

# SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

## Spring 2012 Newsletter

### Save Austin's Cemeteries Board Members

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### Six Degrees of Connection: Texas Heritage Event by Beth Pickett



If you didn't make it out to the first annual celebration of Texas heritage at Oakwood on March 24<sup>th</sup>, just wait until next year—it was an amazing success, and we're planning to repeat it. The weather was glorious, the speakers were wonderfully engaging, and there was a lot to learn from our basket weavers, lace tatters, quilters, flint-knapper, woodwright, and blacksmith. We had Swedes, Germans, filmmakers, and genealogy experts. A troop of Buffalo Soldiers set up camp and shared so much interesting history and artifacts. Local museums were represented. Stories were told, faces were painted, and headstones were cleaned. Two large tents set up just west of the chapel accommodated all of the exhibitors and some of the crafts demonstrators. More crafts spilled out beyond the tents. Bidding was fierce on some items in the silent auction, which featured many history-related books, as well as other items. There was also a scavenger hunt!

Although attendance was not what we had hoped, we were told that it was quite good for a first-time event. An even better compliment was that many visitors thought the event had been held before, because it was running so smoothly. That credit goes to Leslie Wolfenden and her meticulous and thoughtful planning, as well to the Save Austin's Cemeteries volunteers who donated their time to this new springtime event on our calendar. We also very much appreciate the Parks and Recreation Department's assistance and support in planning the event.

The goals in presenting this event were to create a new way to attract people to Oakwood, and we wanted to strengthen our partnerships with other like-minded organizations, such as our co-hosts: the German-Texan Heritage Society, Preservation Texas, the Heritage Society of Austin, and the Neill-Cochran House Museum. We especially hoped to inform people about the Oakwood Cemetery Chapel rehabilitation project and initiate some of the fundraising for it. The day was a success on all counts, including fundraising. We made nearly \$2,000 with fewer than 400 visitors.

Get ready to mark it on your calendar for next year—we'll see you there.

### *Guest Speakers* (Megan Spencer)

If you like stories and songs as much as I do, Oakwood Chapel was the place to be on March 24. Six excellent presenters gave us stories and songs of the earliest settlers in Austin. The stories captivated us and the songs lifted our hearts. This was the first public held event inside Oakwood Chapel, so it seemed like a christening in a way. All day long, I kept imagining the changes that we will see as Oakwood Chapel is restored to its former splendor.

Our day of speaker events started with Kenneth Hafertepe, who talked about grave markers and the people who lay beneath them. He focused on people associated with Abner Cook, the prominent builder of early Austin.

Next, Ed Miller entertained us with stories and songs of Scotland and provided an interesting look at the history of Scotland, its people, and why so many of them left Scotland and found their way into so many parts of the world, including Austin.

Starting off the afternoon was Jeffrey Kerr, who gave an exciting talk on “The Republic of Austin: Scalpings, Ghosts, and Dreams in the Early Texas Capital.” I especially was taken with the story of Josiah Wilbarger. I was familiar with the incredible story of his surviving a scalping attack by Indians and Dr. Kerr brought the story to life. Austin really was the extreme edge of civilization in the 1830s!

Mid-afternoon found us steeped in German history with James M. Damon - a real native Texan, whose family came to Texas when it was still owned by Spain. He gave us an overview of the German Free School and highlights of the German experience from earliest times to the suppression of German language and culture during the Thirty Years War of the twentieth century.

The afternoon ended on a perfect note with the gorgeous voice of Stephanie Prewitt and the sweet sounds of the harp, played by Elaine Barber. Stephanie and Elaine performed songs that may have been in the minds and hearts of early Austin settlers, focusing on immigrant groups. We heard Robert Burns' ballads, lullabies, spirituals, and a hilarious Sephardic song that made us laugh out loud -- and we didn't even understand the words! It was the perfect ending to a day of history and culture.



