



SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

Spring 2018 Newsletter

Save Austin's Cemeteries Board Members

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Upcoming Speaker Event: The Story of Flower Hill and the Smoot Family by Bobby Cervantes

Save Austin's Cemeteries invites you to the North Village Branch Library located at 2505 Steck Avenue on Saturday, August 4th at 10:30 a.m. to meet Robin Grace Soto, Executive Director of Flower Hill Urban Homestead Museum, and Tabita Molett, Board of Directors of The Flower Hill Urban Homestead Museum. They will bring a "Smoot-case" filled with some fun artifacts about urban life in early Austin with photographs, Smoot family letters, and a few items from the Flower Hill Urban Homestead Museum collection. The presentation will include some of Miss Smoot's footage including her oral histories!

Flower Hill is located at 1316 W. 6th Street in Austin. Built in 1877, this house was purposed as the home of Rev. Richmond Kelley Smoot and his family home. He, his children, and eventually his granddaughter, Jane Smoot, lived here until Miss Smoot's death in 2013.



Miss Smoot in front of Flower Hill.

Reverend Richmond Kelley Smoot, his wife Sarah Jane Graham, and their children, Asher and Lawrence, moved to Austin, Texas in 1876 and started construction on what would come to be called "Flower Hill" in 1877. Smoot, a First Southern Presbyterian minister, originally planned the home as a four-room house with an outdoor kitchen. The house grew into a fourteen-room, four-hall, and four-porch estate that would become a gathering place for "relatives, artists, students, professors, and religious leaders to live, study and work."

The Flower Hill Foundation was established in 2003. In February 2016, the Flower Hill Foundation hired an executive director to preserve and share the history of the Smoot family by maintaining a space for individualism, artistic expression, and civic engagement at the Flower Hill Homestead Museum.

The Flower Hill Foundation exists to honor the late Jane Smoot's vision to celebrate an Austin founding family of civil servants; preserve one of the city's last historic homesteads; and empower, inspire, and engage the diverse Austin community of today and tomorrow. For more history on the Flower Hill Urban Homestead Museum, the Flower Foundation, and the Smoot family you can visit: <https://www.flowerhillfoundation.org>

Presenter Biographies:

Robin Grace Soto, Executive Director of the Flower Hill Urban Homestead Museum, has been working in non-profit management and direction and education for the past fifteen years. In addition to serving as the Director of Flower Hill, she is the Director of Camp Shakespeare at Winedale through the University of Texas, alongside the Founder of Shakespeare at Winedale, James Ayres. Mrs. Soto also serves on the founding Board of "Play's the Thing," a program offered to terminally ill children and their families through Dell Children's Hospital that explores the power of play and performance through Shakespeare's works.

Tabitha Molett, Board Chair of the Flower Hill Urban Homestead Museum, has been working in education and program development for almost twenty years. In addition to serving as the Board Chair for Flower Hill, she is the Dean of Faculty and Academic programs at a small private school here in Austin.



The Rough Road to Texas Independence Tour Documents Available by Terri Mirka and Kay Boyd

We unfortunately had to cancel our tours celebrating the many Oakwood residents who helped win Texas' independence in 1835-1836 due to forecasted thunderstorms. We hope to reschedule the event for Spring, 2019. Thank you to the many volunteers who helped prepare for the tour and were signed up as actors, actresses, and event volunteers.

