

# SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

## 2023 Newsletter

### Save Austin's Cemeteries Board Members

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### Newsletter Editors:

Megan Spencer  
Leslie Wolfenden

### Voices of Evergreen II by Melissa Rogers

SAC is pleased to announce the completion of the second installment in the *Voices of Evergreen* series. *Voices of Evergreen II* highlights the contributions of five dedicated and inspirational educators who are buried at Evergreen cemetery: Mary Jane Sims, Lillian Kerley, Hazel Adams, Dr. June Brewer and J. Mason Brewer. Videographer Funmi Ogunro brought these five individuals together in conversation with narrator Harrison Eppright. They discuss the history of segregated schools in Austin, the effects of desegregation on Austin's African-American community, including the loss of L. C. Anderson High School, and the promise of future generations. The video was produced by SAC, Melissa Rogers, and Funmi Ogunro and was made possible by grants from Preservation Austin and The Summerlee Foundation. The video can be found on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MC6PCvSWE3U&t=310s>

Please join us for the premiere of *Voices of Evergreen II* on Wednesday, December 20, at 7 pm at Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1010 E. 10th Street, Austin. SAC is also planning a screening event for Black History month in February 2024.

The poster features the Save Austin's Cemeteries logo at the top left. The title "The Voices of Evergreen II" is prominently displayed. Below the title, a paragraph describes the film as the second in a series of historical documentaries about notable African Americans buried at Evergreen Cemetery, focusing on educators John Mason Brewer, Dr. June Harden Brewer, Lillian Gregg Kerley, Mary Jane Sims, and Hazel Poole Adams. A row of five small portrait photographs of these individuals is shown. At the bottom, it states the production was made possible through grants from Preservation Austin and The Summerlee Foundation. Logos for Preservation Austin and The Summerlee Foundation are at the bottom left, and a QR code with the text "SCAN HERE TO WATCH" is at the bottom right.

## Murder, Mayhem & Misadventure Tours 2023 by Megan Spencer

It was a beautiful day to be outdoors on Saturday, October 28, at Oakwood Cemetery for the annual Murder, Mayhem, and Misadventure Tour! We had a great turnout and a new information booth to show off! I really liked the *Women of Oakwood* booth. Thanks go to Marta Stefaniuk for this informational nook!

The stories that actors portrayed were touching and sometimes hard to hear. I always learn so much listening to them. Our actors had all kinds of interesting stories to tell this year. We had a story about a young man who fell to his death as he trimmed the lights on one of Austin's Moon Towers. Another story that I had never heard before was of a young boy who loved to play with the turtles along the banks of the Colorado River. Sadly, he got caught in quicksand close to shore and drowned in front of his friends who could not save him. And there was a portrayal of another young woman killed by the Servant Girl Annihilator.



We appreciate our volunteers so much. Many thanks to the actors: Barrett Tribe, Marilena Crouchet, Billy Brookshire, Darcy Scott, Beth Pickett, Warren Friedrich, Elizabeth Garzone, Rene Kendall, Lana Davis, Laura Machada, Elizabeth Porterfield, Vanita Trippe, Robbi Crockett, Dorothy Nicolas, and Nancy Castleberry.



Our tireless tour guides are our boots-on-the-ground organizers, and they keep the tours running on time. They also have so many interesting stories to tell! The tour guides were Courtney Bartsch, Mark Heep, and Jesse Burrows. Thank you so much!

## 2023 Membership Drive Time!

We protect and show respect for Austin's cemeteries. Save Austin's Cemeteries is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the city-owned historic cemeteries in Austin through documentation, preservation, and education, and promoting them as local and state cultural resources.

SAC is a non-profit organization; therefore, your membership counts as a charitable donation! Please out the form that can be found on our Membership link (credit card or check): <https://www.sachome.org/membership>

SAC offers 4 levels of membership:

- **\$20 - Individual** Annual Membership
- **\$15 - Senior** (age 60+) Annual Membership
- **\$15 - Student** Annual Membership
- **\$500 - Lifetime** Membership

## It's My Park Day - Record Number of Volunteers by Melissa Rogers

On November 4, SAC participated in the Austin Parks Foundation It's My Park Day event with two projects – the placing of flags on Veterans' graves for Veterans' Day at Austin Memorial Park Cemetery (AMP) and Plummers Cemetery, and invasive plant removal at Evergreen Cemetery.

We had a record number of volunteers sign up to place flags at AMP. Over 30 volunteers participated in flag placement in Sections 1, 2 and 3. The project was completed in under an hour. We had a wait list of 10 volunteers the night before the project. We need to buy more flags and try to cover the entire cemetery!

Meanwhile, over at Evergreen Cemetery, a dedicated crew of volunteers led by Mark Heep removed invasive plants assisted by the new Cemetery Operations conservator, Ryan Dees. A huge THANK YOU to all our wonderful volunteers!

