



SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

Winter 2017 Newsletter

Save Austin's Cemeteries Board Members

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Jan Root, Secretary
Kay Boyd, Treasurer
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Terri Mirka
Bobby Cervantes

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Documentary Screening: *The Last of the Moonlight Towers* by Terri Mirka

Please join SAC at the Yarbrough Branch Library on April 8th for a free screening of *The Last of the Moonlight Towers*, a documentary film by Ray Spivey and Jeffrey Kerr. The fifty-minute film tells the captivating story of one of Austin's most celebrated landmarks and separates fact from fiction about the massive towers first activated over 120 years ago.

There will be two showings, each followed by a discussion with Jeffrey Kerr. The first showing is 11:00am and the second one is 12:30pm. This is a free event, but registration is required due to limited seating at the library. Register at: <https://sacmoonlighttowerfilm.eventbrite.com>

THE LAST OF THE MOONLIGHT TOWERS
a Documentary Film Screening

"This is a fascinating and scholarly glimpse at a vestige of the Austin that used to be..." - Stephen Harrigan

THE LAST OF THE MOONLIGHT TOWERS
A FILM BY RAY SPIVEY AND JEFFREY KERR

PLEASE JOIN US FOR A FREE SCREENING AND DISCUSSION WITH FILMMAKER JEFFREY KERR! PREVIEW THE FILM TRAILER AT [HTTP://WWW.MOONTOWERMOVIE.COM/](http://www.moontowermovie.com/).

SATURDAY, APRIL 8TH - 11AM AND 12:30PM (2 SCREENINGS)
YARBROUGH BRANCH LIBRARY - 2200 HANCOCK DRIVE

DUE TO LIMITED SEATING, RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED. PLEASE RESERVE YOUR TICKETS HERE: [HTTPS://SACMOONLIGHTTOWERFILM.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://sacmoonlighttowerfilm.eventbrite.com)

512-917-1666 OR WWW.SACHOME.ORG FOR ADDITIONAL INFO.

AUSTIN PUBLIC LIBRARY
Presented by
Save Austin's Cemeteries
& Yarbrough Branch Library

The screening is presented by Save Austin's Cemeteries and the Yarborough Branch Library. DVDs of the documentary will be on sale with a portion of the proceeds going to the library.

Here are a few fun facts about Austin's Moonlight Towers:

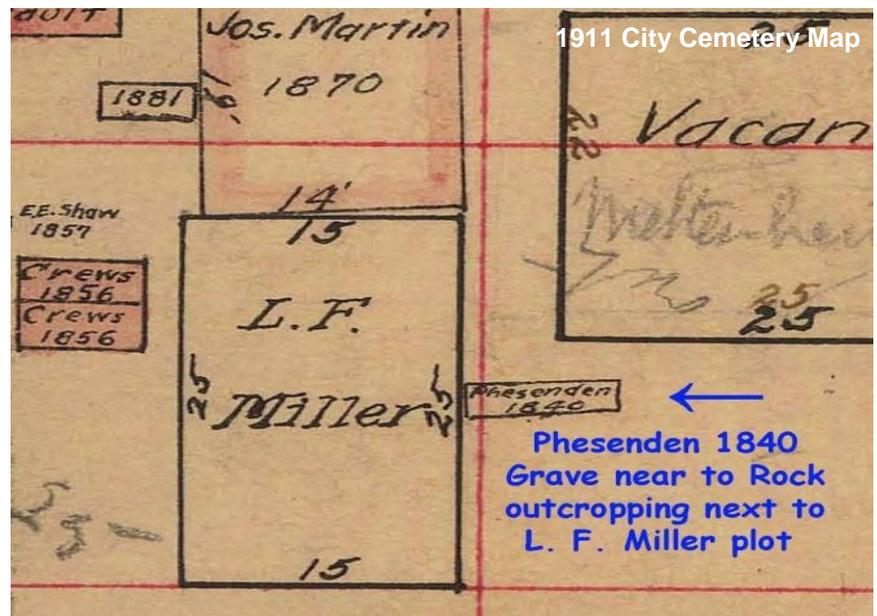
- The Moonlight Towers were first activated in 1895.
- Of the original thirty-one towers erected, only seventeen are standing.
- Although other cities erected towers, Austin is the only known city where they still stand.

