

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

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER 2020 NEWSLETTER

FROM THE CHAIR

Thank you all for your recent support. Especially this year. What a seven-month challenge this has been! For you and for us, for St. John's and the Historic Cemetery, for our nation. One only can say, we *still are here*.

The Cemetery suffered this past spring and summer: weeds grow from tomb cracks, alongside the perimeter fence, between tombs, seemingly everywhere. A Church and Cemetery Work Day took place on August 29 and gave us a decent start at cleaning the grounds. This *refreshing work* will continue when October brings cooler breezes. Volunteers are welcome!

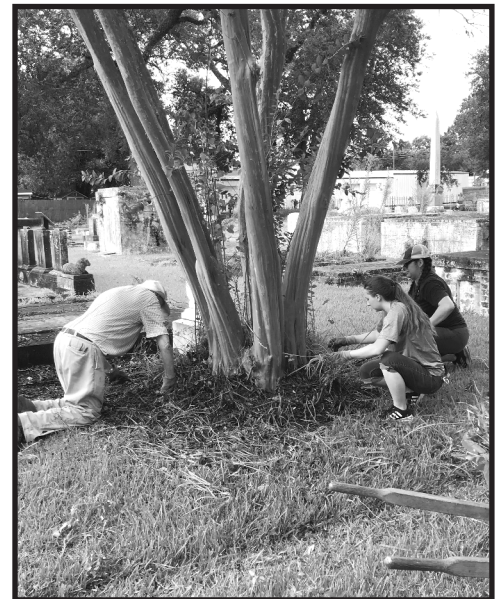
We members of the Cemetery Association are privileged soon to celebrate a special birthday for Dot Pugh, long-time chair of the Association until the late 1990s. Betsy Magee, our vice-president, writes about Dot in this newsletter.

HELP FROM THE CHURCH OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Among those who came from Houma to St. John's for the Cemetery and Church Work Day were four young ladies, two of whom contributed time and muscle to the cause in the Cemetery. Over the past five years or so the Cemetery has benefitted often from the unflinching assistance given by these volunteers. We are so thankful!

LANDSCAPE PROJECT

The March 2020 newsletter announced the prospect for St. John's to do some landscaping in the Cemetery. The center aisle – named for a St. John's founder, George S. Guion – has become rutted, and it and other places in the Cemetery tend to pond during heavy rains. The aisle and drainage swales need appropriate shaping to carry water to the side streets. In addition, St. John's wants to place limestone rock on the aisle from front to back. The St. John's Junior Warden, David Cassard, is consulting an engineer for a precise plan. The project is delayed. More, later.



Mormon volunteers Sister Brown, Sister Torres, and Board Chair David Plater. Photo courtesy of Ladonna Alexander

TREE LIMB HITS PERIMETER FENCE

Earlier this year the Cemetery Association gave St. John's funds to repair the old cast iron fence along W. 7th St. where autos had damaged it. A summertime windstorm broke an oak tree limb near the east corner, causing further fence damage. Thanks to Allstate Tree Service, the limbs were cut and removed at no cost, and the Association reimbursed St. John's for the fence repair. There will be storm damage on occasion. St. John's and Thibodaux were lucky to miss Hurricanes LAURA and SALLY. Trimming also is needed on many of the 165-year-old live oaks.

MEMBER DEATH

The burial of Mrs. Lenno (Patsy Kelley) Powell was held in the Cemetery on September 10. Patsy was a member and devoted supporter of the Cemetery Association. Among her accomplishments in life, she taught school and wrote children's books. We will miss her much.

ANY RELATIVES AND FRIENDS IN THE HISTORIC CEMETERY?

We always want information about those who are interred at St. John's. Please let us know if you have "a story" to share. The Association aims to help St. John's to maintain and restore the Cemetery and to promote and publicize the amazing history of its "occupants." A few years ago the Association board raised funds to have signs placed at a number of tombs, telling about the people interred there. We would like to continue that practice as we find out more and more. Would you like to assist in funding another sign or two?

A CEMETERY ADAGE

"The only people without problems live in the cemetery." *August Eugene Mansker*

A WOMAN OF EXCELLENCE: DOT PUGH



Photos courtesy of Robert Pugh

Special people make lasting impressions that bring smiles and good memories to mind, and they contribute to their community in invaluable ways. DOT PUGH certainly has brought love, laughter, hope, and smiles to countless hearts in her long life. She will be celebrating her 101st birthday on October 27. Our Historic Cemetery was fortunate to have her and John Pugh, Sr., volunteer to keep the Cemetery records and countless other maintenance details in order for decades, beginning around 1947. Much of the progress in recent years in restoration, maintenance, and history of the Cemetery can be credited to Dot and John Pugh paving the way.

Dorothy "Dot" Middleton Ballard Pugh is a longtime member of St. John's Episcopal Church and a very active member of the Episcopal Church Women (ECW) at St. John's. With friends and family, she will be celebrating her 101st birthday in St. Joseph Manor assisted living facility in Thibodaux.

Dot was born in 1919 in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Her father, a World War I veteran, contracted tuberculosis upon his return home. The Ballards moved to Johnson City, Tennessee, where her father required the services of a sanitarium for tuberculosis patients. He could spend time with the family at home during the day but returned to the sanitarium at night. Dot was the eldest of three children with a younger brother and sister. Her mother, Chris Ballard, was the 'baby' of a large family, and her support network was gone when the family made the move to Tennessee. When Dot was about 11 years old, her father passed away, and Chris Ballard moved the children back to Goldsboro in eastern North Carolina. There, Chris worked as a buyer for Weil's Department Store to support the family.

