



SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

Summer 2018 Newsletter

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Oakwood Chapel Rehabilitation Update by Kevin Johnson, PARD Project Contact

As of July 2018, the rehabilitation of the Oakwood Cemetery Chapel is complete. Construction resumed in October of 2017, after nearly a year-long delay due to discovery of skeletal remains underneath the building footprint. Components of the rehabilitation include a stabilized concrete foundation; site, drainage and landscaping improvements; restored windows; masonry; plaster; a new cedar shake roof and reclaimed wood floors, as well as upgraded plumbing, mechanical, and lighting systems. All building inspections have been completed and the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) received the certificate of occupancy in June.



PARD and the project team look forward to celebrating the reopening of the Oakwood Chapel with a short ceremony at 10 a.m. on August 24th. <http://www.austintexas.gov/news/oakwood-cemetery-chapel-restoration-celebration>

Archeological analysis on the exhumed burials continues at the Texas State University Forensic Archeology lab, and is anticipated to extend through the summer. A final report is anticipated in Fall 2018. The Parks Department will continue to provide timely updates related to this reporting, including community engagement opportunities, as it becomes available.

Photos provided by PARD.



Speaker Event: The Story of Flower Hill and the Smoot Family by Megan Spencer

Guests of Save Austin’s Cemeteries gathered at the North Village Branch Library on Saturday, August 4th to meet Robin Grace Soto, Executive Director of Flower Hill Urban Homestead Museum, and Tabitha Molett, Chair of the Board of Directors of The Flower Hill Foundation. Robin and Tabitha told us the story of Flower Hill, a home occupied by three generations of the Smoot family. They also shared plans the Foundation has to preserve one of Austin’s last urban homesteads, a beautiful five-acre tract of land in the heart of Austin.



The audience included Smoot family members and friends. Those who remember Miss Smoot and her family when they were youngsters shared some wonderful stories! We laughed at stories about hiding your bloomers and another one about skating down the steep, curved driveway from the house to 6th Street. The presentation was enhanced by videos, oral histories, original photos, and artifacts contained in a “Smoot-case.”



The Smoot family plot is located in Oakwood Cemetery, where Bobby Cervantes, SAC Board Member, cares for the family’s monument and gravestones. The Foundation’s goal is to engage the Austin community in celebrating an early Austin family’s legacy. The opening of the Flower Hill Urban Homestead Museum is planned for Spring 2019. The home and grounds will include museum displays, oral histories, an edible forest, walking trails, art and literary programs for children and adults, and architectural research. The Foundation will launch a series of “pop-up” museums in locations around Austin as well.

The Foundation is currently looking for volunteers and donors to help them get started. We look forward to partnering with the Flower Hill Foundation through research and programming. For more information, please visit these sites:

Flower Hill Foundation: <https://www.flowerhillfoundation.org/>

Smoot Family Oral History Videos are available: <https://www.flowerhillfoundation.org/gallery>

Smoot Family oral history videos on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/flowerhillfoundation.org/videos>.

Photos provided by Eva and Hal Mohrlök.

Annual Photo Contest by Leslie Wolfenden

Get your cameras clicking! The 9th Annual Cemetery Photo Contest started August 1. Send in your favorite photos of statues, flora and fauna, headstones, and scenic shots from Austin's five city cemeteries (taken at any time, not just in the last year). Austin's five city cemeteries include Austin Memorial Park, Evergreen, Oakwood, Oakwood Annex, and Plummers. Entries will be accepted through August 31 at midnight via email to calendar@sachome.org.

Shortly after that, the photo entries will be uploaded to the internet where you will then have a chance to vote for your top 12 favorites. The 12 photos with the most votes by the end of September will earn places in the 2019 SAC calendar. The winning photographers will win a one-year membership to SAC. The first-place photo earns the calendar cover and a free 2018 calendar! This Fall, we will have the 2019 SAC calendar available for sale online.

Last year's winning photograph by Charles Freeman on the cover of the 2018 SAC calendar.



