

CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR WASHINGTON CEMETERY CARE, INC. and WASHINGTON CEMETERY HISTORIC TRUST

Vol. 17, No. 3

"Heirs Who Care"

November 1993

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More Strangers' Rest Markers Found

Our second workday this year was also the national Make A Difference Day, in which citizens all over the country worked on civic improvement projects, helped the needy, etc. Our project was mentioned in both the Chronicle and the Post. The weather was simply beautiful. A total of 37 people came out on the two days, including six members of Brownie Girl Scout Troop 10435 and three of their mothers.

The girls completed the marking process for a dozen people buried here by adding their names and dates to the concrete markers. Seventy-plus years after their deaths, these 12 people finally have marked graves. Meanwhile, other volunteers set 40 more numbered markers in concrete and discovered dozens more. We have now located at least 250 of the approximately 1500 numbered markers.

Through a careful reading of the printed list of headstones and diligent searching on the ground, we also discovered the location of a group of about 120 1892-1899 burials that pre-date the use of the numbered markers. Together with the rest of the headstones throughout the Strangers' Rest section, we estimate that the locations of nearly 25% of the burials in this section are now marked.

There is still a great deal of work ahead of us on this project. Only 75 numbered markers have been set in concrete. Many of those that were discovered a year ago are vanishing again, and will continue to do so until they are set. It is a labor-intensive project, requiring *young* people (say, under 60 or so!)

There is also a lot of less-physical work. We need people to do library research, checking death certificates, obituaries, census, etc., so that we can be sure the engraved names and dates are correct.

We are trying to create a map showing the location of each grave, which is proving harder than it sounds. Progress is being made, but between the differing sizes of adult and infant graves, the rows that aren't in straight lines, and the many not yet found, we are finding it difficult to establish a pattern. Clipboard-bearing volunteers needed here!

Finally, money. So far, all the labor has been free, but the concrete, death certificates, and engraving are not. We are pleased to announce receipt of a \$1000 Volunteer Involvement Fund grant from **Exxon** for this project, obtained for us through the efforts of our Board Member Vic Gehring. Thanks!

Let's take advantage of our mild winter weather to work on this project. Please call us at either of the above numbers if you can help in any way.

Project PATHH Update

Phase I is complete, and we are working on the design of Phase II, which will consist mostly of drainage improvements to be implemented shortly. After an evaluation period of several months, we will determine whether we can go ahead with the hard surfacing in Phase III, or whether we will need to implement a more complicated (and costly) drainage plan to ensure long life of the new surface.

As of November 1, we have about \$34,000 either in hand or promised for Phases II and III. We were delighted to receive a *second* \$10,000 grant from **Rockwell Fund, Inc.** in September.

Thanks to all who have given time or money to this project. We have a great start, but it will probably not be enough to finish the project. We still need your help, especially in writing letters and locating additional sources of support.

Clements' Corner

Lot B-113, East 1/2: Ellis Benson

Ellis Benson was born in Rutland County, Vermont on 8 February 1813, and named after his father. His early life remains a mystery, but at age 19 he was in the Illinois Territory for the 1831-32 conflict with the Sac and Fox Indians known as the Black Hawk War. Some three years later, he was recruited for service in the Texas Army by Amasa Turner, agent of the Provisional Government. He left the U.S. and came to Velasco, Texas on 26 January 1836. Four days later he enlisted in Captain John Hart's company for "two years or the duration," and was paid a bounty of \$24.00 (and inscribed in the muster roll as "Elias").

At the Battle of San Jacinto on 21 April 1836, he was one of 25 privates in the "Regular Artillery Corps," serving under Lt. Col. James C. Neill (who was wounded the day before the battle and replaced by Inspector General George W. Hockley as commanding officer). Other officers of this unit were: Capt. Isaac N. Moreland, 1st Lt. William S. Stillwell, 1st Sgt. Richard Scurry, and 2nd Sgt. Thomas P. Plaster.