**Exhibitors** (Leslie Wolfenden)

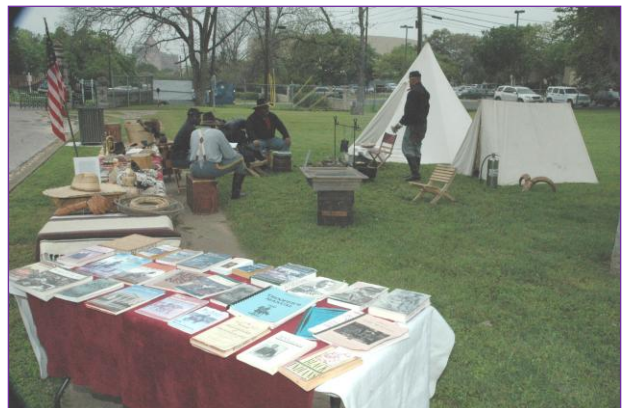
A variety of history-related non-profit organizations hosted tables to showcase the purpose of their groups, to collect donations, and to sell items from their gift shops. As many of these groups had not had a prior chance to meet each other, it was a great opportunity to network, exchanging ideas and contact information with each other as well as the visiting public. The groups that hosted tables included:

- Austin Genealogical Society  
<http://www.austintxgensoc.org/>
- Austin History Center and Austin History Center Foundation  
<http://www.austinlibrary.com/ahc/about.htm>
- Daughters of the American Revolution  
<http://www.dar.org/>
- Elisabet Ney Museum  
<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/elisabet-ney-museum>
- French Legation  
<http://www.frenchlegation.org/>
- German-Texan Heritage Society  
<http://germantexans.org/>
- O. Henry Museum  
<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/o-henry-museum>
- Joseph & Susanna Dickinson House Museum  
<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/joseph-and-susanna-dickinson-hannig-museum>
- Neill-Cochran House Museum  
<http://www.nchmuseum.org/>
- Save Austin's Cemeteries  
<http://www.sachome.org/>
- Swedish Friends
- Texas Archive of the Moving Image  
<http://www.texasarchive.org/>
- Texas General Land Office  
<http://www.glo.texas.gov/>
- Travis County Historical Commission  
[http://www.co.travis.tx.us/historical\\_commission/](http://www.co.travis.tx.us/historical_commission/)
- Travis County Archeological Society  
<http://www.travis.txarch.org/>
- Travis County Archives

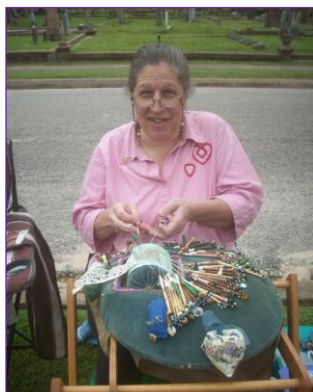
**Demonstrations** (Bob Ward)

The 6 Degrees of Connection historical event featured an incredible array of talent and abilities. Most of the demonstrators were from the immediate area but one ventured all the way from the Panhandle to entertain and educate our guests. The featured demonstrators included:

- Members of the 9<sup>th</sup> Buffalo Soldiers from Camp Mabry set up a tent and campsite along with several tables full of period artifacts. Horace Williams, the president of the local chapter was on hand as they told stories of frontier life and demonstrated a day around the camp.
- Jim Schmidt, the blacksmith from Pioneer Farms and a docent at the French Legation was on hand to demonstrate his considerable blacksmithing skills.



- Joe Rogers came down from the Panhandle with his tools and knowledge of 19<sup>th</sup> Century carpentry skills. Joe knows not only how to demonstrate his craft, but he keeps up a lively conversation with anyone who ventures close.
- Chris Ringstaff is a well-known flint knapper who brought along his tools and chert and spent the day designing spear points and other artifacts of Native American life.
- The Central Texas Basket Guild demonstrated basket weaving techniques. A large display shelf showcased completed basket wares – just breathtaking in their intricacies and variety. [www.ctbg.net](http://www.ctbg.net)
- The Austin Lacemakers Guild came equipped with a variety of lacemaking paraphernalia that astounded visitors with the delicacy and keen eyesight that is needed to attempt this fine craft. [www.lacebobbins.com/AustinLace.htm](http://www.lacebobbins.com/AustinLace.htm)
- The Austin Area Quilt Guild showed how quilting has changed over the years and had a variety of quilt samples on hand. Visitors were encouraged to try their skill at quilting. <http://aaqg.org>
- Donna Ingram is a prize winning story teller who entertained guests under a shade tree with stories of Texas and beyond.



