

# ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

## FEBRUARY-MARCH 2019 NEWSLETTER

### TOMB RESTORATIONS

Despite frequent poor weather, the restoration mason from New Orleans, Teddy Pierre, has almost completed the restoration and cleaning of several more tombs. The Anderson tomb located close to the pedestrian gate had sunken badly on one end but now is stabilized. Others had broken slabs and crumbling brickwork. Over the past six or so years, Pierre has worked on sixteen tombs in the Historic Cemetery:

Pierson-Guion, Plot 61, Cleaning	L. Guion, Plot 61, Cleaning
Lawn Crypt, Cleaning	G. Hunter, Plot 1, Restoration
G. Anderson, Plot 6, Restoration	W. A. Shaffer, Plot 49, Restoration
W. L. Shaffer, Plot 59, Restoration	D. B. Pugh, Plot 39, Cleaning
J. C. Beattie, Plot 4, Restoration	Jas. McAllister, Plot 2, Cleaning
A. J. Donelson, Jr., Plot 5, Cleaning	M. Springer, Plot 12, Restoration
M. P. Zills, Plot 22, Restoration	Young-Guion, Plot 78, Restoration
D. Maxwell, Plot 58, Restoration	Louisiana Scudday, Plot 54, Restoration

The costs of this important, laborious work have been funded by contributions from individual Cemetery Association members and from the Peltier Foundation, Levert Foundation, Azby Fund, TaWaSi, Lorio Foundation, and Greater New Orleans Foundation. [Other contractors will be listed in the September 2019 newsletter]

### MARCH 16 TREE WORKSHOP

The successful workshop on live oaks in 2018 prompted St. John's to offer one this year on general tree planting and care as part of the 175th Anniversary of the Church's founding. It will be held on Saturday, March 16, at Horgan Hall near the Church, from 9 AM to 12:30 PM. Featured are Dr. Hallie Dozier of LSU Ag Center, Scott Courtright, consulting arborist from Baton Rouge, and Frank Thibodeaux of Bob's Tree Preservation in Church Point. There also will be a walking tour of live oaks on the St. John's property. A charge of only \$10, to St. John's Episcopal Church, 718 Jackson St., Thibodaux, LA 70301, is intended to cover costs. Please call 985-447-2910 (St. John's) for information and to let us know you will attend.



*Scott Courtright, Consulting Arborist*

### A WAY TO MEMORIALIZE

Have any of us thought of including St. John's Historic Cemetery Association in our last wills and testaments? It is simple: Add the name and amount as a charitable bequest, normally stated at the beginning of a will. Gifts from estates will help Cemetery restoration or the Cemetery Association endowment. Your choice.

# 2018 CONTRIBUTORS TO ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

You, our donors, are essential to helping fund the work of maintenance, restoration, and repairs in the Historic Cemetery. We ask that you continue the terrific support and help us spread the word.

**Angels:** Azby Fund, Nell Boersma, Richard Bourgeois, Murray Dennis, M/M Paul Due', Greater New Orleans Foundation, M/M Willard Hitch, Levert Foundation, Marion Lifsey, Peltier Foundation, M/M David Plater

**Cherubs:** Dianne Frost, Mary Anne Hoffmann, Diane Martin

**Spirits:** M/M Harold Block, Bennie Bourgeois, M/M Tom Butler, M/M David Cassard, Juanita Woods Caudill, Dr. Jonathan Durocher, Quincy Ewing III, M/M Nicholas Fry, Pat Gaubert, Virginia Gayle, Ann Gresham, M/M C. J. Guillory, M/M Leo Hebert, James Koontz, M/M John Lanier, M/M Walter Lanier Jr., Rosemary Lovell, M/M Malcolm Mackenzie, Betsy Magee, M/M Robert Marcello, M/M Marshall Martin, M/M John Mullane, Michael Pierson, SCV Camp Sanders 2092, Kristi Smith, Alice Strausser, Alice Walther, Rev. & Mrs. George Wharton, M/M B. F. Winters, Lorraine Wise