By December 1836, he was in Capt. John Smith's Co. A, 1st Regiment, Texas Infantry, on detached service at Anahuac. His history fades in and out. When he next comes into focus, he is a member of the ill-fated "Mier Expedition" in William Ryon's company. Luckily for him, he was wounded at Mier on Christmas Day 1842. He was left at Mier with the other wounded when the rest of the captives were marched away for the "Black-Bean Incident." He was among those who recovered, bribed their guards, and made good their escape back to Texas.

Ellis married Mrs. Elisabeth Ritchie, a widow, at Spring Creek in Harris Co. on 25 November 1848. Elisabeth was born 24 June 1819, in Posen, Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany, and came to this country at an early age. They celebrated their 45th anniversary before she died.

There are two children in this family, but it is not yet clear whether they are Benson's children or Ritchie's. Mary married a Coleman and moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, while Bettie married an Oehl (pronounced "ale") and remained a neighbor to her parents here in Houston.

Benson's last known historically significant act was at the 24th anniversary gathering of the San Jacinto veterans. As one of the vice presidents of the convention that met on 21 April 1860, he nominated Sam Houston for President of the U.S. Always

proud of his service to his adopted state, he was an early member of the Texas Veterans Association.

I am as yet unable to confirm his Civil War service, but there was an "E. Benson, Private, Company K, Elmore's Regt. or 29th Infantry", from Texas. As well as the fellow liked to fight, I'm sure he got in somewhere.

He and Elisabeth eventually made their home at 812 Branard Street in the Fifth Ward, she keeping house and he earning a living as a carpenter. She died there Thursday, 1 February 1894. There, too, he died early on Monday, 26 October 1896. They conducted the service at the residence the next day and buried him in the German cemetery (now called Washington Cemetery) beside his wife.

I am attempting to secure an historical marker for Ellis' gravesite, commemorating his service at the Battle of Sam Jacinto, and am writing a pamphlet about him. If you have additional information or corrections, please contact me. (Note: Two standard references, *Heroes of San Jacinto* and the *Handbook of Texas*, are in error on the date of his death; both show the year as 1892).

* * * * *

We need historical material for the next newsletter. Please send any historical tidbits, anecdotes, etc. pertaining to Washington Cemetery to or your loved ones buried here to our **Historian, Gov Clements**.

Our sincere thanks to the following donors to Project PATHH (July 21, 1993 -- October 31, 1993).

Diamond (\$1,000 and up)

Rockwell Fund, Inc.

Houston Endowment Inc.

Gold (\$500 - \$999)

Mrs. Edna M. Hoval

Bronze (\$100 - \$249)

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Mrs. Jane Stuart

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Exxon and Southwestern Bell will match employee and annuitant donations to Washington Cemetery Historic Trust, but these donors need to send us the necessary forms with their donations.

INCOME and EXPENSES – Fiscal Year 1993

CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR WASHINGTON CEMETERY CARE, INC.

Net Assets -- October 1, 1992	\$365,804.41	EXPENSES:	Maintenance	\$14,131.67
			Water Bills	175.95
INCOME:			Postage & Printing	349.6
Maintenance	\$9,403.00		Other Administrative	379.00
Perpetual Care	1,435.00		New Fence	704.79
Improvement Projects	7,275.00		Boundary Survey	2,950.00
Educational Projects	10.00		Donations to WCHT	15,750.00
Book Sales	41.50		Total Expenses	\$34,441.01
Investment Interest	16,305.05		Net Assets -- September 30, 1993	\$365,832.95
Total Income	\$34,469.55		Improvement Projects	\$1,654.28
FUNDS:			Educational Projects	\$249.17
Maintenance/Operations	\$10,471.16			
Perpetual Care	\$353,458.34			

WASHINGTON CEMETERY HISTORIC TRUST

Net Assets -- October 1, 1992	\$5,608.81	EXPENSES:	Security	2,200.00
			Newsletter	845.98
INCOME:			Postage	182.94
Operations/Administration	\$805.00		Historical Research	46.11
" Donation from CCWCC	2,000.00		Strangers' Rest Markers	159.40
Project "PATHH"	27,700.00		Project PATHH	30,921.04
" Donation from CCWCC	13,750.00		Total Expenses	\$34,355.47
Gravesite Restoration	55.00		Net Assets -- September 30, 1993	\$15,819.95
Interest	256.61		Project "PATHH"	\$13,628.96
Total Income	\$44,566.61		Gravesite Restoration	\$415.60
FUNDS:				
Operations/Administration	\$1,391.00			
Historical Projects	\$384.39			

