

FRIENDS OF BENNETT CEMETERY

Dedicated to saving Lavaca County's Bennett Cemetery (located near Sweet Home, Texas)

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Family surnames known to be represented in the cemetery include: Armstrong, Bennett, Bethel, Bingham, Bolsius, Bonneau, Clifton, Cox, Currington, Dew, Durst, Dyer, Ellis, Fisk, Greenwood, Hranitzky, Harwood, Kaiser, Koerth, Kuenstler, Kunetka, Layton, Lehmann, Lewis, McCord, McCutcheon, McGrew, McMurrey, McVey, Middlebrook, Moore, Morgan, Mudd, Neely, Niemann, Noble, Oldham, Perrin, Rathke, Saunders, Schlageter, Sharber, Slanina, Spaulding, Stephenson, Sutton, Tate, Tolleson, Vick and Williams. Please let us know if you have knowledge of others.

DEDICATION CEREMONIES

On Saturday, October 23, 1999 more than one hundred and seventy-five guests were welcomed by Lavaca County Judge Charles J. Rother to the dedication of a Texas Historical Marker for the cemetery, its designation as an Official Historic Texas Cemetery, and the dedication of memorial markers for pioneer members of the Greenwood family. A San Antonio Chapter of the Sons of the Republic of Texas provided the historical flags as a background for the speakers and led the pledges of allegiance. Dr. Melinda B. Berry gave the invocation. Jimmie Ruth Eash, President of the Texas Society, United Daughters of 1812, presented a brief history of the cemetery. Ms. Brenda Lincke-Fissler, Lavaca County Historical Commission, explained the Official Historic Texas Cemetery Designation, pointing out that the Bennett Cemetery is the first in Lavaca County to receive the designation. Mr. John M. (Jack) Greenwood dedicated two memorial markers to his pioneer Greenwood family. Georgianne Bethel read the historical marker inscription and three 3rd great grandsons of Stephen Bennett then unveiled the marker. They were Richard Berry, Paul Sirri and Stephen Bennett Berry. Mr. Doug Kubicek, President of the Lavaca County Historical Commission, then closed by making an impassioned plea for the friends of the cemetery to preserve and save this historic cemetery. After the ceremony, guests adjourned to the Sweet Home American Legion Hall for a picnic lunch and to renew old acquaintances and to meet cousins - many that they had not met before. Those in attendance came from all over Texas including Abilene, Austin, Boerne, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Fort Worth, Hallettsville, Houston, San Antonio, Palacios, Victoria and Yoakum. Out of state guests are known to have come from California, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma.

LOOKING FORWARD

An organizational meeting of the Friends of Bennett Cemetery is planned for **Saturday, April 1, 2000**. The meeting will start at 10:00 a.m. in the meeting room of the Hallettsville Chamber of Commerce located on US Hwy 77 N. It is expected that the meeting will last about two hours.

Didn't the cemetery look nice on October 23rd? Thank you Frank and Viola Kunetka for maintaining the front of the cemetery for so many years out of the goodness of your hearts. Lavaca County Commissioner Daniel Peters also deserves many thanks for sending in a crew before the ceremony to mow the entire cemetery. The editor had never seen the cemetery look so nice and he has been visiting it for more than forty years. We would like to have the cemetery look like that every time you visit, and it can be done with your help. We think it will look nice on April 1st.

The primary purpose of the April 1st meeting will be to see if there is enough interest in saving the cemetery to warrant further efforts and if there is, to set up an interim organization.

Preliminary estimates range upward to as much as \$1500 annually to keep the grass and weeds mowed, perform some basic restoration work on fallen and broken monuments, etc., cover the expenses of a semi-annual newsletter, and the costs of a non-profit organization checking account. Please plan to attend this meeting. If you are unable to attend, but do have an interest in the cemetery, please write and let us know of your interest and any suggestions you may have.

Bennett Cemetery is an important part of our heritage and that of our descendants. Let's save it! Together, we can do it!

A BACKWARD GLANCE

Did you know there have been two Sweet Homes in Lavaca County? "Old" Sweet Home is said to have been established in 1860 when George West (later to become a fabled Texas cattleman) built a store, hotel, and stables on the stage coach line from Houston to San Antonio. D. E. Hicks set up a blacksmith shop, and John Addison directed the building of the New Bethel Methodist Church. During the Civil War, the town served as a winter camp for freight and cotton wagon trains carrying supplies from Alleyton to Brownsville, the only Confederate port remaining open during much of the war. The first German and Czech immigrants began to move into the community about 1873.

In 1887, when the San Antonio and Aransas Pass (SAAP) railroad built five miles south of the town, West sold his buildings to Jan Matussek and moved his store to the railroad. This was the beginning of the little village we know today as Sweet Home. Other settlers from the old town joined him and by 1890 "new" Sweet Home had six stores. One of the first businesses in the new town was August Weid & Co., composed of blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and dealers in Southern Clipper and Buford plows. In 1888, F. G. Patton built a storehouse for his mercantile store, A. B. Noble constructed a grocery store, Robert Mauldin erected a barber shop, and a lumber yard was added to the business district. Plans had been made for the construction of a Presbyterian Church, and a Mr. Middlebrook planned to open a hotel by the first of September. In 1889, J. E. Wilcox opened a fish and oyster saloon, the Youngkin brothers opened a drugstore on the south side of the railroad tracks, and Mr. Yates opened yet another saloon. The original construction of the present town was mostly completed when the school and masonic lodge building from "old" Sweet Home was taken apart and re-assembled in the new town. The masonic lodge building served as the Sweet Home school

until a separate school building was erected in 1919. The beautiful Queen of Peace Catholic

Church was completed in 1920. The railroad (by then a part of the Southern Pacific system) closed its agency in 1937. In 1948, the town, which has never been incorporated, was said to have had twelve stores, the Catholic Church, a recreation hall and a population of about 350. By 1986, the town had only three businesses and a population of 360.

In more recent years, the Yoakum leather industry has grown and has expanded into several of the old store buildings in downtown Sweet Home.

One legend explaining the naming of Sweet Home is that in 1854, after Solomon West had bought several thousand acres of land on the south prong of Mustang Creek, members of his family "wagon-trained" to their new homestead from Alabama. When they finally reached Solomon's land, Mary B. West, exclaimed, "Oh Pa, this will be a sweet home."

Editors note: The above information is taken largely from The Handbook of Texas, The New Handbook of Texas, from unpublished notes of Mr. Doug Kubicek, and from several newspaper columns by Mr. Walter Malec which were published in the Yoakum Herald.

If this organization is a success, we plan to publish two newsletters similar to this each year. We solicit short biographies of persons buried in the cemetery, brief family histories of those associated in some way with the cemetery, stories concerning Sweet Home, Lavaca County, the institutions of Sweet Home (it's churches, schools, organizations, etc.) and old landmarks of the community. Credit will be given to the person submitting the information and all submissions will be subject to editing. Photos that tell the story of the cemetery or of Sweet Home are also solicited and will be returned to the sender.

SPECIAL THANKS

Several contributions have already been received by the Friends of Bennett Cemetery. We now have \$250 toward our Y2K goals. Thank you very much Jimmie Ruth Eash, Tom & Dianne Finger, Donald & Mira Noble and W. Edward Pfeil.

