



## Save Austin's Cemeteries President's Message for 2008

On behalf of the Save Austin's Cemeteries, I am pleased to report that 2008 was a year of notable progress for Save Austin's Cemeteries.

After SAC received the National Trust for Historic Preservation's matching grant, we got a building condition assessment done by Sparks Engineering, which gave us a ballpark figure of \$250,000 for getting the chapel rehabilitated. So we are now in the process of researching grants and fund raising for getting the next step done – a geo-technical assessment of the soils around and under the chapel in preparation for stabilizing the foundation.

We held three walking tours in the past year. In October, we conducted a walking tour for Halloween/All Saints Day. In March, we conducted a walking tour for Texas Independence featuring people connected to the battles and events surrounding Texas Independence. That walking tour was followed up by May's tour featuring Old Austin families. The money raised went into the chapel rehabilitation fund. SAC plans to keep doing walking tours around the same times every year so tour visitors know they can come back next year for more interesting stories of Oakwood residents. We also hope to add costumed tours, which would take a lot of teamwork, long-term planning, and coordination, so if you're interested in seeing this implemented, please see a board member after the guest speaker's presentation.

In May, the cemeteries suffered wind damage, which brought down whole trees and large branches -- damaging several headstones. Approximately a dozen volunteers heeded the call for a clean up day, where over 85 bags of debris was collected for pick up by the city.

We held eight documenting days since last October where volunteers came out to document headstones. We are now about 40% complete in Section 1. Now that the weather is cooling off, we will start scheduling documenting days again.

Gene and Dale rescued a little kitten at Plummers Cemetery. After receiving TLC at the vet, the kitty found a new home.

### RIP Happenings

We became part of the THC's Record Investigate and Protect program, which Anne will be talking about shortly. Dale is in the process of filling out the applications to get Oakwood and Oakwood Annex listed as Historic Texas Cemeteries. AMP is already listed. Evergreen and Plummers will be next.



## PARD News and Events

SAC has ongoing communication with the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) regarding the needs of all the city cemeteries. This summer, PARD did quick condition assessments of the five cemeteries and then held public meetings to get citizen input. SAC attended all three public meetings and then sent out an email to our SAC email list to get input from our members and friends regarding cemetery needs and concerns. The responses were sent on to PARD to be incorporated into the public input. PARD has selected its new director Sara Hensley who starts December 1. She currently is the PARD director in Phoenix. We will be sending Sara an SAC packet after she arrives. Dale has been in touch with our counterpart cemetery non-profit to see how that relationship has worked over the years.

Over the summer, Dale noticed green grass over at Evergreen in the newly platted section. A food dye test showed that the area was receiving raw sewage from the onsite restroom. History shows that this area may be part of an old septic field from the former sexton's house. Plans are in the works to reroute the sewer line along an existing easement and will be retied into the city sewer system.

Also over at Evergreen, PARD has commissioned a study to look into the feasibility of using dirt spoils from AMP to back fill portions of the northeast corner to create more burial space. SAC is watching this closely as this area is a watershed area and is the area where Highland Park Cemetery is located. According to found documents, there are up to 500 possible burials in Highland Park.

PARD and InterCare will be installing new "No Pets" signs at all five cemeteries. SAC is working with InterCare on wording for a public information flyer to help educate cemetery visitors regarding the no pet policy.

Dale is coordinating with PARD (Cora Wright), the Austin History Center (Karen Riles) and the George Washington Carver Museum so SAC has a presence during the Black History month celebration. This is to raise awareness in east Austin about our efforts for preservation of Evergreen and Plummers cemeteries – two historic African American cemeteries. We will have a large map of Plummers Cemetery for family members to mark placements of unmarked graves. Our goal is update the existing InterCare map with corrected information and to get oral histories on tape.

PARD is also working on creating a cemetery link on the Parks' website.

This summer, Oakwood Cemetery suffered several acts of senseless vandalism. Dale reported the crimes to the police and to Gene at InterCare Corp. He also got the events on television. The perpetrators have not been caught yet and unfortunately damaged our only two examples of shell mound graves. PARD reacted quickly and 'repaired' several



of the damaged headstones with silicone without any consultation with SAC or the Texas Historical Commission on how to properly repair headstones. PARD also did not attempt to contact next of kin for permission to repair the headstones, which are private property.

#### Ongoing projects

- Coordination with PARD for cemetery master plans and advisory board
- Research on cemetery residents
- GIS mapping of Oakwood Cemetery, courtesy of Jonathon Jarvis
- Chapel restoration
  - Grant research and fund raising

#### Upcoming volunteer opportunities

- Documenting days
- Walking tours in November, March, and May
  - Tour guides, greeters, and refreshment suppliers
  - Costumed tour coordination
- Tree documentation -- measurements
- Ideas for cemetery signage
- Ideas for guest speakers
- Grant research

#### Other Organizations Contributions

SAC received a CD from the University of Texas Historic Preservation program of architectural drawings of Austin Memorial Park's historic buildings. These drawings are also in the hands of PARD, InterCare, and RAMP. These drawings will be used in the master plan for AMP.

Austin Genealogical Society is currently conducting a headstone survey at Oakwood Annex, much as they did for Oakwood, which has been a great help on our documenting days and database.

InterCare will be reinstalling the recovered fencing at Oakwood over the winter months.



Treasurer's Report

2008 starting balance	9,877.81
2008 memberships	1,585.00
2008 donations	2,873.76
2008 expenditures	<u>(4,769.56)</u>
	9,567.01 of which

Chapel Rehabilitation Fund

6,948.61	raised to date
<u>(4,685.80)</u>	expenses to date: building condition assessment and materials testing
2,124.74	

I'm working on grant research for the geo-technical study done. Unfortunately, I haven't had much time to do the research this summer as my job has been keeping me extra busy. But I promise I'll get around to it soon.