Some of the terrific demonstrators

***Silent Auction Fundraiser*** (Beth Pickett)

The only silence at the silent auction was the bidding—there was quite a lot of conversation about the diverse selection of items. Several historical maps, an Austin-themed water globe, and tempting Texas-shaped cookies were offered. An array of history-related books was contributed by several donors, including titles on Austin and Texas history. The basket weavers over in the crafts demonstration tent, the Central Texas Basket Guild, donated a stunning handmade basket that fetched a nice price, and our own Barbara Surles contributed a stylish, cute-as-



heck handbag with matching wallet that she made. One popular item was a gift basket of Austin-crafted liquors paired with the book *Austin Then and Now*. Then there were tickets to the Neill-Cochran House Museum's speaker series and the Heritage Society's homes tour. A beautiful hanging plant donated by Kay Boyd graced the eaves of the tent until it went home with its successful bidder.

The auction was held from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. All told, 34 items were donated that netted a total of nearly \$600. Plus, it was a lot of fun! Thank you to everyone who donated items and helped make our first silent auction a success.

***Costumed Characters*** (Leslie Wolfenden)

The Austin Tour Guide Association participated in the Six Degrees of Texas Heritage event by portraying historical figures of Texas history, including Susanna Dickinson Hannig (Alamo survivor), Lizzie Williams (cattle baron), Mrs. Nancy Driskill, Ben Thompson (gunfighter and lawman), and suffragist Jane McCallum.

Founded in 2006, the ATGA represents a wide range of tour guides and coordinators in Austin. The ATGA exists to promote the common interests of tour guides in Austin, as well as develop and promote tourism as a successful local industry. <http://www.austintourguides.org/>



***Food Vendors*** (Angie Ward)

Local food vendors provided delicious food and desserts for Six Degrees of Texas Heritage attendees. *Coreanos* concocted savory lunches of Korean barbeque with a Mexican twist, while *Verts* piled up tasty beef, lamb or chicken kebabs that certainly filled stomachs with satisfaction! To top off the tasty lunches, *Amy's Ice Cream* was on hand with its famous homemade ice cream. Save Austin's Cemeteries sold icy cold beverages to thirsty attendees.

Proceeds from the food vendors benefitted the Oakwood Cemetery Chapel Rehabilitation Project. Many thanks to the food vendors for participating!



***Sponsors*** (Leslie Wolfenden)

Many, many thanks go out to the generous Six Degrees of Heritage sponsors. Without their help, putting on this event would not have been possible. So a big THANK YOU to the Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau, The Questers, the Texas General Land Office, Hicks & Company, Peter Flagg Maxson and John C. R. Taylor III, Travis County Archaeological Society, and in-kind sponsors Randalls and Habitat Suites.

***Other Items of Interest*** (Leslie Wolfenden)

SAC's Dale Flatt gave demonstrations on how to properly clean headstones using techniques endorsed by the Texas Historical Commission and the Association for Gravestone Studies. Bob Ward and Liz Hicks gave walking tours about Oakwood's general cemetery history and German people, respectively. Two heritage hunts were available for explorers, testing visitors' knowledge of Austin and Texas history. These hunts led people around Oakwood Cemetery as well as out into Austin itself to see how the cemetery connects to points of interest in town.



