

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

Vol. 21, No. 3

"Heirs Who Care"

August 1997

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 Vice President -----Burt Ballanfant
 Recording Secretary ---- Rita Davis
 Treasurer -----Julie Itz
 Corres. Secretary - Bernice Mistrot
 Historian-----Governor Clements

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Court Appoints CCWCC as Caretaker

On July 16, 1997, thirty CCWCC members, aged 8 to 94, assembled in the 129th District Court in Houston to hear **Judge Pat Mizell** approve an order formally authorizing CCWCC to restore, operate, and maintain Washington Cemetery. CCWCC is the very first non-profit organization in the state of Texas to be granted this authority under Chapter 715 of the Texas Health and Safety Code, which was enacted by the Texas Legislature in 1995.

It has taken a full year of hard work by our Board members, and especially our very patient attorney, **Marcus Faubion**, to make this a reality. We had to develop new bylaws and a written plan for caring for the cemetery that addressed all the points in the law, including how our efforts would be financed. The law also required us to attempt to locate all the lot owners and shareholders of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft* even though we knew most of them were long deceased. The Texas Historical Commission also reviewed our monument restoration program for compliance with current preservation standards.

Total cost of this proceeding, including legal bills, various filing fees, postage, copies, photos, etc., is expected to be about \$8500. Had Mr. Faubion charged us for all the time he spent, it would have been several times that. But now, you're asking, what did we gain for that expenditure?

First and foremost, we finally have legal authority for what we do. For 20 years, we have engaged in restoration and maintenance of the cemetery, but we have done as little "operation" as possible. We now have a responsibility to operate the cemetery in a business-like fashion, including charging for services rendered and actively marketing burial plots.

Following the "Organizational Meeting" required by law (see page 4), we anticipate being able to sell unused lots within the developed part of the cemetery. We are starting to review the cemetery records to create an inventory of available lots and spaces and establish prices in line with those of nearby historic cemeteries. By law, a portion of the sales price of each lot must be added to the CCWCC Endowment Fund to generate income for future maintenance; the remainder can be used for current maintenance and various restoration projects.

Many of you have asked about the vacant land at the north and south ends of the cemetery. Our new status gives us the authority to sell cemetery lots on that land, however, such development will require significant study and expense. At this time, we have neither the need nor the funding to do so.

Monument Repair Gets Foundation Boost

We are delighted to announce recent grants of \$10,000 from **Rockwell Fund, Inc.** and \$5,000 from **Houston Endowment Inc.** for use in Phases 3 and 4 of our Monument Repair project. **THANK YOU!** Also, the **Randalls Good Neighbor Program** (WCHT number is **2810**) reports total purchases of \$10,700 through June 30. We will receive a check in January 1998 for 1% to 2% of our total purchases for the year.

Contracts totaling \$6300 were signed in July for repair, cleaning, and stabilization of 29 more monuments, which we expect to be completed by the Fall Open House. We are continuing to raise funds for the next phase. We've made a lot of progress, but there's still a lot more work to do. As always, your help is needed to make Washington Cemetery look really first-class.

Clements' Corner

Lot C-76, S^{1/2}: Annie Gerdes/Mrs. Joe Schilling

Compiled with assistance from S. Elaine French of League City, TX, great-great-granddaughter of Annie Gerdes, and great-granddaughter of Joe Schilling.

August Henry **Gerdes** (24 July 1832 - 29 July 1879) was a blacksmith with a shop at the corner of Washington and Preston Streets (right behind the present police station). The residence faced onto Preston.

His widow, Annie (**Moeller**) Gerdes, was well liked and respected, and served as a midwife to many in the German community. She purchased this lot early in 1893 and had her husband's remains reinterred here on 25 Jan that year. Two infants reinterred here on the same day are believed to be theirs, though no details are known about them. At least two children survived to adulthood: Mary "Mamie" (1872-1942) and Fritz "Fred" (1866-1915).