We have posted our key tour documents on our website at texastour.sachome.org if you would like to learn more about the tour subjects or do a self-guided tour:

- Texas Revolution Overview – Simplified timeline of Revolution events, map, battle summaries with Oakwood "residents," descriptions of flags used during the Revolution
- Texas Revolution "Residents" Burial Map & Tour Route Talking Points
- InfoSpots (see the example below) on all Texas Revolution "Residents"


Oakwood's Texas Revolution "Residents"

Oakwood Cemetery is the final resting place of many heroes from the Revolution, including:

- Soldiers from the Battles
 - Battle of Gonzales: Elisha Marshall Pease
 - Siege of Bexar: George Glasscock, William Oldham, James Pace, James Swisher
 - Goliad Campaign; William Carleton, Francis Dieterich, John Duval

- Battle of San Jacinto: Washington Anderson, Joseph Baker, Thomas Green, George Hancock, James Hill, James Pace, James Patterson, John Milton Swisher, Ozwin Wilcox
- Financier of the Revolution (Thomas McKinney)
- Publisher of the Telegraph & Texas Register founded at the start of the Revolution (Joseph Baker)
- Survivor of the Alamo (Susanna Dickinson)
- Signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence and Texas Constitution (James Swisher)
- Two of the few who survived the Goliad massacre (escaped: John C. Duval, spared or escaped: Francis Dieterich)
- Authors who wrote about their Revolution experiences (John C. Duval, Mary Rabb, John Swisher)
- Artist who painted the Battle of San Jacinto “Surrender of Santa Anna” (William Huddle)

An InfoSpot is currently available for all Oakwood Texas Revolution Resident.! Here is an example of what you will see when you click on an InfoSpot.



JOHN CRITTENDEN DUVAL (1816–1897), known as “John C” or “Texas John”, was born in Kentucky in 1816. John and his brother Burr were with James W. Fannin's army at Goliad when they surrendered to the Mexican army. In this **Goliad Massacre** on Palm Sunday of 1836, Burr Duval was killed, but John escaped. He became a Texas Ranger in 1845 and, along with William ‘Bigfoot’ Wallace, served in John Hays' company. He has been called the first Texas man of letters because of his early writings. “*Early Times in Texas*” was published in serial form in 1867. He recounted the story of his escape from the Goliad Massacre. His most important book was “The Adventures of Bigfoot Wallace, the Texas Ranger and Hunter”. The story of Duval's remarkable escape from the Goliad Massacre became a Texas classic. At the age of 81, he died in Fort Worth while visiting his sister on January 15, 1897 and was brought to Austin for burial. Duval was the last survivor of the massacre of Goliad. (Lot 1-311)

Meeting the Public’s Needs - Wayfinding and Tourism by Dale Flatt

When people visit historic sites like our State Capitol, the Alamo, and yes historic cemeteries, it is easy to become overwhelmed -- not knowing where to start and what the site has to offer. Signage helps, brochures provide maps and biographical information of events or persons of interest, but nothing beats a walking talking tour guide to educate and entertain.

Staffing a cemetery every day for tourism is nearly impossible; however, technology is catching up! With the use of a smartphone or a tablet and the same GPS technology you use when traveling can be used to create self-guided walking tours.

A very nice man by the name of Chuck Thomas is doing just that. He reached out to Save Austin’s Cemeteries and is willing to help us learn how to do this.

Imagine finding a kiosk that describes several choices of walking tours. You use your device and scan an image, a QR code (quick reference) and a map of your location pops up. It shows your position and the points

of interest from the tour you selected. The GPS in your device tracks your movements to each stop. You click on the icon and information about that location pops up. We can even link to YouTube videos we create. Chuck's initial app can be found here: <https://arcg.is/1m9Pnu>. He has also added the "MMM Downtown" tour link <https://arcg.is/1yX5zK>. You do not need to be at the cemetery to use them. You can tour from the comfort of your home or office.

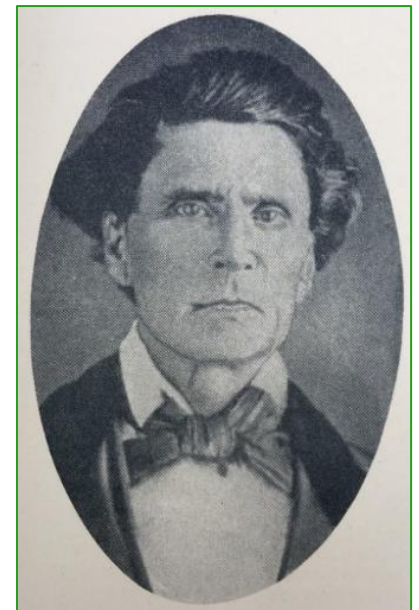
Generations in Oakwood: The James Gibson Swisher Lot 4-127 by Terri Hoover Mirka (4x Great-Granddaughter)