Please return the *entire form* below with your check and mail to **Gus Mistrot, Treasurer**. All donations are deductible on Form 1040 (Schedule A). If your company (e.g., Exxon, Southwestern Bell) will match your donation, please make your donation to the WASHINGTON CEMETERY HISTORIC TRUST; otherwise, please make your annual donation to CCWCC, INC., as usual. **PLEASE NOTE!!** CCWCC and the Historic Trust are separate organizations with separate bank accounts. *Please do not* combine donations to both organizations in one check!

Donor Name _____ Plot Name/No. (if known) _____

CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR WASHINGTON CEMETERY CARE, INC.	WASHINGTON CEMETERY HISTORIC TRUST
____ 1994 MAINTENANCE Donation (\$40.00)	____ 1994 ANNUAL Donation (\$40.00)
____ PROJECT "PATHH" (Promoting Access To Houston's Heritage)	____ PROJECT "PATHH"
____ PERPETUAL CARE (Endowment Fund)	____ GRAVESITE RESTORATION (Strangers' Rest)
Phone Number (optional) _____	____ HISTORY/RESEARCH
	Matching Funds from : _____

Computerized Burial Records

Long-time member and supporter **Ruth Daulley** has begun typing about 7000 burial records into our computer. When completed, the database will combine data from the three record books, headstones, death certificates, and obituaries. The project will probably take several years. The program runs in either dBASE III+ or Foxbase. If you would like to help with the input, please contact Bernice Mistrot at 531-1956. There's plenty of work to go around!

Treasurer's Report

The cemetery looks great, the roads are greatly improved, and we're making real progress towards restoration, both straightening headstones in general and on the Strangers' Rest marking in particular. We've also been very successful in raising money for Project PATHH, as reported elsewhere. That's the good news. However, this success seems to have come at the expense of our maintenance income.

For Fiscal 1993 (ending September 30), CCWCC and WCHT received \$10,200 in maintenance donations and \$16,600 in interest, compared to \$14,300 and \$22,600 the previous year. Routine expenses stayed constant at about \$19,500 per year. Over half of our investment interest is now being used for current operations and maintenance.

The time has come to begin collecting donations to pay for cutting the grass next spring. Many thanks to the 251 donors who helped us last year. Let's try to get to 300 this year, by interesting the younger members of our families in preserving their heritage. The burden you lighten by encouraging new members to join us will be your own.

To Our New Readers

In 1975, Washington Cemetery was very neglected and overgrown, much like certain cemeteries that have been in the news lately. There was no perpetual care fund, and after the caretaker's death, there was no one to maintain it. Through the efforts of many CCWCC volunteers and donors, the cemetery has been transformed from a community eyesore to a tranquil place of beauty. CCWCC has been solely responsible for maintenance since 1978.

We should all be proud of how far we've come -- from just \$5.00 for postage back in 1975 to a \$365,000 organization now, and we did it mostly \$10 and \$40 and \$100 at a time, helped by some larger donations and by several bequests ranging from \$1,000 to \$15,000. We have NO paid staff, except for the crew that cuts the grass.

Our eventual goal is perpetual care; however, that will require some paid staff, with a several-fold increase in annual operating costs. We are moving in that direction, but that day is still a long way off. Until we get there (or someone wins the lottery and gives us the winnings), we will have to continue to rely on lots of volunteers and ask for donations.

As you are doing your year-end tax planning, or perhaps some estate planning, please consider us. Our **Vice President, Burt Ballanfant**, can assist you with the proper wording).

* * * * *

HAPPY HOLIDAYS! As you gather together with family, take a few moments to remember your extended family at Washington Cemetery and come enjoy the peace and beauty you have restored here.

**CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR
WASHINGTON CEMETERY CARE, INC.**

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