

THE FRIENDS OF BENNETT CEMETERY, INC.

*A nonprofit corporation dedicated to preserving and restoring Bennett Cemetery, designated by the Texas Historical Commission as Lavaca County's first **Official Historic Texas Cemetery**. The I.R.S. recognizes us as a Section 501 (c) (3) organization. Donations and bequests are tax deductible. Bennett Cemetery is located one mile north of Sweet Home on the west side of FM 531 at the Texas Historical Marker.*

Volume 3

Number 1

February 2002

Family surnames known to be represented in the cemetery include: Armstrong*, Bell*, Bennett, Berdych*, Bethel, Bingham, Bolsius, Bonneau*, Calhoun*, Clifton, Cox, Currington, Dew, Durst, Dyer, Ellis, Fisk*, Greenwood, Hagin, Harrison, Harwood, Hooper*, Hranitzky, 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.

For the benefit of genealogists and family historians, some of the surnames shown above are the maiden names* of married women. Similarly, when known that a woman was married more than once we have, when known to us, shown the surnames** of her several husbands.

THANK YOU THANK YOU

We are very appreciative of the many nice gifts made to the corporation in 2001. We have made a world of progress in saving the cemetery. We especially want to thank the following 2001 donors for their support and encouragement.

Melinda & Rick Berry
Gene & Georgianne Bethel
James R. & Berdine Bethel
Jennifer Bethel & Erik Sirri
Marshall B. & Peggy Bethel
Bobbie T. Brune
Onita Y. Clifton & Robert Clifton
Jimmie Ruth & Dick Eash
Gwen Essary (Mrs. F.H.) Arnold
Marvin Finger
Amy & Bill Hocking
Lavaca County Historical Commission
Sallie McCutcheon
Jim & Gracie McMurrey
Thomas C. Musgrave, III
Mr. & Mrs. Donald E. Noble
Paul B. Noble
Harold & Edna Noble
Betty H. & Walt Petersen
E.Y. & Rebecca Seale, Jr.
Mr. & Mrs James L. Sims
Pat & Don Welton
Margaret & Kent Zimmerman
And a very generous gift from
an anonymous donor. Their second gift!

Thank you all very much. Your support is very much appreciated. With your continued help, we will save Bennett Cemetery!!!!

Year 2001 was an exceptional year for the preservation of our little historic cemetery. We received a very substantial gift late in the year from a donor who wishes to remain nameless. The donation was restricted to starting an endowment fund for the long-term/perpetual care of the cemetery. Only the interest from the fund can be used for normal expenses, and

DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

We have finally received word from the Internal Revenue Service, in a letter dated November 16, 2001, that they recognize us as Section 501 (c) (3) organization and, as such, donations and bequests made to the corporation are tax deductible to the donor.

A copy of their letter is available on request.

SATURDAY MARCH 23, 2002 MEETING

The second annual meeting of the corporation's Board of Directors is scheduled for Saturday March 23, 2002 in the first floor meeting room of Werner's Restaurant in Shiner. Shiner is about 10 miles north of Sweet Home on US 90A. If you don't know where Werner's is, just ask anyone you see in Shiner - they will be able to direct you.

The Board will have a business meeting from about 10:00 a.m. until 10:30 a.m. An open meeting will follow with everyone invited to offer suggestions, ask questions, or just to say howdy to friends. Feel free to bring a friend.

Many of you know all about the good food at Werner's. Most of us will have a dutch treat lunch there following the meeting. Please join us. Also, if you're looking for a really good breakfast that morning, Werner's opens at 6:00 a.m.

Mark your calendar - SATURDAY MARCH 23rd. Werner's Restaurant in Shiner is the place.

ENDOWMENT FUND

only if other funds are not available for the routine care and maintenance of the cemetery. These funds must be conservatively invested and kept separate from our regular funds.

We hope that this will be an inspiration for others to follow. This gives us a start, a good start, toward

preserving in perpetuity this part of our family heritages. Donations and bequests are now tax deductible as described in the opposite column.

HISTORIC TEXAS CEMETERY MEDALLION

In our October 2000 newsletter, we told of receiving word from the Texas Historical Commission that they had determined that Bennett Cemetery was eligible to display their Historic Texas Cemetery Medallion. This medallion is described as being similar in size and appearance to the T.H.C. medallions placed on various historic houses and buildings throughout the state.

