

SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

Winter 2011 Newsletter

Danny Camacho - One Story at a Time

Our own Danny Camacho, the historian for Save Austin's Cemeteries, was recently in the news. The Austin American Statesman Editorial Board recognized Danny as a "Hero of 2010." In a story published on Christmas Day, 2010, Danny was recognized as a local hero: for making a difference in our community by telling us about our past.

Danny has spent the past twenty years at the Austin History Center, where he is a dedicated volunteer, going through records to find the stories that made Austin the "pot of soup" that it is today. He thinks of Austin as a blend of different people who have maintained their individual identities. He looks for the stories of everyday people who made Austin what it is today. His stories delight visitors to the Oakwood Cemetery each year during walking tours.

Learning about his own family's history is what got him started. Danny's family came to Austin in 1874, so his family is truly "old Austin." As he learned more about his own family, he realized that he wanted to share the history of his family with others in the community. He recognized that the history of Latinos here in Austin was often misunderstood or overlooked. He has spent much of the past two decades uncovering stories, not only of the Latino community, but of everyday people of all nationalities and ethnicities, who came to Austin and made it such a unique city.



Danny Camacho (Photo by Ralph Barrera Austin American Statesman)

To see a video interview with Danny go to:

<http://www.statesman.com/opinion/danny-camacho-study-of-day-to-day-events-1146251.html>

Mapping Plummers Cemetery

On January 8, Dale Flatt was Save Austin's Cemeteries' featured guest speaker at our quarterly meeting at the George Washington Carver Library. He gave an information-packed presentation on Plummers Cemetery history and SAC's efforts to document this historic African-American cemetery located on Springdale Road.

Plummers Cemetery was established in 1898 and was also known as Mt. Calvary. This was a privately owned cemetery. The City of Austin acquired this site in 1957, and as far as we can tell, no records were transferred from the Plummer family to the City of Austin. Because cemetery



Photo by Beth Pickett

records have been lost over time and transfer of ownership, the current cemetery map established by COA in the mid 1970s is inaccurate and is in dire need of updating. Dale has been gathering information about Plummers' slumbering residents based on death certificates, existing cemetery files, sexton records, online records search, onsite documentation, and talking with descendants. If you have ancestors buried at Plummers, please contact Dale so he can record your ancestors' information.

Dale has divided the cemetery into 50'x50' grids to do photo-documentation and has plotted the existing headstones onto an updated draft cemetery map. If you are interested in assisting in this project or learning this process for your own historic cemetery, please contact Dale at 512-917-1666 or daleflatt@aol.com.



Symbolism in Oakwood Cemetery - by Sally Victor

Save Austin's Cemeteries developed a presentation on Iconography/Symbolism of Cemetery Markers during 2010. The seed was planted when SAC member Leanne DuPay requested a cemetery program on symbolism for the Lakeway Antiques Club at their annual October Halloween meeting. Leanne and Leslie Wolfenden provided terrific photographic images and Dale Flatt loaned multiple informative books on symbolism. This is one presentation that I actually got ready ahead of time. Another organization to which I belong had a speaker cancel, so I said I would give the presentation a test drive. So far it has been presented to the South Austin



Kiwanis Club, South Austin Civic Club, and a group of art teachers visiting Oakwood Cemetery for a sketch workshop during the Texas Art Educators Association annual conference in November. Some of the monuments illustrated in the presentation are very grand and some are simple and heartfelt, like the image of a pair of doves for sisters Laura and Helene Buaas at Oakwood Cemetery.

A single symbol can ultimately have multiple representations. The dove for example is a symbol of resurrection, innocence, and peace. An ascending dove represents the transport of the departed's soul to heaven. A dove descending represents a descent from heaven and assurance of safe passage. A dove lying dead symbolizes a life cut prematurely short. A dove holding an olive branch symbolized the soul reaching divine peace in heaven.

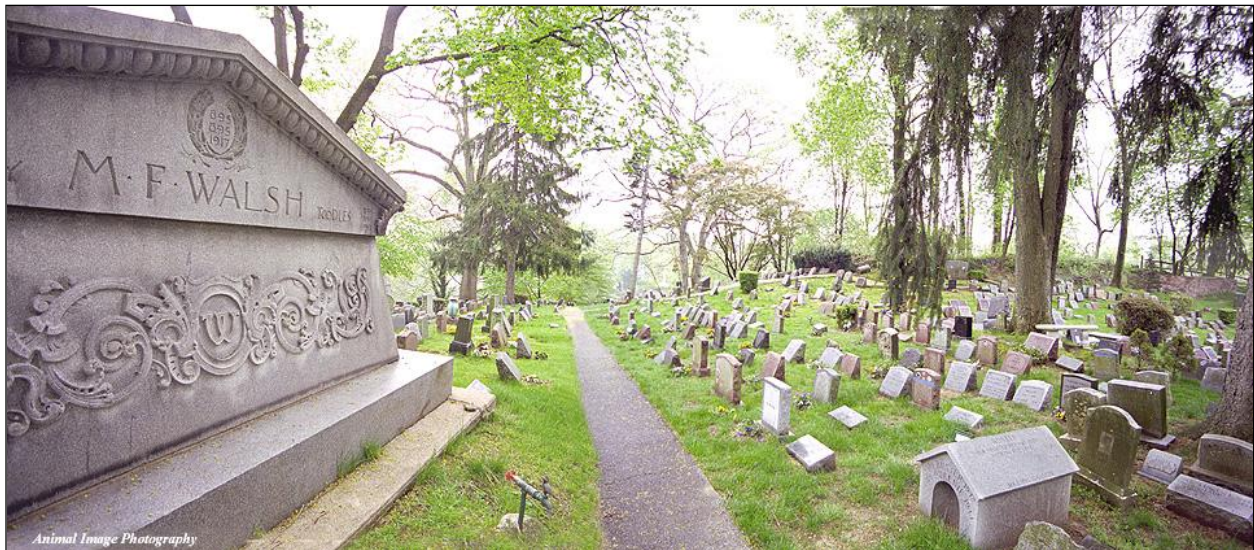
All of the groups that attended a session had questions about burial traditions. Did you know that most historic cemeteries are laid out with the graves aligned on the east/west axis with the feet facing east? In this manner, the deceased will be in a position to view the Second Coming of Christ and join the procession into heaven.

