

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. 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.

Surnames added this issue: Berdych*, Hooper*

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.

If You Don't Keep Their Names Alive Who Will?

PROGRESS/ACTIVITY REPORT

In July, we made application to the Internal Revenue Service for "Recognition of Exemption" under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. If approved, this would exempt our nonprofit corporation from the payment of income taxes and more importantly, would allow donors to treat their contributions to our corporation as tax deductible.

In September, the I.R.S. asked for more data and we responded to their request. We now expect a decision almost any day and are hopeful that our application will be approved. If approved, donations made from March 12, 2001 will be tax deductible.

We have heard from a number of you how nice the cemetery looks. Midway Lawn Service of Shiner is now providing the maintenance for the cemetery. We have not seen the cemetery since last June, but we have heard that the fence lines are **all** completely clear of brush, vines and weeds. The entire cemetery is being mowed on a regular basis. All of the overgrown plots near the rear of the cemetery are now clear. Trees have been attractively trimmed and pruned. All markers, even those lying on top of the ground, are visible. There are two large piles of brush resulting from all of this clearing work. They will be burned when weather conditions are proper and the burning does not cause problems for our neighbors. The Sweet Home Volunteer Fire Department will superintend the burning.

The sign-in box placed near the gate has been a real success. We have had many more visitors than I would have imagined. They have come from as far away as Maine, Tennessee and New Mexico. Three have made donations. Thank you all. Even my faithfully contributing California cousin and his family signed in. Seven names have been added to our newsletter mailing list.

The next meeting of our board of directors will be Saturday morning March 23, 2002. After a short business meeting, the board will welcome all visitors and will appreciate suggestions, comments and questions. Our next newsletter will have more details. Please mark your calendar.

W. L. (Bill) Yolland

It is with deep regret that we report the death of Bill Yolland, one of our charter corporate directors. He agreed last April to serve on our first board even though he was not in good health at that time. Bill died September 19th after a brief illness.

The editor and his wife, along with three or four others, can

Bill was born in Houston in 1922, grew up there and served with the Marines in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Early in his civilian career, he pioneered cotton harvesting with some of the first mechanical cotton pickers. He had lived in Wharton since 1952 and had been involved in farming and ranching operations in Wharton County for many years. He also owned several businesses in the county.

He married Marjorie A. Thigpen in 1942. He is survived his wife, by three daughters and their husbands, a son and his wife, several grandchildren and a great-grandson.

Bill was a descendant of Ezekiel Noble (1817-1891) and his wife, Sarah Calhoun Noble (1821-1892). Ezekiel Noble was a graduate of Princeton University and the son of Patrick Noble, governor of South Carolina 1838-1840. Sarah Calhoun Noble was the niece of John C. Calhoun, the famous South Carolina statesman and politician who served in the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, as Secretary of State, Secretary of War and as Vice-President of the U.S. Ezekiel and Sarah Noble came to Texas shortly after the Civil War in an attempt to rebuild their lives. Both are buried in Bennett Cemetery. Their markers are in the northwest corner of the cemetery.

Bill Yolland was a true friend of Bennett Cemetery and we will miss him very much.

NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST

This newsletter is being mailed to 200 addresses. We are happy to add the name of anyone interested in the cemetery. We drop from the mailing list those persons whose newsletters are returned. Our email address: friends@newtexas.com.

A FEW GOOD VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Bennett Cemetery has, to our knowledge, never been plotted or mapped. This is an important and necessary step in saving the cemetery. The process of mapping the graveyard was set out in some detail in the October 2000 newsletter. Now that we have the weeds and vines under control and the fence lines cleared, we should begin to seriously plan the mapping project.

do this job in three or four days or perhaps less. It does not involve heavy work of any kind. We would stake the cemetery into 20' by 20' squares and then map and record all of the grave markers within each of the squares. The principal tool would be a retracting tape measure like those used by carpenters. Several people could work at a time in taking the measurements within each square while one or two others will be needed to record the measurements (a sitting job). Simple as that!

