

# ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

## FALL 2023 NEWSLETTER

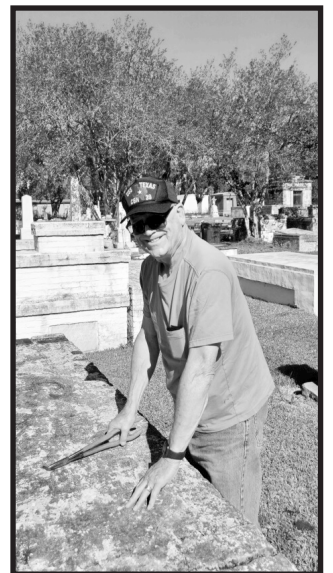
### SUMMER 2023 NEWS

No sooner had our friend and new editor John Dennis completed the last newsletter than he moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas for a new job. We wish him and his mother, Murray Dennis, a happy and healthy life in the beautiful hill country. This newsletter is partly managed by board member Alice Strausser, historian Denis Gaubert, and David Plater, who came out of his retirement cave for the occasion.

The climate in Thibodaux and the surrounding parts of South Louisiana since June has been taking hints from Dante's *Inferno*. We have broiled daily, near, at, or above 100 degrees F. As of this writing, late August, some relief has come; somehow, the historic cemetery has survived and has been well maintained during these cruel months, thanks to the grounds contractor, Mr. Duplantis. The cemetery did receive a great cleanup on an April work day, thanks to all volunteers who helped. The time for a fall work day is still in discussion; it will be a relief to be out-of-doors and not faint from the heat. Care to join us?



Jim Koontz



Charles Clayton

### A PRESIDENTIAL PLEA

Our association president, Clyde Foust, writes: My Dear Friends, *your support is so very important to our cemetery*. Our members - may they increase! - comprise a base of sustenance without which St. John's Episcopal Church could not afford to maintain this historic cemetery. We aim for the best care possible to honor the memory of those resting here. In addition to "normal" upkeep, there remain thousands of dollars of Hurricane Ida repairs, upgrading drainage, removing plant debris, and restoring tombs. A planned strategy is to cycle both major and minor work over a number of years, allowing us to help keep the overall cemetery in good condition. Stay with us, increase your support, if possible, and encourage relatives and friends to join the St. John's Historic Cemetery Association. Thank you.

### 2022 DONORS TO THE HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

First, please, accept our apologies for omitting this list of 2022 donors from our spring newsletter. Your support in 2022 was outstanding. Having a broad base of support is so important in our effort to help St. John's maintain, repair, and publicize a sacred space. Thanks to YOU ALL!

**Angels:** Nell Boersma, Richard Bourgeois, M/M Paul Due, M/M Robert Ells, II, The Levert Foundation, Clyde Foust, The Azby Fund, Marion Lifsey, Dr/M Wes Magee, MD, Martin-Albemarle, LLC, M/M David Plater, Lawrence Pugh, Marlene Shaffer

**Cherubs:** M/M Harold Block, Dianne Frost, M/M Willard Hitch, Jr, Judge/M Walter Lanier Jr

**Spirits:** M/M Olie Adams, William Borskey, James Bourgeois, Rev'd Holly Burris, M/M David Cassard, Virginia Casse, Juanita Caudill, Dr. Susan Crawford, MD, Rev'd/M Charles deGravelles, Dr/M Jonathan Durocher, DVM, Mauguierite Erwin, Agnes Esteve, M/M Miles Forrest, Patricia Gaubert, Olivia Ann Gresham, Mickey Guillory, Dr/Dr Leo/Carolyn Hebert, John Roderick Heller III, M/M James Koontz, M/M David Lowe, Dr/M David Middleton, M/M Nathan Musso, Emile Robinson, Eugene Roth, Marion Segger, Kristi Smith, Alice Strausser, Stevia Walther, Walther-Kerteszy Charitable Fund, Lorraine Wise

