

YET ANOTHER HEROINE OF THE PAST:

Our focus remains to relate the stories of people who are interred in St. John's Historic Cemetery. In the next few newsletter issues, however, we are departing from the routine. The history of the community and of the Cemetery would be incomplete without telling about a remarkable lady on whose shoulders rest the continuing presence today of both the live oak trees and the iron fence which encloses the Cemetery. We hope that you like reading about her.

THE FENCE, THE TREES, AND MINNIE: PART I

by John Dennis, et al.

The live oak trees which line three sides of the St. John's Historic Cemetery are known to have been joyfully planted by the Rev. T. R. B. Trader, of Maryland, in 1858. The first fence to enclose the Cemetery preceded the trees and was erected in 1846, shortly after the church consecration. Much in need of repair by 1866, the fence received fix-up funds from the ladies of St. John's, who held a Tableaux Vivant for the purpose; and the last cemetery fence event of the century was a new one constructed in 1890, costing \$350. All of these early fences were wooden and required constant maintenance.

By 1907, both fence and trees were pronounced by the St. John's Vestry to be a problem, along with general cemetery upkeep. The Vestry's cemetery committee of J. L. Lobdell, John J. Shaffer, and R. M. Hereford reported on April 20 that weeds and grass covered the aisles, graves, and unsold lots in the "Silent City." It declared the need for an iron fence to replace the wooden one, requiring funding of \$1,400 in addition to the \$700 already saved in order to complete the work. But, the committee added:

The fifty or sixty Live Oak Trees now surrounding the cemetery will be a serious hindrance to the erection of an iron fence because the roots & limbs of these trees will be a constant nuisance to its existence; the question of removing these trees will be a constant nuisance to its existence . . . [and] removing these trees should be considered and decided upon before a fence is built.

Instead of first consulting the congregation, the Vestry determined to authorize the committee "to cut down any and all trees in and around the cemetery when in their judgment it becomes necessary to do so."

After a large gap in the minutes of the Vestry and perhaps because of inadequate funds, or controversy over removing the live oaks, the issues of fence and trees were not discussed until following a storm on September 20, 1909, which not only destroyed the fence but damaged the church and rectory. Vestrymen Morgan Williams and Edmund Pugh were authorized to rebuild the fence, using as much of the old materials as possible. The wooden fence was reconstructed by the following February, and there things sat until March 31, 1913.

Enter Minnie Williams, whose name then appears in the Vestry minutes of the meeting that day. An older sister of Morgan Williams, Minnie Roberta was born in 1874 at Sunnyside Plantation just below Lafourche Crossing on the left descending bank of Bayou Lafourche (in more recent times, the Binnings property). Her parents were the Confederate veteran, Captain C. C. Williams, a planter born in Lafourche Parish in 1833, and Eudora Elizabeth Cross, also from Lafourche. They married in 1861 before C. C. headed off to war, after which he rebuilt his life and ended up at the time of his death in 1900 as "one of the wealthiest and most influential of the sugar planters in his section . . ." Williams and his wife Eudora both repose in a large granite family tomb along the main "street" of the Historic Cemetery.

At that March 31 meeting, a letter from Minnie entered into the record stated that \$1,300 was available for the iron fence, construction of which could begin soon. But Minnie also requested a vote of the congregation on the trees, the cutting of which was too important an issue to be left

Some old, some not so

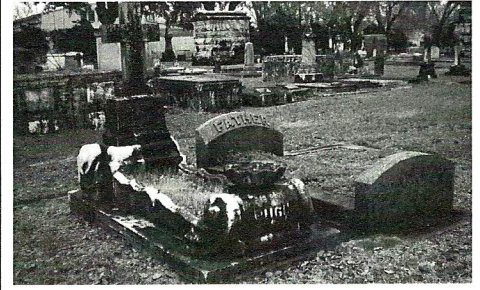
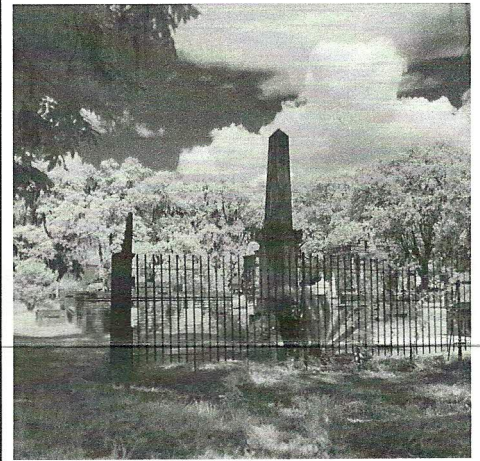


photo courtesy of Susan Shaffer

Cemetery Gates



*Photo courtesy of Archives & Special Collections,
Ellender Memorial Library, Nicholls State University*

OUR CEMETERY "FACING OFF"

Soon, we hope to have a Facebook account with stories and occasional news featured. It will not replace this newsletter, but it also will reach many people who do not subscribe. Be on the lookout!

MEMBERS BY CATEGORY

Our membership falls into categories, noted on the enclosed return envelope. Add to your current contributions and increase your "HEAVENLY STATUS," or join today. Lots of things are happening, and we need support.

TREASURE HELP

Can any one come up with a photograph of Minnie Roberta Williams? Cemetery fence post finials are missing – is there a photo anywhere of one in detail?