The uniform of the day could be blue jeans or similar, with substantial footwear (or even sneakers). We will need drinking water and snacks for refreshment from time to time during each day. Maybe we could even picnic if we brought folding chairs, sandwiches, etc. It seems to me that we could have a fun time doing an important job.

If we have RV'ers who are interested, electric and water hook-ups are available in Hallettsville's City Park (361-798-3681). Yoakum's Hub City Park offers a large number of full hook-up facilities (361-293-5682). Both locations have dump stations and showers. The editor and his wife will probably stay at the Yoakum Park as it is only about five miles from the cemetery.

How about it? Can we get a few good volunteers the week of Monday March 18th through Friday March 22nd? That is the week before our next annual meeting on Saturday March 23rd. If you can help us, please write to us at the address shown on this newsletter or call us at 972-620-0624. We really do need your help!

Know any school kids on Spring break at that time who want to make a difference?

WINGS and ROOTS....

are the two most important things parents can leave to their children. The editor has forgotten who the wise old sage was who said that, but don't you think he was close to right?

Please help us save your childrens' heritage as represented by Bennett Cemetery. With your support and help, a good start has been made in saving our old, historic graveyard.

Donations are always needed and are always appreciated. All are acknowledged. Please help us.

GOD BLESS AMERICA

It's maddening and discouraging to see almost nightly on the TV news, pictures of rampaging middle-eastern street mobs burning American flags and screaming in English "death to the infidels."

There's another side to this though. My wife and I recently returned from a four-week "dream trip" to Europe. In our retirement years we have researched our ancestors, who more than a century ago, came to America from Germany and Switzerland seeking the freedom and opportunity they hoped they would find here. We had learned of their ancestral villages, their churches, their occupations, and much more. Nearly all came from small villages that are still small villages. The exceptions were two of my wife's great-grandparents who came from Osnabruck, Germany, now a city of about 100,000 people. "Our" little villages and towns seem to never merit mention in any of the tourist

books. Americans are rare visitors in these villages.

We were in a small village (Bersenbruck) outside of Osnabruck most of September 11th. When we returned to our Osnabruck hotel in late afternoon, it was still only morning in New York. An excited German businessman rushed up to us to pass on to us those first, terribly-confusing reports - but his concern was for America and for us - as Americans. In the lobby, the desk people were beside themselves in their concern for us and our safety. Bells from a dozen nearby churches rang continuously until late that night.

I went out early the next morning to buy film, and people we had only barely met rushed up to shake hands, hug and say "God Bless You" or "God Bless America". More than a half-century ago Osnabruck (an important rail crossroads) was bombed almost into oblivion, but the affection for us, as Americans, was genuine and overwhelming.

We ate in our room the night of Sept. 11th so we could watch CNN. We needed a knife and went to a department store to buy one. In the section where knives were sold, a young saleswoman, probably twenty years old, broke unabashedly into tears when we asked "Sprechen Sie Englisch?"

In the central squares (zentrums) of the villages and towns, every day there were huge stacks of fresh flowers and messages for the terrorist victims and for America. It was the same in the churches. And there were so many lighted candles in the churches that it was almost impossible for us to comprehend.

We found religious and civil memorial services in every village and constantly ringing church bells for a week or more. The locals always knew we were American. Always more handshakes, more hugs, more "God Bless You" - "God Bless America."

Don't you wish our TV would find this to be news?

GOD BLESS YOU - GOD BLESS AMERICA

THE KUNETKA FAMILY

We are indebted to Viola Kunetka for setting down some of the story of her husband's (Frank Kunetka) family. It's an interesting story, perhaps almost typical, of European immigrants coming to America in the 19th century seeking a better life, working hard, achieving success, and each generation being able to offer their children better opportunities than they had themselves. A truly American story. We have edited the story to fit our space.

Jan (John) Kunetka was born 6/15/1832 in Hodslavicich, Moravia. He came to America in 1874 and landed in Galveston, probably because he had friends or acquaintances living in Texas.