On 28 March 1894, Mary "Mamie" Gerdes married Joseph Edward **Schilling** (1868-1916) at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Houston. The first of their four daughters, Erema Annett (24 Oct. 1895 - 18 Dec. 1895), was baptized at St. Joseph's (church records show her baptismal name as "Mary Inita") on the day of her death. Her grave is adorned with a headstone with a lamb resting on a scroll that reads "A bud on earth, to bloom in heaven."

In April 1897, Mary and Joe were blessed with a second daughter, Helen. Joe took instruction and converted to Catholicism in 1898. A third daughter, Anita Foley, joined the family on 14 Dec. 1899.

Annie Gerdes lived with the Schillings and enjoyed her little granddaughters, but not for long. She passed away 24 July 1900 at age 69, and was buried next to her husband August under a joint headstone with the loving inscription, "Rest dear parents, rest in quiet peace, while we in sorrow, o'er thee weep."

Tragedy struck again just the next year when young Helen died of diphtheria. Anita, who was only two, lost a sister, but Mamie and Joe were devastated at the loss of their second child. Years later, a handwritten note found pressed between the pages of a family Bible revealed the depth of their loss:

In remembrance of our dear daughter Helen, age 4 years 6 months. Died October 23 at 11:00 Wednesday evening 1901.

Dear little hands, I miss them so
All though the day wherever I go
All through the night how _____
For no little hands wake me of my dreams
I miss them all through the waning hours
I miss them _____ do _____
Daytime and nighttime wherever I go
My little darling, I miss her so.

She is buried near her sister Erema, with a simple headstone reading, "Helen 1897-1901". (Curiously, the original cemetery record book clearly shows her burial date as 25 Oct. 1900!)

The fourth daughter, Aldah, was born 7 Jan. 1902, and became the first child baptized in the new brick church building of St. Joseph's, on 23 Feb. 1902. Anita and Aldah were happy girls growing up in the first decade of the century, travelling to Rockdale and Galveston visiting friends and family, and participating in numerous social activities.

Joe Schilling died suddenly on Christmas Day 1916. Friends and coworkers at the American Brewery where he was an engineer and pipefitter were shocked by his death due to acute gastritis. They thought he only had a slight cold. He was buried in Holy Cross Cemetery, next to his father, August.

Within a few years, Anita met and married Guy P. **Miller**. She was cashier for an oil company, and he worked in building construction as a stationary engineer. They lived with her mother and sister on Preston Street in 1920, but divorced the following year and the marriage was forgotten. Anita liked to travel, visiting Colorado and California. On 25 Aug. 1924, she married William N. **Dorman** in Richmond, TX. They moved to De Quincy, LA, and in 1929, to New Iberia, LA. They had no children. Complications following a hysterectomy resulted in her death on 9 Feb. 1936, at age 35. Her sister Aldah, who had gone to nurse her after the surgery, brought her body back and buried her beside her little sisters. Erema, Helen, and Anita, denied a life together as sisters, now share a resting place together.

Mamie Schilling lived with her surviving daughter, Aldah "Christy", for the rest of her life. Stricken with crippling arthritis, she was bedridden near the end of her life, which ended 27 Mar. 1942. She was buried next to her husband Joe at Holy Cross.

Aldah married Gustavus Theodore **Christensen** and had four children: Aldah Mary, Gus T., Jr. (Elaine's father), Joe Ed, and Anita. Aldah lived a long and full life, and died on 20 June 1978 at age 76. She is also buried at Holy Cross, the only child to be buried near her parents.

Fred **Gerdes** and his wife Louise, and their daughter Ruby and her husband Edgar Poe **Carothers** are among those buried in Washington Cemetery on the **Moeller** lot, P-5. But that's another story ...

* * * * *

Your family history can appear here in November. Please send such histories to our **Historian, Gov Clements**.

President's Message

For over 20 years, we have worked together to make Washington Cemetery what it is today, and we have reason to be pleased with our success. However, our continued success depends upon your support.

We still have a long way to go to build our endowment fund to a level that will allow the interest earned by the fund to cover 100% of the maintenance cost. At present, income from the fund covers only about 60% of our total expenses.

We still need your donations of both money and time to meet the rest of the budget for maintenance, operations, restoration of monuments and grounds, research and correction of burial records, and legal expenses for setting up new methods of operation.