Also thanks to the terrific volunteers who helped everything to go smoothly: Abbie Smith-Howe, Angie Ward, Anne Shelton, Barbara Surles, Beth Pickett, Bob Ward, Cecille Marcato, Dale Flatt, Dorothea Adams, Erin Williams, Jan Root, Jean Warnecke, Kay Boyd, John McMiller, Maddie Ward, Megan Spencer, Melinda Ferrell, Melissa MacPherson, Michael Guidry, Patty Johnson, Ramona Reeves, Sally Victor, and Stephanie Jarvis. Thank you to event photographers Kathleen Wolfenden and Eva and Hal Mohrlök because without photos, "it never happened!" To see more great photos of this fun event, go to [www.sachome.org/6degrees.html](http://www.sachome.org/6degrees.html) and click on our Facebook link.



And last and certainly not least, thank you to the co-hosts of this event with Save Austin's Cemeteries: German-Texan Heritage Society, Heritage Society of Austin, Neill-Cochran House Museum, Preservation Texas, and the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department. Many thanks for sharing your collective knowledge, experience, and pragmatic advice on how to put on an event of this size. Also, thanks for sharing this event with us – it was a terrific opportunity to network and to get to know you and your groups better. We look forward to doing it again next year. Thank you for making it possible.

**City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department Update** by Dale Flatt

This has been a busy year for cemetery activists working not only with Parks and Recreation staff but also the members of the Parks Advisory Board (PAB) on the need to examine just how the cemetery contract for services is written. They are looking ahead to figure out how to deal with the many challenges the City of Austin faces with a degrading infrastructure and no dedicated funds. It is a positive step in the right direction and the PAB members have taken a personal interest in our historic cemeteries.

Cemetery master plans for all five city cemeteries are the key to making informed decisions and developing a roadmap for the city to follow. The City of Austin has taken the initial step toward the master plan process in hiring Atkins, a local engineering firm, to do a preliminary engineering report. SAC is working with city staff to gather data needed to start the process.

On the down side, over 250 brass couplers of the sprinkler system at Oakwood were stolen recently. Austin police detectives tracked down the stolen fittings at a salvage yard, collected evidence and statements, and then issued an arrest warrant for our old nemesis Brendan Ryan, the same man that went to jail for the theft of the historic fencing several years back! PARD staff is working with irrigation crews within the city to get the system up in phases, concentrating on a method of watering the drought-stressed trees first.

### Membership Drive 2012 by Leslie Wolfenden

Save Austin's Cemeteries kicked off its annual membership drive in April. SAC is changing its membership year (May to April) to match the calendar year (January to December) in order to make it easier to remember. This year, current memberships expire on April 30, 2012. To cover the transitional time period between May 2012 and January 2013, the membership fee is \$20.00 for renewing and new members. Go to the SAC website to fill out a membership form and/or to pay online via PayPal at <http://www.sachome.org/join/member.html>

SAC relies on the support of its members to achieve its mission – to preserving historic cemeteries in Austin through documentation and education, and promoting historic cemeteries of Austin as cultural resources.

With Member support during the past year, Save Austin's Cemeteries has actively supported the following programs, among others:

- **Public Education:** Every year, SAC hosts several walking tours that educate the public about Austin's past citizens and cemetery preservation, incorporate our youth by having them actively participate as storytellers, and raise money for cemetery projects. SAC also conducts private walking tours for school groups and scout troops upon request. This year, SAC added a Texas Heritage Day event at Oakwood Cemetery, featuring multiple non-profit history groups, guest speakers, walking tours, craft demonstrations, storytelling, and more to raise awareness of Austin and Texas history.
- **Cemetery Preservation:** SAC has teamed with Heimsath Architects for the 1914 Gothic Revival Chapel Rehabilitation Project at Oakwood Cemetery. The project includes the physical restoration, programming for future community uses of the space, and launching a capital campaign to raise the funds to make it all happen.
- **Advocacy for Local Cemetery Issues:** SAC raises public awareness of Austin's historic cemeteries by attending City meetings relating to cemetery issues, helping other local cemetery groups get started with their own cemetery programs, giving presentations to other organizations about historic cemeteries, keeping the City aware of issues – such as vandalism or storm damage, and letting its members know about the latest cemetery events.
- **Guest Speaker Series:** SAC invites expert speakers to present at SAC's quarterly meetings. Past speakers have talked about symbolism, Jewish burial customs, paranormal investigations, local family histories, and ethnic heritage, to name a few.

