

WASHINGTON CEMETERY HISTORIC TRUST

Vol. 30, No. 1

"Heirs Who Care"

February 2006

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Citizens of the Republic of Texas to be Honored on March 25, 2006

Memorial markers (bronze medallions) have been ordered for the following nine Citizens of the Republic of Texas: Julia **Purcell Bergin** and her son Osburn M. **Bergin**, George Albert **Branard**, Louisa **Reinermann Quensell**, Emilie **Usener Schneider**, Frederick **Schweikart** and his wife Antoinette **Officier Schweikart**, Osgood Andrew **Shook**, and William H. **Williams**. Research is continuing on Edmond **Reeves** and his sister Eveline **Reeves Toole**, but it may not be completed in time for the dedication on March 25.

These markers will be formally dedicated in a ceremony at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 25, 2006. Everyone is welcome to attend. Following the ceremony, the **Bluebonnet Branch Chapter, Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT)**, will host a reception at Trinity Lutheran Church. Please contact Nettie Dworsky if you plan to attend. We look forward to seeing you there.

Confederate Grave Marking Program

Fifty-two new Confederate headstones and markers have been dedicated at Washington Cemetery since 1999, forty-nine of them in the last three years. Two more have been installed and will be dedicated on October 28, 2006 in a group of about a dozen. We do not yet know who the other ten will be.

There are 17 reported Confederate veterans and two Union veterans who are eligible for VA markers, if

we can confirm their identity and service. Realistically, we'll probably only succeed on about half of them. We also encourage families to consider adding "VA-style" markers to the graves of veterans whose existing headstones do not mention their service. The cost to the family is only \$60. There are about 30 known or reported Confederate or Union veterans, and an untold number of later veterans, who could have their military service shown on their gravesites. We hope to have the markers for the October ceremony ordered by the end of May. Please contact Gus Mistrot for details.

Headstone Transcription Project and Burial Database

We need a few volunteers to help with transcribing headstones and proofreading the computer printouts after Eleanor Beebe types the headstone information into the burial database. Most of the family plots have been transcribed, but about one third of them still need proofreading.

We are just beginning to transcribe the headstones and markers in Strangers Rest. At present, we have some preliminary maps, but there is no index to them. Ultimately, each of the 1500 or so single graves will be entered in the database with both a chronological number and a physical location to make them easy to find.

There's no reason to confine these transcription activities to defined work days – anytime that your schedule and nice weather coincide is a good time to do it. If you would like to help with this project, please contact Bernice Mistrot.

Clements' Corner

Cemetery, *n.*, place or ground set apart for the burial of the dead; graveyard; churchyard; necropolis.

There are many kinds of cemeteries: public, religious, organizational, military, national honor (e.g., Arlington) and private. Washington Cemetery (WC) has a little of every kind. Religiously, there are Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and others buried here. Many organizations and associations, such as the Sons of Hermann and the Order of Railway Conductors, have lots for their deceased members. There are over 350 military graves, including two veterans of the Battle of San Jacinto, and over a dozen Citizens of the Republic of Texas.

WC was established in February 1887, and the first burial took place just before Easter. Originally called German Society Cemetery, it was intended principally as a graveyard for those of German descent, Germans then being one of the largest ethnic groups in Harris County. The grounds were laid out in a formal arrangement – a long rectangle with avenues, lettered Sections A, B, C, etc., a gazebo, and a fountain. Each section was subdivided into numbered lots. A full lot – 20'x20' – was designed to hold 12 adult burials (more if children). Each lot could be further divided into half lots (6 spaces) or quarter lots (3 spaces). Most lots were purchased for the burial of members of a single extended family.

Special areas throughout the cemetery are designated as "Strangers Rest" (SR), or single grave spaces – intended for the burial of individuals unrelated to those in adjacent graves. The largest SR area is in Section H, in the southeast corner of WC. There are also several SR plots in Sections F and G.

Due in large measure to the influence of Judeo-Christian religious belief, inhumation (burial, interment of a body in the ground) has been the traditional practice in WC. But cremation is becoming more popular. In recent years up to one third of the burials in WC are cremated remains ("cremains").

People in ancient Israel placed bodies in prepared caves and ground burials. Touching a dead body or grave defiled a person, requiring a purification ritual (see Numbers 19:16). By the first century, graves were customarily whitewashed each year in order to

make them obvious and thereby prevent one's stepping on or touching one accidentally or unknowingly (see also Matthew 23:27). This is the background for the tradition not to tread on a grave.

The ancient Germans buried in groves consecrated by their pagan priests. With the spread of Christianity, consecrated places were appropriated for the purpose of burial, and it was regarded as ignominious not to be buried in consecrated ground. The Jews had always practiced the use of separate cemeteries.

Until relatively modern times, ordinary people at death were washed, wrapped in a covering, and lowered into a grave. Then the practice of using a wooden coffin or metal casket became the trend. However over time, with the deterioration of the box, the ground over the grave subsided and monuments tilted (some dangerously so). This has been one of the principal works of Washington Cemetery Historic Trust – the filling-in of sunken graves and righting monuments – and the most costly in dollars. Cemetery regulations now require that a coffin or casket be placed in an outer container (such as a concrete box), thereby ensuring the stability of the grave mound and marker. State law requires at least 18 inches of dirt above the outer container, which generally means a grave 4 to 4½ feet in depth. In earlier years, graves were generally dug six feet deep to keep wild animals from digging up the corpse.

Embalming the body for ordinary people began in this country during the War Between The States (1861-65). Families wanted the slain soldier brought home for burial. Battlefield embalming, sealing the body in a lead-lined box, and sending it home by rail became a regular custom – when possible and for those who could afford it. In subsequent years, if a person died in one part of the country and was to be buried some distance away, or died in another country, embalming was used. Today it is the prevalent practice. In WC bodies have been buried with or without embalming.

