In the ghostly spirit of Halloween, why not leave the land of the living for a while and step back into San Antonio's rich past with a tour through the Eastside Cemeteries Historic District. This National Register of Historic Places district on the city's near Eastside includes 31 unique and distinctive cemeteries. Spanning nearly two centuries, the district is the final resting place of many of San Antonio's most famous residents. It's well worth a drive through the district, and a number of the cemeteries are open for walking. East Commerce Street at Monumental is the best starting point to experience the cemeteries as they developed.

The earliest of the cemeteries were established in 1843 on land purchased by the city. The location was inspired in part by the Rural Cemetery Movement of the early 19th century which advocated remote, park-like settings for burial grounds. City officials chose an area known as Powder House Hill on the far eastern edge of town as the site of the new cemetery, establishing what some say is one of the earliest rural cemeteries in Texas. The Eastside Cemeteries reflect the rustic South Texas landscape as opposed to pastoral, bucolic cemeteries found elsewhere in the United States.

The cemeteries expanded greatly during the late 1800s, and by 1904 the area totaled over 102 acres with 31 separate cemeteries. At that time local residents petitioned the city to stop further expansion of the cemeteries, and the district has since remained unchanged in size. Residential neighborhoods developed and expanded in the surrounding area during early part of the 20th century. A former trolley route, nicknamed the "Cemetery Line" for its proximity to the burial grounds, ran along the busy commercial corridor of E. Commerce Street.

The district includes public cemeteries, private cemeteries of fraternal and religious organizations, and military cemeteries. The majority of headstones, monuments, and markers date from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s and range from formal sculpture to rustic folk art. The district is notable for the wide variety...
of those interred. All walks of life from farmers to soldiers to side by side. Different in size, design, character, and feel. Each of these distinctive burial ground offers a unique glimpse into a part of San Antonio's history.

On the north side of E. Commerce Street are the monuments of City Cemetery No. 1 and the Alamo Masonic Cemetery, both established in 1853 and the oldest cemeteries within the city. Alamo Masonic Cemetery was the first freemason cemetery established in the city, but many others would develop over the following decades. One of the most prominent graves is that of Gen. Edward Reimers, who helped secure the Alamo from the Red AJeries in the early 1800s. The most unusual monument is that of Soraya West, the widow of the frontier hero, John West. After her death in 1977, she was buried according to her wishes, wearing a tuxedo dress and seated at the wheel of her 1956 Ford. The simple headstone of her resting place highlights the city's unique history.

City Cemetery No. 1 boasts the remains of early German pioneer families such as George L. Goode, National Banker, and the Menger Hotel and Ford (A. M. Ford National Bank). The main entrance gate to Cemetery No. 1 along E. Commerce Street is flanked by limestone columns with curving walls. The cemetery features several mausoleums, a faux stone fence, Gothic architecture, and a fine array of monuments.

Nearby is the Roman Catholic Cemetery of Old San Antonio, established in 1835. Across the street and enclosed by a limestone wall is a monument to the San Antonio Masonic Cemetery, established in 1837 and still an active masonic cemetery. The National Cemetery includes the re-interred bodies of 19th century soldiers originally buried at both San Antonio and La Puente West. The cemetery also contains the graves of more than 300 Buffalo Soldiers, African American regiments who served in the Indian Wars, the Mexican War, and the Civil War. The cemetery is open daily and is a popular destination for visitors.

Don't miss a glimpse at the far southern end of the district at Parmerlone and El Rosario Cemetery. This prominent monument is the site of the famous mass murder, the aftermath of a Wild West Gunfire.

South of the cemetery you will encounter a number of other cemeteries, including City Cemetery No. 2 at S. Palomar and Montrose Cemetery, No. 3 contains several African American cemeteries within its boundary. Although not officially recognized, African American cemeteries are located at the eastern edge of the cemetery and include the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows Cemetery, San Antonio Lodge No. 1 Cemetery, United Brothers of Friendship Cemetery, St. Elmo Lodge No. 25 Cemetery, Beacon Light Masonic Lodge Cemetery, and St. Peter's Cemetery.

Further south are St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery, St. John's and Emmanuel German Lutheran Cemetery, and St. Michael's. St. Mary's Cemetery features elaborate statuary and is the burial site of Alamo De Zavala, who served as Governor of Texas, and instrumental in helping to preserve the Alamo in the early 20th century.

If you're interested in a guided tour of the cemetery district, join the City of San Antonio's guided tour of the Alamo and the City Cemetery. The tour operates on Saturdays and Sundays at 9:30 AM. Registration is $15 and includes a San Antonio "Know Your Roots" shirt. Contact the Office of Historic Preservation at (210)257-9214 or online at www.sanantoniогov/historic. To request:...