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By HAMPTON DUNN



ST. MICHAEL'S ONE OF OLDEST CEMETERIES IN U.S.

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PENSACOLA --- The historic St. Michael's burying ground here is one of the oldest dedicated cemeteries in the nation. In 1781, the King of Spain donated to the Catholics the eight-acre plot on Alcaniz Street at a time when the Spanish ruled this community. It's bounded by Alcaniz, Florida Blanca, Chase and Aragon.

The cemetery for many years was administered by the Church and owners of private plots until many of the old families disappeared and the burying place was neglected. Left untended for decades, the restoration was begun in 1968 by the Pensacola Historical and Preservation Commission, a statewide agency.

St. Michael's is the burying place of most of the great Spanish, French and American families of the 19th century. Here lies Dorothy Walton, wife of a signer (from Georgia) of the Declaration of Independence; Stephen A. Mallory, Confederate Secretary of the Navy; Desiderio Quina, Manuel Gonzalez, Francisco Moreno, Jose Noriega, and numerous other pioneer figures.

There are 2,743 legible markers of those interred, representing 805 families, which has dwindled to 205 families now residing here.

Before the days of the daily newspapers, Miss Leila Abercrombie relates, when there was a death in the family, invitations to the funeral were printed. Then those black bordered notices were carried on a silver tray with a black crepe bow on it, by a servant, to friends and relatives to announce the death and invite them to the funeral. Sometimes the notices were nailed on trees. Often bands accompanied the cortege. The stores on Palafox St. closed as funeral processions passed.

