

Black History Month: Henry Green Madison by Kay Dunlap Boyd

Black History Month is observed in February. During this time, we endeavored to share the stories of some of the African American individuals and families on the Save Austin's Cemeteries Facebook page.

Everyone leaves a footprint or trace when they live. Some are deeper, more distinctive than others. Whether it be children, structures, good deeds, written word or just a tombstone, there is a story. We wanted to learn more about some of the people and their families buried in the grounds of Oakwood Cemetery.

Some of these families were Anderson, Baylor, Dedrick, Fontaine, Freeman, Givens, Holland, Littlefield, Lovinggood, Mitchell, Murchison/Strain and others who came before us. The Madison family was the first to be spotlighted.

Henry Green Madison (1843–1912), the first African-American city councilman in Austin, son of Emanuel and Elizabeth Madison, was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1843. A freedman, he came to Texas and married Louisa Green of Texas by the early 1860s. Census records indicate that they had up to nine children, but apparently not all survived to adulthood. Arriving in Austin, Madison built a small cabin on present day East 11th Street in 1863 and began operating a shoemaking business and built a small log cabin at what is now 807 E. 11th Street. An active Unionist, in 1867, Madison was president of the Austin chapter of the Union League. He was an active participant in Reconstruction and served as an assistant at the Texas Constitutional Convention of 1868–69. In 1870, he served as a captain of an all-black unit in the Sixth Regiment of the Texas State Guard.



Reconstructionist Governor Edmund J. Davis appointed Madison as an Austin city alderman in 1871. That same year he volunteered to serve as a registrar of voters in Travis County, a dangerous job for a black man in Reconstruction-era Texas, due to the continued opposition of black civil rights in the former Confederate State. Madison held his Alderman office until November 28, 1872. Madison went on to serve as a policeman in Austin, and later worked as a porter in the Texas House of Representatives.

In 1886, Madison built a frame house that completely enclosed the original cabin on 11th Street. The cabin remained hidden until 1968, when a deconstruction crew discovered it while tearing down the outer house. The cabin was donated to the City of Austin and was disassembled and later re-assembled at its current location in Rosewood Neighborhood Park. Madison died in Austin on May 31, 1912 and is buried in Austin's historic Oakwood Cemetery. Although presently there is no tombstone for Madison's grave site, several other members of the family do have markers in the Community Grounds. *(Paraphrased from Texas State Handbook and Wikipedia.)*



Historical plaque at Madison Cabin in Rosewood Park,
2300 Rosewood Avenue, Austin

HENRY G. MADISON CABIN

Built about 1863 at 807 East 11th Street; homestead of Henry Green Madison (1843-1912), policeman, and farmer and his wife Louise and their eight children. In 1886 Madison built a frame house enclosing the cabin, which remained hidden until a razing crew found it in 1968.

The log structure was donated to the City of Austin in 1968 by Mrs. Ninabell Wooten, dismantled, and reassembled on this site to the black heritage of the city.

Recorded Texas Historic Landmark – 1974 (*From Texas Historical Commission files*)

Notable WWI Veterans Series, Part 2: African-American Soldiers by Terri Mirka

In honor of the 100-year anniversary of World War I, we identified as many WWI soldiers and nurses buried in Travis County as possible during 2018. We will continue to share summaries on some of these heroes this year for the WWI Centennial that concludes in June 2019, 100 years after the Versailles Treaty formally ended the war. See our last newsletter for Part 1 on WWI nurses buried in the city cemeteries.

During Black History Month, we are highlighting a few of the over 250 African-American soldiers who helped with the “Great War” and are buried in Austin’s city cemeteries. The majority of African American soldiers in WWI were privates who served in non-combat service roles. We found many local heroes who defied this and fought and lead their groups.