In 1878, John Kunetka married Veronika Klimicek (1844-1886) in Ross Prairie, TX. The couple acquired land near Sweet Home and had three sons, John E. (1881-1965), Frank J. (1884-1972) and Joe Dyer (1886-1950). The third boy was named Joe Dyer Kunetka because his mother, Veronika, died in childbirth and the baby was given to the local Dyer family whose only son had died earlier.

Viola continues her story saying that after the Civil War, most of the undeveloped land around Sweet Home was owned by the large cattlemen and they began selling it off in smaller tracts (usually a minimum of 100 acres) to immigrant families. Corn was usually the first cash crop grown, but the families also grew sweet potatoes and other vegetables. They kept chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks, hogs and perhaps a few head of cattle. Horses or mules were a necessity to clear the land for cultivation. It was a continual struggle and hard work. The fields were plowed with primitive implements. As time went on, some families were able to buy better equipment and that made their work a little easier. Children attended school only long enough to learn to read and write and to add and subtract. Then they worked to help their family.

Frank J. was the father of "our" Frank Kunetka. As a young man, Frank J. worked in a lumber mill in Deweyville in east Texas, then came back to Sweet Home to farm with his father. He married Janie Berdych who was a European immigrant.

"Our" Frank was born on San Jacinto Day, April 21, 1915 in Sweet Home and married Viola Ermis on September 2, 1940. I'm not going to tell you more about him or Viola right now except to say that we are deeply indebted to both Frank and Viola for lovingly tending the cemetery for many years. Thank you both, more than we can ever tell you.

Graves of the Kunetka family include Jan Kunetka (1832-1916), Infant Frank Kunetka (1914-1914), Joe Dyer Kunetka (1886-1950), John E. Kunetka (1881-1965), Frank J. Kunetka (1884-1972), and Janie (Berdych) Kunetka 1891-1956. The Dyer family are also buried in the cemetery.

If you don't keep their names alive ... who will?

SUGGESTIONS/NOMINATIONS FOR DIRECTORS

At the March 23, 2002 meeting of the board of directors, one of the most important items on the agenda will be the election of two directors to serve the corporation for the next three years.

The unfortunate death of W. L. (Bill) Yolland creates a vacancy that should be filled. The editor, Gene Bethel, was elected to a one year term last April. His seat is also available. He is willing to serve a three-year term, but also agreeable to stepping down in favor of new blood and fresher ideas. If replaced on the board, he will be willing to continue as President and as editor if the board so chooses.

The directors manage the corporation through officers who are appointed, supervised and removed by the directors. At present, directors meet only once each year. They receive no compensation.

The board will appreciate your suggestions or nominations of persons to fill these positions. You can nominate yourself. Please advise any of our current directors or the editor.

Currently, all of our directors are contributors to the corporation and also have ancestors buried in the cemetery. However, these are not requirements. Our by-laws require only that all directors be of the age of majority in Texas.

We will also need to replace any officers who may choose not to serve again. We do not know of any officers planning to resign, but your suggestions for potential replacements

will be appreciated.

Presently, we have one officer position that is not filled. That is the position of **Vice President - Lavaca County**. Generally, the duties of this position are to be the corporation's representative (eyes and ears) in Lavaca County and to keep a loose watch on the cemetery through periodic visits. We ask that they keep the board advised of any matters that he/she thinks should be brought to the attention of the officers or board.

We hope that we will have a volunteer step forward to take this very important job. Like our other officer positions, the pay for this job is just the satisfaction you will have for being able to help. There are no specific qualifications for being an officer. You can volunteer yourself.

Serving as a director and/or an officer is very important to the long-term success and survival of our corporation. Please help us make these important decisions.

INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY BIOGRAPHIES NEEDED

Don't you like Viola Kunetka's story of her husband's family? We solicit bios on every person buried in the cemetery. You can do your part in keeping their names alive. Please help us. Those coming after you will be thankful that you did.