

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER 2017 NEWSLETTER

A REPORT ON OUR CEMETERY

Thibodaux's summer weather has been RECORD-SETTING WET. It made regular maintenance a challenge for the contractor. The Cemetery lawn is in splendid shape; weeds, however, plague some tombs. Our live oak trees remain undamaged by high winds. Most of the trees lining West Seventh Street and some on Church Street were trimmed last spring to lift the growth and keep limbs from touching a number of tombs. The Cemetery Association reimbursed St. John's for the work. The Azby Foundation financed the cost of restoring two Larkin family tombs near the entrance gate. Stanley Baker, a local mason, did a splendid job on the tombs.



Before restoration of Larkin tombs



After restoration of Larkin tombs. Photos courtesy of David Cassard.

CEMETERY ENTRANCE

Plans are moving ahead for construction by Cedotal Landscaping of a new surface leading to the Cemetery's main entrance. It will feature a stiff, "alligator skin" coating on limestone conglomerate - firm but permeable to protect live oak tree roots. The entrance will be restricted to pedestrians, and vehicles will be directed to the gate on Church Street. The Vestry approved the plan donated by Leonard Chauvin Engineers, which is part of a still-incomplete general Campus Plan. The Cemetery Entrance stage can proceed thanks to funds the Association raised recently from Levert Foundation, Shaver family, TaWaSi, and Peltier Foundation.

MARCH 2018 LIVE OAK TREE SEMINAR

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture will hold a two-day seminar on oak tree planting and maintenance on March 9 and 10, 2018. The event will take place at St. John's and use the cemetery and church campus trees as a laboratory. On Friday, March 9, the attendees will be limited to arborists who must renew their license certifications. The Saturday session will be open to the public, at no charge, to teach about live oaks and their care. Dr. Hallie Dozier of the LA State Agriculture Extension Service is organizing the event and will invite Dr. Fave Leonard, a live oak specialist from Kentucky, to assist. **Please let us know if you wish to attend.**

ART AT ST. JOHN'S/GIVE NOLA DAY

In April the Cemetery Association sponsored Art at St. John's. It was favored by good weather, excellent art, good food, and a fine turnout. Mike Strausser's committee of Mickey Guillory, Betsy Magee, Aline Barr, Dawn Koetting, Robin Whitman, and NSU professor Joseph Holsapple, and other volunteers worked hard. The next Art at St. John's will be held on **Saturday April 14, 2018.**

A day-long event in early May was Give NOLA Day. Donations were made online to the Greater New Orleans Foundation, with the Cemetery Association receiving a portion of those donations from people who so designated it as "their" organization. The Cemetery Association made over \$1,300. Betsy Magee was our organizer for the event.

*The St. John's Historic Cemetery Association, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) organization under the Internal Revenue Code.
All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

OUR FINANCIAL GOALS

You are helping the Cemetery Association fund maintenance, preservation, and improvement of St. John's Historic Cemetery. In the recent past we have solicited money from members and friends twice yearly. The change from one solicitation yearly, as once was the case, to two – late winter and early fall - is due partly to our stepped up efforts: no longer simply assisting with lawn maintenance, but increasingly tomb restoration, tree care, and fence repair needs to name a few. We also are trying to build a financial savings base for emergencies and to establish an endowment for the future. The Cemetery Association no longer directs efforts just toward families whose relatives are buried at St. John's; for one reason, we have increasing difficulty locating them as time passes. Our solicitations are directed to any individuals and foundations who may wish to assist in preserving and maintaining this historic, beautiful place.

We at the Cemetery Association ASK again, therefore, FOR YOUR HELP and trust that you approve of the efforts that we are undertaking. We always want to hear from you and to welcome you in person when you visit the Cemetery or St. John's Episcopal Church. Please also advise us of any other friends or relatives who may be interested.

TID BITS

Our Association web site www.stjhca.org has some lovely photographs of the Cemetery and other matters of fun and interest for us all.

New officers of St. John's Historic Cemetery Association are the President, John Shaver, whose family has a long history with the Cemetery Association; and David Plater, past president, who now is the Corresponding Secretary. Alice Strausser remains the Recording Secretary and Fred Sollars the Treasurer.

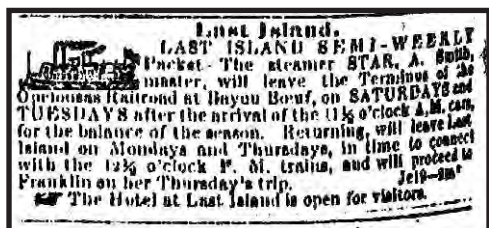
Two other St. John's-related events are being planned for 2018: the annual meeting of the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation in Thibodaux on May 16-18, 2018; and a seminar on cemetery preservation & conservation on October 20, 2018.

St. John's will have a work day on Saturday, October 28, 2017. Volunteers are needed from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

St. John's has reprinted *The Remarkably Neat Church in the Village of Thibodaux: An Antebellum History of St. John's Episcopal Church*. Orders and payment should be sent to the church at 718 Jackson Street, Thibodaux, LA 70301; with mailing, the cost is \$20.

