

FRIENDS OF BENNETT CEMETERY

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, Bethel, Bingham, Bolsius, Bonneau, Clifton, Cox, Currington, Dew, Durst, Dyer, Ellis, Fisk, Greenwood, Hagin, Harrison, Harwood, 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: Bell, Bonneau, Calhoun, Hagin, Harrison,

PROGRESS REPORT

It has been a year since the Texas Historical Marker was dedicated and the cemetery designated an Official Historic Texas Cemetery. Let's look back at some of the things the FRIENDS have been able to accomplish in that year.

The FRIENDS organization has been formed and officers elected to serve the organization. The first meeting was held in Hallettsville on April 1st. A second annual meeting is scheduled for Saturday April 7, 2001 at a historic site in Sweet Home.

Twenty FRIENDS have made donations to help preserve and maintain the cemetery. Our major expenditures have been mowing and to a lesser extent, the newsletter.

The cemetery was mowed on March 30th, April 25th, May 11th, May 31st, June 26th, July 20th, and August 25th. We expect that it will require one more mowing this year. Our contractor increased his price from \$75 to \$100 with the June mowing. The writer has not personally visited the cemetery this summer, but believes it to be "walkable from front to back and from side to side." That was what we asked for and felt we should receive. Please let us know how you find it.

Three newsletters have been published in 2000, February, April and October. This issue is being mailed to 189 addresses. The next issue is planned for February 2001.

A visitor sign-in (rural mailbox) will be set up at the cemetery gate by next April so that visitors can sign in and let us know of their interest in the cemetery.

An e-mail address for the FRIENDS has been established. It is: friends@newtexas.com. This will be an easy and inexpensive way to communicate with us if you are "on the net."

Twelve of our FRIENDS have agreed to receive the newsletter by e-mail, thus saving the organization some postage. We certainly appreciate their response, however, this has not been the success that we had hoped it would be.

We have experienced software compatibility problems with

Continued on page 2

WHO'S WHO IN BENNETT CEMETERY

A list has been developed showing the names of persons buried in Bennett Cemetery. Our starting point for the list was the survey of grave markers made by Mr. Sammy Tise and members of his family beginning in 1981.

We have expanded on his list with information from a variety of sources, including census records, newspaper accounts, family records, information from books written by Judge Paul C. Boethel (and others), records of the National Archives and Record Administration, etc.

The list will consist of two parts. Part One of the WHO'S WHO is an alphabetical listing of persons buried in the cemetery, with birth, death or other information found by Mr. Tise on the grave marker. Where we have found other information which we thought to be of general interest, we include that. Examples are birth place, maiden surname of married women, occupations, cause of death, military service, church affiliation, etc. It is intended that the information in Part One relate primarily to individuals buried in the cemetery.

Part Two (yet to be developed) will have expanded information on the families of persons buried in the cemetery, e.g. parents, children, siblings, friends, business partners, etc.

Both parts will be a work in progress for several years. It is intended that they will be updated annually as we acquire additional information.

Please help us by sending information to be included in future editions. We especially solicit data on persons buried in the cemetery in (now) unmarked graves.

Please help us remember your ancestors and/or the friends and associates of your ancestors.

To receive a copy of the thirteen page Part One, send a self-addressed 9" x 12" envelope with postage of \$0.00 affixed.

Those FRIENDS who have contributed to the Friends will have a complimentary copy mailed to them the day after this newsletter is mailed.

Cont. from page 1 - Progress Report

some of our FRIENDS. We are working on the problem, but for this issue, all copies will be sent by U.S. mail.

An application is being prepared to request funding to pay for some of the costs associated with establishing the Friends as a non-profit corporation under the laws of Texas.

If and when that is accomplished, we intend to file with the Internal Revenue Service for a letter of determination approving tax-exempt status for the FRIENDS. We have no assurance that our application for a grant will be approved. We should know after the first of the new year. If we can achieve tax-exempt status, some potential donors will find a little additional incentive to contribute to preserving the cemetery.

Descendants of the Tolleson family have cleaned up their family's plot which was overgrown with weeds and poison ivy. Then they cleared much of the overgrown Neely plot, and then even cleared a considerable portion of the cemetery's north fence line. Thank you very much!

CHARTER DONORS

We think that a lot has been accomplished in the last year. It would not have happened without the financial generosity of the following FRIENDS.