Cousins Serving Overseas in Engineer Unit

Jefferson Parks (1895-1974), on the left, is buried at Evergreen Cemetery and is shown with his cousins Ernest Eppright (1891-1953, buried at Park Springs Cemetery, Travis Co.); Andrew Eppright (1894-1975, buried in Houston National Cemetery); and Walter Eppright (1897-1950, buried at Park Springs Cemetery). All of these soldiers were born in Manor and served in France in engineer units. These handsome men are all great uncles to SAC volunteer Harrison Eppright.

(Photo Credit: From the collection of Ms. Rose E. Parks, Houston)



Combat Soldier Awarded the Purple Heart

Clarence Barnes (1897-1953) was unique in many ways. He was a combat soldier who enlisted early in August 1916 prior to the draft at Fort Sam Houston and was first assigned to the Illinois National Guard. His group joined the 370th Infantry of the 92nd Division, which was a combat unit fighting under the French.



Flat granite marker at Evergreen Cemetery. *(Photo credit: Kami Harcrow, Findagrave.com)*



Notice the ‘PH’ on Clarence’s headstone? The letters stand for the Purple Heart that Private Barnes was awarded. The Purple Heart is given to those wounded or killed while serving, on or after April 5, 1917. Clarence’s service record notes that he was severely wounded while fighting on September 30, 1918 in the Oise-Aisne Offensive in France. Census records show his residence at the VA Home 1930 and 1940, so he must not have fully recovered. He is buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

Local African-American Leaders

Pinkney Lander Mitchell (1888-1963) was born in Goliad, Texas, and was a school teacher when he enlisted in the military service as a resident of Austin in 1917. He must have been an impressive soldier as he was promoted to a Second Lieutenant just four months after enlisting. He began his work in a service unit, but was quickly moved to a Military Police unit where he served in France for nine months. His death certificate lists his primary profession as a shipyard worker.



Flat granite VA headstone mounted upright at Evergreen Cemetery (with his first name misspelled!)

Walter Sullivan Ross (1887-1957) was born in Austin and inducted into service June 1918 to the 165 Depot Brigade service unit at Camp Travis in San Antonio. He was rapidly promoted to a Corporal within three months and then to a Sergeant just two weeks later, serving in the US for about a year. After the war, he worked as a waiter and at a shipyard.



Flat white marble VA headstone at Plummers Cemetery

Reuthells Benford (ca 1897-1923) was born in Austin and enlisted April 1917 at Fort Sam Houston. He was in the 24th Infantry, which served in the US during WWI and was promoted to a corporal. He immediately re-enlisted in the US Army after the war, but sadly died at age 26 in 1923, likely while stationed in New Mexico.



Upright white marble VA headstone at Plummers Cemetery

Locals in the Famous “Harlem Hell-fighters”

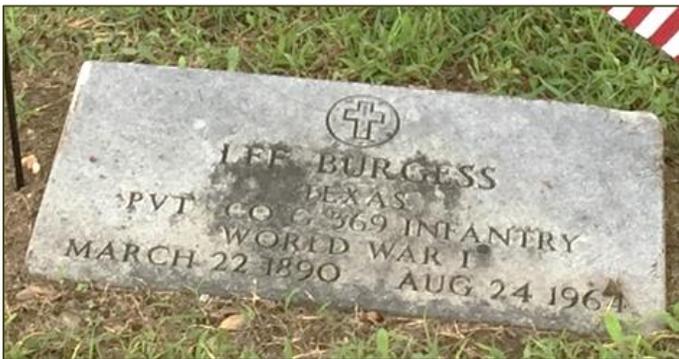
The Harlem Hell-fighters (369th Infantry) were an African-American infantry unit in WWI originally formed from a NY National Guard, thus the “Harlem” name. The unit was at first relegated to labor service duties in France in late 1917 and segregated from the white soldiers. In April 1918, the US assigned the group to fight under the French forces as many white American soldiers refused to perform combat duty with the black soldiers. The French, however, welcomed the additional

manpower. The highly awarded 369th spent more time in combat than any other American unit and was nicknamed the “Hell-fighters” by the Germans because of their fierce fighting.

