



## SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES Spring 2011 Newsletter

### **Oakwood RIP Guardians Host THC Workshop Event – by Anne Shelton (Texas Historical Commission, Cemetery Division Director)**

The Oakwood RIP Guardian volunteers hosted a workshop as part of the Texas Historical Commission's Annual Historic Preservation Conference on Saturday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Conditions Assessment Survey for Historic Cemeteries workshop allowed conference attendees from around the state to work alongside local volunteers, learning how to record individual gravemarkers and features. By learning hands-on, conference participants explored how Oakwood volunteers determined a recording path to suit the space and contributed additional volunteer power to the monthly recording event.



Thanks to SAC volunteers Eva and Hal Mohrlok, Roger Waguespack, Bob Ward, Beth Pickett, Kelley Russell, and Michael Guidry, survey participants wrapped up conference on a stellar note. The SAC volunteers made this survey event a productive and fulfilling use of new volunteer efforts.

Comments from the conference event evaluations:

*"This was the best workshop at this conference. Being new at this, it shows what we can do right now without having to wait for funds."*

*"Having hands-on experience was great!"*

*"Awesome workshop!"*

Many thanks to Leslie Wolfenden and Dale Flatt for hosting a memorable event!

### **City of Austin Culture and Arts Division: Culture and Heritage Roundtable – by Megan Spencer**

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, SAC members Bob Ward and Megan Spencer attended a Culture and Heritage Tourism Roundtable given by the City of Austin. The guest speaker, Lenwood Sloan, is Director of Cultural and

Heritage Tourism with the Pennsylvania Tourism Office. Representatives from a number of Austin-based arts, culture, and heritage organizations attended.

Many historic/cultural travelers agree that trips including cultural, arts, historic, or heritage activities or events are more enjoyable to them (39%). A select group feels that a leisure or vacation trip away from home is not complete without visiting a museum, historic site, or landmark (26%) or attending a cultural event or arts performance (17%). Cultural tourism is intangible and may include language, folkways, music, and poetry. Heritage tourism involves taking care of and promoting “stuff.” It is preserving buildings, letters, monuments, etc. Heritage organization staff and volunteers may devote fifty percent of their time to preservation.

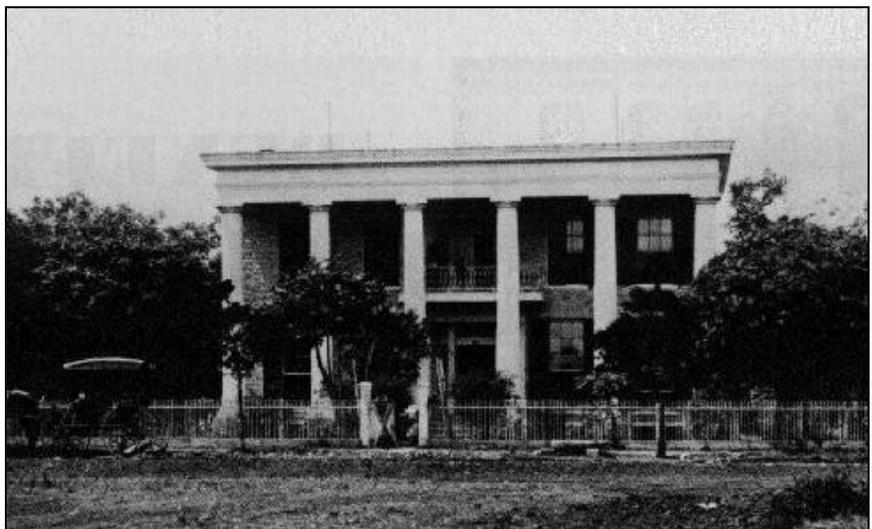
Heritage tourism is “the stewardship of what man placed within the landscape of God: churches, train stations, graveyards etc.” It gives us a “sense of people.” Informative signs are very helpful, but they are not experiences or interpretations. Curators and interpreters provide experiences. Heritage organizations must provide experiences that engage both local and out of town visitors.

Mr. Sloan also stressed the importance of drawing in young people. Because heritage tourism is still very much a “word of mouth” endorsement, SAC is considering new ways to reach younger visitors, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr. Both YouTube and Flickr are easy ways for people to post videos and photos to websites. SAC wants to bring in younger board members as well. The SAC board is focusing on identifying future leaders. SAC elections will be held this October. If you are interested in participating on the board or would like more information, please contact SAC at [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org).

### **Austin’s Master Builder Abner Cook Breakfast Event – by Leslie Wolfenden**

I attended a Heritage Society of Austin’s event at the Neill-Cochran House Museum on March 25. The event featured guest speaker Dr. Kenneth Hafertepe who spoke about Austin’s master builder Abner Cook. Mr. Cook built architectural jewels such as the Governor’s Mansion, Sweetbrush, and the Pease Mansion, among others.

As this particular topic tied in so well with what SAC was already planning for its walking tour, I thought I should brush up on my Cook knowledge and maybe learn something new. Held at one of Cook’s creations – the Neill-Cochran House Museum on San Gabriel – the stone house was open for guests to walk through and admire the architectural features and historical artifacts. The breakfast buffet was old-fashioned oatmeal porridge with condiments varying from fresh and dried fruits to cream and brown sugar. The breakfast session was held outside on the charming rose-draped stone patio with white tablecloths and fresh flower centerpieces.