**Friends:** M/M Olie Adams, M/M Allen Alexander, Bill Borskey, Henry Brownlee, Virginia Casse, Alfred Delahaye, Kitty Gaharan, Roderick Heller, III, M/M Ted Hoffmann, Jr., Addie Joy Kearns, Marguerite Knight, Ann McDonald, John McNerney, Miki Pfeffer, Patsy Powell, M/M David Reso, Anne Lovell Rienets, Murphy Rogers, Eugene Roth, Tommy Stringer, M/M Richard Weimer

## A STORY: MORGAN SPRINGER, MASTER CARPENTER

A one-line advertisement in the February 25, 1854, issue of *The Thibodaux Minerva* announced, "SPRINGER, M., Carpenter and Builder, Jackson Street, near the Methodist Church." The location of one of antebellum Thibodaux's premier builders, Springer's shop and residence were within an area rich in industry and commerce.

Morgan Springer, born in 1811, was a son of Zadock Springer and grandson of Levi Springer, prominent citizens of Fayette County, Pennsylvania. They descended from early Pennsylvania pioneers who included Captain Uriah Springer, a veteran of the American Revolution, and U.S. Army General Anthony Wayne, whose soldiers defeated Indians, British, and Canadians at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794. The Springer family lived near Uniontown, south of Pittsburgh and not far from the Monongahela River.

The construction of the famous National Road heading west from Baltimore, Maryland, beginning after the War of 1812, brought the new "highway" through Uniontown. Levi Springer determined to take advantage of the trade he foresaw; his farm was located adjacent to the planned route of the road that eventually connected all the way to Illinois. In 1817, Levi built a large brick house for both his family home and a public inn. Surely Levi's grandson Morgan watched and learned from workers as they framed up and brick-walled the large structure. A relocation of the new interstate road forced the Springers to use the house as a residence only. The farm prospered through the nineteenth century, and the Springer house

Thus, in 1840, Morgan and a friend, neighbor, and fellow carpenter, James Frost, set out for Louisiana via the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. They eventually landed in the small village of Thibodaux and entered into the business of carpentry. The settlement was beginning a major growth spurt, lasting until the Civil War. Then and there, too, St. John's Episcopal Church of Thibodaux was constructed, 1843-44.

Springer is not mentioned in the contract between early founders of St. John's and its builders. But he often partnered with Frost, who with the builder Absalom Kees constructed the Church. In 1842, George S. Guion and his wife, Caroline Winder, subdivided some of their Ridgefield Plantation land on the west side of Jackson Street from Bayou Lafourche to St. Mary Street. Frost and Springer separately bought large adjacent lots in the first block. Adding to their holdings, in 1847 they jointly acquired from Dr. Thomas M. Williams (one of the founders of St. John's) a lot on the corner of Jackson and St. Mary and located the partners' carpenter shop there. Frost and Springer also sold to Sciotha S. Evans, another carpenter who had migrated from Missouri, a piece of the lot they had acquired from Dr. Williams facing St. Mary Street. Evans later became a partner of Springer. Kees, from South Carolina and Natchez, owned property close by. Jackson Street from Bayou Lafourche to St. Mary Street became a hub of industrial, commercial, and service businesses, mixed with residences. Two churches, St. John's Episcopal Church and the First Methodist Church, were just down the street.

In June of 1842, Frost and Springer contracted with the Clerk of the District Court for a building, "somewhat similar to the Recorder's office," to be raised off the ground eighteen inches, and sized "24 ft front by 35 feet deep with brick cornice divided into two rooms with fireplace and grate in front room, and two mantle peices (sic) one in each room." The ceilings were twelve feet high, and a gallery was attached on one side. The charge was \$1,400. The house was the first of the partners' public building ventures.