James Gibson Swisher and wife Elizabeth Boyd Swisher and family moved from Tennessee to Texas in 1833, first living in Robertson's Colony on the edge of the then Texas frontier. Within a year, they moved to Washington Municipality near the Brazos River to a safer location away from Indian raids and ran a farm and store there. After losing several older children to malaria in the wet climate, the Swishers then settled in the dryer climate in the city of Austin by 1846.

They soon became heavily involved in Austin life and operated a hotel, a tavern, and a ferry at Congress Avenue from 1852-1875, an important transportation link on the Austin-San Antonio Road and the longest running ferry in Austin. Swisher owned a large farm on the south side of the Colorado River and in 1852 donated a 120' right of way through it for a highway to San Antonio, now called South Congress Avenue.

Captain James Gibson Swisher (1794-1862) was born in Tennessee territory to Henry Swisher (1772-after 1845), a poor German immigrant, and Annie Gibson Swisher (1768-after 1840), who was a highly educated woman from a wealthy family. Annie made sure her children and husband were educated, while Henry taught them an appreciation of the land and survivorship skills.

James worked as a land surveyor in Tennessee and gained extensive military experience in the Indian Wars and during his three years of service in War of 1812. During the Texas Revolution, he formed a military company that participated in several fights including the Siege of Bexar after which Swisher was one of three Texans appointed to negotiate the surrender terms of the Mexicans. In 1836, Swisher was elected as a delegate to the Convention of 1836 where he took an active part in constitutional debates, served on the defense committee, and signed both the Texas Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Republic of Texas.



After the war, Swisher continued his service as a Texas Ranger in 1836 and as justice of the peace of Washington County between 1839 and 1841 while running his farm.

Although James was primarily a farmer, he was an advocate for education, thanks to his mother's influence. He formed a school shortly after he arrived in Texas in 1833 in the frontier town of Tenoxtitlan, was an incorporator and trustee of Union Academy, a Washington County school chartered in February 1840, and in 1848 a registrar of an Austin high school. James died in 1862 in Austin.

Elizabeth Boyd Swisher (1798-1875) was born in Williamson County, Tennessee, July 27, 1798 to James Boyd (1768-1821) and Nancy Gentry (1764-1828) whose ancestors first arrived in Virginia in the 1630s.

After James Swisher's death in 1862, Elizabeth operated their ferry for thirteen years and ran their farm. With the death of the mothers of five of her young grandchildren in the early 1860s, Elizabeth had the role of raising these children as they all came to live with her on the farm.

“She (Elizabeth) was a wonderful woman, lived with only the grandchildren on her farm... She was the most courageous woman I ever saw. I’ve seen her get up in the middle of the night when she thought someone was trying to steal the buggy and go all over that big yard with a lantern looking for intruders. She had no fear of anything.” (Family letter written July 1935 by granddaughter Annie Blocker).



Elizabeth was a woman of boundless energy and was profoundly interested in politics. Son-in-law Dr. Richard Lane described Elizabeth: “She was the only woman I ever knew who could discuss worldwide affairs with the grasp of a man.”