Many traditions are recognized in this cemetery. In addition to a headstone, marker, or more elaborate monument, you will often see a smaller footstone. Some graves have a "cradle" of stone, cement, or brick outlining the actual gravesite. This seems to be another of the traditions brought over from the old

country. Many families and associations have erected a curb or "coping" around their lots.

And lastly, another tradition, followed more conscientiously in the past, was that the deceased was buried with feet to the east and head to the west, from the common belief that Christ would return in the early morn in the East, and the resurrected body would rise facing east to meet the Lord.

In a future "Corner" some of the interesting monument inscriptions will be displayed.

Contacts:

Burial Database: Eleanor Beebe.

Veterans Database: Gus Mistrot.

History Book Text & Newsletter Editor: Bernice Mistrot.

History Book Photos: Ginger Daily.

Glenwood Cemetery, 2525 Washington Avenue, Houston, TX 77007-6020, phone (713) 864-7886, fax (713) 864-6429, <info@glenwoodcemetery.org>.

Treasurer's Report (January 31, 2006)

During the four months ended January 31, 2006, WCHT received 68 donations from individuals. During this period WCHT also received unrestricted bequests totaling \$25,000 in memory of Regina and Faust Nadolny, Emil Kolarz, Eugene D. Gorski, and an unrestricted gift of \$5,000 in memory of former WCHT Trustee H. V. "Vic" Gehring, Jr.

WCHT also receives funds from the *Randall's Good Neighbor* Program (WCHT #2810) and Kroger *Share* Card. While WCHT is currently receiving funds through the matching gift programs of ExxonMobil and J. P. Morgan Chase foundations, many other corporations have matching gift programs for employees and retirees. These programs all help to finance WCHT's restoration projects.

The total assets of WCHT at January 31, 2006 equal \$217,503, of which \$86,713 is held in the Improvements Fund for continuing projects. The unaudited financial statement for the four months ending January 31, 2006 follows.

Fund Balance – September 30, 2005	\$183,380
Income – donations	33,109
Income – investments	<u>2,727</u>
Total Income	35,836
Expenses – historical	1,007
Expenses – newsletter and postage	693
Expenses – administrative	<u>13</u>
Total Expenses	1,713
Fund Balance – January 31, 2006	\$217,503

Investments are carried at cost. As of January 31, 2006, the market value was below cost by \$1,144.

* * * * *

Please return the form below with your check and mail to the **WCHT Treasurer, Lloyd Shenberger**. All donations are deductible on Form 1040 (Schedule A).

WASHINGTON CEMETERY HISTORIC TRUST	
Donor Name _____ Phone Number _____	
E-mail Address (if applicable) _____	
_____ 2006 ANNUAL Donation (\$20.00) _____ GRAVESITE RESTORATION _____ HISTORY/RESEARCH	Surname(s) of Deceased _____ _____ Plot Number(s), if known _____
_____ TOTAL	Matching Gift from _____

2005 Burials in Washington Cemetery

The following persons were laid to rest in Washington Cemetery in 2005.

	<u>Lot No.</u>	<u>Burial Date</u>
Carolyn Fant Thames	D-045 E½	04 Jan 2005
Billie Jean Stonecipher Calmes	D-116	08 Mar 2005
Dell Eubank Prell	D-118	11 Mar 2005
Nelson Edward Moy	A-065	20 Aug 2005
Robert Paul St. Cyr	C-082 E½	01 Oct 2005
Gretchen A. Villarreal	H-063 S½	21 Apr 2005
William Davis Curry	F-013	20 Dec 2005

Spring Visitor/Work Days Planned

While Houston has had beautiful weather recently, the recent Visitor/Work Day was rained out – it was one of only two days in January with significant rain. We hope that the weather will cooperate for the Dedication and remaining spring work days.

“Work Day” at Washington Cemetery has a much different meaning today than it did 25 years ago. Now that Glenwood is taking care of all maintenance, including planting seasonal flowers in several places, the WCHT workdays are an opportunity to enjoy the fruits of Glenwood’s labors while transcribing headstones or continuing the search for hidden markers in Strangers Rest.

We look forward to seeing you there. Of course, you’re always welcome to just come and visit, whether on a defined workday, or any day. The cemetery gates are open seven days a week, 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Enjoy this lovely weather, while it lasts!

WASHINGTON CEMETERY HISTORIC TRUST

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Glenwood Annual Meeting on June 15

All original Owners of lots in Washington Cemetery (or surviving spouses, executors, or descendants of deceased lot owners who have completed a Glenwood Declaration/Proxy form) are invited to attend the Annual Meeting of Glenwood Cemetery, Inc. The primary purposes of the meeting are to elect the Board of Directors and to review the important events of the year.

If no one in your family received the Declaration/Proxy for your lot last year, and you wish to become the representative for your family lot, please contact the Glenwood office at (713) 864-7886. You may also write to Glenwood Cemetery, 2525 Washington Avenue, Houston, Texas 77007-6020 or send e-mail to Martha Peterson.

Calendar of Events

Dedication of Republic of Texas Medallions

Saturday, March 25, 2006, 10:00 a.m.

Washington Cemetery Visitor/Work Days

Saturday, February 25, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 29, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Glenwood Cemetery Annual Meeting

Thursday, June 15, 10:00 a.m.

51st Floor, 1301 McKinney (Chevron Tower)

Dedication of Confederate Headstones

Saturday, October 28, 2006, 10:00 a.m.