

ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2019 NEWSLETTER

FINANCIAL BASICS

St. John's will hold four sessions on "financial basics" for both its parishioners and the community of Thibodaux beginning January 6, 2020. The session leaders are donating their services: Karen Foust, lecturer at the Tulane U. School of Business, John Stearns of Summit Financial Group/ Stearns Wealth Management, and Angela Denham and Micah Lillich of Morgan Stanley in Houma and Baton Rouge. The sessions will be on Monday evenings at 6:30 PM on January 6, 13, 20, and 27, 2020. The topics are, in sequential order: "Understanding money and budgeting," with Dr. Foust; "How to pay bills/how to manage credit," Dr. Foust; "Basic saving and investing," led by Mr. Lillich and Ms. Denham; and "Retirement," Mr. Stearns. St. John's will accept donations from attendees to cover costs and to support St. John's Endowment Fund. Reservations may be made at the St. John's office, 985-447-2910.

OUR MEMBERSHIP

A few of us have been on the telephone lately checking on our members; we tend to lose track of some of you as time passes. Included in this mailing is a semi-annual membership donation request. The Association members are its BACKBONE. We help financially in keeping the difficult-to-maintain grounds well mowed, over \$5,600 yearly; paying for projects such as always expensive tomb restorations and tree trimming; and staying in touch with you by newsletter. Please write on the return envelope your current addresses and other info as well as the names/addresses of anyone whom you recommend to join the Association. We now also have available "Pay Pal" for donations: go to the web site www.stjhca.org, click the link to "Get Involved," and at the bottom of that page click on "Donate."

FRONT GATE INFORMATION BOX

Visitors to St. John's Historic Cemetery will notice a newly installed, hand-made wooden box containing information about the Cemetery. Thanks to David Cassard, a board member of the Cemetery Association and the Cemetery Warden, for creating a much needed storage place for the information. Attached to the fence to the left of the gate, the box has Cemetery maps, brochures, and Association donation envelopes.

SIGN CLEANING

Most of us are aware of the thirty-odd signs at various Cemetery burial sites, installed several years ago. They have been a major help in explaining Cemetery and local Lafourche history. They also acquired mold from exposure to our weather. Lo and behold – the signs now are clean again, thanks to C. J. Guillory of St. John's.



C. J. Guillory cleaning sign

WHO "RUNS" ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC ASSOCIATION

It is a frequent question. We periodically change board members and officers: Present board members are Richard Bourgeois, David Cassard, Karen and Clyde Foust, Sue Herpel, Betsy Magee, David Plater, John Shaver, and Alice Strausser. The board chair is Plater, Magee is Vice Chair, Strausser is secretary, and Fred Sollars (not a board member) is Treasurer. When communications are needed between our board and the St. John's Vestry, the Vestry contact is the St. John's Cemetery Warden, David Cassard. St. John's owns/ controls the Cemetery, hires contractors, and pays the bills; the Cemetery Association assists financially, publicizes the Cemetery's history, and gives tours. Your donations help restore and preserve the Cemetery and inform the public about it.

TOMB RESTORATIONS, CONTINUED

In our last issue Theodore Pierre's contributions to Cemetery tomb restoration or cleaning were listed. Listed here are projects by other artisans since 2011:

Stanley Baker, mason, of Thibodaux:

Susan Larkin, Plot 3, restoration

James Larkin, Plot 3, restoration

Martha J. Sherrod, Plot 3, restoration

Bayou Preservation, LLC, of New Orleans:

Larkin plaque, Plot 3, restoration

Sherrod-Larkin plaque, Plot 3, restoration

Mitchell plaque, Plot 31, restoration

Dederick plaque, Plot 17, restoration

Yates Rogers plaque, Plot 19, restoration

Carrie Emma Darden tomb, plot 36, restoration

McNair monument, plot 44, cleaning

175TH ANNIVERSARY

St. John's Episcopal Church and the Historic Cemetery were founded 175 years ago. A celebration of that anniversary has begun. The Cemetery Association has responded to a request from St. John's to fund the restoration of two brick tombs, one of Collins/Green, in Plot 14, the other of a Church founder, Dr. Thomas M. Williams, in Plot 32. The restoration mason, Theodore Pierre, is completing work on Collins/Green and has commenced restoration of the Williams tomb.

