

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.*

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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.

MARCH 2002 BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Our cemetery Board of Directors met in Shiner at Werner's Restaurant on Saturday, March 23, 2002. A number of decisions were made that will affect the future of the cemetery.

Two directors were elected to serve three-year terms. Paul Noble of Houston was elected to fill the position created by the death of W. L. "Bill" Yolland. Paul is dedicated in words and deeds to saving and preserving the cemetery. He is also one of the younger directors. Gene Bethel, your editor, was reelected to a three-year term. The other directors, Melinda Berry, Bobbie Brune, Jimmie Ruth Eash, Tom Finger, and Don Noble are continuing in their positions.

The Directors reappointed four officers, all of whom serve at the pleasure of the Board. They are President - Gene Bethel, Executive Vice President - Jimmie Ruth Eash, Treasurer - Bobbie Brune, and Secretary - Georgianne (Gay) Bethel.

The Board officially accepted the \$500.00 grant provided by the Lavaca County Historical Commission for the purchase and mounting of a Texas Historical Commission medallion similar in size, shape and appearance to the medallions you have probably noticed on historic houses and buildings in the state. The Historic Texas Cemetery medallion will be mounted near the front of the cemetery, but the exact location and method of mounting are yet to be decided. We are very grateful to the Lavaca County Historical Commission for their continued support and generosity. Ms. Brenda Lincke-Fisseler, Secretary-Treasurer of the Commission, attended our meeting and pictures were taken of her presenting the check to our Treasurer, Ms. Bobbie Brune. The pictures with an accompanying article

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CEMETERY MAPPING PROJECT

We have finished the field mapping of the entire cemetery. The week before our Board meeting, the cemetery was marked into 20' by 20' grids (more than 520 of them) and then the location of every grave marker, fence, and tree in each grid was recorded. Every marker was photographed and a written description was made of its appearance.

My wife and I are now making a rough map of all the landmarks. Our very good cemetery neighbor, Mr. Harvey Matusek, has volunteered to take our notes and map them using his CAD computer program. When all of this is finished, we expect to have a map that can be placed in the sign-in box for the use of visitors to locate the graves of their family members. I have had telephone calls from persons asking if I could direct them to the grave marker of their ancestor. Sometimes I knew where the marker was located, but could not adequately explain how to navigate the tall weeds and describe the nearby markers or landmarks so that the marker could be found. Our map should be a great help in this regard.

We plan to eventually put together a booklet with a picture, written description and grid location of every grave marker in the cemetery. This "inventory" will serve many purposes in the years to come and we hope will be an aid to visitors in the immediate future. When known to us, a short bio of the person will be included.

We had some good help working on this project. The efforts of our volunteers are greatly appreciated. Many thanks to Bobbie Brune, Don and Mira Noble, Melinda Berry and to the unstinting efforts of my wife, Gay. We had rain, some cold weather and very strong winds, but we stayed with it until every grid was recorded.

We hope our next newsletter will be able to report that this project is, or is almost, completed.

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appeared in the Hallettsville, Shiner and Yoakum newspapers.

The Board discussed some “hoped-for improvements” for the cemetery when we can afford them. (1) We may be able to soon have a web page, thanks to the expertise of our new director, Paul Noble. This will not involve a lot of money. If your editor had not been out of town so much for the last three months, we would be further along on this project. (2) We may make another effort to deliver the newsletter by e-mail to those able and willing to receive it that way. That would help offset the increased postage rates. (3) The cemetery fence needs considerable repair. This was not so obvious until all the vines and brush were cleared from it. We may, in time, have significant repairs made to the southwest portion of the fence at very little cost to the cemetery. More on this if and when it actually happens. (4) We need a sign at the front of the cemetery identifying it to passing motorists as Bennett Cemetery. The only identification now is the Historical marker. We are investigating possibilities and hoping that we may be offered some help with this because of our nonprofit status and because donations are tax deductible to the donor. (5) The completion of the cemetery mapping project is discussed elsewhere in this newsletter.

The Board adopted an expense budget of \$2,235 for the coming year. This excludes the \$500 expense funded by the Lavaca County Historical Commission and another one-time cemetery maintenance expense approved by the Board. The largest expense is mowing and mowing supplies, budgeted at \$1800. This mowing expense is somewhat variable depending on rainfall and climate. The next largest expense is publishing the newsletter, etc. budgeted at \$415. Of this \$415, we budgeted \$238 for postage. As you probably know, postage rates will increase in the near future. We continue to add names to our address list, mostly from people who sign in at the cemetery gate. We feel we need to continue with at least several newsletters annually, because nearly all of our donations follow shortly after a newsletter is mailed out. We certainly hope this one brings a similar response. We need it now.

The Board meeting closed with most of our attendees having a fine lunch at Werner’s. A time and place for our next meeting was not arranged, but it will probably be in late March or early April of 2003.

THIS NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is being mailed to 208 addresses. We are happy to add the name of anyone who wants to receive the newsletter, but please let us know if you do not want to continue receiving the newsletter.