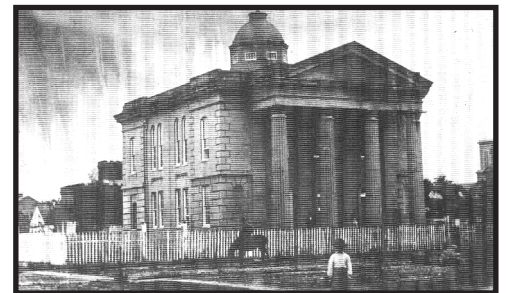
The Pennsylvanians' work was good, and it was valuable. John Larkin, another recent arrival from Pittsburgh and an owner of the Thibodaux Foundry (see the Spring 2016 Newsletter), hired the partners in October 1845 to construct his large, two-story brick residence of fifty feet deep by twenty feet wide. It was positioned next to Springer, and Larkin paid the builders \$1,540.

Still a bachelor when he arrived in Thibodaux, in January 1846 Morgan Springer married a seventeen-year-old local girl, Azelie Bourg, and they commenced raising a large family in their house built fronting on Jackson Street. In addition to his builder trade, between 1849 and 1861 Springer was on the town

Council serving frequently as a Trustee.

The Springer-Frost partnership flourished during the 1840s, but at some point Springer split with Frost. And soon after Frost's death from yellow fever in September 1853, Frost's Succession Sale took place. In it, Van Perkins Winder, of Ducros Plantation (at present-day Schriever), acquired two of Frost's male slaves, Aaron and Dan, both carpenters, for a princely \$4,650. Perkins immediately re-sold the men to the new partnership of Evans and Springer, who had begun work on Martha and Van Winder's large home. Owned today by the Cemetery Association board member Richard Bourgeois, Ducros house is in the style of the famed Hermitage of Andrew Jackson near Nashville. The slaves' sale prices exemplified the high value placed upon such enslaved master craftsmen in antebellum Louisiana.

After Van Winder's death in November 1854, his widow Martha was unable to complete the home until at least 1861. At the time Morgan Springer died in July 1861, she still owed the Springer-Evans partnership the astounding sum of \$14,132.18 for its construction (and perhaps other buildings on the plantation). The two slave carpenters, Aaron and Dan, were still working for Springer and Evans.



*Lafourche Parish Court House c. 1865, courtesy Nicholls State University Archives*

Probably Springer's most significant job was the still-standing (although remodeled in 1900) Lafourche Parish Court House, designed by the famous Louisiana architect, Henry Howard. Paid over \$18,000, Springer and Evans began the work in 1860, completing it just before Springer's death in 1861. But the Lafourche Parish Police Jury still owed the partnership \$4,770.00, as noted in Springer's Succession Inventory. Given the commencement of the Civil War that year, one wonders whether Springer's heirs ever collected on the two major debts owed to them.

Morgan and Azelie Bourg Springer (d. 1918) and several of their children are buried at St. John's Historic Cemetery. The Springer tomb is marked with a sign.

*[Sources consulted: Thibodaux Minerva; Lafourche Comet; Fayette County (PA) Historical Society; Triblive.com; WikiTree.com; Genui.com; Nationalroadpa.org; U.S. Library of Congress; Rootsweb.ancestry.com; Route40.net; Lafourche Parish Police Jury Minutes; Thibodaux Town/City Council Minutes; Lafourche Parish Conveyance Records; U.S. Census Records; Lafourche Parish; David D. Plater, ed., "The Remarkably Neat Church in the Village of Thibodaux": An Antebellum History of St. John's Episcopal Church (St. John's Episcopal Church, 1994)]*



*Levi Springer house and farmstead c.1880 (U. S. Library of Congress)*

survived until vandals burned it down in 2015.

Morgan Springer became a builder by trade; it was a desirable occupation in an area where barns and limestone or brick houses were common and built strongly to last and to survive harsh winters. Such craftsmen also were needed in the thriving steamboat industry in nearby Brownsville, on the Monongahela. Morgan's father worked for a local newspaper, *The Genius of Liberty* of Uniontown; but an uncle, Levi Springer, Jr., was a flat-boatman on the rivers to New Orleans who no doubt advised Morgan to take advantage of the economic boom underway in the Deep South.