Washington Cemetery is a highly worthwhile project and it is important to both the city of Houston and the state of Texas. Please continue to be a part of the effort to restore and enhance this cemetery for the benefit of your families and the veneration of your family and friends buried here.

-- Herman Lauhoff

W.C. Centennial Book Out of Print

Several recent callers have asked where they can buy the book we wrote in 1988. All 400 copies have been sold. However, if there is enough interest, we may consider a reprint. The cost will be determined by the number printed but will probably be *at least* \$35. If you have any extra copies that you would like to sell or donate for resale, please call **Leona Zaboroski**.

* * * * *

Please return the entire form below with your check and mail to **Julie Itz, Treasurer**. All individual donations are deductible on Form 1040 (Schedule A). If your company (e.g., Exxon, Southwestern Bell, Tenneco) 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 WCHT are separate organizations with separate bank accounts. Please do not combine donations to both organizations in one check!

More Strangers' Rest Markers Found

Board member **Carl Young** and his hardy helpers have uncovered dozens more of these markers in Section F, next to the Rice Mill Fence. Most of these burials occurred in the 1930s and 1940s. We plan to set 50 or more in concrete after the Fall Work Day.

Treasurer's Report (August 1, 1997)

First, we want to thank the 250 individuals and corporations who have contributed to CCWCC or WCHT this year. Your support is not only much appreciated, but essential to our continued success.

The total value of CCWCC is about \$446,000, including \$422,000 in the Endowment Fund. The total value of WCHT is about \$32,000, including \$20,000 reserved for restoration projects and \$7,500 for road maintenance. Combined expenses of CCWCC and WCHT since Feb. 1 include \$13,800 for routine expenses and \$7,000 for costs associated with our successful court petition. Combined donations over the same period include \$7,800 for routine expenses, \$12,000 for monument restoration and \$500 for legal/research. The \$6,000 difference between maintenance donations and expenses was paid from the \$8,600 of income generated by the CCWCC Endowment Fund over the six-month period.

During the next quarter, we expect routine expenses of about \$8,000, not including the headstone repair. Please be generous. The future of Washington Cemetery, as well as the present, depends on YOU.

-- Julie Itz

Donor Name _____	Surname(s) of Deceased _____
Please send acknowledgment <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Plot Number (if known) _____
CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR WASHINGTON CEMETERY CARE, INC.	WASHINGTON CEMETERY HISTORIC TRUST
____ 1997 MAINTENANCE Donation (\$40.00)	____ 1997 ANNUAL Donation (\$40.00)
____ IMPROVEMENTS & REPAIRS	____ GRAVESITE RESTORATION
____ RESEARCH/LEGAL FUND	____ HISTORY/RESEARCH
Phone Number _____	Matching Gift from _____

Fall Open House and Work Day

Our Spring Work Days were a great success, except for April, which was rained out. Thirty-four people came to the March Open House in lovely weather, many to visit graves of ancestors they had never met.

Mark your calendar now for the **Fall Work Day** on **Saturday, Oct. 11** and **Open House** on **Oct. 25**. Several Board members will be there from about 9-4 both days and we'll have the record books available.

We encourage everyone to come visit the cemetery and see what we've accomplished in the last 20 years. If you haven't seen it lately, you're in for a treat. Glenwood is doing a fine job of maintenance -- the cemetery has never looked better. Even the vacant acreage at the back is always neat and tidy.

Bring a picnic lunch, enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the place, and give thanks to all the hard-working folks who started this organization when it took a lot of imagination to see the cemetery as it is now. We look forward to enjoying it with all of you.

Annual Meeting and Board Election

This year's **Annual Meeting** of the membership will also serve as the **Organizational Meeting** required by Texas Health and Safety Code, Section 715.010.

All CCWCC members are invited to attend, **Sunday, September 21, 1997, 3:00 p.m.** at our usual meeting place, Central Congregational Church, 3410 Austin at Holman. Officers and directors will be elected for the coming year. Here's *your* chance to get involved! If you are interested in serving on the Board, either as an officer or director, or on any committee, please contact the Nominating Committee prior to **September 7**.