At that time, it seemed out of the question for us to be able to purchase a medallion. It still would be --except -- we made application last year to the Lavaca County Historical Commission for a grant to purchase the medallion. We received word last week that we had received a \$500.00 grant in response to our request. This will allow us to have the medallion cast and securely mounted on a post at the foundry and ready for placement in the ground. This will be discussed at the board of directors meeting on March 23rd. There are questions concerning the exact placement of the medallion and the time of placement and dedication. We will welcome your suggestions.

We are very grateful to the Lavaca County Historical Commission for their continued support and encouragement. The support we receive from the Commission is pledged to "capital projects" that will provide a permanent or long lasting improvement. We are not to use the grant for routine maintenance or recurring expenses.

We sincerely hope that when visitors to our cemetery see the Historic Texas Cemetery Medallion, they will be encouraged to make efforts to improve and enhance an old cemetery of interest to them - perhaps even ours. Thank you Lavaca County Historical Commission.

MONEY MONEY MONEY HELP HELP HELP

In this issue we note generous gifts from the Lavaca County Historical Commission and one from a donor to establish an endowment fund. Does all of this sound like we are on easy street? We're not!!

These wonderful donations provide long-term help for the cemetery, but neither one helps us with our maintenance expenses this year. Not a dollar of either of those gifts can be used to pay for mowing or other Willis continued in the cattle business after the Civil War during the time that Hollywood thinks of as the "glory years." He partnered with such Sweet Home historical cattle notables as the brothers Sol, Ike and George West (for whom the town George West is named), John M. Bennett, and several others from

routine expenses.

We need the financial help of everyone interested in preserving and saving Bennett Cemetery. A world of progress has been made in the appearance of the cemetery through the very hard work of Mr. Earl Schacherl. Please help us stay on track to maintain and further improve the appearance of the cemetery. Spring comes early to Sweet Home. Late winter and early spring donations are especially needed.

THE McCUTCHEONS

Not many people are now aware of the importance of Sweet Home to the fabulous legends of the longhorn cattle drives to the northern markets. That's a shame, because a lot of that history is related to or buried in our little cemetery.

One of the men who truly typified the famous Texas cattlemen of the trail driving days was Willis McCutcheon, Sr. whose forebears came to Texas in 1832. Willis was born on April 14, 1836, one week before the Battle of San Jacinto, while his father was serving with General Sam Houston.

Willis and his father, William McCutcheon, are credited in Don Worcester's *The Chisholm Trail* with profitably driving Texas longhorns up the "Old Shawnee Trail" to Quincy, Illinois in 1857. This was, of course, several years before the Civil War and a full year before another legendary Texas cowman, Oliver Loving, managed to trail a Texas herd to Illinois. The Shawnee Trail passed through Waco, Dallas, Preston (TX), Baxter Springs KS, Sedalia MO and finally into Quincy.

Several years ago when the city of Dallas was dedicating their monumental and larger than life cattle and cowboy statuary near city hall, *The New York Times* had a lot of fun deriding Dallas for their nerve in trying to capture a part of the Texas cattle era heritage. They quickly learned the facts, but I do not think they ever acknowledged that some of the very first cattle drives did, in fact, pass through pioneer Dallas before, in later years, going through Fort Worth.

When in Dallas, try to see the monument. Take your camera. It's impressive and the kids will love it. When I look up on the cliff at the cowboy watching over the cattle crossing the creek, I think to myself, "That's Willis McCutcheon on the trail."

Lavaca County. His first "legal" partner that we have discovered was Stephen Bennett himself. Their "joint co-partnership" (consisting of all cattle, sheep, horses and horse kind, hogs, wagons, etc.) was signed in September 1865 and continued until Stephen's death in 1874.

Willis married Mary "Mollie" Adele Bennett in February 1865. She was the youngest daughter of Stephen and Mary Breazeal Bennett, the early Lavaca settlers for whom the cemetery is named. Mollie was the elder Bennetts' only child born in Texas. She was born in 1844. The others were all born in Alabama before the wagon train trip to Texas.

Willis and Mollie had five children, but Mollie died an early death in 1884 when the youngest child, Sallie, was just six years old. The two boys, Bennett Brazil and Willis William, Jr. learned ranching, horses, and the cattle business from their father while growing up in Sweet Home.