I became interested in this famous group after learning about them and hearing that 65 East Texans fought in the 369th. While at Evergreen Cemetery, I came across military headstones of brothers Lee and Willie Burgess that surprisingly read “369th Infantry” and found that the soldiers had no connection to East Texas nor New York. More research led to finding at least seven men with Austin ties who were part of the famous Harlem Hell-fighters, and four of them are buried at Evergreen cemetery: **James Bolden** (1892-1980), **Lee Burgess** (1890-1964), **Willie Burgess** (1894-1964), and **Alfred Cabin** (1894-1965).

All four Austin men enlisted April 26, 1918 and were originally assigned to a US-based service unit. Within two months though, they were all on a ship bound for France where they bravely fought with the French. Alfred’s service record noted he was slightly injured, but a descendant told us his leg had to be amputated after the war from the injuries.

Lee Burgess and Willie Burgess with flat granite VA headstones at Evergreen Cemetery.



Both Alfred Cabin and James Bolden of the 369th Infantry have flat brass VA headstones at Evergreen Cemetery. Note that their headstones do not specify the infantry in which they served, but we found that Alfred and James returned on the same ship from France as the Burgess brothers and were able to identify the 369th Infantry service from their military records.



Members of the WWI Centennial Committee for Travis County honored the four Harlem Hell-fighters buried at Evergreen Cemetery with a wreath laying ceremony on November 10, 2018. Shown is the bronze headstone for James Bolden with a ceremonial wreath.



Ceremony participants shown left to right: Bob Ward (chairman of the Travis County Historical Commission, veteran), Kevin McKenzie (veteran and military history expert), Suzanne Faught and Carol Castlebury (members of the Thankful Hubbard Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, organizers of the event), Terri Mirka (SAC board member), and Glenn Towery (Veterans Suicide Prevention Channel, veteran). *(Photo by Joe Mirka)*



Civic Leader and Dentist Served in WWI

Dr. Everett H. Givens (1888-1962, large private headstone at Oakwood Cemetery). Dr. Givens was inducted into WWI military service when he was thirty years old and served five months in the 165 Depot Brigade service unit. After his military service, he was a well-known East Austin dentist, civic leader, and newspaper editor. Givens Park is named in his honor.



WWI Veteran Lists and Research Resources

Please visit our WWI page at <https://www.sachome.org/events/TravisWWI-100.html> to see the lists of soldiers we identified in Travis County for Veterans Day 2018. The WWI gravesites were identified by first recording those with military headstones. However, most WWI veterans have private headstones, so we uncovered many more by using genealogical and military records. A unique resource available for Texas WWI soldiers and many nurses are the Texas WWI Service Record Cards from the Texas Military Forces Museum. They are available for free from familysearch.org, but an account is required. Direct links to this resource and many more are provided in our [“Research Resources for Locating WWI Veterans Gravesites”](#) document. The WW Service Record Cards were the primary source for the military service described for each of the soldiers.

(All photos credit Terri Mirka unless otherwise noted.)

New SAC Board Members for 2019 by Sally Victor and Kay Boyd

In order to stay energetic and refreshed and relevant, Save Austin’s Cemeteries selected some new individuals to the Board of Directors of Save Austin’s Cemeteries. The SAC board is so pleased to have such appreciative cemetery enthusiasts join our numbers: Sally Baulch, Lowell Hertzog, Scott Myers, Melissa Rogers, and Arro Smith. More about all these wonderful folks follows.

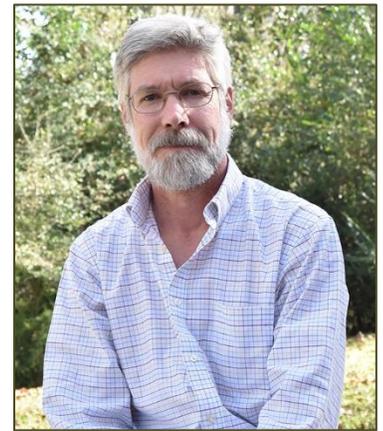
Sally Baulch

Cemeteries were just another park to my siblings and I growing up. We tagged along with the relatives and listened to stories. My “home” cemetery is in Sweetwater, so I’ve adopted the Austin city cemeteries as my step-cemetery. Over the last thirty years, I’ve worked in museums in the cultural history, education, and interpretation departments, currently with Texas State Parks. Outside of work, I serve as a mentor at an elementary school, steward my neighborhood park, garden, and mother two grown children.