YOUR ESTATE PLAN AND ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY

We wish to comment again on how to assist the work of the Cemetery Association through your estate plan. If you want to use your last will and testament to make a testamentary gift of cash, bonds, or equities, simply include St. John's Historic Cemetery Association, Inc., as a Particular Bequest in the will. Let us know if you need more details.

PRESERVING HISTORY BRICK BY BRICK: THEODORE PIERRE

BY BETSY MAGEE

The pace of everyday life seems always to be clipping along faster and faster, even on slow-moving Bayou Lafourche as it runs through the heart of Thibodaux. Finding a few minutes of peaceful quiet and solitude to walk in the shade of the ancient oaks and graves in St. John's Historic Cemetery can be a refreshing respite in a busy and hot day. You might even have the unique pleasure of coming across Teddy Pierre. He will be known by the trowel in his hand and bucket of mortar along-side him.



Teddy Pierre has been responsible for the majority of the restoration work on the tombs in the Historic Cemetery since 2013. He is at least the fourth-generation of Pierres that have been Louisiana craftsmen, including Valcour Pierre, his great-grandfather; Gilbert, his grandfather; and his father, Theodore M. Pierre, Sr. A graduate of Tulane University with a master's in architecture, Teddy found out quickly that he was not cut out for office work. His natural interest in historic

preservation techniques followed the example that his father set for him as one of New Orleans's premier brick masons.

Born in 1929 in Edgard, La., Pierre, Sr. moved to New Orleans at the age of 16 and entered Booker T. Washington High School to learn a trade. A master wheelwright and blacksmith as well as a stonemason, he was named Craftsman of the Year by the Louisiana Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1973. Teddy's mother was a school teacher in New Orleans. Teddy began working with his father at age 12, learning from the master what many stonemasons lack – an understanding of old brick. Teddy has two sons, and while they appreciate their father's work and skills, they have chosen other career paths. The oldest is an Army sergeant, specializing in cyber security and communications; the youngest is a Tulane University Law School grad working in maritime law in New Orleans. He worked with Teddy in the Cemetery during the repair of the Young-Guion tomb.

Mayor Dutch Morial appointed Teddy as the Deputy Director of the Historic District Landmarks Division in his administration, but it just was not a good fit for him. Working outdoors and using the techniques and materials of historic work were calling Teddy. After Pierre, Sr. died in his 50s, Teddy picked up his father's contacts and tools. The abundance of crumbling historic cemeteries in New Orleans and the region, followed by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, meant he was in high demand. "My father always said, 'It's not the dead people you have to worry about, it's the living ones!'" chuckled Teddy. He also worked as the masonry instructor for the Preservation Resource Center in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

The respect Teddy has for preserving older structures and the pleasure he takes in working with the low-fired bricks are evident in the pride and skill shown in his tasks in the St. John's Historic Cemetery. He points out that the soft, low fired, hand-made bricks are irreplaceable: "They cannot be duplicated by today's bricks."

The preservation/restoration work on crumbling tombs is slow and labor intensive. It is also expensive, and donations and memberships in the St. John's Historic Cemetery Association provide the necessary funding. Not only are tombs taken apart brick by brick, they must also be cleaned by hand with D2 Biological Solution and a natural bristle brush (specified by National Park Service guidelines). The marble monuments and crypts also need special care. As all South Louisiana homeowners know, moisture and humidity create the perfect environment for rapid mold and mildew growth, and the cleaning process needs repeating every few years.

The current tomb in the Historic Cemetery that Teddy is working on is the Collins/Green Tomb in plot 14; next in line is the tomb of Dr. Thomas Williams, a founder of the Church, in plot 32. The many others were listed in the last Association newsletter.

