleans cemeteries are one of the oldest above ground burial plots in the world.

In a tour of New Orleans, our group went to Louis #3, Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans cemetery. This photo program will explain how the burial system works for mausoleums with multiple burials.









**Guide's explanation of burial process:** Above are single, less costly, burial tombs. Each cell has one casket.

Below are two examples of family members who have been buried over a long period of time. This is not cheap, and as the guide stated, "not a great job for those who manage these tombs."

What happens is that there are three levels in the tomb; the one on the right may have two columns, based on its width.

Workers would chisel the cover off and find the two most recent caskets. The person who just died would be placed on the top level and the current top casket would be moved to the second level. The casket that was in the second level would be opened and the remains would be placed in a third casket at the bottom of the tomb with others who had previously died.

He noted that when people are buried six feet underground, the temperature may be around 50 degrees, while the above ground tombs can reach a temperature of 150 degrees farhenheit. He said, "it's like a slow cremation." The third or bottom level would not be exposed to moisture and micro organisms. This adds to the further decomposition of any bones or remains. The tomb he gave the explanation of had 29 family members buried in it over 130 years.