Lowell Herzog, Jr.

Lowell is a fifth generation Texan, who earned degrees in both History and English from Texas A&M University. He taught in public schools for over twenty years. Currently, he is s cemetery headstone/monument conservator who pursues stone conservation full-time throughout southeast Texas and has studied the various methods of conservation used in the U.S. and Europe for cemetery monuments and outdoor ironwork. Trained by nationally recognized gravestone and monument conservator Jon Appell, he is a member of the Association for Gravestone Studies (AGS) and the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC).



Scott Myers

I am a native Texan. My mother’s ancestors were Swedish and settled in a small town on the Travis/Bastrop county line, which they named after their home back in Sweden, Lund. I grew up in Austin and have held a variety of jobs throughout my working life. Currently, I am employed by Weed Corley Fish Funeral Home. I seem to have found “my calling.” My grandparents are buried in Oakwood Cemetery Annex and my parents are buried in Austin Memorial Park. I was asked to be an actor for the MMM tours with SAC three or four years ago and have enjoyed the experience as well as the people I have met along the way. I’ve taken another step with SAC by becoming a board member. I look forward to helping SAC with its mission to Save Austin’s Cemeteries.



Melissa Rogers

Melissa has been fascinated with cemeteries since her childhood. She appreciates the unique historical perspective that cemeteries provide to a community. She has volunteered with SAC since 2016 as a member of the gravestone cleaning crew and as a tour guide for the MMM tours. Melissa is a Volunteer Docent at The Bullock Texas State History Museum, where she specializes in the Comanche and early Native American trade routes with an emphasis on Jumano Trade Fairs. Melissa is committed to serving the community of Austin and is a Commissioner on the Municipal Civil Service Commission and a Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrar.



Arro Smith

Arro Smith, PhD, is a librarian and historian. His research interests include public history, oral history methodology, and memory studies. He became interested in Save Austin’s Cemeteries while researching the Oakwood Cemetery plot belonging to his lodge of the Independent Order Odd Fellows and worked on the WWI project last year.



When is Government Oversight Over Reaching? by Dale Flatt

The Austin Parks and Recreation Department has had management oversight of the city cemeteries beginning in 1986. Four years later, they privatized the day to day operations to InterCare Corporation. In 2013, the City again assumed responsibility for the day to day operations.

The vast majority of Oakwood was sold as family burial lots that are 25-feet x 30-feet. Many were subdivided into half or quarter of the original lot size, while some are set aside for single graves. What is common in all the city cemeteries is that the monuments are placed by the families and are the family’s responsibility. There is a reasonable expectation by the families and the public that the people who maintain the cemetery should take every precaution not to damage the monuments.

Only if a monument becomes a safety hazard will the governing body of that cemetery take action to assure the public’s safety and relevel or remove the at-risk section of the monument and place it on the ground. The city has long held the stance that the monuments are the responsibility of the families, they are considered private property, and that the city could not spend public monies to address private property.

This was one of the key reasons that we formed Save Austin’s Cemeteries (SAC), so we could work with families and find the solutions to address the condition of monuments, as well as take a role in the oversight of the cemetery operations.

Many of the families in older cemeteries have died off or moved far away from the area. At Oakwood, gravesites go back more than six generations. In most cases, there is no one left to care for the monuments. Many family members do continue to come out and look after the family plots. That right is protected under state law. The Texas Statutes, Health, and Safety code 713.010 states:

This subchapter does not affect the right of a person who has an interest in a grave or burial lot, or who is related within the fifth degree by affinity or consanguinity, as determined under Chapter 573, Government Code, to, or is a direct descendant of, a decedent interred in the cemetery, to beautify or maintain a grave or burial lot individually or at the persons own expense in accordance with reasonable municipal rules.