Richard & Melinda B. Berry	Mesquite, TX
Gene & Gay Bethel	Dallas, TX
M. B. & Peggy Bethel	Bryan, TX
Russell & Berdine Bethel	Glendora, CA
Bobbie T. Brune	Palacios, TX
Danny & Darlene Clay	San Antonio, TX
Jimmie Ruth Eash	San Antonio, TX

(three donations)

Tom & Dianne Finger	Shiner, TX
Tom & Rita Flynn	Louisville, CO
William R. & Amy Hocking	Abilene, TX
M. E. & Carolyn Mertz	Palacios, TX
Don & Mira Noble	Houston, TX
Harold & Edna Noble	Orange Park, FL
Betty H. Petersen	Pensacola, FL
W. Edward Pfeil	Dallas, TX

(two donations)

Ellen Reesch	Modesta, CA
Darlene Sauer Rogers	San Antonio, TX
James & Ruth Sims	Odessa, TX
Joe & Sally Tolleson	Garland, TX
Bill & Marjorie Yolland	Wharton, TX

We have survived our first year only because of you. Thank you very much, each and every one of you.

STAMPS

We always try to send the FRIENDS mail with a stamp displaying our flag. Please take a look at the stamp on this mailing. It is not the usual first class stamp. The postoffice has issued a set of twenty stamps, each depicting a different historic U.S. flag. We hope you will enjoy your patriotic stamp.

FUTURE PROJECT

WHO'S WHO in BENNETT CEMETERY is a good second step in trying to identify who is in the cemetery. Mr. Tise's surveys were the first step.

Maybe it is time now for the FRIENDS to begin planning for the third step - a serious beginning to truly preserving the cemetery.

This third step would be to create a map of the cemetery and to document it's archaeology and geography. It would be a project that would not involve heavy work and could be finished by five or six reasonably able volunteers in less than a week. More volunteers would make the work go faster.

The cemetery would be plotted into a grid of small squares and the precise location of every grave marker in each square would be noted on the map. Accompanying the map would be a written description of every marker found.

The editor has acquired an excellent technical manual for professionally mapping a cemetery. The procedures are not very complex and do not require expensive equipment - mostly just willing volunteers and a few home workshop tools and some common items found in nearly every household.

A map of the graveyard would have many uses.

1. Visitors could locate, with little difficulty, any grave marker in the cemetery. A copy of the map could be left in the visitor sign-in box at the front of the cemetery for the use of anyone trying to find their people.

2. We could begin seriously looking for grave markers that have fallen over and have become buried beneath the surface. Some stones are undermined by ants; others fall because their foundation deteriorates; animals knock some over. The job of probing for buried stones becomes science instead of guess work when we have small squares to explore. How many "lost stones" might we find?

3. The map could be used to identify a marker vandalized or stolen from the cemetery. We would know with accuracy where it belongs in the grave yard and it's appearance when we made our map.

4. Copies would be filed with libraries and the several historical organizations that are interested in the cemetery. This would establish a permanent record and archaeological history of the cemetery. Our work would live on long after us. What better tribute to those buried there!

Any volunteers?

Do any of our Lavaca/DeWitt County FRIENDS know of an Explorer Scout Troop (or similar organization) looking for a worthwhile community service project? This would be a good one!

HISTORIC TEXAS CEMETERY MEDALLION

The Texas Historical Commission has advised that Bennett Cemetery is eligible for the above named medallion. The reason the cemetery is eligible is because it is recognized by the Historical Commission as an Official Historic Texas Cemetery.

The newly created cemetery medallion is described as being very similar to the Recorded Texas Historic Landmark medallion you have probably seen attached to historic buildings throughout Texas.

We were pleased to learn that the medallion and plaque are available to the cemetery, but for the near term we feel it is out of reach financially as it costs \$150. The accompanying (optional) 16" x 12" interpretative plaque is priced at another \$225.

The editor feels that the first priorities for our limited funds should be mowing the cemetery and publishing the newsletter. Until we get on a sounder financial footing, he thinks that the purchase of the medallion should not be seriously considered.

The medallion and plaque will, however, be discussed at our annual meeting on April 7th. An additional problem that would need to be solved before buying the medallion (and plaque) would be how to mount, fix or display the medallion (and plaque). They would surely "wander off" if they weren't securely and permanently fixed in position. The mounting would be an additional expense.

