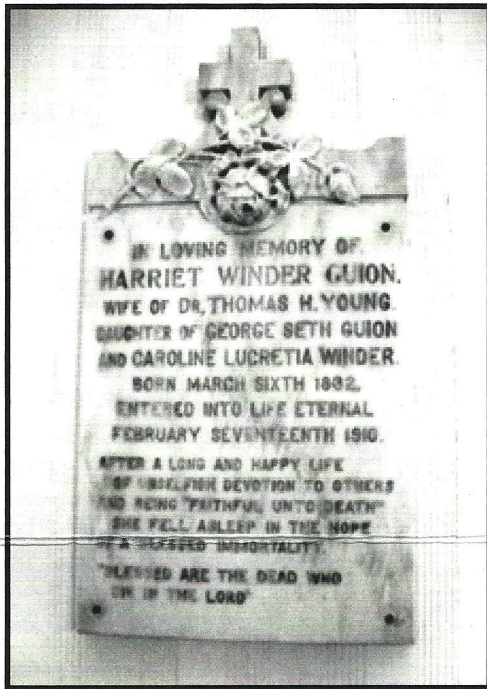


STILL A MYSTERY?

Upon entering St. John's Episcopal Church, one cannot help but to be drawn to a beautiful, ornate, marble plaque affixed to a simple, bare wall. The plaque's inscription reads "In Loving Memory of Harriet Winder Guion." Who is this Harriet Winder Guion, why would the church memorialize her, and who paid for the memorial?



On March 6, 1832, Harriet Winder Guion was born in Natchez, Mississippi to George Seth Guion and Caroline Lucretia Winder, originally of Kentucky. The Guions had seven children: George, Jr., William, Harriet, Lewis, Julia, Ann, and Caroline. The Guions migrated to Thibodaux shortly after George and Caroline were married in 1831. That year, Caroline's wealthy stepfather, John Davidson Smith, at his death bequeathed to her his 1200 acre sugar cane plantation, known as Ridgefield, to which George later added several parcels of land.

Much has been documented about George Seth Guion and the important role he played in the development of St. John's Episcopal Church, as well as of the town of Thibodaux. Very little has been recorded about Harriet. According to the Louisiana 6th District Court marriage records, on October 15, 1851, Harriet Winder Guion, age 19, married Dr. Thomas Young. He originated in Kentucky and resided in

Terrebonne Parish. On July 20, 1852, the couple gave birth to their only son, Alexander. By August 1853, yellow fever swept through the Thibodaux area taking with it as many as 224 victims, including Alexander Young. Alexander was only 14 months and 12 days old. As stated in the Thibodaux Minerva, Alexander died at the residence of his father, in the parish of Terrebonne, Tuesday, October 4, 1853. Although Dr. Young survived the fury of the 1853 epidemic, he couldn't escape its return in 1854. The Assumption Pioneer noted that Dr. Thomas Young died of yellow fever in Thibodaux on November 19, 1854. In three short years and at age 22, Harriet Young had lost her only child and husband.

Harriet's whereabouts following the deaths of her husband and son may best be traced by examining the United States Census records from 1860 until her death in 1910. According to the Census of 1860, Harriet was 28 years old and living at Ridgefield Plantation with her father, who was widowed. By 1870, Harriet was residing with her brother Lewis, a Thibodaux attorney and a former captain of the Confederate army. The 1880 census indicates that Harriet was living in the 1st Ward of Lafourche, with her sister Elizabeth, age 30. A fire destroyed a large portion of the 1890 federal census; Harriet Young's census information was lost with more than 6 million other United States citizens. In 1900, Harriet was 68 years old and living in Ward 14 of New Orleans. She resided with Margaret Ellis, age 56, probably her cousin through Guion-Ellis family marriages.

Efforts to uncover additional information about Harriet Winder Guion Young lead to two local newspapers. Their obituaries read:

"Weekly Thibodaux Sentinel"

February 19, 1910

Entered into life eternal on Thursday, February 17, 1910, at 1:07 p.m., Harriet Winder Guion, daughter of the late George S. Guion, and widow of Dr. Thomas H. Young. Interment at Ridgefield, near Thibodaux, on Saturday, February 19th, on arrival of the Southern Pacific train at 10 o'clock a.m.

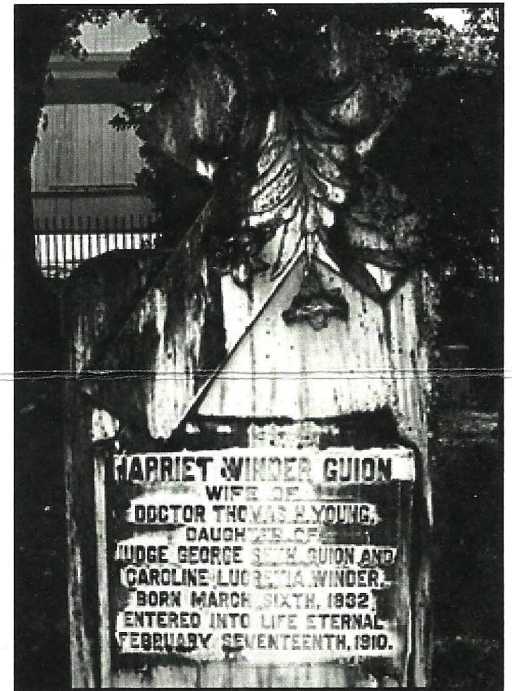
"The Daily Comet"

February 24, 1910

The remains of Mrs. Thomas H. Young, who died last Thursday, were brought to Thibodaux last Saturday for burial in the family graveyard on Ridgefield Plantation. The deceased was the daughter of the late George S. Guion, at one time owner of Ridgefield Plantation. She had not been residing in

this parish for a long while, but years ago she conducted a private school near what is now the homestead of Governor F. T. Nicholls. She was considered an excellent instructor. The death of this lady whose age is said to have been 78 years records a noteworthy event in the Guion family, as it is the first death in the family of an aged member since 1869.

A stroll through St. John's Historic Cemetery will lead you to the Guion family plot, located to the rear. There, the tombs of Harriet Winder Guion, her husband, Dr. Thomas Henry Young, and their child, Alexander, are located. When, how, and why the bodies were moved from Ridgefield Plantation to the cemetery is unclear.



According to Thom S. Rainer, "A person or a family gets naming rights to something in a church because of their financial gifts to the congregation." Whether Harriet Young donated gifts of any kind to St. John's Episcopal Church remains unknown. Efforts to uncover succession records proved unsuccessful. Although undocumented, it appears that as late as 1988, a succession was never opened.

Simply put, Harriet Winder Guion's beautiful, ornate marble plaque affixed to a simple, bare wall in St. John's Episcopal Church is **STILL A MYSTERY**.

Please forward any information concerning this subject to St. John's Historic Cemetery Association.