

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2021 NEWSLETTER

WORK DAY, MARCH 27

A Work Day for the Cemetery and the Church campus is planned for Saturday, March 27. It will begin between 8 and 9 AM and last until about noon. Refreshments are served, and the event is fun. We always need help picking up trash, removing weeds between and on top of tombs, cleaning away leaves and other debris, and trimming branches. Please bring gloves and implements like rakes, shovels, and tree limb loppers. Call David Cassard at 985-414-3295. He can answer any questions.

FOUR DECEASED CEMETERY ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

Dot Pugh – Our “story” subject of the last issue, our “grande dame” Dorothy Ballard Pugh, died in Thibodaux in January at age 101. For years she chaired the Cemetery Association; her leadership is unmatched. She kept things on track and knew almost every member of the Association.

Linda Richard Keller – Living in Midland, TX, Linda was the daughter of Lynn and Lucille Richard of Thibodaux, who are interred in our Historic Cemetery. A long-time member, Linda is survived by her husband, Wayne Keller; a daughter, Deborah Keller Thibodeaux; her son David Keller; their families; and a sister, Joan Richard Knight, also an Association member.

John Ladd Lanier – On January 21 John passed away in Thibodaux. A lawyer for many years with Pugh, Lanier & Pugh, he gave great support to the efforts of the Cemetery Association. John's widow is Barbara Lanier, and he had a daughter, Caroline Lanier Anderson, and one grandchild.

C. J. Guillory – A frequent volunteer working in the Cemetery and around the Church, C. J. passed away on February 19. He and his wife Mickey, a devoted gardener and artist, always brightened our days, and C. J. never lacked for a good story or joke.

STATE OF THE CEMETERY

Two work days, one in August and another in October, got the Cemetery into good shape. It has required minimal maintenance over the late fall and winter, up to now. When a funeral for St. John's parishioner Ranald Graham took place recently, the work crew rutted the rear portion and along the main, or Guion, avenue. The damage emphasized again a need to undertake drainage work and place gravel where vehicles must pass. We also await the spreading of mulch around a number of the live oaks, for which the Azby Fund graciously made a contribution in 2020. The last such treatment was over ten years ago.

CEMETERY ASSOCIATION FINANCES, 2020

The Association received \$22,841 in donations last year. Its expenses totalled \$18,296, of which 1.) \$11,644 were to reimburse St. John's for repair and restoration of tombs, etc., and 2.) \$5,604 for reimbursement for Cemetery maintenance. Other expenses were for the two newsletters and maintenance of the Cemetery Association web site.

ANNUAL MEETING

The Cemetery Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 16, by ZOOM, at 5:30 PM Central time. Any and all members are welcome, if we have your e-mail addresses to send the link. Please check your e-mail a day ahead for the link; click on it a few minutes ahead of the meeting on the 16th and follow instructions.

BAYOU GIVES DAY

This year the Bayou Community Foundation's Bayou Gives Day will be on April 27. It is a community-wide online giving day that benefits a broad community in the Lafourche/Terrebonne area. Our Cemetery Association will be registered to accept donations, for those who prefer that manner of giving.

*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.*

2020 DONORS TO THE CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

During a difficult, Covid-19 afflicted year, YOU members kept the faith. And - welcome to NEW members. Having a broad base of support is SO important to our effort to help St. John's maintain, repair, and publicize a sacred spot. Thanks to YOU ALL.

Angels: Marion Lifsey, Nell Boersma, M/M Robert Ells, II, M/M David Plater, Richard Bourgeois, M/M Charles Cropp, M/M Paul Due, M/M John Shaver, Azby Fund, Levert Foundation

Cherubs: M/M Bobby Marcello, Dianne Frost, M/M Willard Hitch, Jr., M/M Wes Magee, III, Diane Martin-Albemarle

Spirits: Charlotte Bollinger, William Borskey, Agnes Esteve, M/M Clyde Foust, Virginia Gayle, Mary Anne Hoffmann, M/M Donald Koeting, James Koontz, Barbara Lanier, M/M Walter Lanier, Jr., Rosemary Lovell, Lawrence Pugh/Victoria Lee, Marion Segger, Kristi Smith, Alice Strausser, Lorraine Wise, M/M David Cassard, Janet Lee Davis, Jonathan Durocher, Patricia Gaubert, Olivia Ann Gresham, M/M C. J. Guillory, M/M Leo Hebert, Rod Heller, III, M/M David Lowe, M/M Malcolm Mackenzie, M/M Nathan Musso, Alice Walther, Stevia Walther