DIED

On Friday morning last, Mrs. Bennett, widow of Stephen Bennett and mother of our former townsman, Dr. M. B. Bennett.

Editors note: The above appeared on page 2 of the December 26, 1877 issue of the *Hallettsville Herald and Planter*. It has not been altered or abridged in any manner.

It is not much of an obituary for Mrs. Bennett who died December 21, 1877. She was Mary "Polly" Breazeale prior to her marriage. She was born in South Carolina and moved to Alabama shortly after her marriage. She accompanied her husband and children on the 1840/1841 wagon-train trek from Alabama to the Republic of Texas. She was very active in the Baptist Church and was the mother of twelve children, ten of whom survived to adulthood. The seven children who were alive at her death were still residing in Lavaca County. Several of her sons and sons-in-law became prominent and prosperous driving longhorn cattle from the Sweet Home and (now) Yoakum area to Kansas and points north in the legendary cattle drive era after the Civil War. One son was extremely active in early Lavaca County political life. One son-in-law is considered to have been the first school teacher in Hallettsville. One son and a son-in-law fought with the Texans in repulsing the Mexican invasions of the Republic of Texas (Woll and Vasquez Campaigns) in 1842. Her husband was a veteran of the War of 1812. Two sons fought in the Mexican War of 1846-1848. Two sons were Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. She was the granddaughter of a Revolutionary War soldier who had "wintered in 1777-78" with George Washington at Valley Forge.

The Stephen and Mary Breazeale Bennett plot is near the middle of the cemetery in a chain link fenced area.

THE HARDEST YEAR?

You have probably heard the saying that the first year is always the hardest for a new enterprise or business. We hope that old saying is true.

We think mowing has to be our highest priority in saving the cemetery. It has sometimes been nip-and-tuck this summer whether we could continue the mowing.

Our mowing contractor would have liked to mow more often than he did, but we didn't have the money for that. He was told several times "only one more mowing unless we get some more money." And just as he was told that, it seemed we would receive a nice and unexpected donation.

The drought played right into our hands even though it caused many problems for almost everyone else. We hope that next year will bring normal rainfall. If it does, the cemetery will need more than the seven mowings it has had this year thus far. It may need a total of ten or twelve mowings in 2001. Each mowing is now \$100.

We still have a little money in the bank so we are not destitute - yet. But the cemetery will probably need mowing one more time before the end of the year, and we plan to publish a February newsletter. In addition, the weeds and grass always begin growing early in the year in South Texas.

Several of our FRIENDS who made sizable contributions in 1999 or 2000 have told us that they were especially generous in trying to help us get started, but that their donations would be smaller this year. We understand that and do very much appreciate their generosity - past and future.

We have made a pretty good start on saving Bennett Cemetery. We have accomplished a lot in just a year. Let's don't let it all get away from us now. Together, we can save it.

We hope that you will think of making a donation early next year. Don't let those weeds get waist high before the first cutting.

We want to believe that the first year will prove to have been the hardest and most difficult for the FRIENDS.

NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST

We want to improve our mailing list with each new newsletter. If you know someone who would be interested in receiving it, please let us know.

In the same vein, if you are receiving the letter and have no interest in it, we would appreciate your letting us know.

We remove names from the list when the letters are returned to us because of a change in address. Please keep us advised of your new address.

SWEET HOME and HOPE SCHOOLS

The editor is interested in learning more about the public schools in Sweet Home in the time period 1880 to 1920 and in the Hope schools from about 1890 to 1927. Each of those towns is thought to have had several different school buildings during those years.

He would like to know when the school buildings in those towns were built and why was the new building built. What happened to the old buildings that were replaced? Were they sold? Did they burn? Were they torn-down? What was the appearance of the schools? Were they built of logs or lumber? Were they one-room or two-room buildings? Were they one-story or two-story buildings? Was the new school built on the same property as the old building? Did the school own the property or was the land owned by someone else? Did the school own the building or was it owned by someone else, etc.

Nearly every class of students had their class picture taken! Does anyone have photos of those really old school buildings with the students and their teacher posed on the grounds in front of the building?

Please write to me at the address shown on this newsletter or e-mail me at friends@newtexas.com or call me collect at 972-620-0624. Thank you very much.

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