

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*, Clements, 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: CLEMENTS

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.

CEMETERY MAPPING PROJECT

The mapping project has been completed - for the time being! A copy of the map is enclosed. These will also be placed in the sign-in box for the use of visitors.

This project involved a number of your officers and directors during almost a full week in March. The cemetery was marked off with flags into twenty-foot squares. Then every marker, fence, etc. was measured and placed on the map in its proper position in its square (s). Every marker was photographed, measured and the words on the marker recorded.

This provides us with an accurate inventory of the markers now remaining in the cemetery. In the future, your editor plans to put together a booklet that contains a photograph of and the words on each marker with a summary of the physical aspects of the marker (height, width, thickness, etc. To the extent available, a bio of the deceased will also be included.

The map is a permanent improvement of the cemetery and one that will provide useful information for decades to come. Many, many thanks to the officers and directors who braved those cold winds and rain of March to bring this project to a conclusion.

Earlier it was said that the project was completed - for the time being. The reason for that statement is that we have received a report with photographs (thank you, Rick Berry) that several buried markers are beginning to "migrate" to the surface. This is probably due to the regular cutting of the grass and the physical action of rain and wind. We were delighted to hear this.

We have long believed that there are a number of buried markers in the cemetery and now we have some evidence! One of the photos shows a marker not even found by Sammy Tise in his surveys. It is for Rheuben B. Clements, infant son of B. S. & S. P. Clements - born March 20, 1890, died March 29, 1891. Can someone tell us about the Clements family?

McCUTCHEON FAMILY REUNION

William McCutcheon served at San Jacinto with Sam Houston on April 21, 1836. The descendants of William McCutcheon and his wife, E. J., held a very enjoyable reunion at the Prude Ranch near Fort Davis, Texas on June 29-30, 2002. Ten of the eleven family lines descending from the pioneer couple were represented by more than one hundred people, including descendants of Willis and Mary Adele Bennett McCutcheon.

Gay and I with our grandson, Richard Berry, and our Treasurer and board member, Bobbie Brune, with her granddaughter, Lauren Brune, attended and we all had a lot of fun seeing some cousins we had met before and meeting many more for the first time. We really enjoyed the cowboy dinner and breakfast under a grove of beautiful old oak trees and then Sunday church with an old-time preacher and a fiddler providing music for the hymns.

The organizers could give lessons on how to plan a family reunion. They also had a wonderfully successful silent auction and everyone brought items to donate and also bought one or more items. The organizers had announced beforehand that the proceeds of the auction would be split between the Shiloh McCutcheon Cemetery in Hutto (Williamson County) and the Bennett Cemetery in Sweet Home. How's that for being cousinly?

We were amazed and very pleased to come home with a check for \$713.25!! Our heartfelt thanks to all of the McCutcheons, especially Sally, Jane, Wid and Daisy, and Alfred and Jenny. You are all wonderful!

THIS NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is being mailed to 212 addresses. We are happy to add the name of anyone who would like to receive it. Please notify us when you move - doing so will save us postage.

FENCE REPAIRS

On your next visit to the cemetery, please notice the much improved condition of the north and west fences. I haven't seen them since Mr. Gladney Harrell of the H & N Fence Company worked on them, but I have included a picture which shows a portion of the north fence. It now appears to be as straight and vertical as new!

Until the fence was cleared by Mr. Earl Schacherl of the heavy growth of vines growing on it, we did not know the fence was in need of repair. After it was cleared, we could see that it was leaning mightily and needed attention.

Mr. Harrell has very generously donated his time and talents in doing this work. As his circumstances and time permit, he plans to undertake the much larger job of repairing the west end of the south fence. There will be expense to us in this as some of the old fence is well beyond the point of repair. Trees on the fence line have grown into the fence and have done considerable harm. Portions of it will need to be replaced. Thank you Mr. Harrell and also Mr. Harvey Matusek, who has offered to let us move the fence a little bit onto his property to get away from the trees.

FENCE HISTORY

Who knows the real history of the cemetery fence? We have heard that the cemetery had a barbed wire fence before the present chain link fence was erected. About 1973, an article in the Yoakum newspaper commented that the fence was erected about 1955 by Mr. John M. Bennett. At that time, the son and grandson of the first John M. Bennett were both living and both were financially capable of building the fence. Questions directed to some of the descendants of those men did not provide a definite answer as to who was the benefactor.

We do know from talking to several fence people that the fence material is of very high quality and would have been expensive when built. We know it has survived the neglect of man and the ravage's of nature for more than a half century and has survived in surprisingly good condition.

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to the fence builder! Chances are the cemetery would be almost wholly gone now instead of mostly there. Thank you, Mr. John M. Bennett!

