

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

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

ST. JOHN'S CEMETERY WORK DAYS

At this time there are two planned work days for the St. John's Cemetery. The spring work day is scheduled for March 22nd and the fall date is October 25th. We encourage and appreciate those who volunteer to help on these days. It is a wonderful opportunity to "get to know" more about the cemetery and those buried there. Denis Gaubert researches and provides interesting information about the cemetery. Thank you, Denis.

ANNUAL MEETING

The 2025 Cemetery Association Annual Meeting will be held on March 11th, at 6:00 P.M in the Hunter Horgan Parish Hall library.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

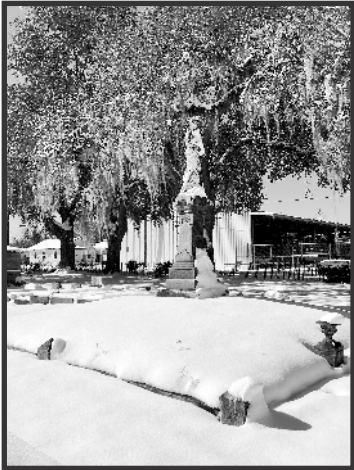
Patty Hrapmann has taken over the editing of this newsletter. She enjoys learning about the historic cemetery.

2024 DONORS

Your support this past year was outstanding and will be a great help in providing for future work planned in the Cemetery. Thank you!

- Angels:** Richard Bourgeois, Estate of Paul H. Due, Marion C. Lifsey, Diane T. Martin (Albemarle, LLC), M/M David Plater, Kristi Smith, Perry Szush
- Cherubs:** Levert Foundation, M/M Willard Hitch, Jr., Judge/Mrs. Walter Lanier, Jr., M/M Bobby Marcello, M/M Bryan Plater, Lawrence H. Pugh
- Spirits:** Chris Berger, M/M Harold Block, William Borskey, M/M David Cassard, Virginia Casse, Juanita Woods Caudill, M/M Charles Clayton, Susan Crawford, M.D., Rev'd/M Charles deGravelles, Dr. Jonathan Durocher, Marguerite Erwin, M/M Miles Forrest, Karen Foust, Patricia Gaubert, M/M E. J. Grabert, John Roderick Heller III, Mary Anne Hoffman, M/M James Koontz, M/M Malcolm Mackenzie, Dr/Mrs. Wes Magee, III, M/M Ray McCormick, M/M Nathan Musso, Emile Robinson, Ben Roth III, Alice Strausser, Ms. Stevia Walther, Miss Alice Walther, Lorraine Wise
- Friends:** Olie & Sylvia Adams, LTC James Bourgeois, Henry F. Brownlee, Agnes Esteve, Mrs. Mickey Guillory, Patricia A Hoehing, M/M Kenny Hrapmann, Addie Joy Kearns, Ann McDonald, Dr. Miki Pfeffer, M/M Murphy Rogers, Eugene Roth

*St. John's Historic Cemetery Association, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) organization (Tax id # 72-6020733) under the Internal Revenue Code.
All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.*



January 21, 2025 - Snow Covered St. John's Cemetery | Pictures donated by David Cassard

HEADSTONE FRAGMENTS

OBSCURE RELICS OF ST. JOHN’S CEMETERY HISTORY

*There pass, with melancholy state,
By all the solemn heaps of fate,
And think, as softly-sad you tread
Above the venerable dead,
“Time was, like thee they life possessed,
And time shall be, that thou shalt rest.”
Those graves, with bending osier bound,
That nameless beave the crumpled ground,
Quick to the glancing thought disclose
Where Toil and Poverty repose.
Thomas Parnell, “A Night-Piece on Death”*