The Austin Parks Department recently launched a new program called “Cemetery Improvement Process,” whereby families or groups like SAC must fill out a form and get approval from the city to do work on monuments or the family lot. The catch is if the city approves the proposed work, the applicant must pay a \$75.00 inspection fee to ensure that any work done by individuals or outside contractors did not harm the monuments in question or the surrounding area, and in some cases the city requires a million-dollar insurance policy before the work can start the work.

The problem is the city council approved the \$75.00 fee based on this description: “Inspection Fee is associated with monument setting performed by outside contractors, and it is subject to governing rules and regulations.” That states nothing about cleaning a headstone or repairing a broken stone.

The city has a process for creating rules, and fees must be approved by the city council. It appears that cemetery leadership rebranded an approved fee to mark gravesite location or install new markers and is trying to charge families a fee for something as simple as cleaning a monument, which state law grants the public the right to do. Another issue is they include a set of rules that have yet to be approved by the city manager.

Oversight can be a good thing. I have seen many poor headstone repair jobs, improper cleaning techniques and harmful cleaning solutions used in my years of studying cemeteries. For over three years, SAC has been working with descendant families to clean their ancestors’ monuments with approved D/2 solution to remove harmful toxins. We have cleaned over 1,000 monuments and have a strong track record of improving both family headstones and orphaned monuments, those with no known descendants. We have been asked by the Austin Cemetery Division to stop cleaning headstones and get the families’ permission for each stone. I find this contrary to State law, which supersedes local policy, as well as nearly impossible to contact all of the living descendants to ask permission to perform a simple maintenance task.

A review of proposed **restoration work** at Oakwood or any other cemetery is not a bad idea. This should be done with a review panel, not just one person. While we agree in principle that better documentation should be kept about cleanings and treatments used on historic monuments, nowhere is the city’s budget process has this level of staff time or authority over private property been discussed and approved by the city council.

I think that it is fair to say that it is overreaching for the cemetery office to charge an unapproved fee for families to have to seek permission; wait up to three weeks just to clean a headstone; then, they must pay a \$75.00 fee. There are many fine instructional videos out there that the city could link to their website to educate families on how to properly clean a monument. The Cemetery Division could, if they choose, go through the proper steps and offer cleaning kits for a modest profit if they feel the need to create income. But they cannot just make up rules and fees without going through the proper steps.

Cemeteries as old as Oakwood are by nature are financial sinkholes, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars per year for maintenance, while only generating a small percentage of income for new burials or maintenance request from families.

We want to hear from you on this; please email comments to info@sachome.org.

Cleaning and Preserving Veteran Headstones by Terri Hoover Mirka

Save Austin's Cemeteries cleaned and preserved many of veteran gravestones in cemeteries throughout Travis County in 2018 in an effort to not only improve the appearance of the headstones, but also to stop the destruction of environmental toxins eating away at the headstones. We followed the ["Best Practice Recommendations for Cleaning Government Issued Headstones"](#) which includes specific techniques and products to use (such as D/2 Biological solution, brush types, rinsing methods, etc.). The best practices were developed for "government issued-headstones based on research undertaken by the National Park Service National Center for Preservation Technology and Training and funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration."

Summary: "Headstone cleaning must take into consideration the operational standards set forth by the National Cemetery Administration:

- Headstones, markers, and niche covers are clean, free of debris and objectionable accumulations.
- Headstones, markers, and niche covers are not damaged by cemetery operations.

"Biological organisms, such as bacteria, mold, mildew, algae, mosses, or lichen can adhere to the headstone and result in appearance changes.... *Bacteria can consume air pollutants and produce acids that can attack the stone.* Fungi can penetrate the pore systems of stone and carry bacteria further into the stone."

