

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION, INC.
718 Jackson St.
Thibodaux, LA 70301

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER 2018 NEWSLETTER

THE STATE OF THE CEMETERY

A relatively wet late summer has left the Cemetery green and lush. It also has presented problems of maintenance. But things look well, and we are preparing for an autumn when visitors may come and enjoy their tours. Despite frequent rains, preservation mason Teddy Pierre has completed a (we believe) first-ever thorough cleaning of the Lawn Crypt in the west corner of the Cemetery. He also restored brickwork on the Hunter tomb nearby the front gate and cleaned three other tombs badly in need – Lewis Guion, Pierson Guion, and one of the Woods family tombs. All were accomplished thanks primarily to contributions from you and from the Azby Fund in New Orleans. We thank you all.



Lawn Crypt with restorer Teddy Pierre

CAMPUS IMPROVEMENTS PLAN

As part of the Vestry's funding campaign for changes to parking, walkways, and the playground, the Cemetery Association donated \$5,500 to St. John's. The funding came from TaWaSi, Levert Foundation, and the Shaver family, which the Cemetery Association gratefully acknowledges. The amount will be used for the new Cemetery Entrance Walkway. The Vestry has initiated funding requests to foundations; and it welcomes help from us individual members of the Cemetery Association and any others sent to St. John's Episcopal Church, 718 Jackson Street, Thibodaux, LA 70301.

ART AT ST. JOHN'S

The Cemetery Association is resuming the popular Art at St. John's, on Saturday, October 13, 10 AM to 3 PM. The committee is registering artists, has musicians and a caterer, and will conduct Cemetery tours. COME AND ENJOY!

ALL SAINTS DAY

There will be future St. John's announcements of celebrations on or around All Saints Day on www.stjohnsthiodaux.org. Rev. Stephen Shortess, the new rector at St. John's, is impressed with the care being given to the Historic Cemetery and is developing a celebration of the memory of those interred there.

ART AT

A outdoor fine art event
at St. John's Episcopal
Church in Thibodaux.

S. JOHNS

Live Music

LOCAL ARTISTS

GREAT FOOD

Cemetery
Tours

CHILDREN'S
ACTIVITIES

Help support
the
restoration &
preservation
of
St. John's
Historic
Cemetery.

Benefit for St. Johns Historic Cemetery Association Inc.
www.stjca.org

SATURDAY
October 13
2018
10am-3pm

St. John's
Episcopal Church
718
Jackson St.
Thibodaux,
LA

LIVE OAK TREE SEMINAR

The Historic Cemetery and Churchyard both feature beautiful 160-year-old live oaks, and much attention is given to preserving them. On March 10, St. John's hosted dozens of arborists from around south Louisiana who were required to renew their licenses. The meetings on Friday were held by the Louisiana State University Agriculture Department, under Dr. Hallie Dozier, and the featured speaker was Dave Leonard, well known arborist of Lexington, Kentucky. The session included an outdoor tour of the churchyard and Cemetery, to explain dos and don'ts about trees. The following day there was another large gathering, this time with members of the general public, and a second tour of the trees to show us how to care for live oaks. The information we received was important and fascinating. E. g, mulch your trees as far out as possible, with hard wood chips 4 or 5 inches thick. They rot and feed and nourish feeder roots. Minimize compaction. Learn proper trimming, but do not overdo. We were reminded how valuable these trees are to our physical environment. We thank Dr. Dozier and Dave Leonard.

YOU ARE OUR SUPPORT

If any reminder is needed, we want to repeat how essential are your contributions in helping preserve and inform the public about St. John's Historic Cemetery. Please continue your membership and your assistance. Envelopes are provided with this newsletter. And we hope to see you visiting the Cemetery, now that the cool autumn approaches. Do let us know when you come by telephoning the church office, 985-447-2910.

A STORY: R. H. "BOB" SIMONS MEMORIES OF A LIFE WELL LIVED

[Editor's Note: Our newsletters often concentrate on times of prosperity when newcomers flocked to Thibodaux. One such was after World War II. Oil and gas discoveries increased in south Louisiana; they brought wealth especially after 1950. The first gas well located in the City limits was drilled around 1954 in the cow pasture of the former home of Francis T. Nicholls, fronting on St. Mary Street (now Nicholls Shopping Center). A participant in the era was Robert H. Simons. The author, Betsy Magee, who is a board member of St. John's Historic Cemetery Association, thanks the Simons daughters Robin and Kelly for their help.]

was raised during the 1930s Great Depression years; his father had dairy cows, and his mom kept her family fed and corralled. His mother baked 12 dozen biscuits every morning for their breakfast. Leftovers were packed in the children's lunch boxes and appeared again as after school snacks. All 144 biscuits would be gone by the evening, and the process began again the next morning. Bob was always missing when his mother called the kids in at the end of the day. She knew that he could be found hiding out under their raised house, where he was dreaming about flying and one day becoming a pilot. His dream later became true.