## Reflections on Reunir: La Historia del Dia de los Muertos by Megan Spencer

There couldn't have been a more perfect evening to be at Oakwood Cemetery. Everyone enjoyed the events surrounding el Día de los Muertos at Oakwood Cemetery and Annex on Thursday, November 2. It was an artistic and a soulful experience. The digital version of the History of Día de los Muertos is fantastic. It provided a great introduction to the evening and I continue to read and to enjoy learning more about this ancient tradition.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/9b0fd74c76834aa3b09e4afd4af29094>



We viewed the Chapel ofrenda (altar) and enjoyed homemade tamales and beverages. The viewing of the ofrenda was accompanied by the music of Javier Jara in the Chapel. His voice and his guitar were perfect in the wonderful acoustics inside the chapel. He writes songs that tell stories of love and loss in Spanish. For me, it was an opportunity to practice my Spanish listening skills. It was a lovely preview of the evening's activities. For more about Javier go to: <https://javierjara.net/bio/>



Next, we met local artist Alonso Estrada, who created the Chapel's ofrenda (altar). Alonso had just finished putting the final touches on the work. He was still dotted with colors of the ofrenda. Alonso is a self-taught artist who loves the mythology of the ancient past. He describes his style as "modern symbolism." I asked about the dog's head. He told me about Xolo (Xoloitzcunintli), the dog who is the guide to the underworld. Xolo is represented by the Mexican Hairless Dog, which is an ancient breed. It was the Aztec god of lightning and death whose existence goes back 3,500 years. For more information about Alonso: <https://www.thedeathhead.com/>

Now onto the food! Mariana Nuño-Ruiz and her husband, Ian McEnroe, presented their book, *Dining with the Dead*, an extensively researched history of Día de los Muertos, including recipes passed down in Mariana's family. The recipes are accompanied by extraordinary photos taken by Mariana and her husband Ian McEnroe during their time in Mexico researching the cuisines associated with Día de los Muertos. The format of this book allows anyone to create these recipes. For highlights of the book, go to: <https://diningwiththedead.com/books/>



Then, we left the Chapel and walked to the Oakwood Annex with our little candles lighting the way. Along the way, we were accompanied by music performed by Jorge Tamayo and friends. We stopped near the Herrera and Limon lots in Section C of the Annex to view the family ofrendas and to welcome their ancestors. Hermalinda Zamarripa, a descendant of the family, spoke about the tradition. Herlinda's family is featured in the *Reunir* digital exhibit. She was a strong advocate for this event at Oakwood. I enjoyed hearing five of the descendants (all female cousins) talk about their large and loving families.

The digital and in-person events were made possible by the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, the Oakwood Cemetery Chapel, the Brush Square Museums, and the Cemetery Operations Division of the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Austin.

### **Austin Museum Day** by Melissa Rogers

SAC participated in Austin Museum Day on September 17. We offered walk-up tours at Evergreen Cemetery and Oakwood Cemetery. After all our hot summer weather, we were worried that people would opt for air-conditioned activities. Luckily, we had a cool day for the event. Our wonderful volunteer docent, Warren Friedrich, led groups around Oakwood Cemetery sharing his stories.

A special thanks goes to Caitlen Hill, Program Manager with PARD Cemetery Operations, who worked with SAC Board Member Lydia Moore to create and give walk-up tours at Evergreen. Caitlen arranged for us to have a big tent and chairs for tour guides and the visitors who came for the tours. Caitlen is working on a self-guided tour and brochure for Evergreen. She and Ryan Dees, the new Conservator with Cemetery Operations, joined Lydia and Melissa Rogers to give tours, hand out drinks, and visit with old and new friends. We had such a wonderful time at Evergreen that we are planning quarterly walk-up tours.

### **SAC Working with New Cemeteries Conservator, Ryan Dees** by A. Arro Smith, PhD

This summer, the City of Austin filled the long-vacant Cemeteries Conservator position by hiring Ryan Dees from Louisiana. Officially, he is the "Environmental Program Coordinator." It has been a pleasure for many of the members of Save Austin's Cemeteries to get to know him and begin a working relationship to preserve the city cemeteries.

Dale Flatt, Keith Crippen, Mark Heep, Melissa Rogers, and Arro Smith are all working on various projects with Ryan. As we formalize these projects, SAC will sponsor training sessions with Ryan to address several issues, beginning with the following:

- Oakwood bridge restoration: organizing and training volunteers to carefully remove rust from the historically valuable bridges that cross the drainage canals in Oakwood.
- Gravestone restoration days: working with Ryan to train volunteers to clean and conserve markers on a monthly basis.

As Save Austin's Cemeteries formalizes the training and protocols for these projects, we will call for volunteers in the coming months.