Please help us continue to serve the preservation needs of Austin's historic cemeteries. Let's work together to preserve these important cultural resources. ***Become a member today!!*** Go to the SAC website for more details and to sign up. <http://www.sachome.org/join/join.html>

### Scheduled Walking Tours by Kay Boyd

#### OAKWOOD HISTORY WALK

On June 2, 10:00 a.m. join us for a walk through Section Four of Oakwood Cemetery. Learn about the burials in the "colored grounds," Beth Israel II, and many of the older gravesites in this section. Historian Danny Camacho will share his knowledge of the cemetery. Make your reservation by PayPal or by email.

Save the date! Our 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Murder, Mayhem & Misadventure Halloween walking tour will be held on October 27 at Oakwood Cemetery. Be sure to mark your calendars for a thrilling, chilling, spine-tingling tour with the return of costumed character and ghostly stories.

### Newly Appointed Board Members by Beth Pickett

We're delighted to welcome four new members to the Board of Directors. In considering our organization's increasing momentum and ambition, the executive board unanimously agreed that it's time to expand the leadership of the group by adding four more positions. Danny Camacho, Dale Flatt, Megan Spencer, and Bob Ward—all tireless volunteers and significant contributors to our organization's efforts—have graciously agreed to join the board in these new positions. In the past, Dale has served as a board officer to the maximum extent allowed by the bylaws, but adding the new non-executive board positions means that we're able to recruit him for further service. Each of these individuals brings valuable insight and talent to the board. Please extend your thanks and congratulations when next you see them.

### Ben Thompson Dedication by Leslie Wolfenden

On Sunday April 29, a special Ben Thompson Graveside Dedication & History Conference hosted by the Ben Thompson Preservation Foundation and other groups was held. At 1:30 p.m., there was a graveside marker dedication and 21 musket and cannon salute at Ben Thompson's grave in Oakwood Cemetery. This was followed by a 3:00 p.m. history conference at the Austin History Center at 810 Guadalupe Street. This event was hosted by the Austin History Center, the Ben Thompson Preservation Foundation, the Sons of the Confederate Veterans, the Former Texas Rangers Foundation, the Giddings Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Wild West History Association. Go to [www.benthompsonfoundation.org](http://www.benthompsonfoundation.org) for more information.

### Photo-documentation Sessions

We wrapped up our photo-documentation sessions on May 5. These sessions are on hiatus for the hot summer months. We will restart in September or October, once it cools off a smidge outside. This season (October through May), we documented approximately one-third of Section 2.

Oakwood Cemetery has some 10,000+ headstones for over 23,000 graves, but SAC volunteers are getting it done! Many of the beautiful monuments we see today may not be here in twenty years or even tomorrow, as we have seen over the past couple of years with occurrences of vandalism and wind damage. Save Austin's Cemeteries' goal is to photograph each headstone at the five city cemeteries of Austin. These reference shots will help us in the future when the headstones are impacted by time, weather, theft, or vandalism.

### Submit an Article to the SAC E-newsletter

If you would like to submit an article to the SAC e-newsletter, please send your article or idea to [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org).

### Calendar

Please join us for these upcoming events!

June 2	10:00 a.m. Cemetery tour in Section Four with historian Danny Camacho. Go to <a href="http://www.sachome.org">www.sachome.org</a> to reserve your tickets.
July 14	Guest Speaker: Nedra Lee (UT doctoral anthropology student) on African American cultural heritage
Oct. 13	Guest Speaker Session: TBA
Oct. 27	6 <sup>th</sup> Annual Murder, Mayhem & Misadventure Walking Tours for Halloween

*If you would like to stop receiving SAC emails, or if you have updated contact information, please send an email to [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org).*