America's Oldest Pet Cemetery Holds Unique Legacy in Lore and Stones - by Mary Thurston

Today, Hartsdale Pet Cemetery in New York holds the distinction of not only being the oldest incorporated burial ground for animals in the United States, but also the longest continuously operated pet cemetery in the world. Encompassing seven acres, the "Peaceable Kingdom," as it is affectionately called by its caretakers, is the final resting place to dogs and cats, along with other creatures. SAC member Mary Thurston is the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery staff historian, whose task is to catalog the cemetery's documented history and to conduct additional research and conservation work. Every year Mary makes the pilgrimage from Austin to Hartsdale to explore the grounds and delve into its history, and today her own dog rests beneath a tall stand of maple trees near the cemetery's summit (and right next to her mother's ashes). Today, the cemetery holds approximately 9,000 grave markers, although the total number of burials that have occurred since its inception in 1896 is believed to be as high as fifty thousand.

The cemetery owners, the Martin family who have operated the cemetery since 1974, are passionately interested in the history they've been entrusted with, and are devoted to its proper care. Moreover, the plot-holders exhibit a genuine enthusiasm for projects that maintain or improve the grounds to everyone's benefit. We have just begun a campaign to inform everybody of the need for historic preservation and to raise funds to restore specific monuments. Hopefully, this will lead to a more long-term plan for historic archiving, conservation, and educational outreach through special events and guided tours.

For a more in-depth story about Hartsdale Pet Cemetery, please see the second pdf attachment.



Author bio: Mary Thurston's first book, *The Lost History of the Canine Race: Our Fifteen Thousand-Year Love Affair with Dogs* (1996) devoted a whole chapter to cemeteries for animals. In addition to her duties as the historian for Hartsdale Pet Cemetery, she works in Austin as a pet photographer. She can be reached at info@animalimage.com.

Travis County Historical Commission's Cemetery Project – by Bob Ward

The Travis County Historical Commission, in coordination with the Texas Historical Commission, has established a committee to identify endangered historic cemeteries and record related information between the various area stakeholders. Cemetery Committee member Bob Ward (TCHC) has enlisted the considerable knowledge, expertise and data base of Dale Flatt (Save Austin's Cemeteries) and Kay Boyd (SAC and the Austin Genealogical Society). The first order of business will be to reconcile information between the Texas Department of Transportation cemetery map and the Travis County cemetery map. This includes determining accurate locations of the cemeteries and prioritizing sites for designation as a Historic Texas Cemetery. Any and all information collected will be stored at a public facility found to be suitable in terms of security and access. The cemetery committee would like to extend an invitation to interested parties to join in this effort to create a working relationship uniting the diverse cemetery communities and other interested parties. For more information, please contact Bob Ward at traviscountycemeteries@ymail.com.

Announcements

Please join us for these upcoming events!

March 5	Austin Parks Foundation "It's My Park Day" clean up session: Sprucing up Plummers Cemetery and Givens Park from 1:00 to 4:00, Saturday at 1150 Springdale Road. SAC is hosting its second annual It's My Park Day event. The volunteer sign-up sheet is now available. In order to know how many tshirts and refreshments to provide, APF requires all volunteers to register. Please go to this link to register: Click Here
April 2	Headstone Documentation and Preservation Session as part of the Texas Historical Commission's annual conference. For conference attendees only. For information regarding the THC conference, go to http://www.thc.state.tx.us/annualconference/cof2011.shtml 9:00 to 12:00 at Oakwood Cemetery
April 2	Photo Documentation Session 9:00 at Oakwood Cemetery. Participate in the THC's conference cemetery session for free as an SAC volunteer by showing conference attendees how to do photo-documentation.
April 9	Guest speaker session: Austin historian Phoebe Allen to present on the unique marble lot at Oakwood Cemetery of the Townsend/Robertson families. For more information click here . 1:00 at Oakwood Cemetery Chapel
April 30	Walking Tour featuring Austin's master builder Abner Cook, the homes he built and the families who lived in them. 10:00 to 4:00 at Oakwood Cemetery

SAC is on Facebook! If you are too, we hope you'll "like" Save Austin's Cemeteries!

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