For more information, including the film trailer, visit: www.moontowermovie.com or <https://www.facebook.com/moontowermovie>

Who was Mary? by Kay Dunlap Boyd

Several years ago at the Austin History Center, Dale Flatt located a map of City Cemetery (before it was known as Oakwood) dated 1911 with field notes showing graves identified by city engineers. This map includes the names and dates of graves found at that time. Many plots marked then are no longer identifiable. Between the names of others such as Green, Ziller, Martin, Donnan, and Miller was Phesenden. Who was Phesenden?

The notation for the Phesenden grave was dated 1840, making it one of the first burials in Oakwood. When working on topics this early in Texas history, a good place to start researching is the *Portal to Texas History* website,¹ which has a collection of many newspapers from across the state. Phesenden is a rather unusual name and would be a phonetic spelling of Fessenden. I found something on my first search. There were several newspaper articles on Fessenden found in the 1830s and 1840s. The one that stood out was an 1840 obituary. It was for Mary Fessenden who died November 8, 1840 at the age of twenty-two. Based on her age at the time of her death, she would have been born in 1818. The *Texas Sentinel* printed her obituary notice and identified her as the wife of Joseph Fessenden. Obituaries from this time are very rare. Mary's obituary read:



Departed this life, on 8th inst, [8th of this month] after a short illness, Mrs. Mary Fessenden, wife of Mr. Joseph Fessenden, of this city, in the 22nd year of her age.... Mrs. F. was too well known to require any flattering comment upon her memory; but it is but justice to say that she was beloved by all who knew her, and in her death, society has met with an irreparable loss.²

¹ The Portal to Texas History website: <https://texashistory.unt.edu/>

² *Texas Sentinel* (Austin, Texas) Saturday, November 14, 1840, p. 1.

Hal Mohrlök and I, both compulsive genealogy researchers, continued to search for information. The *Daughters of the Republic of Texas Patriots Vol. 2*³ states that a Bowles married a Fessenden. Mary's parents were Benjamin and Betsy Smith Jeffries Bowles who came to Texas in 1827 from Missouri. Betsy was a niece of Henry Smith, the first Governor of the Republic of Texas, making Governor Smith a great uncle of our Mary.

