

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 to the Vestry. W. E. Howell was appointed to "entertain Miss Williams" on the matter, on which the Vestry hoped to have her cooperation. That must have proved difficult, because after two years the Vestry still needed "to wait upon Miss Williams with the aim of obtaining her consent and cooperation;" but it also could inform her that the Vestry now had concluded that a fence could be built without having to remove the trees. She who has the gold has the power?

Minnie Williams was a force. She insisted that the Vestry provide information to the congregation and all the donors to the fence project; names were finally collected for a letter. Minnie also – apparently on her own – found a New Orleans contractor, William Pierce, and along with her sister Ruby Williams requested the Vestry to permit him only "to remove the wood fence, roots of trees and the trees along the dividing line of St. Johns Cemetary [sic] that he may erect an iron fence along this line." Directing her to proceed first "to submit plans, bids, and specifications for same," the Vestry awaited Pierce's information, which was soon in coming.

By November 29, 1915, the Vestry of St. John's had a proposal from Pierce which included samples of materials to be used in the fence construction and requested that Minnie submit a formal bid from William Pierce for the building of the fence. If the bid were accepted, the Vestry would authorize Minnie to sign on the Vestry's behalf a contract with Pierce and also to remove one hackberry tree and one oak tree along the boundary between the churchyard and cemetery as well as "one Live Oak Tree on the corner of West Seventh Street."

**(TO BE CONTINUED)**

St. John's Historic Cemetery Association, Inc., is a 501 (c) (3) organization under the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax deductible to the limits provided by the law.



*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?

### *One of many veterans*



*photo courtesy of Susan Shaffer*