A CEMETERY STORY: JOHN CHARLTON BEATTY

One of the early St. John's families whose tomb is prominent in the Historic Cemetery is the Beatty family. [The name is often spelled Beattie.]



August 1856 newspaper ad for steamboat trip to Isle Derniere

John C. Beatty, with his wife Charlotte Reid and a brother Adam Beatty – all from Mason County, Kentucky, settled in Lafourche Parish in 1829. Trained in medicine, John later chose instead to study and practice the law. He assisted in drafting the incorporation law for Thibodaux in 1839 and served as a trustee of the town. Beatty also acquired sugar plantations, among them Beatty Plantation, later called Beattyville, along upper Bayou Terrebonne. In the 1840s the Beattys lived in Thibodaux, next to the homes of Reuben Bush, a merchant, and G. W. Squires, native of Baltimore and the town treasurer.

John C. and Charlotte Beatty were involved with St. John's Episcopal Church and Cemetery from their beginnings, John serving on the vestry and the building committee in 1843. When Charlotte died in 1847, she left her husband and three children, Taylor, Sarah, and Walker. Charlotte is buried in St. John's Historic Cemetery, the tomb so marked. A mystery surrounds the burial of John, his son Walker, and his second wife and children.

After 1850, John C. Beatty married Mary Foley of Assumption Parish. Because Mary was a Roman Catholic, the couple's two children, Mary and Arthur John, received baptism at St. Joseph Catholic Church, then

fronting Bayou Lafourche at the lower end of Thibodaux. During the 1850s the Beatty family lived along the left bank of Bayou Lafourche, upstream from Thibodaux a few miles. They customarily vacationed on the Gulf Coast at the increasingly fashionable Isle Derniere (Last Island) resort. During August 1856 John C. and Mary Beatty were there with the younger children and servants.

For Bayou Lafourche residents, two such vacation "escapes" were then accessible. One was Caillou Island; travelers reached it by steam vessel via the Barrow Canal near Lockport across to Bayou Terrebonne below present day Houma, and on down Bayou Terrebonne to the Gulf. By 1856, the other retreat from summer heat, mosquitos, and fevers was Isle Derniere. Located west of Caillou Island, it could be attained using the newly constructed railroad from Terrebonne Station (now Schriever) across to Tigerville (now Gibson) on Bayou Black, and on that stream by steamboat to the Atchafalaya River and down. Some residents living closer to Napoleonville traveled to the resort via the Attakapas Canal to Lake Verret, and from there across swamp streams and lakes to the Atchafalaya River. [Grand Island, today's preferred resort, was unavailable via Bayou Lafourche. The bayou still was dammed with trees and other debris after an order of Andrew Jackson in late 1814 to prevent British forces from attacking New Orleans from the west side of the Mississippi River. The dam caused Bayou Lafourche to flood frequently below Lockport.]

When John and Mary Beatty, children Walker, Mary, and Arthur John Beatty, some relatives, and their servants were vacationing at Isle Derniere, Taylor Beatty was at school in Virginia, and Sarah had left

the island earlier. The terrible Last Island hurricane hit on August 10, 1856, killing upwards of 300 people, among them all five Beattys and most of the servants, who drowned in Caillou Bay. A Beatty slave coachman, named William Cush (or "Cutchmember"), saved a three-year-old child, Thomas Bryan Pugh. Cush survived well past the Civil War, living on the Beattys' Orange Grove plantation. Thomas Bryan Pugh lived to be the oldest survivor of the hurricane.

In the St. John's antebellum history (1992, 2016), the short biography of Beatty noted that the bodies of the family members who drowned at Last Island were found and returned to St. John's for interment. Other histories state that no or few remains ever were retrieved. In *Last Days of Last Island* (2009), author Bill Dixon holds that John C. Beatty's body and those of children Mary and Arthur John were recovered and buried at St. John's, but that Walker's and Mary Foley Beatty's bodies were never found. The marble tablet on the Beatty tomb states that Arthur John and Mary indeed "lie buried here;" their father, John C.'s, name also is engraved on the tablet. Taylor Beatty served as an officer in the Army of the Confederacy in the Civil War and became a district judge and planter on Coulon Plantation (today's North Thibodaux). His sister Sarah married Robert N. Ogden, a Confederate officer and to-be-prominent state politician and judge.

[References: David D. Plater, ed., "The Remarkably Neat Church in the Village of Thibodaux": An Antebellum History of St. John's Episcopal Church (1992, reprint 2016); Bill Dixon, *Last Days of Last Island: The Hurricane of 1856, Louisiana's First Great Storm* (2009); Christopher E. Cenac and Claire D. Joller, *Hardscrabble to Hallelujah Legacies: Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana Vol. I: Bayou Terrebonne* (2016); Judy Riffle, "Was a Georgetown Slave a Hero of the Last Island Hurricane of 1856?", *Le Raconteur*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 2, June 2017, 113-116.]