When the introduction of barbed wire began closing the open range, and the coming of the railroads made it unnecessary to drive cattle to distant points, the age of fenced ranching came of age. In 1883, Willis with three of his brothers and with John M. Bennett began accumulating vast land holdings in the largely unsettled and unfenced Davis Mountains of west Texas.

Willis and John M. Bennett operated the huge Seven Springs ranch. About 1890, Bennett sold his interest to Willis, Sr. who later disposed of his interests to his two sons. The boys owned and operated the ranch as a partnership and called it B.B. McCutcheon and Brother Ranch. Some reports state that the ranch once held 27,000 cattle and that the deeded land portion of the ranch alone was in excess of eighty-five sections.

In 1920-21, as the children of the brothers became older, B. B. and Willis, Jr. divided the ranch into two parts. The two ranches were, separated in part, by the famous Limpia Creek that traverses the Davis Mountains.

Willis, Sr. did not remarry after the death of Mollie and lived out his life after the 1890's mostly in Victoria. He died in Victoria in 1916 and is buried there in Evergreen Cemetery. Mollie was buried in Bennett Cemetery upon her death in 1884, but may have later been exhumed and reburied beside her husband in Victoria. There are markers for her in both cemeteries.

The two McCutcheon brothers were a vital part of the west Texas cattle business for many years, but over time, a number of conditions caused their Davis

Mountain ranches to be reduced in size - economic bad times, poor cattle prices, family deaths, other opportunities, droughts, etc. In 1939-40, Bennett McCutcheon sold off his holdings and moved to San Antonio.

There are, however, still McCutcheon descendants in the Davis Mountains area. Other descendants of Willis, Sr. and his brothers live in several areas of Texas and many other states.

These surviving McCutcheons have great pride in their family heritage and we salute them in successfully preserving their family history and knowledge of their relationships. They have a long list of illustrious ancestors who lived long before the subjects of this little story.

Most of the history in this write up comes from the McCutcheon family magazine, *McCutcheon Trace Association*, in articles written by Alfred Holt McCutcheon, Jr (May 1998) and by Mrs. Alleen Rudolph and Mrs. Margaret Crislip (November 1994).

Many of Willis, Sr.'s trail books, letters, diaries, records and receipt books and other artifacts of his trail-driving days survived him. Very few of these kinds of records have survived the passage of time and the rough conditions they were exposed to. Several years ago Willis' descendants gave his to the University of Houston - Victoria for their growing collection of early Texas cattle business records and related memorabilia. The University considers Willis' records a major historical find.

About two weeks ago, the editor received a much appreciated invitation to the 2002 McCutcheon Reunion to be held June 28-30, 2002 at the Prude Ranch at Fort Davis, Texas. The reunion theme this year is "Family Traditions" and they have a great program lined up, including a golf tournament, a genealogy workshop, children's games, and family dinners and breakfasts. They have arrangements with about every hotel, B & B, and motel in the city. We know our newsletter goes to quite a few of the McCutcheons, and if you're one and didn't receive the notice, you can contact Alfred McCutcheon at 830-249-9042, Sallie McCutcheon at 602-944-1681 or me at 972-620-0624, and I'll send you a copy of my invitation. They want all family members to know about this event.

I've saved part of the very best for last. I couldn't believe this! At the reunion, they will have a Silent Auction and all monies raised will be divided between the Shiloh Cemetery and our Bennett Cemetery in Sweet Home!!! Now that's real preservation and reunion. Thank you very much, McCutcheons.

SWEET HOME MASONIC LODGE
and
NEW BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH

The editor is interested in almost anything that relates to 19th and early 20th century Sweet Home. Most all information from that period has some bearing on persons buried in the cemetery.

The editor has, for several years, been researching two long ago and now mostly forgotten institutions that played an important part in the life of early Sweet Home. They are the Sweet Home Masonic Lodge (1883-1925) and the New Bethel Baptist Church (about 1865-70 to about 1900). Almost no records are known to have survived from either of these two venerable institutions.

If you have knowledge of, or a few surviving records, of these organizations, please get in touch with me. Your help will be greatly appreciated. Even a little information will be very useful! My research papers on these organizations will eventually be given to the Friench Simpson Memorial Library in Hallettsville for their files.