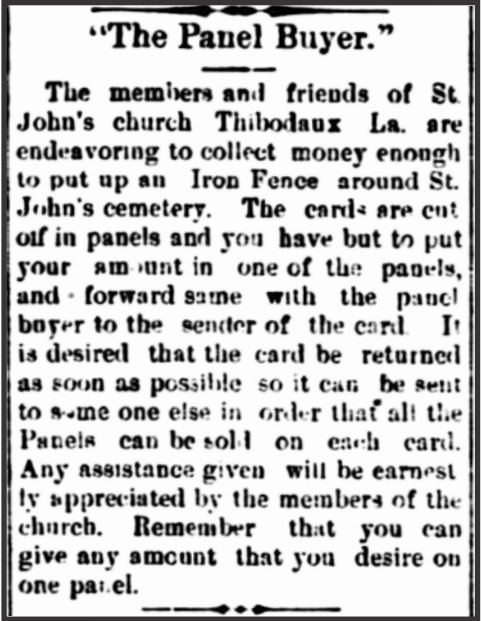
The histories of the occupants of the more prominent tombs and graves in St. John’s Historic Cemetery are well known and commemorated in the Church’s written history and the cemetery’s historic markers and guides. But what about lesser-known figures who found their final repose therein, and whose resting places are mostly forgotten or unknown? The visitor may pass by their monuments and graves with little thought or with only curiosity. Let us figuratively enter the fence, an historic relic itself, to discover those lost memories within.

THE FENCE

On February 10, 1855, the Thibodaux Minerva published an editorial prompted by a complaint from a female parishioner of St. John’s Church, regarding “that herd of mischievous goats which daily and nightly make the cemetery their place of resort [and] are destroying every shrub and ornament placed around to render conspicuous the last resting place of those now reposing in the cold embraces of death, to await the last solemn day of reckoning.” The editor suggested that the vestry “make a more secure barrier around the cemetery” to keep out the horned nuisances. A fence was eventually erected and a stray goat ordinance enacted by the trustees of the town of Thibodaux.

The Thibodaux Sentinel reported on August 23, 1890, that “[t]he new fence that has just been built around St. John’s cemetery adds much to the appearance of that part of town. It is strong, solid and substantial and will last for many years.” That confident prediction sadly turned out to be untrue. By 1902, a fund was begun by congregants of St. John’s Church to raise money to replace the deteriorating wooden fence.

The Thibodaux Sentinel of March 8, 1902, explained the fundraising technique:



The Lafourche Comet of August 10, 1910, provided an update that the iron fence fund in Hibernia National Bank amounted to \$885.66 and that the existing wooden fence had been repaired and painted. A separate fund had also been created in the Bank of Thibodaux for

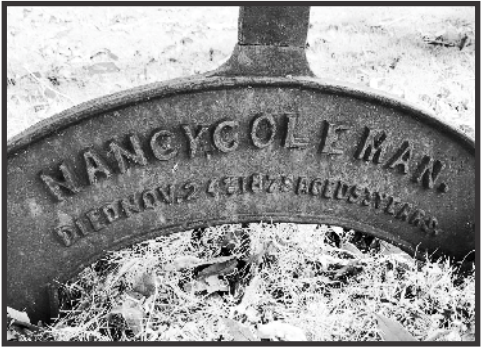
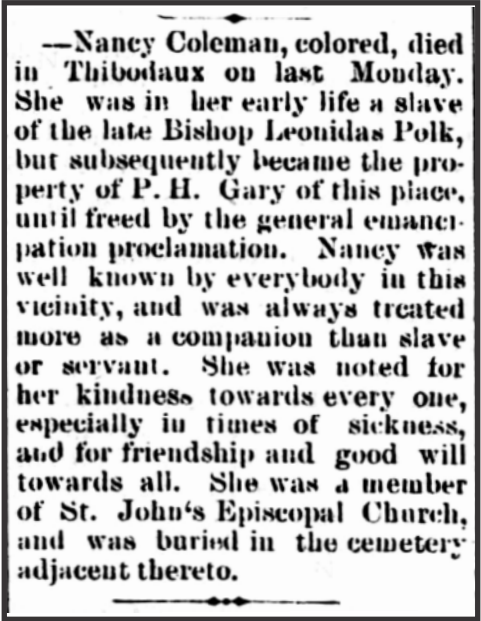
maintenance of the aisles in the Cemetery.

In a letter published in the newspaper on March 20, 1913, prominent Church member John J. Shaffer acknowledged that the contributors to the fence fund were impatient for progress and explained that the iron fence fund had grown to \$1,300.03 due to the “constant and admirable” efforts of Minnie Williams and Ruby Williams. He further explained that he had instructed them not to start the fence construction until it could be paid for in cash (about \$1,500.00, or \$1.50 per foot for 1,000 feet) and decisions made about removing various obstructions along the fence line. In a long letter to the editor dated April 6, 1913, parishioner H. A. Pugh complained that the fence proponents “seem to think the beautiful Live Oak trees surrounding the cemetery a menace to this work, and that they must of necessity be destroyed.” Mr. Pugh described such an idea as a “desecration” and forcefully urged that “the fence be so constructed as not to destroy the trees,” which were “a gift from Nature and cannot be replaced.”