An excellent student, Dot graduated from high school at 16 and went to college at Peace Junior College in North Carolina, where she took business courses. Money was tight, and after a year Dot went to work in a local doctor's office. During that time a good friend fixed her up on a blind date with a young Army recruit from Napoleonville, Louisiana, named John Foley Pugh. Stationed for training in Maryland when they met, her date was descended from the Pugh

and Foley families, among the first of the Anglo-American families to settle in the Lafourche region dating back to 1818. William Whitmell Pugh, John's great grandfather, arrived "on the bayou" at a very young age with his family and later would build Woodlawn Plantation near Napoleonville. He amassed a great fortune during the antebellum era and left a large legacy of family members, 15 children and hosts of grandchildren, when, at age 95, he died in January 1906.

Upon graduating from Napoleonville High School early in 1931, John Pugh attended LSU and entered LSU Law School without completing the last year of college. He was invited by his great-uncle, Lawrence H. Pugh, to join the firm of Pugh & Lanier in Thibodaux. John Pugh and Walter I. (Fido) Lanier, a partner in the law firm, were called to serve in the armed forces for World War II. After John's basic training he and Dorothy Ballard were married on November 7, 1942. The newlyweds were stationed in Madison, Wisconsin, when the first of their three sons, John Foley Pugh, Jr., was born in 1944. Lieutenant Pugh soon shipped out to serve with General George Patton's troops in Europe. Finding a place to rent in Thibodaux was difficult; Dot and baby John moved to Napoleonville and lived with her father-in-law.



Dot & John Pugh visiting the USS Kidd in Baton Rouge in the 1980's

Once Army Major John F. Pugh returned from the war, he resumed work with his Thibodaux law firm. After the couple found and moved into a home in Thibodaux, two more sons, Lawrence and Robert, enlarged the family. Called "Mimi" by her grandchildren, Dot has five granddaughters and one grandson; the family now includes eight great-grandchildren.

Robert Pugh, Dot and John's youngest son, recalls that his grandmother Chris lived with his family for 40 years. Known by the family and throughout Thibodaux as "Bamba," she developed quite a network of friends and had an active social life. Although she planned to rotate her living arrangements with other children during the year, Chris so enjoyed Thibodaux life that she spent most of the year with Robert's family.

Dot attributes her long life to "just keeping busy." She always participated fully in the activities of the Episcopal Church Women (ECW) at St. John's Episcopal Church, the English Tea, the Christmas craft bazaar, selling Christmas greens and brooms, and making crosses out of palmetto fronds for the church. St. John's parishioner and the current St. John's Historic Cemetery Association secretary, Alice Strausser, shared that Dot loved to debone the chickens once they were cooked and to peel the eggs for the Lenten gumbo lunches - jobs that

others did not relish! Alice described Dot as the quintessential "Southern lady," gracious, friendly, and smiling.

Dot did more than just "keep busy." She volunteered at the Good Samaritan Food Bank and was instrumental in getting the St. John's Episcopal Church, St. John's Historic Cemetery, and Christ Episcopal Church in Napoleonville placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Dot was honored by the Louisiana Diocese of the Episcopal Church when she was presented with the ECW Honored Women Award for her long service. She enjoyed serving and encouraging the underprivileged and underserved in her community. A charter member of the Bayou Lafourche chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, she also served as the second president of the TaWaSi Club when it decided to hold an annual antique show. Dot took art lessons from Francis Folse and Dottie Billou and greatly enjoyed painting. She always relished the freedom of hopping in her car and taking off. She got her last new car at age 95 but gave it up when she moved into St. Joseph Manor.

Suzy Leseur Blanchard of Thibodaux has been a close friend and special "niece" with Dot. Suzy's father grew up in Napoleonville next to John Pugh and his three brothers, all first cousins. She shared that after John passed away in 1992, Dot made sure that the annual "Pugh Picnic" tradition at the family graveyard behind the location of Woodlawn Plantation occurred every year. The annual occasion brought in many relatives and restored the historic cemetery. Later, the picnic moved to the cemetery behind Christ Episcopal Church in Napoleonville, but the tradition continued. Some of the Cub Scouts that Dot led as troop leader in the 1960s visited with her at St. Joseph Manor, and she was grinning from ear to ear sharing the memories with these men, who are now in their 70s.

Dot's goddaughter, Kelly Simons Landry of Thibodaux, said that her mother Helen and Dot were best friends, the families close. "Dot is one of the nicest and strongest people I know. When she broke her hip at 90 something, she was frustrated that recovery took so long. She never liked being down for long! She has always been the sweetest lady and very independent."

So often, the women who quietly work behind the scenes to keep things running in a community are never acknowledged, nor do they ever expect or seek the recognition for their work. Dot Pugh is a quiet, strong woman; she has touched so many lives and has strengthened and grown a community and church in so many ways. Proverbs 31 says it best: "A woman of excellence, who will find? For her worth is far more than precious jewels. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the future. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and instruction of kindness is upon her tongue. Her children rise and consider her happy, her husband also, and he praises her. Give to her from the fruit of her hand, and may they praise her works in the city gates."

We wish you a very Happy 101st Birthday, Dot!
Betsy Magee, Cemetery Association Board Member