

# ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

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SEPTEMBER 2014 NEWSLETTER

## TWO BROTHERS

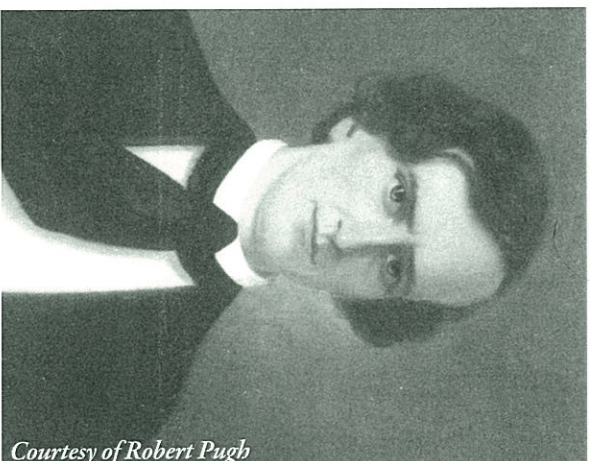
*To My Sons, On Going to  
the Rescue of General  
Taylor: 'Tis your country  
that calls you, Her  
summons obey; Away to the  
rescue, My brave boys away.*

During the War with Mexico, two sons of Judge Thomas Clark Nicholls served as volunteer officers for the United States in Mexico. Named Robert Welman Nicholls, born 1815, and Edward Fitzgerald Nicholls, born 1819, they were elder brothers of Francis T. Nicholls, later a Confederate general, twice state governor, and Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court.

The war began in 1846, and the Nicholls brothers enlisted, becoming part of the 2nd Regiment in General Persifor F. Smith's Brigade of Louisiana Volunteers. The company was commanded by Colonel James H. Dakin and assisted by West Point graduate Captain Albert Gallatin Blanchard. Volunteers from around the country normally gathered and organized in the muddy fields of Chalmette, located below New Orleans. From there, the volunteers sailed to the south Texas coast and eventually transferred to Matamoros, Mexico. Their hope was to earn glory, to experience adventure, and to uphold the honor of their country. Military distinction was an ambition of many of the officers who joined in that war. The brothers also counted on serving with their fellow Louisianan, "Old Rough and Ready" Zachary Taylor, whose victories in Northern Mexico captured the imaginations of so many Americans.

Welman and Edward Nicholls lived in Donaldsonville, and both led active lives. Welman, the eldest, was a prominent attorney, and Edward was mayor of the city in 1844 and clerk of the state district court in 1846. A third brother, Lawrence Drake Nicholls, enlisted, but soon illness forced him to return home from Mexico. In March 1847, he was chosen as Clerk of Court in the place of the absent Edward Nicholls.

After the first three-month-long tour, the Nicholls brothers remained in Mexico and



*Courtesy of Robert Pugh*

### ROBERT WELMAN NICHOLLS

became part of a newly organized group of 94 volunteers under Captain Blanchard. Named the Phoenix Company, it participated in the hard fighting leading to the capture of Monterey on September 24, 1846. At the time, Welman Nicholls, a lieutenant, was aide de camp for General Taylor. By all accounts of newspapers and first-hand reports, the volunteer soldiers of the Phoenix Company, foremost among them the two brothers from Donaldsonville, fought heroically against a professionally trained Mexican Army. According to W. W. Pugh, his brother-in-law, Welman first raised the American flag when the Bishop's Palace was captured.

The Phoenix Company was disbanded in May 1847, after taking part in General Winfield Scott's siege of Vera Cruz in March 1847 and the Battle of Cerro Gordo in April. Edward F. Nicholls remained listed as a 2nd lieutenant in Captain Blanchard's Company until then, but official records do not include Robert Welman Nicholls through that time period.

With the permission of General William J. Worth, Welman had returned home after the Battle of Monterrey to attend to his ailing father, Thomas Clark Nicholls, who died on June 12, 1847. Welman replaced his father as

judge of the 4th Judicial District in July 1847, and served in that capacity until his death in August 1849. Upon Edward Fitzgerald's return from Mexico, he practiced law for a short time, but he soon commenced the study of medicine at the University of Louisiana in New Orleans. After his schooling and two years of experience at Charity Hospital, Edward practiced medicine in Donaldsonville. His life ended in a fall from his horse in December 1851.

Both men were interred in Donaldsonville. At some point, they and other deceased Nicholls family members were moved and reburied in the Ridgelyfield Plantation cemetery near Thibodaux. Their remains were transferred to the St. John's Historic Cemetery by Josephine Nicholls, according to a Nicholls descendant, Josephine Ware Wallis.