As noted in Dale Flatt's article "When is Government Oversight Over Reaching?" we have been asked to halt headstone cleaning in the five city cemeteries. We continue to believe our veterans and all Austin cemetery "residents" deserve to have headstones that are "protected and treasured" as highlighted in the best practices for national cemeteries document at: <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/wp-content/uploads/Best-Practices-Final.pdf>

Government-Provided Military Markers (Reprint from SAC's Feb. 2018 newsletter)

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will furnish a free Government headstone for the unmarked grave of any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world, regardless of their date of death. For eligible veterans who died on or after Nov. 1, 1990, a government-issued headstone or marker may be provided for those whose grave is marked with a privately purchased headstone. Applicants must be descendants or a spouse of the veteran.

Flat markers in granite, marble, and bronze and upright headstones in granite and marble are available. There is no charge for the headstone or marker itself, however arrangements for placing it in a private cemetery are the applicant's responsibility and all setting fees are at private expense. Please visit www.cem.va.gov/hmm/ for additional information on military headstones, including the best practices document described above.

Be Aware of the Mowers by Dale Flatt

The photo on the left was taken at Oakwood Annex on January 30, 2019. This mower was placed in service in May of 2014. The photo on the right is what the mower looked like new - can you spot the safety issue?



The protective discharge shoot has been removed. This is a necessary part of the mower’s safety equipment that prevents rocks and sticks from shooting out and injuring bystanders or family monuments. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission:

Lawnmower injuries sent more than 80,000 people - including 5,000 children - to U.S. emergency rooms in 2015. Lawnmower injuries have been blamed for an average of 70 deaths annually. The injuries range from people falling or slipping in front of or off a mower; burns; amputations from the blades; damage from projectiles thrown from the lawnmower; and rollovers.

[http:// https://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2018/06/riding_lawnmowers_kill_average.html](https://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2018/06/riding_lawnmowers_kill_average.html)

In a cemetery setting, it is not uncommon to find items like glass marbles, plastic or ceramic figurines, coins, etc., placed on gravesites or on headstones. These items sometimes find their way onto the lawn areas and they become flying projectiles that can injure people and damage monuments.

A section of Oakwood Annex, known as baby land, has over the years taken a beating from the riding mowers. In many cases, these small infant markers are not placed flush with the ground and are not in standard rows. When the grass is tall, crews cannot see these markers, so the rollers on the center of the deck can dislodge/shift the stones and the blades strike them causing damage to the markers and the mowers.

Before Late Jan, 2013 FindaGrave – Photo by Robert Sage

After January 14, 2019 Photo by Dale Flatt



It is important for families to document their family monuments and, if they see any damage, report it to the cemetery office. Sometimes damage is caused by vandalism; sometimes it is weather related (trees or water), but sometimes it is caused by routine maintenance practices. Monuments are the private property of the families who placed them there. It is a reasonable expectation that the people who have oversight of these sacred spaces would ensure that the personnel who service these areas have the proper training. The equipment they operate should be maintained to ensure the safety of the operators, the visiting public, and the monuments.

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/>)

Facebook Update by Kay Boyd

If you are on Facebook, hopefully you have seen some of our ***On This Day*** posts. We continually research and look for people who were born or died on each day of the year. If you have a person in your family or an interesting story you would like to feature, please send the name and date to mkdb1405@gmail.com. A sentence or two of information can be included. We will track this information on a spread sheet and it will assist us in identifying people to post.

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!

March 2	Oakwood Photo Documentation and Oakwood Cleanup 9 am – 11 am
April 6	Oakwood Photo Documentation 9 am – 11 am
April 27	Texas Independence Day Walking Tour 9 am – 2 pm
May 4	Oakwood Photo Documentation 9 am – 11 am
October 5	Oakwood Photo Documentation 9 am – 11 am
Oct. 26	Murder, Mayhem, and Misadventure Tour 10 am – 4 pm
Nov. 2	It's My Park Day Fall 9 am – noon (Oakwood Photo Documentation and clean up)

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