

## ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

### FEBRUARY 2015 NEWSLETTER

#### REFLECTIONS UPON A STROLL THROUGH OUR CEMETERY:

#### A TIME TO BE BORN AND A TIME TO DIE (ECCLESIASTES 3:3-2)

A black, cast iron fence surrounds the cemetery behind St. John's Episcopal Church. Its unlocked gates are a welcoming passageway through time. Majestic live oaks that line the perimeter of the cemetery tower overhead. Listen carefully: a symphony quietly plays as the gentle breeze stirs the leaves that grace these stately oaks. Birds that nest there sing in harmony with the wind. Leaves drift slowly down moving to and fro, dancing in time to the music. This place is one of peace and sanctuary, and there is beauty in the architectural treasures that dot this landscape.

A rosemary bush planted long ago by some unknown hand grows untamed atop a forgotten grave. Its fragrance fills the air. Crimson flowers still in bloom are scattered among the evergreen leaves of a camellia grown tall with time. Whose memory does the camellia honor and whose hands lovingly dug the soil, planted the tree and cared for it so many years ago? A statue stands serene, Spanish moss draping her shoulders like a shawl beneath the canopy of ancient oaks. Bouquets of flowers placed tenderly by devoted hands remind us that someone still mourns the loss of loved ones. But far too many of the tombs have not seen flowers for countless seasons, and those who are buried there are long since forgotten.

History is written in the headstones that mark the tombs. Inscriptions on soldiers' graves attest to their service in the many conflicts that shaped our character and this country we call home. Names that are slowly wearing away can only be read as fingers trace the fading letters carved in stone. Should flags mark the graves of veterans so that visitors might honor their

service? Will their stories be lost forever when their identities are erased?

The names of those interred in recent years are effortlessly read, and the flowers placed there are a reminder that their lives are not forgotten. Yet time erases, and tombs fall into disrepair. The relentless forces of nature threaten the beauty and integrity of the Cemetery. Ferns, woody plants, and errant weeds push their way through the aging mortar. Large oak roots heave below the tombs. Wind and rain continue unremitting erosion. Water entering cracks repeatedly freezes and thaws, degrading the mortar, old bricks, and monument stones.

Walking along the neatly manicured paths yields a sense of one's mortality. Those who have gone before us had hopes and dreams. They loved and were loved. Each played a part in the world and paved the paths that we follow. Each

has a story that makes up our history—a history that should not be forgotten.

Cherishing this place will enrich not only our lives but those of generations to come. The responsibility of preserving this sanctuary falls upon the shoulders of us all. There is a part that each of us can play to protect and preserve all that St. John's Historic Cemetery represents. In its tranquility, it honors those who have gone before us. It is our reminder of all that is to be prized in life and of our God, who forever holds both us and those who have gone before in the shelter of His arms. Take a stroll through those gates. As you wander past the rosemary and the camellia—if you listen carefully—you will hear the symphony playing quietly.

Aline Barr.  
February 8, 2015



CEMETERY C. 1900 LOOKING NORTHWEST TO CHURCH STREET, OLD CEMETERY PICKET FENCE, STILL YOUNG OAKS, AND RESIDENCES WHERE FROST LUMBER NOW IS LOCATED. COURTESY JANE LOVEGROVE.

## ANNUAL MEETING AND REPORT


Your Association will have its annual meeting on Monday March 2, at 5:30 p.m., at the St. John's Parish Hall, followed by the quarterly meeting of the Board. The Association completed a successful 2014. Membership rose to 115 people and organizations—a nice increase after a dip the prior year. The response to our special plea last fall was wonderful. We welcome our new members and returnees. Additionally, the Association received three foundation grants! Thank all of you. Besides normal funding for Cemetery maintenance, we will be able to use the contributions for some major projects, like tomb restoration. Last year, we assisted in funding ten tomb restorations, mostly for stone cleaning and repair. Note the photo of a work day with the ladies of Bayou Preservation Group of New Orleans, who labored last spring and fall. The Vestry plans more work for them this year.



## BAYOU PRESERVATION GROUP AT WORK

### NEW PROJECTS

Aside from tomb repair/restoration, you should see some new signs soon. We present one as an example of the signs which will be mounted on metal posts at about 17 burial sites. The manufacture work is underway. When the signs are received, they will be set in concrete, hopefully before this coming Easter. At the entrance gate, a larger sign with a keyed Cemetery map will be placed. Together with the now-available brochure and map, the signage will inform visitors and help them locate tombs of friends and relatives. Funding has been found, too, for aisle marker posts, and their manufacture awaits action by the Church Vestry. Thanks again to the Nicholls State Art Department graphics students and teacher Trisha Rabalais for their creative efforts designing the signs, brochure, and map.