On his way home to his plantation in December 1847, General Zachary Taylor was given a lengthy welcome in New Orleans. After leaving the city, he traveled upriver aboard the steamboat *Missouri*, accompanied by an aide de camp, one Captain Garratt. The boat stopped in Donaldsonville, where the Nicholls brothers welcomed General Taylor. According to newspaper reports, the General and his aide walked through crowds to the home of Judge Nicholls, who by then was Robert Welman Nicholls. According to a newspaper account, "as the old hero came into the room, there was a great rush—or, as an old campaigner styled it, a regular stampede—towards him, to get hold of his hand, or to snatch the long-to-be-remembered kiss from his weather-beaten cheeks. . . . The old General seemed not to be seriously discomfited by the sturdy attack, but maintained himself against the severe pressure to which he was subjected, with the constancy worthy of a hero of a hundred fights." After "much hilarity and many roasts and speeches," Taylor resumed his voyage to his home in Baton Rouge. It was only one of several such interludes to see old friends and comrades in arms.

**TO THE GREAT GOD OF BATTLES,  
THAT RULES IN THE SKIES,  
TO THE GREAT GOD OF BATTLES,  
MY PRAYERS SHALL ARISE.**



## SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS PAY A VISIT

One hot day in August, a group of soldier-likes from around South Louisiana convened at the Historic Cemetery. The occasion was the birthday of Brigadier General Francis T. Nicholls, CSA. Andrew Capone of Napoleonville, Nicholls's biographer, gave the crowd a talk about Nicholls. The gathering of men and women also was amazed to learn from your editor that at least eight Confederate veterans are interred in the Cemetery. The visitors received copies of the last newsletter and invitations to become members of the Cemetery Association. Yankee and Rebel sympathizers alike are welcome, with no distinctions!

### CEMETERY CONDITION

The usual summer conditions have pressed the lawn maintenance contractor, but the Cemetery is in good shape. So far, localized storms have not been a major problem, and—please say a prayer—no tropical systems have visited us as of this date. Hot weather is keeping the Church Vestry's New Orleans contractor from commencing tomb restoration on another two or three old structures. The work should take place this fall and winter. Funding for signage for some twenty burial sites and for iron post markers for the main and cross aisles in the Cemetery should be available once the Vestry decides on the particulars and undertakes a contract for work.