CEMETERY IMPROVEMENTS

We were very pleased in March to see some significant restorations taking place. In mapping and photographing the grave markers, we couldn’t miss noting that the beautiful Bolsius monument has been righted and placed on a new foundation.

While we were doing our mapping work, workers were doing a nice restoration of the McMurrey plot. A low concrete border was poured around the plot, and two or more displaced headstones were permanently placed within the border, joining the one marker that was still standing. We thought it looked great. A very nice tribute by a family that obviously still cares.

Don and Mira Noble also did an exceptional clean-up job on the two Noble monuments. A very careful cleaning that did no harm to those old markers.

We hope that when other families see this restoration work, they will be encouraged to think about beginning some restoration work on their own family monuments.

CEMETERY MYSTERIES

We learned a lot about the cemetery during our mapping project. And we learned a lot about how much we don’t know!

With the cemetery freshly mowed, we could see many ground depressions that appear to be unmarked graves.

We know of a few burials that are not marked at this time, including the editor’s Tolleson family. There are many of these depressions throughout the cemetery and we think most are graves.

We have heard that in the 19th and early 20th centuries, paupers and transients without local family were buried along the south fence line. We’ve even heard that a few fellows there died with their boots on. There are certainly many ground depressions along that fence line to make these stories plausible. Who knows something about this? Please drop us a card or letter.

How about family members in your family’s plot that do not now have a headstone? We would really like to know. Even if it’s just an old family story, we would like to hear it.

We would also appreciate short biographies of your kin buried in the cemetery. This is a way for them to be remembered. We do thank those of you have helped us in this way, especially Viola Kunetka.

We think there must be many Civil War veterans in the cemetery. Tell us about them. There must be other veterans also.

DONATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

We are nearly to midsummer and we are behind in donations from where we were last year at this time. We hope that you have just temporarily overlooked us. Much progress has been made in saving our officially designated "HISTORIC TEXAS CEMETERY", but it is all just temporary without your continuing donations.

We are blessed with several large contributors and we could not have come nearly this far without them. We also have two young people who contribute monthly to the upkeep of the cemetery. Their monthly contributions are not really so large, but at year's end they are among our three largest individual donors. Thank you - all of you. You know who you are.

In reality, we need more donors and more donations to put us on a really sound financial footing and keep us there. We know that there is a lot of interest in saving our cemetery. Help us - Support us with your contribution in whatever amount you can afford.

Every contribution will be gratefully acknowledged and is greatly appreciated. No donation is too small. And remember that all donations are now tax deductible from your federal taxes.

None of your money is ever paid as salary or travel expense to your officers and directors. They receive no payment of any kind for volunteering their time, services and, in many cases, material. That is just another aspect of their donations to the cemetery.

Any donations received that might be more than we have to have this year will go into our endowment fund that we hope, in years to come, will earn enough in interest payments to provide permanent care.

LET'S ALL DO OUR PART

If everyone who receives this newsletter would make a \$15 to \$25 donation every year, we could easily make our expense budget and put a little money into the endowment fund. We hope that you will act on this.

Please be a partner in saving our HISTORIC TEXAS CEMETERY. Thank you very much.

D.R.T. MEETING

Ms. Bobbie Brune of Palacios, our Treasurer and a Director of the corporation, is a very proud member of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (D.R.T.), an international genealogical society. Her genealogical eligibility for the society is based on the Republic of Texas citizenship of several of her ancestors who are buried in Bennett Cemetery.

On Tuesday, April 9th, Bobbie and her sister, Carolyn Mertz, hosted their D.R.T. Chapter meeting by inviting the members to visit Sweet Home and Bennett Cemetery. She reported there were sixteen members and one husband that made the trip and that the meeting was a real success. Several members came from as far as New Braunfels. The group had lunch at Mary's Sweet Home Restaurant and the food was as good as always. The business meeting was conducted in the restaurant and the group then adjourned for a tour of the cemetery. I'm sure Bobbie was an excellent tour guide as she had just completed recording and photographing many of the grave markers for our mapping project. Part of the object of the visit was to show and tell how the cemetery has improved in the last year or two and the steps taken to try to save the little graveyard.

Can you imagine a D.R.T. Chapter (or any group) visiting our cemetery several years ago? That's a mark of real progress. Thank you for the report Bobbie. Thank you, Mr. Earl Schacherl, for the job you have done in getting the cemetery cleaned up.

FUTURE NEWSLETTERS

We are always receptive to items about the cemetery, or the historic village of Sweet Home, or of the historic institutions of western Lavaca County to put in the newsletter. Any ideas? Let us know.

We also appreciate your ideas concerning steps to save or improve the cemetery. When you visit, why not drop us a line or e-mail us to tell us how you found things. I live in the Dallas area and only see the cemetery once or twice each year. Please keep me posted. That's the only way I know what's happening.

My e-mail address is - friends@newtexas.com. My postal address is shown on this newsletter. Your comments are always welcome.

We now plan to publish two more newsletters before our next board meeting - one in October and one in February.