

Baton Rouge Cimetière

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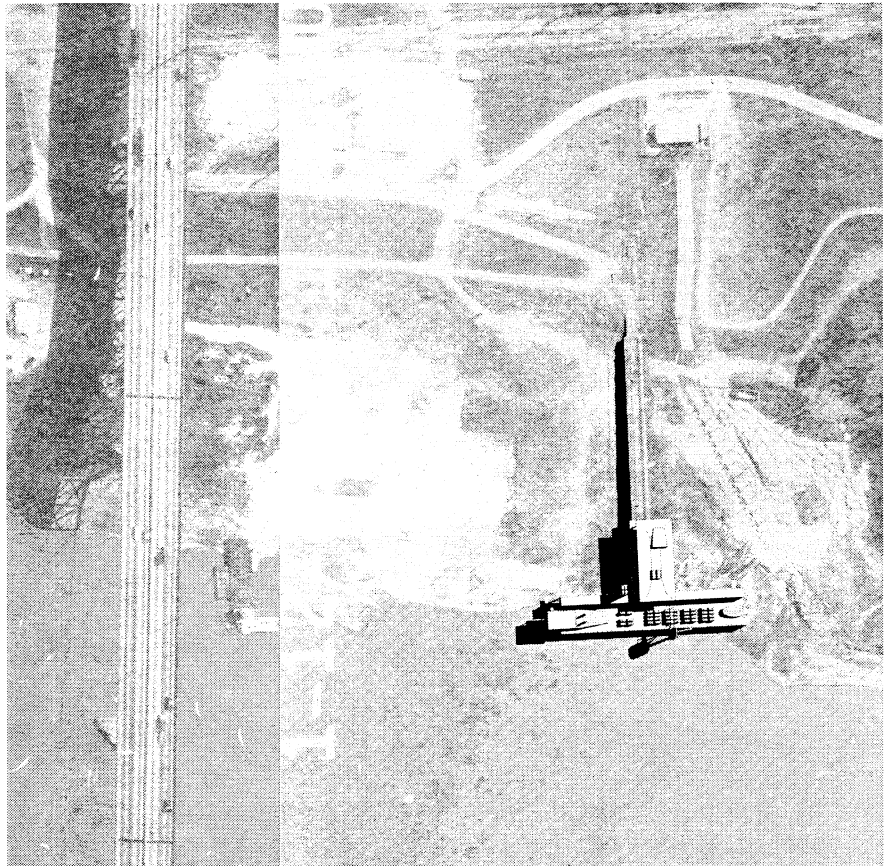
RED STICK—Site, Program, and Prudent Land Use. The Louisiana city, Baton Rouge, (French for “red stick”), was named by the French explorer, Sieur d’Iberville. The name refers to a pole, which separated the hunting grounds of two Native American tribes, the Bayagoulas and the Oumas. The blood of animal slaughters reddened this thirty-foot pole. It is thought to have been a boundary marker and a ceremonial artifact.

The site for this program, a Catholic cemetery, is an abandoned concrete loading platform located near the Huey P. Long Bridge, at the Mississippi River, in Baton Rouge. A bridge from the levee, which protects the city, accesses the platform.

The choice of site addresses the issue of land consumption. From Japan to Italy to the US, alternatives to land-intensive burial practices are being considered. Located at the undulating seam between land and water, this platform offers an alternative to burial practices, which often consume large acreage. Making a cemetery on this platform would be an environmental gain in that it would not adversely affect this wet land environment.

This program for a Catholic Parish includes a church, a crematorium, and a cemetery. Ground planes and relative height are themes introduced by the site. The program is disposed in relation to the elevational tension between the ground plane and the existing higher platform. Upon arrival, one moves up to the level of the platform at the location of the man-made levee. A bridge leads across to the cemetery, to the level of the dead. The open-air crypt is located at this level and provides a porous foundation for the church.

One ascends to the level of the church. From this level one may survey the cemetery platform, enter the church proper, access the upper portion of the mausoleum wall, or proceed to the crematorium chapel. The baptistery is located at this level, suspended above the river. Below the platform is the furnace for the crematorium and the suspended cage of the Tomb of the Unknowns. The bell tower provides the best plan view of the local compound as well as a privileged view back to the city.



The bell tower is a vertical ruler, which connects all of the levels of the project with the sky and the changing level of the water.

Louisiana—Cities, Towns and Above Ground Cemeteries. Making cemeteries to house bodies above ground is not a new idea in southern Louisiana. A high water table and wet soil made the practice of above ground burial a practical necessity. New Orleans is famous for particularly memorable cemeteries, which are like diminutive cities. Such cemeteries are found not only in New Orleans, but also in many towns and cities across the southern portion of the state.

Up close, haptic experience of the site would reveal comparisons to urban spatial aggregations. The long view from the Huey P. Long Bridge would offer an unusual bird’s eye view, very similar to a roof plan rendering. One would enter the city of the red stick over this new small city in red, perceived through perspective at the small size of a map.