Friends: John McInerney, M/M Olie Adams, M/M Ed Blackburn, Henry Brownlee, Virginia Casse, Janis Crisp/Elizabeth King, Kitty Gaharan, Patricia Hoening, Addie Joy Kearns, Ann McDonald, M/M John Mullane, M/M David Reso, Anne Rieniets, Pat Szush, Marie Anthony, Irma Arceneaux, M/M Marshall Martin, Jr., James Bourgeois, Richard Combes, M/M Cam Herpel, M/M Richard Weimer, M/M Murphy Rogers, Martha Ayo

A CENTURY OF BOATS ON BAYOU LAFOURCHE: A STORY

This time last year we featured the Holden family. Benjamin Holden was a respected merchant in Thibodaux in the 1850s and one-time steamboat captain on the Mississippi River system. Steamboats appeared on Bayou Lafourche in 1825, when Captain Ferdinand M. Streck of Donaldsonville brought his small steamer, the Eagle, down Bayou Lafourche. Open to the Mississippi, but seasonally active in accordance with its flood or low stages, the bayou could not have been anything but hazardous. Although lined with trees and filled with snags and other debris, Streck managed to navigate the stream. From thence, even with such hazards, our bayou became a major avenue of commerce on which goods and people travelled to and from Thibodaux.



The sternwheeler steamboat H. N. Sherburne, c. 1900, alongside a warehouse now renovated to Rotolo's Pizzeria, at the corner of Jackson and Bayou Rd. (Courtesy Nicholls State U. Archives)

Now mostly unnavigable other than by small pleasure craft, upper Bayou Lafourche is blocked off to commercial boats by low, fixed bridges connecting the two highways, LA 1 and 308. The populace also has taken charge of the bayou edges, building homes and businesses. The agencies maintaining the bayou for fresh water for three hundred thousand citizens in three parishes and Grand Isle have much difficulty doing their jobs.

The commercial use of Bayou Lafourche long predated Captain Streck, and until steamboats came, rafts, dugout pirogues, flat bottom bateaux, small flatboats and keelboats, and rowboats all dominated. We forget how ancient these sorts of wooden craft were, made possible by the prehistoric inventions and uses of the axe and adze. And our area supplied vast sources of cypress trees that could be felled and fashioned for water craft. Lafourche Valley dwellers carried in their small boats a variety of materials and food to the important market in Thibodaux, located where City Hall stands today. Abuse by mooring vessels soon got out of hand as steamboat frequency rose. In the 1840s the Town of Thibodaux created a two-block-long area between Maronge and St. Louis Streets for moorage and enacted controls over its use.

Despite the rise of the steamboat, hand-powered boats dominated the scene. For both personal use and for transporting goods, Bayou Lafourche also saw boats fitted with sails such as small sloops, skiffs, and rowboats.

Not only dugouts, but plank-sheathed boats originated in Mesolithic, or Stone Age, times. Such ancient types of craft remained in operation along Bayou Lafourche past 1900. Among them were both small and large keel and flat boats, most familiar along the Ohio and Mississippi, but which entered Bayou Lafourche bringing grains, lumber, fruit, and even live animals from the Midwest and Upper South. They were navigated along the bayou by poling and cordelling. Cordelled craft involved humans, oxen, or mules laboring to pull a boat with a towline as they walked along a worn



Barges and flatboats moored alongside Bayou Lafourche above Jackson St. bridge, Thibodaux, c. 1890 (Courtesy Nicholls State U. Archives)

path beside the bayou. Evidence of such paths remains to this day between the water edges and remnants of the levees. These infinitely varied vessels are what our ancestors in the 19th century employed to migrate to Thibodaux and were essential to carry on daily life in the Lafourche Country.

After the Civil War sugar mills enlarged and consolidated. Dummy railroads appeared on plantations, and large flatboats were used to bring sugar cane from smaller plantations to the improved mills. The cane was hoisted onto the bayou bank and loaded into open rail cars which then were pulled by steam engine to mills.



Small sloop sailing Bayou Lafourche just below Thibodaux, c. 1900 (courtesy Nicholls State University Archives)

Local citizens' lives in the 19th century were daily entwined with Bayou Lafourche. And the City of Thibodaux spent considerable time and money through the 19th century making sure that a decent place could be had to moor, load, and unload vessels of all sorts. We still appreciate our bayou, over which we pass daily. Between 1800 and 1900, however, people used the bayou to get everywhere and to carry themselves, goods to sell, and necessities.

Sources consulted: Melanie Damour, "Born on the Bayou: Louisiana's Vernacular Constructed Watercraft," in Amanda M. Evans, ed., The Archaeology of Vernacular Watercraft (2016); City of Thibodaux Record, 1838-1861; "Steamboat Times: A Pictorial History of the Mississippi Steamboating Era" (www.steamboattimes.com, accessed 2/16/21); Roland Ennos, The Age of Wood: Our Most Useful Material and the Construction of Civilization (2020); Various collections, Nicholls State University Archives.