

# ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER 2012 NEWSLETTER

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As autumn approaches, we find the Cemetery relatively unharmed by storms. Hurricane ISAAC whacked us in August, but for the most part we were blessed by little damage to tombs and to trees. Having just trimmed the trees helped protect them; only a few small branches tore loose. We also have received many compliments for the removal of the old ligustrums planted between the live oaks. Thanks to Lee Shaffer, III, the Cemetery now is opened up and much in view from area streets and sidewalks.

The March request for membership dues again came up short in meeting the needs of regular maintenance, which leads us to a second solicitation in 2012. Please sign up friends and relatives, too.

Further, we always are looking for friends of the Historic Cemetery who can volunteer and help us with such things as internet development, grant writing, historical research, administrative support, or just plain getting hands dirty planting, trimming, and cleaning in the Cemetery. If interested, please contact our Board members Lee Shaffer, III, 985-804-2265, or David Plater, 985-446-8908.

## TOMB REPAIR GRANTS

We have noted the need for restoration of many tombs in the cemetery. Having written two applications for foundation assistance, we await responses. If successful, the funds will enable the St. John's Vestry to make a start some time in 2013. We are working on a third application, much broader in scope and including the fence needs (missing finials, etc.), which will be submitted in October.

## CARE OF YOUR TOMB

Soon, tomb cleaning and painting will commence in the Cemetery. It is a traditional October performance in cemeteries in the bayou area. The process for cleaning old tombs is not always clear and easy; each structure uses different materials and has its own style, and tombs change with time and culture. The office at St. John's has more detailed instructions, but we offer brief suggestions for maintaining tombs, many of which are original to the nineteenth century and are constructed using materials and techniques which are special to those days:

1. Inspect the structure first, photograph it, and avoid anything that would cause the surface to peel off or break. Wet down and

rinse off the structure. Use non-ionic soap, e.g. Orvus®, found in feed stores. Unless the structure (including headstone) is recent, use the soap and water with a natural bristle and wood brush, applying elbow grease to clean off mildew and dirt.

2. Strong chemicals like bleach harm many of the materials used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially marble, limestone, sandstone, and old brick. With marble and limestone, one can mix with the water one part household ammonia to four of water.
3. Do not use a power spray or power sander. Use a water hose with a regular power nozzle. Apply gently.
4. Many tombs were intended to be white washed (lime washed), or left plain. Today, if white wash is unavailable in an original recipe, use simple water base acrylic paint, diluted with water.
5. Old bricks were "filled" using oyster shell or lime mortar. If your tomb or tablet/slab needs reconstruction or demands serious repair, please inform St. John's Vestry of your wishes, so that you can be put in touch with a restoration specialist. Do not use current manufacture Portland concrete for stucco and mortar joints.

*The Rear Window*



*photo courtesy of Susan Shaffer*

## ADOPT A TREE

The Association's Board of Directors has decided to institute an "Adopt a Tree" effort, in order to raise capital and endowment funds. Details will be forthcoming in the next newsletter in February-March 2013. There are roughly 40 trees remaining in the Historic Cemetery. A few additional trees eventually will be planted to replace those recently removed.

## LANDSCAPE PLAN

Recently Chad Danos, a landscape designer, presented several schemes of the St. John's "campus." They include reworking the Jackson Street pedestrian entrance to the Cemetery, parking, and general access. The plans are on display for any one to consider at Horgan Hall near the Church. Comments will be taken, and a final plan should be completed by December, in order to proceed with implementation.