**Friends:** Irma Arceneaux, John Barrilleaux, M/M Ed Blackburn, Henry Brownlee, Richard Ewing Combes, Rita Dickie, Michael Duplantier, M/M EJ Grabert, M/M Cam Herpel, Leonard Hingle, Addie Joy Kearns, M/M Marshall Martin, Jr, Ann McDonald, Lucie Morvant, Dr Miki Pfeffer, M/Murphy Rogers, Pat Szush, Judy Weimer

# A STORY, PART II: THE REV. CHARLES FELIX DIXON LYNE

*The story of the Lynes continues from the Newsletter of February-March 2023. Written by attorney and historian Denis Gaubert of Thibodaux, it depicts a heartbreaking time in the history of St. John's Episcopal Church and Cemetery.*

On May 25, 1872, William Whitmell Pugh, a prominent Assumption Parish planter, wrote to his son Thomas, describing a tragic incident that occurred on May 17:

The town of Thibodaux was much shocked a few days since by a murder of a little negro girl by Strangulation (accidental it is to be hoped). Mrs. Lyne the wife of the Episcopal minister had a girl about 12 years old bound to her until she reached a certain age. From all accounts the girl was high tempered and very obstinate. She and Mrs. Lyne had some disagreement. Mrs. Lyne slapped her and the girl returned the blow. Mrs. Lyne tied her around the waist & the girl untied herself and started to run. She was caught, tied around the neck and left for a few minutes, when Mrs. Lyne returned the girl was down and nearly strangled. She cut the rope and used such restoratives as she could lay hands on but without success.

A few days later, the New Orleans Republican of May 28, 1872, published an article under the headline of "Sad Affair At Thibodaux":

We are informed that about a week since, Mrs. Lyons [sic], wife of Rev. Mr. Lyons [sic], . . . now pastor of an Episcopal church at Thibodaux, wishing to punish a colored servant girl, ten or twelve years old, put a rope around the girl's neck, one end of which was attached to a beam in the kitchen, and left the child standing on tiptoe while she went out of the house. On the return of Mrs. Lyons, the girl was dead.

Intense excitement was created by the event, and there were threats among the colored people of the vicinity that they would hang Mrs. Lyons [sic] in retaliation. She was arrested and placed in prison, where, at last accounts, a strong guard was protecting her from the threatened violence of the populace.

The following day, the newspaper issued a correction, identifying the arrested woman as a Mrs. "Lyne." It repeated the account that she "punished in an unusual manner a colored servant girl in Thibodaux a few days ago" and that the punishment was administered with "cruel severity."

The victim was Mrs. Lyne's indentured servant, Kate Garnier, also known as "Kate Hathaway." (The alternate surname "Hathaway" was obviously derived from her mother's given name of Attaway.) A formal examination of the body by witnesses and an autopsy were conducted, followed by an inquest by the coroner's jury. The coroner's jury of five men returned a verdict that "death was caused by congestion of the brain caused by strangulation, said strangulation being the effect of ill-treatment at the hands of Mrs. Eleanor Lyne."

In her voluntary statement and later trial testimony, Mrs. Lyne detailed the exchange of slaps by her and Kate and the two incidents of tying her with the rope previously described in Pugh's letter. Contrary to the newspaper account of the girl being made to stand on tiptoe, Mrs. Lyne emphasized that there was at least a foot of slack in the rope tied around Kate's neck and that her hands were not tied at that time. Mrs. Lyne added a detail that she had poured a dipper of water on Kate's head in an attempt to calm her down and then went to the dining room. After five to ten minutes, she returned to the room where she had left Kate and found that her feet had apparently "slipped out" (perhaps from the water on the floor) and that she had fallen against the wall, causing the rope to tighten around her neck. She cut the rope and tried to revive the girl by bathing her chest with water and giving her some wine, which she seemed to swallow. Reverend Lyne was not home at the time, and by the time he returned it was clear to him that the girl was dead. Mrs. Lyne concluded by stating: "[Be]fore my God, I protest that I am guiltless of all criminal intent in this matter; that I meant no harm or injury to the child and that her death was purely the result of an accident."