Although facing tough competition from rival mockingbirds, Dr. Hafertepe more than held his own, providing a scintillating presentation with amusing anecdotes on the topic of Abner Cook, holding an audience of some 60 people enthralled for almost an hour. The presentation was well received and appreciated.

All in all, it was a delightful way to spend an early spring morning and good refresher course before SAC held its own Abner Cook event at Oakwood Cemetery.

If you would like more information on the Heritage Society of Austin or the Neill-Cochran House Museum, please go to their websites at <http://www.heritagesocietyaustin.org/> or <http://www.nchmuseum.org/>.

## **Guest Speaker Series: Townsend, Thomson and Robertson Families: Neighbors in Life and Death – by Megan Spencer**

On April 2, Phoebe Allen and Danny Camacho presented a history of three families buried in Oakwood Cemetery – the Townsends, Thomsons, and Robertsons. These families' lives were intricately bound together. Phoebe started with a lecture and slide presentation inside Oakwood Chapel, focusing on the families' histories and their connections. This was followed by a short walk across the street to the Townsend lot to hear Danny's presentation on the construction of the beautiful marble balustrade and the story behind the Stark Young Robertson monument.

Nathaniel Townsend was a successful businessman in Austin. He came to San Felipe, Texas, on the Brazos River as part of Stephen F. Austin's Second Expedition with his first wife, Maria Roach. Appointed by Sam Houston as the New Orleans consul, he served two years there before moving to Austin in 1839 with his family. In 1841, he bought property on Congress Ave between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets where he established a very profitable mercantile business. After his first wife's death, he married his second cousin, Angeline Louise Townsend. Angeline is buried in the Townsend family lot along with her daughter, Susie Marsh Townsend Robertson, and other descendants.



In 1911, Thaddeus Thomson purchased Nathaniel Townsend's mercantile property on Congress Avenue, and built the Townsend-Thomson Building, a Victorian Italianate structure that is now a National Register property. Thaddeus and his two brothers, Horace Alexander and Rector McDonald, were wealthy cattle ranchers and they are buried with their families in Oakwood.

The Robertson and Townsend families were neighbors. In 1877, Nathaniel and Angeline's daughter, Susie Marsh, married James Harvey "Jim" Robertson, who served in the Texas Legislature representing Williamson County. Jim practiced law with Governor Hogg, served as District Attorney in Williamson and Travis counties, and was Judge of the 53<sup>rd</sup> District Court. Jim and Susie had six children, five of whom are buried in the Townsend lot.

At the Townsend lot, Danny Camacho talked about the architectural features and design of the balustrade and the Carrera marble cross near the center of the lot in memory of Stark Young Robertson, the youngest son of John Ben and Julia (McGehee Young) Robertson and grandson of Jim and Susie Robertson. Julia's brother was Stark Young: author, critic, and UT professor of theatre. Having already lost two infant children,

Julia was reluctant to allow her third child, Stark Young Robertson, to leave home to attend Yale University, but her brother encouraged her. Sadly, in 1936, Stark Young Robertson died at age 18 during his first year at Yale. His death was devastating for Julia. The monument to this young man is one of the most striking in Oakwood Cemetery. The unusual design of the cross brings together various spiritual traditions: the Bronze Age "Wheel of Life," the Irish Catholic Saint Columbo Cross, the Celtic Cross, and the Rose Croix of Freemasonry. The classic Italian Renaissance style balustrade and white marble flagstone sidewalk surrounding the Townsend lot were added in 1938.

Some descendants of the three families were in attendance on April 2<sup>nd</sup> to hear the presentations. Thank you, Phoebe and Danny, for bringing our family history and the history of Austin to life.

## **Austin's Master Builder Abner Cook, the Homes He Built, and the People Who Lived in Them Walking Tour**

SAC held walking tours on Saturday, April 30, throughout the day at Oakwood Cemetery. Abner Cook's clients were featured on the tour including such notables as Dr. Samuel Haynie, General Andrew Neill, John Milton Swisher, Thomas Cochran, provisional Governor Alexander Hamilton, Governor Hogg, Governor Colquitt, Governor Roberts, Governor Pease, Governor Hogg, and of course Abner Cook himself. Donations received during the tour went toward the Oakwood Cemetery Chapel Rehabilitation project.

## **Submit an Article to the SAC E-newsletter**

If you would like to submit an article for the SAC e-newsletter, please send your article or idea to [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org).

## **Announcements**

Please join us for these upcoming events!

May	Membership Drive and Renewal time! Please go to the <a href="#">Join Us</a> tab for more information.
June 4	Photo Documentation Session 9:00 at Oakwood Cemetery
June 25	Guest speaker session: Long-time preservationist and architect Wayne Bell, FAIA, will discuss his professional and personal relationship with <a href="#">Miss Ima Hogg</a> . 1:30 at the <a href="#">Austin History Center</a>
July 9	Guest speaker session: Phil Baum returns with his presentation on Jewish death and burial customs. 1:30 at the <a href="#">Austin History Center</a>

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