Rainy Day, Oakwood Cemetery (Photo by Charles Freeman)

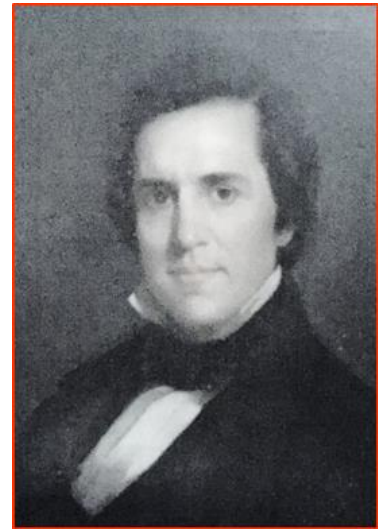
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Generations at Oakwood: The John Milton Swisher Plot 1-28 by Terri Hoover Mirka (3x great-granddaughter)

Colonel John Milton Swisher was a soldier, civil servant, founding Austin resident, and financier. He was born in 1819 in Tennessee, and moved to Texas in 1833 with his parents James Gibson and Elizabeth Swisher. As a teenager, John helped on the family farm in Robertson’s Colony and then ran a family store in Washington Municipality. John later recorded his remembrances of early Texas and the Texas Revolution in “The Swisher Memoirs” such as this passage about Davy Crockett’s staying with the Swisher family:

“In late January 1836... on the day Colonel Crockett arrived, I had been out hunting, and he surprised me by ... assisting me in taking (a deer) down from the horse, ...complimenting me highly by calling me his “young hunter”, and bantering me to a shooting match... We tried our skill with the rifle every day he remained with us and my recollection is that we made a drawn match of it... I shall never forget the day he left us for San Antonio.... What Texan does not recall at the mention of his name, the bravery ...at the massacre of the Alamo...only a few weeks after he left us....” (Swisher Memoirs, p. 18-23)

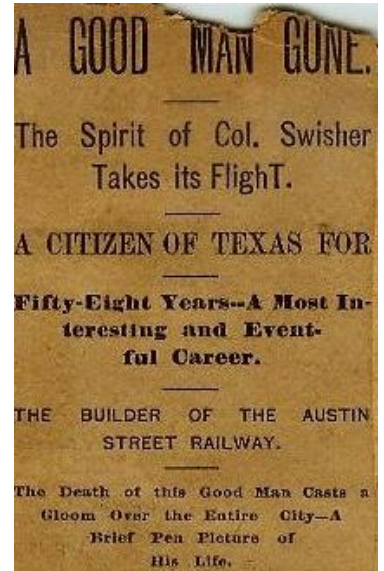


After hearing of the Travis appeal for help at the Alamo, John and his companions started for the Alamo on March 1, 1836, but were halted enroute at Gonzales and joined Sam Houston’s troops. They trained for nearly six weeks as they retreated. John was one of the youngest soldiers in the Battle of San Jacinto April 21, 1836 and was later portrayed in both William Huddle’s “Surrender of Santa Anna” and Henry McArdle’s “Battle of San Jacinto” paintings. His San Jacinto experiences had a lasting impact on him as his headstone is engraved: “San Jacinto soldier, and a man who had the interest of Texas ever at heart.”

John Milton Swisher’s Career

Swisher held many appointed positions within the Republic of Texas 1836-1846, the State of Texas governments 1846-1856, and pursued a variety of entrepreneurial activities.

- Moved to Austin in 1839 with his Republic of Texas job and was promoted to chief clerk
- Served as clerk of the Ninth Congress of the Republic of Texas, clerk of the Convention of 1845, appointed auditor of public account for Texas in 1848
- Elected colonel of the Texas militia in 1846
- Formed one of Austin’s first banks in 1852, and ran a banking and commission house in Galveston 1865-1868
- Built the Austin Street Railway, the first city railway, in 1870



Source: “A Good Man Gone. The Spirit of Col. Swisher Takes its Flight.” The Capitolian, Austin, Texas, 11 Mar 1891. Print

Swisher Addition and South Congress Avenue

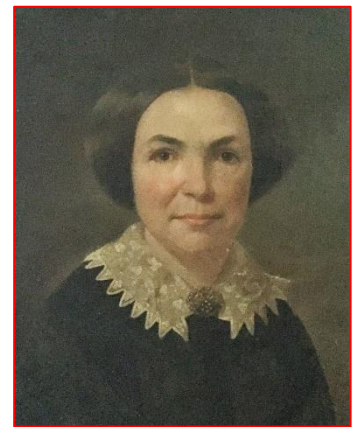
John and his father donated a 120’ right of way through the Swisher farm, which stretched from the Colorado River 2 ½ miles south, that allowed the extension of Congress Avenue, providing a spectacular view from far

down South Congress Avenue across the river. In 1877, John developed the first platted neighborhood south of the Colorado River, the Swisher Addition, and named the streets after family members:

- Milton Street: himself or his son John Milton Swisher, Jr.
- James, Gibson, and Elizabeth Streets: his parents, buried in Oakwood 4-127
- Nellie and Nickerson Streets: his second wife, Nellie Nickerson, buried in Oakwood 1-28
- Annie Street: his sister, Anne Swisher Lane, buried in Oakwood 4-127, and for a daughter
- Monroe Street: his brother James Monroe Swisher
- Mary Street: his daughter Mary Swisher Buckner Saylor
- Eva Street: his granddaughter Eva Buckner Saylor de Normandie
- Newton Street: brother-in-law and business partner Dr. Richard Newton Lane
- Brackenridge Street: his neighbor and business partner