The district attorney for the 15th District Court, Thomas P. Sherburne, presented the case to the parish grand jury. Through its foreman, Paul Thibodaux (a former Confederate soldier), the grand jury returned an indictment for murder against Mrs. Lyne. Her attorney, Louis Bush, with co-counsel John S. Billiu, Francis T. Nicholls, and Lewis Guion, filed a motion for a change of venue on

the grounds that she could not receive a fair trial in Lafourche Parish. Following a hearing, Judge Taylor Beattie granted the motion and transferred the case to the 3rd District Court for St. Mary Parish.

The case was heard before Judge Henry Train in Franklin. The coroner and other examining physicians all testified in detail that there was no evidence of recent blunt force trauma or abuse and that the cause of death was asphyxiation by strangulation. A black lady who lived with another family next door to the Lynes testified as to her knowledge of the child's prior misbehavior and her suggestion to Mrs. Lyne that she be sent home to her mother in Florida. A defense witness, Clement P. Binnings of Thibodaux, testified that he was a former indentured servant in London for seven years and that it was not unusual for indentured servants in England to be tied up as a form of discipline for misbehavior. Under cross-examination, however, he admitted that he had never seen or heard of tying a rope around a servant's neck for such purposes. Following the trial, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty," obviously concluding that the death was a tragic accident. The New Iberia Sugar-Bowl observed that "[t]he unfortunate lady (the wife of an Episcopal minister) had the sympathy of all good citizens of this entire section, and [they] are rejoiced to hear of her acquittal."

Sometime late in 1872 (probably following his wife's acquittal), Reverend Lyne "reported good feeling, Christian sympathy and support extended to him by all classes of the community." On October 5, 1872, Rev. Lyne became a U. S. citizen. Local businessmen John S. Billiu and L. F. Suthon served as witnesses to his oath of citizenship given at the Thibodaux courthouse.

Eleanor Lyne died on July 5, 1875 and was buried in the Church Cemetery. Less than two years later, on February 5, 1877, Rev. Lyne married Clara Amanda Springer, the daughter of Morgan Springer, born in Pennsylvania, and Azelie Bourg Springer, a native of Lafourche Parish. Rev. Lyne was then 59; his bride was only 22. The bride's father was a prominent local builder and contractor, who, with S. S. Evans, built the Lafourche Parish courthouse in 1859-1861. In the 1860 census, his occupation was listed as "master carpenter."

In 1879, Rev. Lyne held the office of Chaplain in the Thibodaux Benevolent Lodge No. 90 of Freemasons. While in Thibodaux, he participated in the annual councils of the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana. In 1881, the Lynes adopted an infant girl whom they named Mary Alice.

On December 4, 1881, Rev. Lyne became rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Key West, Florida, and the family relocated there. Since the death of its prior rector by yellow fever in 1880, parish activities had declined, but under Rev. Lyne there was "a renewal of life." In May 1883, the Lyne family returned to Thibodaux for an extended visit and on Sunday, May 20, he preached at St. John's. Reverend Lyne died in Key West on February 13, 1886, at age 67, after a brief illness. The Tallahassee Weekly Floridian published an obituary of Rev. Lyne, including the following eulogy:

"He was a gentleman by birth and nature, a learned scholar, an eloquent preacher and a zealous, laborious pastor. He was esteemed by all classes, and we read that a vast concourse followed his remains to their resting place on Sunday, 14th instant."

Rev. Lyne was interred in the church cemetery in Key West, but his widow at some point had his remains removed to St. John's Historic Cemetery in Thibodaux.

Mary Alice married Josiah Wheeler, Jr., on September 15, 1903, at St. John's Church. In 1904, the captain of police in St. Joseph, Missouri, received a letter from a Connecticut attorney, requesting assistance in locating Rev. Lyne or his heirs. A notice to that effect was published in the local newspaper there. Reverend Lyne was reportedly the heir of an estate worth a half million dollars. Whether Mrs. Lyne or Mary Alice ever received that legacy is unknown. Mary Alice died on March 16, 1907, at age 24, and was interred in St. John's Historic Cemetery.

Reverend Lyne's widow, Clara Springer Lyne, resided in Thibodaux after his death and was active in the social affairs of the town and the parish. She also enjoyed traveling, spending several months in New York City in 1908. She died on April 19, 1936, in New Orleans, and her remains rest in St. John's Cemetery near those of her husband and daughter.