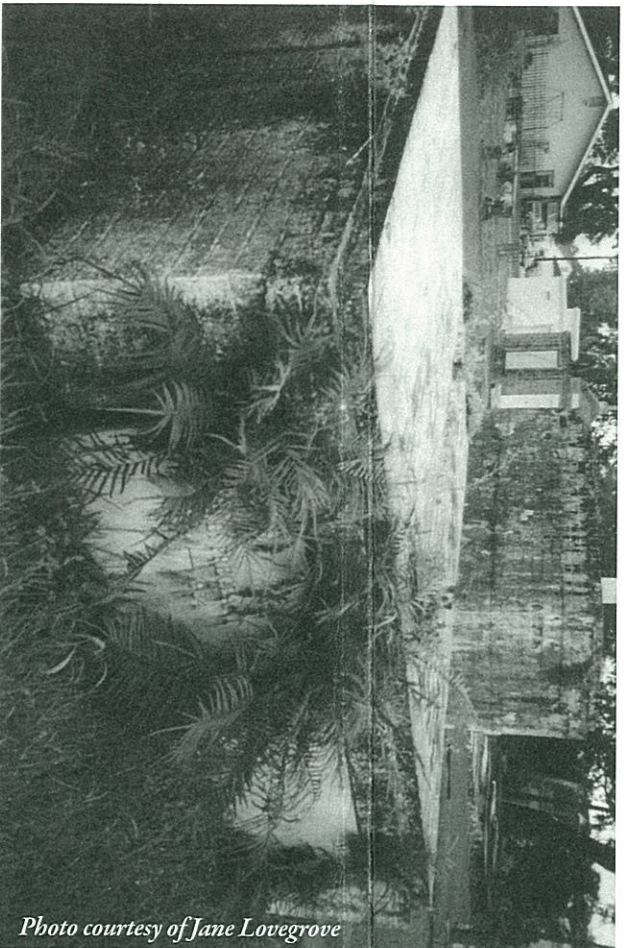


Photo courtesy of Jane Lovegrove

### PLEASE CLEAN ME.

### WHAT WE PAY FOR

Your Association sets a budget yearly to assist in the cost of Cemetery maintenance. This year, we have been paying about \$1,400 each quarter, which is 70% of the cost. Your contributions are what we use for this purpose. As you know from earlier newsletters, the conditions of many tombs are bad. Depending on what is received each year, some of your contributions help reimburse the Church for the very high restoration costs. Special grants have enabled the Association to assist with tree maintenance and preservation, and to undertake the creation of the web site, the brochure, and the Cemetery map. We will try to obtain other such grants for signage, aisle marker posts, drainage improvements, fence restoration, and a campus plan which includes the entrances to the Cemetery. In sum, the Association needs your financial help. We also need your recommendations for other members. Without a strong, numerous, informed membership, we cannot exist.

### CONGRATULATIONS

Rev. Doug Laster, a native of LaPorte, Texas, is the new pastor at St John's. He served two mission churches in cold, windy Montana, before receiving this call. Doug will be pastor of both St. John's, Thibodaux and Trinity Morgan City. Welcome to Doug, his wife Robi, and their two children Craig and Emily.

### DOWN THE PIKE

The "by-invitation-only" art show held on the grounds of St. John's last April was successful. Over \$750 was raised from artists' commissions, and the money was dedicated to the Cemetery. The event will be repeated on April 11, 2015. We will notify members about the particulars as soon as they are available.

### WORK DAY, OCTOBER 11

From 9 AM to noon on October 11, there will be a work "celebration." We urge you to come, armed with brushes, pruners, rakes, and gloves, etc. Tombs can be cleaned, weeds removed, trash picked up, and all that makes for fun.

### COMMUNICATING WITH YOU

The Cemetery Association has been sending its members two newsletters yearly. High printing costs may force us to revert to a letter version at least once yearly. Similar historic preservation organizations are utilizing e-mailed newsletters, which also is an option. If you can, therefore, please furnish us with your e-mail address as soon as possible. We promise not to be a pest, but electronic communication is a reality.

### REACHING OUT

The Association's web site was introduced the past spring, and it is SPECTACULAR. Take a look at [www.sfnca.org](http://www.sfnca.org). Follow links as they interest you. You will be amazed at the information provided. Thanks to the work of Nicholls State art students in fall 2013, and to the creativity of web site generator Susan Shaffer, our long-held goal is accomplished. On the heels of the new web site, the Association has completed a brochure for the Association and a Cemetery map.

We are enclosing the brochure with this newsletter, and the map is available at the church office for anyone who wishes a copy. Please contact Chris Robichaux at 985-447-2910 or by e-mail, [sfjohnoffice@bellsouth.net](mailto:sfjohnoffice@bellsouth.net). It also can be found on the web site and printed out from that source.

The map will be useful for visitors who are searching for relatives or looking for public figures who may be interred there; some of them are identified on the map. In the future, when the Association is able to undertake a full survey of the Cemetery and have a numerical system keyed to burial sites, all of the information needed to locate people will be placed on the web site.

### VETERANS INTERRED IN THE HISTORIC CEMETERY

The Association has completed a survey of all tombs of military veterans. The identifications and numbering of veterans' plots are available on the web site. They date back to the War of 1812 and extend almost to the present day. Confederate veterans are also surveyed. The listing is not complete, however, because some of the tomb markers do not identify the veterans as such. If you know of veterans who served the United States or Confederacy, please inform us.

### A WORTHY STORY

Information for *Two Brothers* was provided by St. John's parishioner Robert Pugh; independent researcher DeeDee Dbenedetto; William Hugh Roberts, *Mexican War Veterans: A Complete Roster of the Regular and Volunteer Troops in the War between the United States and Mexico, from 1846 to 1848* (Washington, D. C., 1887); Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of the United States Army from Its Organization September 29, 1789, to September 29, 1889* (Washington, D. C., 1890); Edward H. Moseley and Paul C. Clark, Jr., *Historical Dictionary of the United States-Mexican War* (Lanham, MD., and London, 1997); and MSS, 2160, Col. W. W. Pugh Papers, Thomas C. Nicholls Record Book, LSU Special Collections Library.

Additional useful reading on the conflict with Mexico may be found in James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War 1846-1848* (New York and London, 1992); and Richard Bruce Winders, *Polk's Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station, Texas, 1997). Poetry is taken from Louisa Hannah Drake Nicholls, *Poems* (New York, 1857), 96-97.]

[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.]