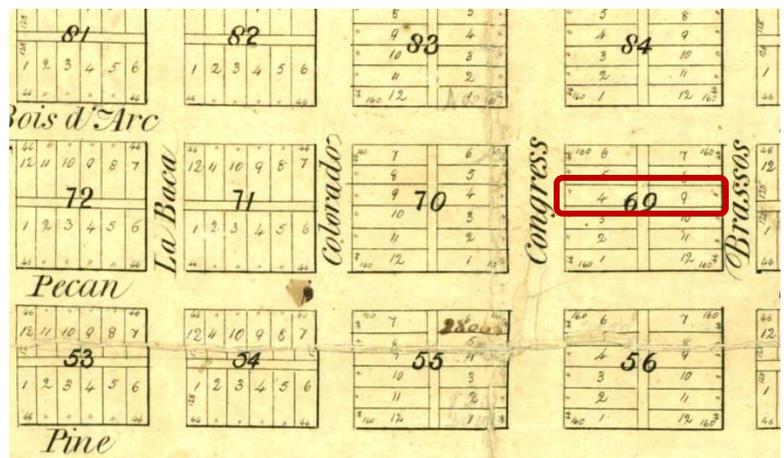
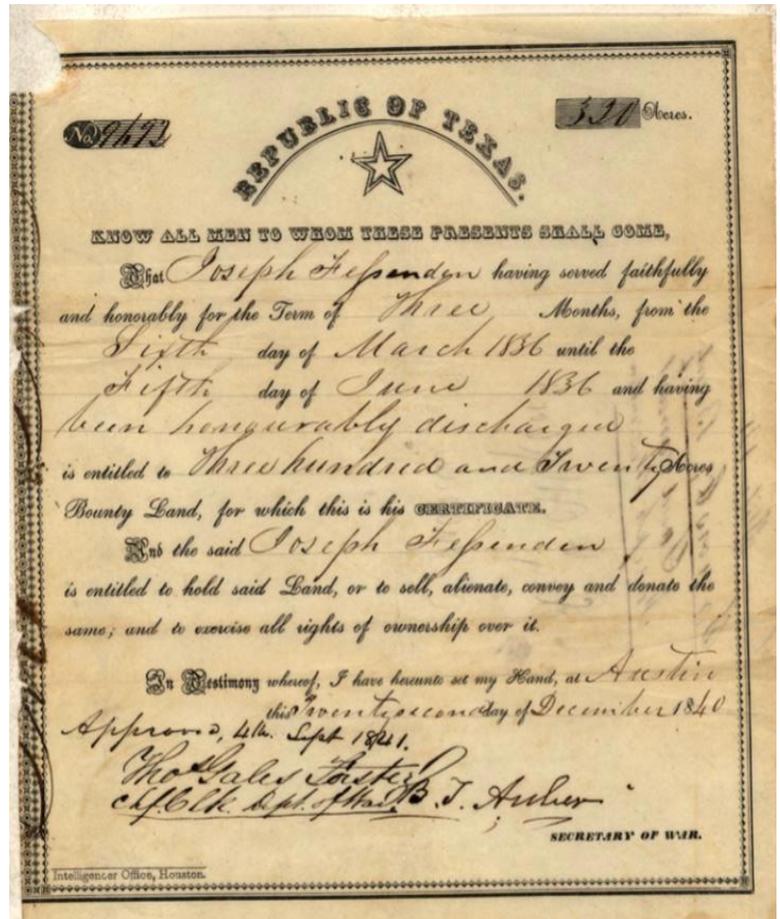
*The Fessenden Family in America*⁴ states the family was from Maine and that brothers Isaac, Joseph, and William moved to Texas, possibly in 1827. It states Joseph's birth as March 13, 1808. Both the Bowles and Fessenden books on Mary and Joseph ended with 'moved to Texas.' No researchers followed these two after they moved.

*The Telegraph and Texas Register*⁵ newspaper mentions a lost note (a loan) from Joseph. In the 13 June 1840 *Texas Sentinel*, a notice states Fessenden is a member of a "military organization of the citizens, for the better guarding and protecting of the town by night, so as to render a surprise next to impossible."

A marriage notice appeared in *The Telegraph and Texas Register*⁶ that included "on the 11th ult [previous month] Joseph Fessenden to Mary Bowls." On the same page is a notice saying Joseph Fessenden petitions the court applying for probate of his deceased father-in-law, Benjamin Bowles. That notice is dated January 27, 1837 in Brazoria County.

Hal found that Joseph was enumerated on the tax rolls in 1837 in Brazoria County with 500 acres of land and livestock. Later he was also on the tax rolls in Austin County and Travis County.

General Land Office records list ten land transactions for Joseph Fessenden. The Republic of Texas had little money and paid those who served in the military with bounty land grants. Fessenden received his land bounty of 320 acres in Travis County with Warrant #9672⁷ for serving his three months in the Texas army from 6 March to 5 June 1836. The land office records also state that Joseph arrived in Texas in May of



³ Daughters of the Republic of Texas Patriots Vol. 2, Turner Publishing Company, 2001

⁴ *The Fessenden Family in America*, Fessenden, Edwin Allan, 1882-1963; Washburn, Mary Elizabeth Fessenden, 1914-

⁵ *The Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas) Vol. 1, No. 30, Ed. 1, Tuesday, September 20, 1836, p. 3.

⁶ *The Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas) Vol. 2, No. 4, Ed. 1, Friday, February 3, 1837, p. 3.