## Introduction to Ryan Dees, Cemetery Operations Conservator by Ryan Dees

I am from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and I received my Bachelor's degree from LSU in anthropology, focusing in archaeology. Since then, I traveled to 33 different states with my dog, Forks, while working on various archaeological projects. I moved to Austin about two years ago and fell in love with the city immediately. Making a career change from archaeology to historic preservation has been challenging and rewarding at every turn. I've loved walking through the cemeteries and learning about the rich history this city has and the people who built it from the ground up.

One of my favorite hobbies outside of work is drawing. I have been drawing with graphite for over 10 years, completely self-taught. Forks and I love hiking the greenbelt, kayaking, camping, and swimming. Most afternoons, you can catch us fighting over sticks at the dog park. I look forward to working together with SAC and building a strong relationship with my community.



## 3D Model of Historic Colored Grounds Progress by Jennifer Chenoweth, Oakwood Chapel Museum Coordinator

The Parks and Recreation Department is completing a grant project from the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH) that was received in 2021. The goal of the Digital Humanities Advancement Grant was to construct a digital 3D model of a three-acre section of a historic cemetery. Men, women, and children buried in this section in the 1800s-1900s were of African American, Mexican American, and European American heritage; segregated due to race and class.

Our staff learned much about the Historic Colored Grounds through this project, and has shared research with the public through online exhibits "All Together Here," "To Emancipate," and "To Change."

"All Together Here" documents the ongoing project to account for, research, and honor the men, women, and children buried in this section when the Oakwood Chapel was built upon existing graves in 1914. In May 2023, a three-day memorial event included the dedication of a new granite monument marking their graves on the west side of the Chapel.



DNA researchers at the University of Connecticut's Ancient DNA Laboratory shared their findings in an online meeting in October. They prepared potential descendants to submit samples for comparison in the coming months.

Read here: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d0b7ec88a46147ff835c3be602d72938/page/All-Together-Here-Home/>

"To Emancipate" contextualized the lives of African Americans who were enslaved in Austin, Texas; many of whom are buried in the Historic Colored Grounds. This exhibit won a Special Recognition Award in Education by Preservation Austin in November 2023.

Read here: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f2792615f8a24e47b31ce5f23ca95eea>

"To Change" demonstrates the geographic and demographic history of Austin with a focus on how our perceptions of race, ethnicity, and equity have changed in this ever-growing city. It includes community engagement videos about the NEH grant project, a description of the burial records for the Historic Colored Grounds, and technical information on creating the 3D model.

Read here: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/1243d8347a2e4a4ca61ecd67e50e3d8b>

Chapel staff are currently working with Esri consultants, the software company that the City of Austin works with on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data to finish and publish the model.

What we know about the Historic Colored Grounds:

- The area is predominantly African American with approximately 3,000 people buried here with no headstones, and approximately 2,700 of those with no record of burial locations. Of these, 169 individuals buried were listed without names. Many of the 3,000 people were enslaved during their lives.
- There are also approximately 400 Tejanos, Mexicans, or Mexican Americans buried in areas listed as "Mexican Grounds" and "Strangers Grounds" that are subsections of the Historic Colored Grounds. Of these, 65 men, women, and children were listed without names.
- There is one 25-year-old unnamed Chinese immigrant buried in 1888 in the segregated section.
- There were approximately 1,400 Europeans or European Americans who were recent immigrants or impoverished and buried in areas listed as "Strangers Grounds" and "Pauper Grounds." Of these, 61 people were listed without names.

## 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](mailto:info@sachome.org).

## SAC Board Meetings

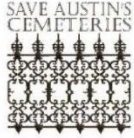
If you are interested the city's cemeteries and would like to attend a board meeting, please contact [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org) to confirm the time and place of the next board meeting.

## Calendar

Please join us for these upcoming events!

Dec 20	Screening of <i>The Voices of Evergreen II</i> , Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1010 East 10 <sup>th</sup> Street, Austin, 7 pm.
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If you would like to stop receiving SAC emails, or if you have updated contact information, please send an email to [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org).



# Save Austin's Cemeteries

## Membership Application (January to December)

Save Austin's Cemeteries is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization

Membership Year 2023

Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership contribution to Save Austin's Cemeteries.

- \$ 20 Individual
- \$ 15 Student (with copy of current ID)
- \$ 15 Senior (60+ years of age)
- \$ 500 Lifetime Membership
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Other ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

- 
- My check is enclosed (please make check payable to Save Austin's Cemeteries and mail to PO Box 16411, Austin, Texas, 78761)
- I prefer to charge my membership (go to <https://www.sachome.org/join/join.html> to use your credit card or Pay Pal)

Name:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Email:

Phone (optional: indicate preferred number)

- Cell:
- Home:

Do you have ancestors buried at any of the city cemeteries, if so, which ones?  
(check all that apply)

- AMP
- Annex
- Evergreen
- Oakwood
- Plummers

I am interested in and would like more information about volunteering for SAC projects and events. (check all that apply)

- Headstone Cleaning
- Headstone Restoration
- Historical Research
- Newsletter Stories
- Photography
- Social Media
- Tours
- Video Production