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

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1997 a Year of Many Anniversaries

110 years ago --

7 Feb. 1887: *Deutsche Gesellschaft von Houston* purchased 27 acres outside the Houston city limits to establish a cemetery for the German community.

23 Mar. 1887: First burials in the new cemetery were two little girls, recorded as **J. Turner**, age 1 (Lot B-17) and **M. Zeidler**, age 7 (Lot C-63 E½).

75 years ago --

1 Apr. 1922: *Washington Cemetery* incorporated for 25 years by **J. B. Cochran**, **W. H. Goetzman**, and **Theo. Dreyling**. This was the third and final charter (the first two were in 1879 and 1900).

50 years ago --

1 Apr. 1947: Last charter expired; not renewed. Cemetery continued to operate informally.

20 years ago --

8 July 1977: Last caretaker, **Leona Tonn**, became a victim of foul play. Her assailant was never found.

8 Aug. 1977: CCWCC incorporated by **R. E. Ballanfant**, **Mrs. Howard Wilson**, and **Jess Petty, Jr.** Major cleanup, restoration, and fundraising efforts began. Total donations since then -- over \$531,000.

5 years ago --

10 Apr. 1992 -- WCHT formed by **Herman Lauhoff**, **Gov Clements**, **Burt Ballanfant**, **Bernice Mistrot**, and **Lois King** to assist in funding historical research, monument restoration, road repair, and other major improvements. Total donations since then -- over \$104,000.

This Year --

16 July 1997 -- **Judge Pat Mizell**, 129th District Court, formally authorized CCWCC to restore, operate, and maintain Washington Cemetery.

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Group formally adopts 118-year-old cemetery

Pioneers buried near Washington Avenue

By **GEORGE FLYNN**
Houston Chronicle

Concerned Citizens for Washington Cemetery Care Inc. have received authorization to take over the 118-year-old burial grounds for some of Houston's earliest pioneers.

State District Judge Pat Mizell approved what is effectively a legal adoption — and one of the first area applications of a state law designed to give new life to dying cemeteries.

A half-century ago, Washington Cemetery, at 2911 Washington Ave., had been abandoned in terms of legal ownership.

The widow of the last caretaker attempted to carry on maintenance until her death in 1970, when the 21-acre site slipped into an overgrowth of weeds and disrepair.

Members of CCWCC — including many related to those buried there, began restoration and cemetery care in the late 1970s. But group attorney Marcus Faubion said Mizell's action will expand those efforts and ensure the cemetery is viable for future generations.

"The state law seemed tailored to what CCWCC is trying to do," Faubion said. By assuming control of the cemetery, the group can sell undeveloped plots and use those revenues to pay for continued improvements and maintenance, Faubion said.

The cemetery began with the charter in 1879 of Deutsche Gesellschaft von Houston — the German Society of Houston. It was organized to "support benevolent and charitable undertakings." Those were primarily:

"To promote morals, to render mutual assistance in case of sickness,

distress and misfortune, and to bury the dead."

When the charter came up for renewal in 1900, the graveyard was changed to "German Society Cemetery." Faubion said the anti-German sentiments after World War I contributed to the decision in 1918 to rename it as simply Washington Cemetery.

That incorporation lapsed in 1947. When CCWCC started restoration efforts in 1977, there was only a ghost of a chance of finding most of the original 37 shareholders, the group's attorney said.

Under the 1995 state law, CCWCC was required to show that it had a special relationship to the cemetery — whether in culture, religion, history or ethnicity. It proved the cemetery was more than 75 years old, that there was no viable organization of plot owners or operators, and that the site could become a public nuisance or threat to safety, health or comfort.

The group also filed an improvement and care plan for improving the cemetery. It already has conducted major cleanups, repaved and restored roads, brought water lines into the property, stabilized headstones, added front gates and security lighting to ward off vandals.

From an initial bequest of \$20,000 20 years ago, the group has raised about \$400,000 for future work.

Group members also have researched the lives of those in the cemetery, publishing a 300-page history of them and the graveyard. They also have microfilmed burial records and located and marked the previously unmarked graves of about 600. The group has raised about \$400,000 for future work.