Bob and Helen Louise Pitcher were wed in 1948 and raised two daughters in Thibodaux.



R.H. "Bob" Simons served as a Naval Aviator from 1942-1945. Later, he would serve as Director of Public Works for Lafourche Parish.



Bob always dreamed of becoming a pilot and flew Wildcat planes for the Navy off of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Solomons, patrolling the East Coast of the U.S.

A stroll through St. John's Historic Cemetery is a special way to observe Veterans Day, which falls on Sunday, November 11, 2018. Among the numerous veterans from all branches of the United States military services and the military of the Confederate States of America that lie interred in St. John's Historic Cemetery is Robert Henry Simons. R. H. "Bob" Simons served in the U. S. Navy as an aviator from 1942 to 1945, during World War II.

Known as "R. H." as a boy growing up in Boyce, Louisiana, and "Bob" when he eventually moved to Thibodaux in 1950, he and his wife, Helen, would raise their family here. Bob first worked for an oil field construction company but eventually would become the Director of Public Works for Lafourche Parish.

Bob's daughters, Robin Simons Wittman and Kelly Simons Landry, recently shared fond stories and memories about their parents. Many of the stories are ones they grew up hearing and that are still held in their hearts. Bob, born in 1923, was one of 6 children and was raised in the small, rural Louisiana town of Boyce. Bob

Lying about his age, Bob enlisted in the U. S. Navy on December 12, 1942. During his aviation training, the lanky, 6'4" man can be spotted in his platoon's first picture, because the Navy had trouble finding a shirt to fit his long arms. While his service during WWII did not entail duty in the South Pacific or European theaters, Bob was based off the aircraft carrier USS Solomons and flew patrols up and down the U.S. East Coast in a Navy Wildcat. One of Bob's responsibilities was to ferry Navy planes to Oklahoma. On the way, he buzzed the bank building where Helen worked in Mobile and barrel rolled over the main street of Boyce for his mother.

Helen Louise Pitcher's first appearance in Bob's life occurred when his aircraft carrier pulled into Mobile for a Navy Day. Helen and a group of her girlfriends showed up for a tour of the carrier and the chance to see the sailors. Bob sighted the girls and pointed Helen out to his buddies saying, "See that girl? That's who I am going to marry." He charmed Helen into a cup of coffee with him that afternoon, and the rest is Thibodaux history. Bob and Helen were married in 1948, after his discharge as an Ensign from the Navy in 1945, when he received a promotion to Junior Guardsman. Bob earned an engineering degree from Southwestern Louisiana Institute in Lafayette (now ULL), while Helen worked in Mobile and Birmingham before their marriage.

Taking advantage of the busy oil industry, Bob got a job in Lafayette as an engineer with Guy Scroggins, one of the pioneers in oil field construction. It was not his first career choice, however; Bob wanted to continue flying airplanes as a crop duster. But Helen gave a 'thumbs down' on that idea. He was transferred to Thibodaux in 1950 and was in charge of construction of oil field board roads and of operating crew boats. After shifting to become the Director of Public Works for Lafourche Parish, Bob worked on many of the early road, bridge and construction projects in the parish. Among his challenges was helping design the Bayou Country Club Subdivision and golf course, the first such local golf club development since the Depression.

Helen was an active member of St. John's Episcopal Church in Thibodaux and brought her young daughters to church, although Bob did not attend. After Helen's death in 1998, Bob became active at St. John's and was confirmed in the church with that year's 12-year-old confirmation class. He never missed a Sunday service thereafter. He often could be found working around the church and in the church yard and cemetery.

Bob's daughters Robin and Kelly describe their father as "a very humble, fun-loving man" who "loved to play jokes on others." One story involved his hunting buddy and St. John's member, the late John Pugh. John cancelled on a planned duck hunting trip that the two had made. Not to miss an opportunity to rib his friend, Bob wrapped up a pair of old, canvas tennis shoes in newspaper and stuck them in his freezer. He took the frozen package to John saying, "I have some canvasbacks for you." Dot Pugh and Helen Simons were great friends and talked almost every day. Dot told Helen that they were expecting family and she was going to fix a duck gumbo with the canvasback ducks that were in her freezer from Bob. Helen warned Bob that he better let Dot know what was really wrapped up in newspaper in her freezer—and fast!

Bob Simons left a legacy of love and laughter to all who knew and worked with him. Veterans Day is a special time to remember the service men and women that have touched and shaped our lives, our city, and our great nation in so many unspoken and unknown ways.