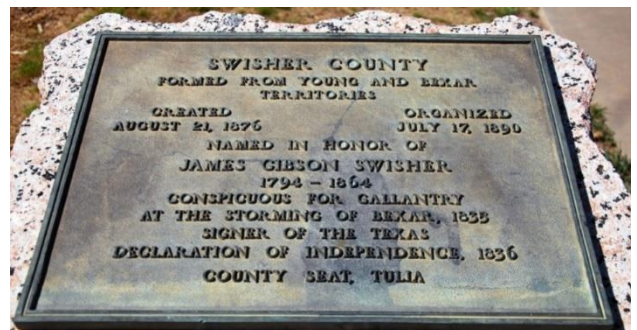
James and Elizabeth had eleven children, but only four lived to adulthood:

- Colonel John Milton Swisher (1819-1891), served in the Battle of San Jacinto and held many appointive offices in the republic and state of Texas; buried nearby at Oakwood and will be the subject of a future “Generations at Oakwood.”
- Captain James Monroe Swisher (1822-1903), farmer, Indian fighter, Texas state legislator; buried at White Rock Cemetery in Bee Caves near Austin.
- Annie Swisher Lane (1837-1864), died from consumption (tuberculosis) at age 27; buried in the Swisher lot
- Edward Swisher (1841-1865), died from consumption; buried in the Swisher lot

Elizabeth died in 1875 and was laid to rest with her husband and two of her children. With her death, the ferry transportation across the Colorado River also ended.

*Swisher County, Texas Historic Marker. Inscription:
“Named in honor of James Gibson Swisher. Conspicuous for gallantry at the storming of Bexar, 1835. Signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence, 1836”*

Austin streets (Swisher, James, Gibson) were named after him; Elizabeth, Annie, Monroe and Milton off South Congress Ave. on their former farm were named after family members.



Oakwood Chapel Rehabilitation Update by Kevin Johnson, PARD Project Contact

Construction progress continues and the end is within sight! Substantial completion remains scheduled for early June.

Major scopes that are now complete include: structural stabilization of the foundation, new floor structure and installation of reclaimed wood flooring, masonry repointing and cleaning, window and door replacement, restored roof structure and cedar shingle roof, all new electrical, lighting, HVAC and plumbing systems, new plaster, finish carpentry, tiling, and restoration of the original safe. Remaining work includes primarily interior finish outs, hardware installation, fine grading, landscaping, and asphalt repairs in the roadway. The site may continue to be fenced into the month of June, due to the need to restore grass sod in the vicinity of the chapel and for the contractor to complete punch list items.



Archeological lab analysis continues on the exhumed burials, and a portion of the project team has scheduled a visit to the Texas State University Forensic Archeology lab the week of May 14 to meet with the team leading the analysis of the skeletal remains. A final report will not be delivered until later this summer when all skeletal analysis is complete. The Parks Department will continue to provide timely updates related to this reporting as it becomes available.

Photo Documentation Session Wrapped Up in May by Leslie Wolfenden

SAC volunteers made good headway in the 2017-18 headstone photo documentation season in Section 4 of Oakwood Cemetery before wrapping up the season as the hot months come upon us. We completed over a third of Section 4 including the Beth Israel II section. This was a much better season weather-wise than what we experienced last time as we did not have to cancel any sessions due to poor weather conditions, although we did cut one session short due to a damp cold front coming through. We have completed Section 1-3, each section taking about 2.5 years to complete.



We conduct photo documentation sessions to create a visual inventory of all the headstones in the cemetery. All too often, headstones and other artifacts, such as fencing or urns, get damaged by storms or vandals, get stolen or moved to other locations, or simply erode over time. Having a visual inventory allows us to place the items back where they belong or to see what changes have taken place over the years.

If you are interested in participating in this process, we meet the first Saturday of the month, running October through May. Each session is about two hours in length. Volunteers work in teams of two, one taking digital photographs and the other logging the information on a photo log sheet. Information collected includes deceased's name, death date, and photo numbers. No prior experience is necessary. We will put you with an experienced volunteer so you can learn the ropes.

It is an interesting and fun experience. You never know what you are going to see or learn or who might drop by to see what is happening. At the Spring It's My Park Day, we had a gray fox up a tree watching our activities. This is not the first time a gray fox has been seen in Oakwood. He also made another appearance at our May photo documentation session.