John Milton Swisher's Family

John Milton Swisher married three times as his first two wives died young and are buried near him in unmarked graves. John's first wife was **Maria W. Sims (Simms)**, whom he married May 1844 in Washington Municipality. Maria was born in 1818 in Virginia and arrived in Texas in the 1830s with her mother and siblings. Maria was described in Swisher family writings as being highly educated and from an aristocratic family. Adolphus Sterne wrote in his Nacogdoches County diary about enjoying evenings listening to music performed by the Sims sisters, who later also ran a girls' academy in Washington County starting in the 1840s.



Maria W. Sims Swisher (1818-1870). Photo from portrait in private collection, San Antonio.

John Milton Swisher, his wife Maria, her sisters Elizabeth and Martha, and other Austin residents helped found Austin's Church of the Epiphany at an organizational meeting January 1851 at the Swisher Inn. This church later became St. David's Episcopal Church and is still thriving in downtown Austin.

John and Maria sadly lost five children who died young. A monument in the Swisher lot includes four doves that are typically used to symbolize peace with the dove as a symbol of innocence. The monument includes the names of four children who died young: Bettie Swisher (1847-1848), Louisa Swisher (1849-1851), Maria Swisher (1850-1853), and an Infant Daughter (stillborn, 1857). Another child, Jennie Swisher (1859-1860), died after the monument was installed and is also buried with the family.



John and Maria had two children who lived to adulthood, Mary Virginia Swisher (1845 Austin – 1914 San Antonio) and John M. Swisher, Jr. (1852 Austin - 1900 Houston)

Three of Maria's sisters are also buried near her in unmarked graves in the Swisher lot: Ann Sims (1800-1865), Martha Sims Hall (1810-1875), and Elizabeth Sims Crosby (1816-1861.) Maria died April 13, 1870 in Austin from heart problems.

John married his second wife Helen Nellie Nickerson (1848 Ohio - 1875 Austin, Oakwood 1-28) in January of 1873. They had two daughters, Annie Elise Swisher (Oct. 1873 Austin – 1949 New Jersey) and Helen Nellie

Swisher (Feb. 1875 Austin – 1942 San Antonio). He married his third wife Bella French (1837 Georgia – 1893 California) in 1878. She was an editor and writer and convinced John to document his remembrances.

The John Milton Swisher Family lot at Oakwood includes a large monument for John Milton and a smaller monument for four children who died young. The lot has sadly suffered the typical damage at Oakwood Cemetery, as a plaque was stolen from John Milton’s monument, the urn atop the child’s monument is missing, and large trees have died in recent times. The graves of at least six other adults buried in the lot are no longer marked, and the burial records unfortunately do not include specific burial locations for us to add markers at the right gravesites.



Swisher’s Greek Revival home, designed by noted architect Abner Cook in 1853, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and as a Registered Texas Historic Landmark. It was originally built on the 400 block of San Antonio Street, overlooking Republic Square. The home was bought by Zachary Scott in the 1920s, moved, and restored. The “Swisher-Scott House” is still standing at 2408 Sweetbrush Avenue in Austin.

We would like to hear your family story. Send it to us for a future newsletter.

Isabella Dennis: PARD Environmental Program Coordinator by Isabella Dennis

Isabella Z. Dennis joined PARD Cemetery Operations in mid-June 2018 as the Environmental Program Coordinator. She is an architectural conservator who will be working to implement recommendations in the *Historic Cemeteries Master Plan* related to the conservation of historic resources. Her work will focus on maintaining and extending the life and integrity of historic resources within the municipal cemeteries through the use of appropriate conservation techniques and methodologies. Isabella holds a Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies with a concentration in Architecture from Barnard College at Columbia University and a Master of Science in Historic Preservation with an emphasis in materials conservation from the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture. Both of her theses explored the ethics and practicality of preserving the total work of art within the active built environment.

For the past decade, Isabella has worked on the conservation of historic architecture and outdoor sculpture in Texas and the Southwest. Her projects have involved a variety of materials including metal, glass, stone, ceramic, plaster, wood, organic material, and concrete. She has completed conservation treatments to restore and stabilize historic resources that involved tasks such as condition assessments, treatment plans, and treatment reports; material analysis; consolidation; filling and loss replacement; inpainting; surface and structural stabilization and restoration; cleaning; and providing recommendations for preventative maintenance and mitigating future deterioration. In addition, Isabella has developed scopes and funding strategies for complex

projects, completed historic resource surveys and National Register nominations, written historic structure reports, and developed contexts for Section 106 review.

