

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

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2021 NEWSLETTER

IDA

Hurricane IDA struck St. John's Episcopal Church and the Historic Cemetery on August 29, 2021. Its winds clocked over 110 miles an hour, with flooding rains. Thibodaux and our city neighbor to the south, Houma, took big hits. St. John's Episcopal Church lost many roof slates, several windows were broken, rainwater poured in. The Cemetery suffered broken live oak tree limb; some tomb adornments received damage. Portions of the 100-year-old iron fence were knocked over. The Cemetery Warden, David Cassard, quickly contracted with All State Tree Service, and the Cemetery is fairly presentable again; but clogged street drains and ruts are keeping the soil mucky, unable to be mowed. Our pleas to Association members and friends now are particularly urgent. Help is needed to reimburse St. John's for the expenses occasioned by terrible IDA.



Before and after cleanup at the Cemetery courtesy of Henry Foust

FROM THE NEW ST. JHCA PRESIDENT, CLYDE FOUST

The board of the Cemetery Association is identifying goals to strive for in the next several years. Some may be easily accomplished; others will require longer to achieve. Helping us in the goals process is Dr. Benny Zachry, former Nicholls State University business administration professor.

A major challenge is environmental risk from hurricanes and rain-generated flooding. Our board member John Dennis, who teaches surveying at Nicholls, will perform a Cemetery survey this fall. It should identify actions to be undertaken by the St. John's Vestry.

Another project will be assessing needs for repair and painting of the Cemetery wrought iron fence. The Cemetery Warden is collecting information and calculating costs. The 1916-era fence is showing its age and bears the marks of accidents and damage over the years, including IDA.

*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.*

A PODCAST: THE ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY FEATURED

Late in July our Historic Cemetery was represented by Board member John Dennis, former President David Plater, and restoration mason Teddy Pierre in episode 43 of the podcast named The Ordinary, Extraordinary Cemetery. The hosts, Jennie Johnson and Dianne Hartshorn of Colorado, led a fun, interesting session about the history and features of our Cemetery. You can find the podcast at this link: theordinaryextraordinarycemetery.com/episode-43-st-johns

CEMETERY WORK DAY

Last Spring the Cemetery received a good cleanup and weed pulling from a number of volunteers. Thanks to all helpers. A Fall Work Day is scheduled Saturday, October 23, at 9:00 a.m.

BOARD MEMBERS

As of the annual meeting in March, your Cemetery Association Board members are Peggy Baumann, Richard Bourgeois, John Dennis, Clyde Foust, Karen Foust, Sue Herpel, Luke Joseph, Betsy Magee, and Alice Strausser.

FROM THE NEW RECTOR OF ST. JOHN'S: ON OUR HISTORIC CEMETERY

When I was young, most of my friends' families spent summer vacations at the beach or in the mountains or at amusement parks. My parents instead packed up me, my two sisters, and my brother and took to the back roads of Mississippi and Louisiana to search out cemeteries for their genealogical and folklore research. Some of the burial sites were on private property where the current landowners had no personal connection to the families buried there, but many of the cemeteries were still lovingly maintained by their descendants.

My favorite locations were nestled among the trees of old-wood forests or in the piney woods. My least favorite graveyards were found commonly in the middle of pasture land, open to the blazing sun, often enclosed by an iron fence. They had suffered, in my father's words, from "those destructive cows" which used them over the years as scratching posts. Although these pasture sites were my least favorite, there was always the chance that they had been neglected long enough for blackberry vines to grow; we hoped that we might be visiting during the peak of ripened berries.

Although I think that we children were probably quite obstreperous on these trips, I look back on them with fondness. We were let loose with the challenge to find the most interesting epitaphs. The inscriptions and our questions about them taught us about scripture, classical poetry, and prose. The graveyards closest to the old home-place in Southwest Mississippi often gave Daddy the chance

to tell us stories about the interred there whom he personally remembered or had heard about from his parents and aunts and uncles. Some of the stories were amusing, some heartbreaking; all added to our sense of identity shaped by this family history.

I first arrived in Thibodaux a few months ago and familiarized myself with the buildings and grounds at St. John's. Upon my entering the Cemetery, funnily enough the scripture that popped into my head was from the resurrection account in Matthew's gospel, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Mary Magdalene and the other Mary of course were not anticipating the miracle of the resurrection but were visiting the resting place of Jesus in order to honor and mourn the loss of one whom they loved. Visiting burial sites of the dead is part of what we do to remember the past, personally and historically. It reminds us of our own mortality and the preciousness of the gift of life.

The Cemetery at St. John's Episcopal Church is an extraordinary treasure, combining the sacred and historic. Its artistry and craftsmanship are embodied in the sepulchers and monuments; its peaceful, parklike greenspace is surrounded by centuries-old live oaks.

I look forward to joining with the community of St. John's Episcopal Church in Thibodaux to do all we can to restore and maintain this invaluable cultural resource.

Holly Burris, Rector, St. John's Episcopal Church