The common gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) is native to Texas. Its specific epithet *cinereoargenteus* means "ashen silver." It is a carnivorous mammal of the family Canidae found through North and Central America. It is the only American canid that can climb trees. It has a gray, salt-and-pepper coat with a white throat, cheeks and underbelly, reddish brown legs and a distinctive black-tipped tail, and weighs about 7-11 pounds as an adult. (Information from Wikipedia)



Photo by Eva Mohrlök

Identifying Veteran "Residents" in Austin's City Cemeteries Update by Terri Hoover Mirka

We are continuing to make progress in identifying and compiling lists of all known military veterans in Austin's five city cemeteries and will post the lists to the SAC website in mid-June. We are extracting the lists from the burial records previously documented by volunteers from Austin Genealogical Society and Save Austin Cemeteries when military inscriptions were identified. For cemeteries like Oakwood and Plummers, we have walked the grounds to identify the military markers and have identified over 3,500 veterans in the city cemeteries, including over 700 veterans who served in World War I (WWI).



Our first planned project is to recognize WWI veterans on Veteran's Day November 11, 2018, the 100 year anniversary of the signing of the armistice to end WWI on the western front. We will place USA flags at the gravesites of all known WWI veterans at Oakwood Cemetery and Plummers Cemetery, and if we can recruit enough volunteers, also at Evergreen Cemetery and Oakwood Annex. SAC's WWI flag placement project is part of a partnership with the Daughters of the American Revolution Thankful Hubbard Chapter and the Travis County Historical Commission, which is leading Travis County's participation in a variety of events as part of the Texas and National WWI Centennial Commemorations.

Because many veterans do not have military markers, we are also researching WWI service cards and enlistment records to identify other people who served during the WWI era. Once the veteran lists are posted online, we will announce their availability and request that you let us know of other military ancestors not yet on our list. We will also let our volunteers know more in early Fall on how you can help with the USA flag placement, so that we can paint the city cemeteries red-white- and blue for our WWI veterans!

Cleaning and Preserving our Veteran Gravestones

We are also cleaning military gravestones as many stones are no longer legible. All veteran stones have been cleaned at Plummer's Cemetery and about 25% of those at Oakwood are finished. If you would like to assist by donating to the Veteran Gravestone cleaning projects or USA Flag funds, please do so and specify how you would like your funds used. Donation options can be found on our website www.sachome.org/



Willie Roberts, WWI Veteran at Plummers Cemetery, before and after cleaning. (Photos by Terri Mirka)

It's My Park Day-Spring 2018 at Oakwood by Sally Victor

We would like to thank the many volunteers who joined us at Oakwood Cemetery March 4th for a fun and productive day of work during "It's My Park Day Spring 2018" as part of Austin Parks Foundation city-wide volunteer event. Thousands of volunteers work to improve parks and greenbelts throughout the city so we at Save Austin's Cemeteries host events at Oakwood Cemetery.

During our Spring event, we split into two groups to do both a general clean-up of fallen branches and trash as well as photo documentation, which is a long-running project to photograph and document each headstone in detail at Oakwood Cemetery.



Photo by Eva Mohrlök

Please plan to join us for the next "It's My Park Day" event November 3, 2018 to get a little exercise and a free t-shirt. We will announce the opening of the registration when the Parks Foundation is ready in October.

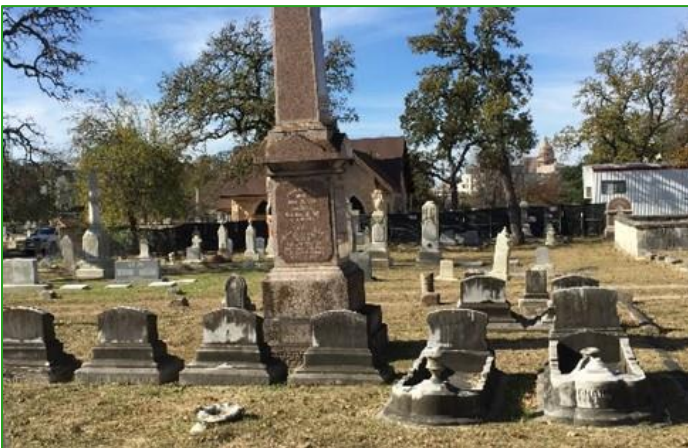
Gravestone Cleaning at Oakwood Update by Terri Hoover Mirka