Izabella has particular interests in developing strategies for preventative maintenance, preserving and interpreting vernacular historic resources, and working to engage community stakeholders in historic preservation and conservation efforts. She is an active member of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC), the professional organization that supports conservators, and she is Vice President of the Texas chapter of the Association for Preservation Technology (APT), a professional organization dedicated to promoting the best technology for conserving and preserving historic structures and their settings. Izabella has spoken at conferences nationally and internationally about her work, and she is committed to engaging in the active and evolving dialog on best practices for the conservation of historic works. Most recently, Izabella contributed a chapter discussing her research on architectural color to a new monograph on Eileen Gray's architectural masterpiece, *E.1027 (Eileen Gray: E.1027, 1926-1929)*; editors Wilfried Wang and Peter Adam; expected publication date August 28, 2018). Izabella is excited to be working with the City of Austin on the long-term preservation of historic resources in its municipal cemeteries.

12th Annual MMM Preview by Kay Dunlap Boyd

Our 12th annual Murder, Mayhem and Misadventure tours will be held October 20, 2018, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. this year. We moved the date forward one week, so as not to conflict with other Halloween events. Mark your calendar and save the date to come out and learn about these people who contributed to the interesting history of Austin.

The stops this year will include the stories about:

- A postman shot by his father-in-law, a real family dispute.
- The first Austin policeman killed on active duty.
- A fireman killed in a confrontation.
- Two men who simply wanted to come to town to sell their cotton and were killed.
- A man who killed his family and died of a broken neck.
- A saloon owner who was killed by a cedar chopper.
- One of the girls killed by the "Servant Girl Annihilator."

To help make the day a success, we need volunteers to assist us. Are you interested in participating in any of the following ways?

- Tell the stories at the stops. These people will be in period costume and tell the researched events of the person featured at each stop. Costumed volunteers work the morning shift 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. or the afternoon shift 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. and need to show up about 15-30 minutes before the shift starts.
- Lead the groups from stop to stop with provided narration.
- Support the event by helping us with setting up, working registration, selling our books, helping with take down and clean up, for the morning or afternoon shifts.



If you can help in any role on October 20, please contact us at info@sachome.org

Identifying Veteran “Residents” in Austin’s City Cemeteries Update by Terri Hoover Mirka

We are continuing our 2018 research project to compile lists of all known military veterans in Austin’s five city cemeteries. We began by identifying any with military headstones and then conducting detailed genealogical research to identify as many World War I (WWI) veterans as possible for the 100-year anniversary of the signing of the end of WWI on Nov. 11, 2018. We have expanded the scope to include all Travis County cemeteries in support of the Travis County Historical Commission’s WWI Centennial Committee project. In our Spring SAC newsletter, we reported that we had located over 700 WWI veterans in the city cemeteries. Our count is now at over 1,100 in the city cemeteries and 500 in other cemeteries within Travis County. At Oakwood Cemetery alone, we have located 260 WWI veterans, but only 35% had military headstones – illustrating the need to conduct detailed research to identify the majority of WWI veterans.

We will recognize local WWI veterans on Veterans Day on Nov. 11, 2018 by placing USA flags on as many WWI veteran gravesites as possible in early November. We will begin an outreach to our marvelous volunteers in September to estimate how many helpers we can recruit and then work with our partners to obtain funds to purchase USA flags. Many thanks to the Daughters of the American Revolution Thankful Hubbard Chapter, which has already agreed to fund a large number of USA flags! We will also post our list of veterans on the SAC website in early September and ask for help to identify any of your family members we may have missed.

Cleaning and Preserving our Veteran Gravestones Update

We began a cleaning project in January 2018 of veteran headstones in the city cemeteries and completed those at Plummers Cemetery. All at Oakwood and Oakwood Annex were sprayed with D2 Biological Solution in the spring, and many were gently scrubbed after several weeks. Our next focus was to be Evergreen Cemetery, which has over 150 WWI veterans; however, the Austin PARD Cemetery Division asked us to stop the veteran cleaning project in mid-July while they document cleaning processes.

In the interim, our generous donators and many members of our gravestone cleaning squad have agreed to re-direct our efforts to clean WWI veteran headstones outside of the city cemeteries.