HISTORIC TEXAS CEMETERY

Thanks to the Lavaca County Historical Commission, we have the Texas Historical Commission's Historic Texas Cemetery medallion. It will be a very nice addition and a permanent improvement when mounted near the front. Stay tuned for further developments.

TIME AND TALENT AND MATERIAL

We have always asked for money donations in these newsletters. But this newsletter is just going to hope for the best in that regard. Money donations are absolutely essential to our success, but donations of time and talent are priceless. We have to have both!

In this issue, I want to recognize the contributions of time and talent that we have received. I know I may overlook someone, but none have been left out intentionally - any oversight is due to my bad memory.

The below are listed alphabetically - about the only fair way I think. All of their help, great or small, in time or talent or material is greatly appreciated and has helped us get to where we are now. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Melinda Berry
Rick Berry
Bobbie Brune - and her sons
Pat Bujnoch
Gene Drozd
Jimmie Ruth Eash
Robert Easton
Tom Finger
Brenda Lincke-Fisseler
Gene's Appliance Store - Hallettsville
Jack Greenwood (deceased)
Hallettsville Chamber of Commerce
Gladney Harrell
Amy Hocking
H & N Fence Co - Hallettsville
Doug Kubicek
Frank Kunetkna
Viola Kutnetka
Lavaca County Historical Commission
Eleanor Marlow
Harvey Matusek
Alfred McCutcheon
Daisy McCutcheon
Sally McCutcheon
Thomas Musgrave
Midway Lawn - Shiner
Don Noble
Mira Noble
Paul N. Noble
Queen of Peace Catholic Church - Sweet Home
Earl Schacherl
Victor Smolik
Sons of the Republic of Texas - San Antonio
William Barret Travis Chapter
Sweet Home American Legion
Sweet Home Store & Restaurant (Mary)
Werner's Restaurant - Shiner
W. L. "Bill" Yolland (deceased)

And I absolutely must give a little extra recognition to my wife, Gay Bethel, who has truly given at least several thousand hours to saving the cemetery. Thank you so much, Gay. And all the rest of you, too!

JOHN MIRZA BENNETT

John M. Bennett lived an exciting life during exciting times. He was a man of action and of great accomplishment. He was born in Alabama in 1831, the seventh child (fifth son) of Stephen Bennett and his wife, Mary Ann Breazeal Bennett. In 1840/41, John accompanied his parents and most of his eleven siblings in a wagon train of almost one hundred people, led by his father, immigrating to the Republic of Texas.

In Texas the Bennett family, building a new life, encountered many hardships including Indian raids and the two invasions of Texas in 1842 by the Mexican Army under Generals Vasquez and Woll. During the Mexican War, John, still just a boy, hauled supplies under contract for General Zachary Taylor. When the Civil War came along, he was an early volunteer and served as a cavalryman on the western frontier, protecting settlers from marauding Indians. After the war, John became active in the cattle business driving Texas longhorns to Kansas and other points north. He led cattle drives for Colonel George Brackenridge who was so impressed with the success of these drives that he loaned Bennett the money to buy his own cattle to drive north. The cattle themselves served as security for the loan. In later life, Bennett commented that this was the only indebtedness he ever had. As a cattleman, Bennett partnered with a number of the well known cattlemen of that time including Monroe Choate, Willis McCutcheon, the brothers George, Ike and Sol West, and several of his own brothers. Bennett prospered in the cattle business and this was the foundation for his later successes. He bought a number of large Texas acreages and transformed them into successful ranches, some of which are still owned and operated by his descendants.

At the end of the cattle drive era, Bennett entered the banking business and became immensely successful. In 1889, he was a founder and the first President of the Yoakum National Bank. He then became a director of the First National Bank of Victoria and in 1903, became a member of the first board of directors of the National Bank of Commerce in San Antonio.

In 1869, he married Elizabeth Bonneau Noble (1841-1916), the daughter of South Carolina patricians who had moved to Texas after the Civil War in an effort to rebuild their lives. John and Elizabeth had two children.. Daughter Martha (1879-1900) married Ed Lassiter. Son John (1878-1974) married Jamie Armstrong. John M. Bennett was a positive influence for good in the communities where he lived. He was a land donor and one of the founders of the public school system in Sweet Home. He was a benefactor and one of the founders of the New Bethel Baptist Church in Sweet Home. He was a member of Masonic Lodges in Hallettsville, Sweet Home, Yoakum and San Antonio. He was elected to the initial Board of Directors of the "Old Time Trail Drivers Association" at its founding meeting in San Antonio in 1915. His philanthropies in San Antonio, and those of his descendants, are well documented and are much too numerous to list in this article. John M. Bennett lived to eighty-nine years of age, dying in 1920. He is buried in Sweet Home in the Bennett Cemetery.

YOUR DONATIONS OF MONEY, TIME, TALENT AND MATERIALS AT WORK