⁷ General Land Office website: <http://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/land-grants/index.cfm>

1835. Fessenden and his partner Coleman Denman purchased lots #4 and #9 in block 69 of the recently platted town of Austin. They also owned *Travis House* on Congress Avenue for boarders and travelers. A land patent in Travis County appears in September, 1841.

An article giving more details on Mary’s grave was found in *The Austin Statesman*. This gives us complete information on her tombstone inscription:

“What is said to be the oldest grave in Oakwood is that of “Mary W. Fessenden, late consort of Mr. Joseph Fessenden, who departed this life November 8th, 1840, aged 21 years and 3 months.” The grave is marked by a thin upright slab, rather ornate, and better preserved than some, though it is chipped in places. The length of the grave is covered with a rounded tapering stone, which is also shattered at one end. The inscription is very obscure and was laboriously made by tracing with a pointed instrument. The virtues of the deceased are told in the following verses:

Plain as her native dignity of mind,
 Arise the tomb of her we have resigned,
 Unflan’d and stainless to the marble scroll,

Emblem of lovely form and candid soul;
 But of what symbol avails to tell
 The kindness, wit and sense, we loved so well;
 What scripture shows the broken ties of life
 Here buried with the parent, friend and wife.”⁸

According to an entry in www.findagrave.com, Joseph died December 31, 1847 in Galveston, aged thirty-one years, eight months, and seventeen days. His grave marker was located in the Bremond Cemetery at Hempstead in Waller County.

Mary died before photographs were common and we found no children who might have passed down any portraits, but enough facts were found about her life to put some “flesh on her bones.” Now we know more about her and the location of her limestone marker and its remnants (see red rectangle on photo). Having these details, we plan to give Mary Fessenden her proper recognition in Oakwood Cemetery.



⁸ *The Austin Statesman*, April 10, 1910, p. 5.

It's My Park Day by Barbara Surles

Each year, the Austin Parks Foundation hosts its biggest city-wide volunteer event, It's My Park Day, and twice each year (in spring and fall), thousands of volunteers work to improve parks and greenbelts throughout the city. This year's **Spring IMPD 2017** will take place on Saturday, March 4th, and SAC is hosting a trash clean-up and photo documentation session at Oakwood Cemetery, 9 a.m. to noon. Please join us if you can! Register online and find additional information here: <https://givepul.se/zy3u1>



To Connect with Texas History by Jan Root

For those of you who are Texas history buffs, the Texas General Land Office has a blog site for you! As part of the Save Texas History (STH) Social Media Program, you can read short blogs of information taken from the archives of the Texas General Land Office. The GLO Archives is home to over 45,000 maps, sketches and drawings, and 36 million documents that cover almost 400 years of Texas History. The Archives serves as a home for the history of Texas land and is a premier resource for historical research.

The STH program is dedicated to preserving and promoting the historic documents and maps of the General Land Office archives, serving as a teaching resource for Texas history education and as a resource for digitizing Texas history.

To connect to the STH blog and read articles on all sorts of subjects in Texas history, click on either of the following links:

<https://medium.com/@txglo>

<https://medium.com/save-texas-history>

To learn more about the Save Texas History program, click on the following link: savetexashistory.org