Save Austin's Cemeteries began our formal gravestone cleaning project in the Summer of 2017 using D/2 Biological Solution, a well-tested cleaning solution which not only safely cleans the surface of gravestones but also penetrates below the surface to fully flush out environmental toxins. We're happy to report that over 1,200 historical monuments have now been cleaned and preserved to prevent the environmental pollutants from doing any further damage to the stones.

The cleaned areas at Oakwood Cemetery include:

- All areas surrounding the Oakwood chapel to allow for beautiful pictures of the soon to be restored chapel (Community Grounds and Section 4 near chapel)
- Most of Main Avenue (the paved road) from the west entrance through Central Avenue
- Old Grounds A, B, and most of C
- Veteran Headstones (in process, about 25% completed)
- Tour subjects and family lots requested by descendants

Many thanks to the gravestone cleaning members helping with this preservation work and to the generous people who have donated close to \$5,000 towards the cost of the expensive D/2 Biological Solution and cleaning supplies. These funds have almost all been used, so any donations with a "cleaning designation" will be appreciated! To donate, go to <https://www.sachome.org/join/join.html>.



Before and after cleaning photos of the lot of Elisha Marshall Pease, Battle of Gonzales veteran, governor of Texas, and benefactor of the city of Austin. (Photos by Terri Mirka)

Superstitions about Death and Burials Part II collected by Kay Dunlap Boyd

Here are some more cemetery superstitions we have collected for you. You might be surprised at some of these! We are watching out for lightening bugs! Don't let them inside the house!

- Never cry on a dead person because if the tears fall on them, it makes it harder for the spirit to leave this world.
- Graves should be oriented so that the bodies lie with their heads to the West and their feet to the East. This old custom appears to originate with the Pagan sun worshippers, but is primarily attributed to Christians who believe that the final summons to Judgment will come from the East.

- The bed of a gravely ill person should never be placed north and south, and always east and west with the head toward the west. This will speed the process of dying and reduce suffering.
- Visiting a cemetery after dark will bring you bad luck.
- It is bad luck to point at a grave, because the dead will see you.
- If a firefly or lightening bug gets into a house, someone will soon die.
- If a sparrow lands on a piano, someone in the home will die.
- When the head of the household dies, one must go out and whisper the news of the death to the bees, or all in the home will meet the same fate. Bees were believed in past to be the messengers of the gods, so when informed, bees would take the news to them.
- If a cow moos after midnight, it is an evil omen.
- Death comes in threes.
- To dream of a deceased person in an agitated state means that they are in hell. To dream of them in a pleasant state means they have gone to heaven.
- Finding a four-leaf clover on a grave foretells a friend coming to visit to give you some money.
- As long as the funeral bill remains unpaid, the corpse will not rest in its grave.

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/>)

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.

SAC Board Meetings

If you are interested the city's cemeteries and would like to attend a board meeting, please contact info@sachome.org to confirm the time and place of the next board meeting.

Calendar

Please join us for these upcoming events!

Aug 1-31	SAC Photo Contest
Aug 4	SAC Speaker Series: Robin Grace Thompson-Soto, Flower Hill Foundation, North Village Library Branch, 10:30 am
Sept 23	Austin Museum Day
TBD	Albert Fuster Memorial Event
Oct 6	Photo Documentation (9 am-11am)
Oct 20	12 th Annual Murder, Mayhem & Misadventure Walking Tours
Nov 3	It's My Park Day and Photo Documentation (9 am-noon)
Nov 11	Veterans Day – Flags at WWI Veteran Gravesites

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