**FRANCIS REDDING TILLOU NICHOLLS**

BORN IN 1834, IN DONALDSONVILLE, FRANCIS NICHOLLS ATTENDED WEST POINT BUT TURNED TO THE LAW. HE ESTABLISHED HIS OWN LAW PRACTICE IN NAPOLEONVILLE IN THE LATE 1850S BEFORE ENTERING THE ARMY OF THE CONFEDERACY AS A CAPTAIN DURING THE CIVIL WAR. PROMOTED TO COLONEL AND THEN TO BRIGADIER GENERAL, NICHOLLS LOST AN ARM AND A FOOT IN BATTLE AND WAS CAPTURED AND HELD PRISONER. NICHOLLS BECAME GOVERNOR IN 1876 AS RECONSTRUCTION ENDED. ELECTED TO THE GOVERNORSHIP A SECOND TIME IN 1888, NICHOLLS HELPED TO END THE CORRUPT LOUISIANA LOTTERY COMPANY. HE WAS APPOINTED CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE LOUISIANA SUPREME COURT IN 1892 AND SERVED UNTIL 1911, WHEN HE RETIRED TO RIDGEFIELD PLANTATION, OWNED BY THE FAMILY OF HIS WIFE, CAROLINE ZILPHA GUION. NICHOLLS DIED IN 1912 AND WAS BURIED WITH HIS WIFE, HIS FATHER THOMAS CLARK, A VETERAN OF THE BATTLES OF NEW ORLEANS IN 1814-1815, AND TWO BROTHERS, ROBERT WELLMAN AND EDWARD FITZGERALD, WHO SERVED IN THE WAR WITH MEXICO, 1846-1848.

### ART AT ST. JOHN'S APRIL 11

buoyed by the popularity of last year's event, St. John's again will hold its art show on Saturday, April 11, from 10 AM to 3 PM. Admission is free to anyone. Original works will be displayed and sold, and the artists are contributing a portion of their receipts to assist the Cemetery upkeep. This year, too, food will be available, and visitors are encouraged to tour the Church and Cemetery. Mike Strausser has additional details, 985-447-9328.

### WORK DAY MARCH 7

The Cemetery can use some physical help come Saturday March 7, on our semi-annual Work Day. Beginning at 9AM, we will assemble at the church parking area. Among Cemetery problems, we will pull weeds from tombs, rake leaves out of the drains, and dispose of trash and fallen limbs. Bring your own tools. The work usually lasts 3-4 hours, and we have a jolly time accomplishing things together. Let David Cassard know if you can come, 985-414-3295. If rained out, we will meet to work the next Saturday, March 14.

### DONATIONS WELCOME/NEEDED

Enclosed is a donations envelope for much needed 2015 contributions. All such funds are tax deductible. Please remember that we have a tree adoption fund. Last year, David & Sheela Plater added to it. Thank you both.

## OUR 2014 MEMBERS

### Angels

Jerry & Melda Bridges  
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Due  
Joan R. Knight  
Levert Foundation  
Marion Lifsey  
Dr. Wes & Betsy Magee  
Peltier Foundation  
David & Sheela Plater  
Kristi Smith  
TaWaSi

### Cherubs

John & Murray Dennis  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ellis  
Cam & Sue Herpel  
Lindy & Mary Ann Hoffmann

### Spirits

Olie & Sylvia Adams  
J. Winston Ardoin  
Jim & Aline Barr  
Harold & Jane Block  
Nell T. Boersma  
Ray & Bennie Bourgeois  
Carolyn Boudreaux  
Tom & June Butler  
Mr. and Mrs. Jack Caudill  
Dr. and Mrs. Jonathan Durocher  
Maguerite Erwin  
Mr. and Mrs. Russell Esteve  
Quincy Ewing, III  
Miles & Chris Forrest  
Clyde & Karen Foust  
Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Fry  
Patricia Gaubert  
Virginia Carmouche Gayle  
Olivia Ann Gresham  
Mrs. Leo & Carolyn Hebert  
J. Roderick Heller, III  
D. Leonard Hingle  
Mrs. Jim & Ann Jackson  
John & Margaret Lanier  
Walter & Rita Lanier, III  
Rosemary Lovell  
Bobby & Lesley Marcello  
Mary Morton  
Dr. and Mrs. Charles Parsiola  
Dr. Franz & Marian Segger  
Mr. and Mrs. John Shaver  
Fred & Margaret Sollars  
Mike & Alice Strausser  
Alice Walther  
Stevia Walther  
Rev. George Wharton  
Jack & Lorraine Wise

### Friends

Allen & LaDonna Alexander  
John Anthony  
Irma Arceneaux  
William Borskey  
Mr. and Mrs. Roger Busbice  
Abbot Combes, III  
Janice Crisp and Elizabeth King  
Alfred Delahaye  
Pat Dormier  
Kitty Gaharan  
Caroline Goddard  
C.J. & Mickey Guillory  
Patricia Hoehning  
James Koontz  
Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Martin, Jr.  
Patsy Powell  
Dorothy Pugh  
Ann Lovell Rieniets  
Mr. and Mrs. Gibbens Robichaux  
Eugene Roth  
Lee & Susan Shaffer  
Dr. Philip Saleeby/Claudia Spence  
Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Townsend  
Richard & Judy Weimer

### Other

Virginia Casse  
Mr. and Mrs. Ted Hoffmann, Jr.  
Lucie Morvant

[Our apologies for leaving off Jim & Kathy Silverberg from the prior year listing.]

[Your membership contributions help to pay for normal maintenance to the Historic Cemetery. Please mail donations to St. John's Historic Cemetery Association, 718 Jackson Street, Thibodaux, LA 70301. The Association is a 501 (c) (3) organization founded to preserve and inform about the Historic Cemetery. Donations are deductible to limits provided by law.]