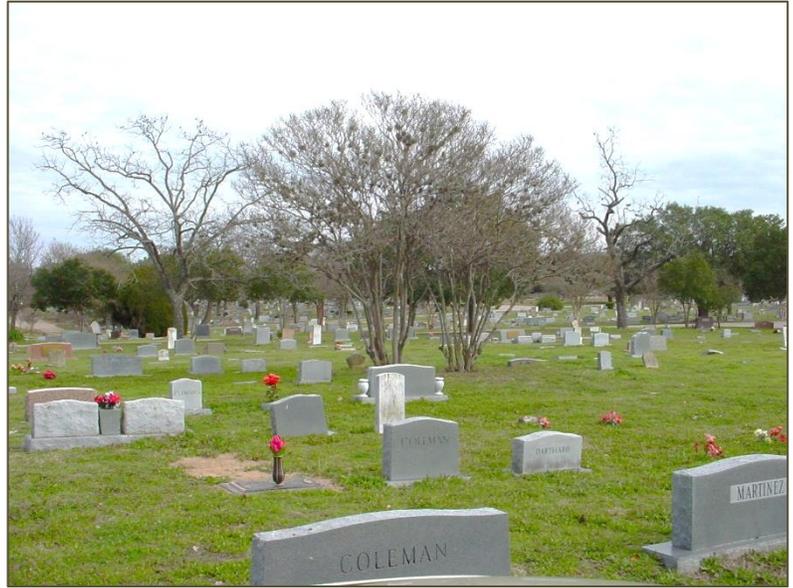


Black History Month by Dale Flatt

We have posted Black History Month biographies on our Facebook page. This year we will include some new bios from folks at Evergreen Cemetery. Check it out! You can find SAC on Facebook at:

www.facebook.com/SaveAustinsCemeteries/

Every year, SAC features tours and we want to add more African-American biographies to our collection. If you have information about your family and you would like to share it, we will include your family's story at one of our cemetery tours. SAC tours are fun and educational and are often linked to themes, i.e. Murder, Mayhem and Misadventure in October; other tours may focus on a day to pay homage, i.e. Mother's Day. We are always open to new ideas that will bring history to life in our city cemeteries. Please contact us at info@sac.org.



History Revisited: Stories Collected by Kay Dunlap Boyd

Following are three stories about Oakwood Cemetery that were originally printed in *The Austin Statesman* in 1910, 1911, and 1914.⁹ I found these articles by searching the ProQuest database, which is available to anyone with an Austin Public Library card. With your library card, you can access this database at no charge and do a word search for the years 1871-1977.

The Austin Statesman, Apr 10, 1910

A VISIT TO OAKWOOD CEMETERY

A visit to Oakwood Cemetery served to recall the commendable activities of the Ladies' Cemetery association, and to bring up the question of its future.

The impressive red granite gate at the west entrance to the grounds is one conspicuous testimony to the association's record for accomplishments, the fine tree-bordered avenue leading from this gate east through the center of the cemetery also owes its condition in the efforts of this devoted band of women. Many trees have been planted, not only along the avenues, but in clumps in the corners of the grounds. The sexton's house has been neatly fitted up by the ladies, and through their influence a young and active man has been placed in charge. Also a great improvement in the manner of conducting interments has been brought about. The traffic nuisance of grocer's wagons, sloop wagons, etc., has been broken up.

⁹ <http://www.austinlibrary.com:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/hnpaustinamericanstatesman/index?accountid=7451>

Note: Other newspapers can be searched using <https://texashistory.unt.edu/>

Inquiry of Mrs. Mitchell, the president of the association, elicited the information that the next achievement which the association had set for itself was the building of a substantial and slightly iron fence along the west side of the grounds. It is hoped that this will become an accomplished fact at no distant date. The plans contemplate the building, ultimately of a similar fence on the other three side.

Another thing which the ladies have set their hearts on is the creation of a small mortuary chapel. Under one roof will be included toilets, tool houses, sexton's office, etc., besides the chapel proper and vaults for caskets. Plans and specifications for such a building have already been offered from a local architect.

The Austin Statesman, Mar 19, 1911

The little chapel to be built at Oakwood will add much to the beauty of the cemetery grounds, while the comfort and conveniences it will afford can not be overestimated. Especially is this true of the up-to-date receiving vaults, which will be located in the chapel. The plan to raise the building fund by asking for \$1 subscriptions is a wise one, as it gives everybody an opportunity to aid with a building which will be for the use of all.