On December 23, 1915, the Lafourche Comet announced that the contract for the new iron fence had been signed on December 8 and the contractor had begun work.

The newspaper added: “The signing of the contract for the fence must have been as agreeable to Miss Ruby Williams, of Lafourche Crossing, as a beautiful Christmas present, for she has been ardently at work for a number of years trying to raise the funds necessary to pay for the fence.”

From the Thibodaux Sentinel of Nov. 29, 1879:



A tragic accident befell a doting grandfather on the morning of Wednesday, July 15, 1885. Christian Belteau, an experienced harnessmaker, had gone into the upper room of Hoffmann’s Livery Stable on Jackson Street, in order to salvage scraps of old leather to repair some harness for his grandchildren. He accidentally stepped through the opening in the floor and fell nine feet headfirst to the ground floor, breaking his neck. The Thibodaux Sentinel recounted that

he was 70 years old and had worked on various plantations as a harnessmaker for 30 to 40 years. Honored as an active member of Thibodaux Fire Company No. 1, his brother firemen “laid the body of their unfortunate comrade away to rest under the shadow of the oaks in St. John’s cemetery” that same evening. “Everyone knew and liked the quiet, gentle, inoffensive old man,” the newspaper eulogized.

In addition to native-born citizens, St. John’s Historic Cemetery shelters the remains of a substantial array of foreign-born persons, demonstrating the cosmopolitan character of Thibodaux even in its first century.

On April 12, 1887, Alexander Menzies, age 76 and a native of Scotland, died at his residence on St. Philip Street in Thibodaux. Mr. Menzies was born on March 18, 1811, and immigrated to the United States in 1829. In 1850, he was living with his wife and children in New Orleans and working as a mechanic. By 1860, he was living with his family in Thibodaux and employed as an ironworker and pattern maker for the local foundry. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States on October 24, 1872. Later in life, he became too feeble to work, but, according to his obituary in the Thibodaux Sentinel, “[h]e was able, generally, to walk about his yard, and, occasionally, upon the streets.” The newspaper added that “Mr. Menzies was of a retiring disposition, seldom mingling in society, and found happiness and comfort around the family fireside.” On the evening after his demise, “as the shadows of the trees were lengthening into darkness,” and after “impressive ceremonies” at St. John’s Church, Mr. Menzies was laid to rest in the Cemetery.

In its edition of June 8, 1895, the Thibodaux Sentinel reported the tragic death of an employee of the Louisiana Cypress Lumber Company on June 1, 1895. The worker became entangled in some ropes at the company’s lumber camp in the rear of Laurel Valley plantation and his neck was broken. The newspaper identified him as Matz Stainlacker, a native of Finland. (In the 19th century, Finns were well-known for providing most of the labor for clearing forests in Sweden and Denmark.) His body was brought to Thibodaux where it was interred in St. John’s Cemetery. Church records give his name as Matz Staimbakler and his age as 42.

Henry (born Heinrich) Fritzinger was born on September 1, 1863, in Darmstadt, Germany. He was a nephew by marriage of Thibodaux livery stable owner and fellow German Frank Hoffmann, whose wife Lisette was his paternal aunt. In the late 1880s and 1890s, he was a prominent member of the Badeaux Bucket Brigade fire company. He purchased and renamed his uncle’s stable business in 1889, but later that year they mutually rescinded the sale and he later opened his own livery business in Napoleonville in 1891. He was elected as a trustee for the Town of Thibodaux in 1896. In 1899, he and his wife moved out of a cottage on Jackson Street owned by his uncle and relocated to New Orleans. He again purchased the Hoffmann livery stable in 1899 but suffered financial reverses by 1900, resulting in seizures of business assets.

After a funeral at the Presbyterian church on Sunday, August 4, Mr. Fritziger’s remains were interred in St. John’s Cemetery in the Hoffmann family plot.

*“Good or bad, handsome or ugly, rich or poor,
they are all equal now.”
~ William Makepeace Thackeray*