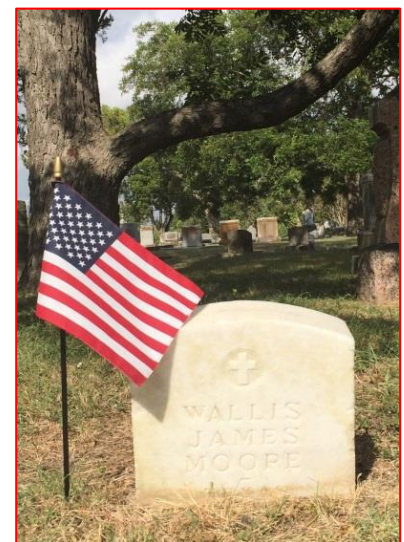
Here is an example of our veteran cleaning project at Oakwood Cemetery.



Can you tell who this WWI veteran is?

It is the military headstone of **Wallis J. Moore** who happens to be the **highest awarded WWI veteran in the city cemeteries**. Wallis was one of only 135 Texas awarded the prestigious Distinguished Service Cross Award for his efforts in WWI.

His headstone is cleaned (but still sunken) and is modeling the USA Flag that will adorn many WWI veteran gravesites in November.



Capital Lodge #23 of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Performs Ceremony for Decorating Graves edited by Kay Dunlap Boyd

Save Austin's Cemeteries wishes to thank the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) Capital Lodge #23 for their generous donation to our cleaning and restoration funds. We look forward to working with this dedicated group and we reprint this article with their permission.

Note: This article was taken from the *Odd Fellow News of Texas*, June 2018 Edition.

To commemorate the anniversary of Our Order's founding, the men of Capital Lodge No. 23 of the IOOF (Independent Order of Odd Fellows) gathered at Austin's historic Oakwood Cemetery where a small section is dedicated to local Odd Fellows and other brothers and Rebekah sisters from Austin's earliest days are interred.

Last year, our Secretary Brother Donald Rupert found deeds to several plots in the historic cemetery, located just east of downtown Austin with impressive views of the Capitol. Noble Grand Israel Freeland began further researching this asset, and with the aid of the cemetery association (SAC) was able to identify the occupants of our graves – including five unmarked plots.

Oakwood is the oldest "City" cemetery in Austin, dating from 1839. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. Notable Texans buried in Oakwood include Susanna Dickinson (Alamo survivor), Governors Elisha Pease and James Hogg, and the Governor's unfortunately named daughter Ima Hogg. The view of the Capitol is one of the statutory "Capitol View Corridors" meaning downtown buildings are prohibited by State Law from obstruction the view from the cemetery.

There are ten graves (for the IOOF). The earliest grave dates from 1915, and is marked with a Civil War Veteran marker. Most of the burials are from the 1930s. The last burial is in 1978. Brother J. D. Latta's inscription shows he was an Odd Fellow for thirty years and indeed, his name appears on the 1964 cornerstone of our Lodge as Secretary.

We gathered on Tuesday, April 24, 2018, to perform the Ceremony for Decorating the Graves of Deceased Members. Pictured are Past Grand Jim Letchworth, Financial Donald Rupert, Right Support to Noble Grand Keith Crippen, (Past Grand) Warden Shawn Lennartson, Noble Grand Israel Freeland, Vice Grand Justin Schneider, and Chaplain Joseph Honett. The Noble Grand, Chaplain, and the Recording Secretary, Arro Smith, performed the ceremony, with the Vice Grand marking the graves with memorial IOOF flags as each deceased brother was recognized by the Secretary.



The ceremony includes the following description to use at each grave:

“Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime,
 And, departing, leave behind us footprints on the sand of time.
 There is no death! The stars go down, to rise upon some fairer shore,
 And bright in heaven’s jeweled crown they shine forever more.”

Our Lodge has rededicated ourselves to maintain this section of the historic cemetery. We are working with a non-profit (SAC) that advocates for Austin’s oldest cemeteries. Eight empty plots remain in our section (4, lot 902) of Oakwood, so our current brothers are placing dibs, though none are anxious for a permanent relocation, to this prized piece of Austin real estate.

Oakwood Cemetery Plots for Sale

Six (6) plots are available for sale in Section 3 Lot 118 in Oakwood Cemetery on Central Avenue. SAC is not involved and will not profit from this transaction. We are sharing the news with our members and friends who may be interested. For more information, call or text 303-587-6007.

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 24	Oakwood Chapel Rededication 10 a.m.
September	Public voting on Photo Contest entries
Sept 23	Austin Museum Day 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Oct 6	Photo Documentation (9 a.m. to 11 a.m.)
Oct 20	12 th Annual Murder, Mayhem & Misadventure Walking Tours
Nov 2	Travis County History Days: WWI Theme 10 a.m. to noon
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.