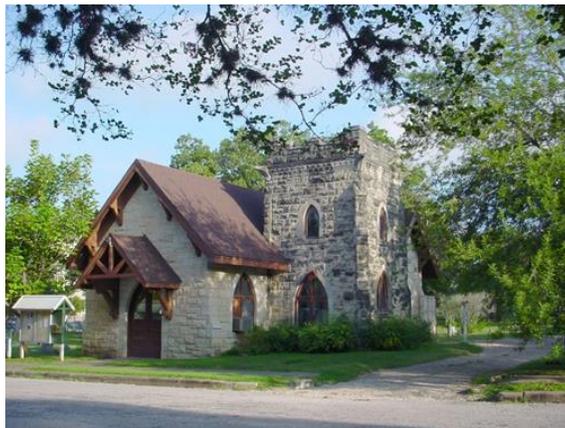
The Austin Statesman, Nov 4, 1914

MORTUARY CHAPEL COMPLETE Oakwood Cemetery Improvement Soon Ready for Inspection

The mortuary chapel in Oakwood Cemetery has been completed by Contractor James Waterson and will probably be accepted by the city this week. It will be open to inspection by the public all day next Saturday.

This handsome stone chapel has been built at a cost of \$5000, all of which has been paid except \$1500, which will be included in next year's city budget and paid soon after Jan. 1. The Cemetery Association has contributed \$1500 toward the cost of the building.

Some time this week it is expected that Mayor Wooldridge, Councilman Bartholomew, a representative of C. H. Page & Brother, architects, and the contractor will visit the structure and go over the plans and specifications together, after which the Council will accept the job if found satisfactory.



Interested in Using GPR to Locate Burials? By Terri Mirka

A group of Oakwood families plan to use Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to help them identify specifically where burials are located within their family lots at Oakwood. GPR is a geophysical method that uses radar pulses to image what is underground and it can be used to pinpoint where remains are buried within lots. Several SAC members have expressed interest in having GPR used in their family lots to determine locations of unmarked graves. Some of the lots do not have grave markers or markers were placed in different places rather than where records show them, making it difficult to make improvements to the lots or to identify where there are open spaces.

If you are also interested in having this done in your family lot (and sharing costs), please contact SAC at events.sac@gmail.com. The date and costs will be determined in Spring, 2017 after we are able to fully scope this project based on interest.



Records show this Swisher lot had ten people buried in it during the 1800s, but there are only two monument markers. GPR can be used to identify where the burials are located.

Docent Program by Dale Flatt

What is a docent you ask? A docent is a person who is a knowledgeable guide, especially one who conducts visitors through a museum (or in our case a historic cemetery) and delivers a commentary on the exhibitions (history of the site and burials). The Zilker Botanical Gardens has an active docent program that helps maintain the gardens, works with school children on field trips, and helps assist the public who are visiting the site. The program exists within the parks system, so it is just a matter of adjusting it the need to fit the cemetery environment. As a group, we have struggled with past administrators of the cemetery to insure that the East side cemeteries get the same standard of care as Austin Memorial Park receives. From watering the grounds to insuring that trash is picked up in between mowing cycles, often the cemetery staff does not have enough hours in the day. This is a work in progress. We may have a working model in place by April. Please stay tuned.

SAC on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

You can follow Save Austin's Cemeteries on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. These links will take you to Save Austin's Cemeteries.

Facebook (link to: <https://www.facebook.com/SaveAustinsCemeteries/>)

Instagram (link to: <https://www.instagram.com/save.atx.cemeteries/>)

Twitter (link to: <https://twitter.com/SaveATXCemetery/>)

Website Assistance Needed: Can You Help Us?

Save Austin's Cemeteries is searching for someone who can redesign our website. If you or anyone you know would like to talk with us about it, please contact us at info@sachome.org. We'd love to talk to you.

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.

Calendar

Please join us for these upcoming events!

March 4	It's My Park Day with Photo Documentation at Oakwood Cemetery, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Be sure to register under "Oakwood Cemetery – Trash Clean-up and Photo Documentation." https://austinparks.givepulse.com/event/35868-Oakwood-Cemetery-Trash-Clean-Up-and-Photo-Documentation
March 11	SAC Board Meeting
April 8	Screening of "The Last of the Moonlight Towers" at Yarbrough Branch Library, 11:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. showings. Need to register to attend: https://sacmoonlighttowerfilm.eventbrite.com

If you would like to stop receiving SAC emails, or if you have updated contact information, please send an email to info@sachome.org.