

# SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

## Summer 2013 Newsletter

### Save Austin's Cemeteries Board Members

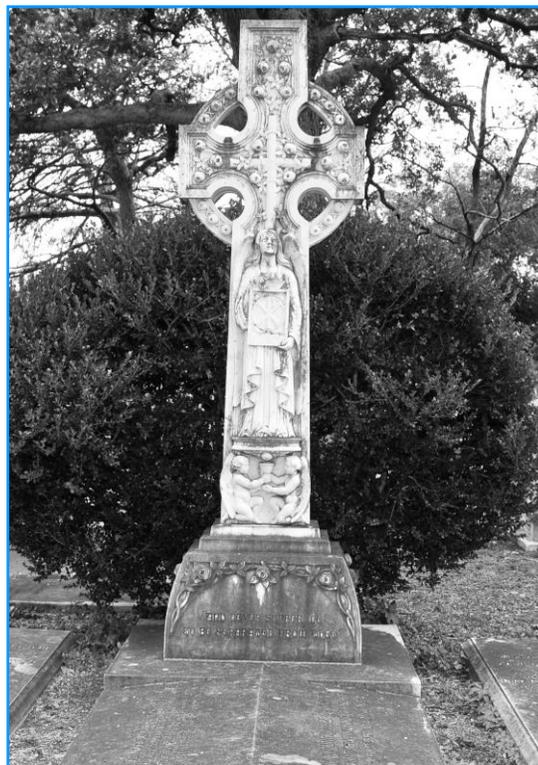
Beth Pickett, President  
Kay Boyd, Vice President  
Leslie Wolfenden, Secretary  
Barbara Surlles, Treasurer  
Danny Camacho  
Dale Flatt  
Megan Spencer  
Bob Ward  
Sally Victor  
Jan Root

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**One Grave at a Time** by Barbara Surlles and Kay Boyd  
Save Austin's Cemeteries is dedicated to preserving our historic cemeteries in Austin, and we are excited to announce an official name for an old (and ongoing) preservation project that we hold near and dear. Oakwood, like other city-owned cemeteries, is much like any outdoor gathering space: things like weather, litter, and time tend to wear on the property and on its belongings (gravestones, lot borders, monuments, etc.) The goal of our new "One Grave at a Time" means what it says! We are cleaning, repairing, and restoring Oakwood's belongings *one grave at a time* in hopes of preserving these beautiful historical gems for many generations to come. While it may seem like a daunting task to take on, focusing on individual graves and family lots, rather than thousands of graves all at once, makes SAC members feel accomplished and eager to persevere on – baby steps will get us there!

Repairing any damage done to a headstone or any lot damage must get prior permission from the owner(s). Sometimes that is tough to do with older lots. Thankfully, we have been able to locate and gain the support of owners' families. SAC founder, Dale Flatt, along with board member Bob Ward, recently completed stabilization work on the Fannie Harris box tomb that rests in Oakwood's Section I. They did a terrific job, and we are looking forward to the next project, the Robertson/Townsend lot. The Robertson/Townsend lot is an eye-catching part of the cemetery that can be seen as visitors enter the gates. An impressive marble balustrade surrounds the lot, and walking stones, an ornate Celtic cross, and plot markers have rested on the lot for many years. Because of weather and time, signs of wear have become more and more noticeable.



SAC has several volunteer opportunities each year including headstone documentation and cleaning. Please consider signing up to volunteer and help Save Austin's Cemeteries preserve our historic cemeteries – *One Grave at a Time!* Sign up to receive our email updates or check out our website for more details. [www.sachome.org](http://www.sachome.org) Also feel free to contact [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org) for more information.

### **Murder, Mayhem and Misadventure Tour by Bob Ward**

Get ready for SAC's 7<sup>th</sup> annual Murder, Mayhem & Misadventure Halloween Walking Tours at Oakwood Cemetery on October 26 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. These tours highlight the lives and deaths of Austin's early citizens. These chilling tales of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century murders and other untimely deaths shed new light on Austin's history and put you in a ghoulish mood!

Photo features 'Susan Hancock,' one of the unfortunate women of Austin who met her grisly fate on December 24, 1885, at the hands of Austin's Servant Girl Annihilator, an early example of a serial killer operating in the United States.

Tours run from 10:00 to 4:00 and begin approximately every 20 minutes. Each tour lasts about 1 hour. Comfortable close-toed shoe are recommended for uneven, unpaved terrain. These tours are open to the public with donations welcome. Proceeds benefit SAC cemetery preservation projects.



### **Annex Roof Project by Leslie Wolfenden**

After cutting a lot of bureaucratic red tape, the Oakwood Cemetery Annex Roof Project is making headway. The old roof has been stripped off, savings as much historic material as possible, the remaining material has been gone through hazardous materials remediation (asbestos and lead paint), and new roofing material applied. Using a historic photo and original blueprints, the City and contractor have attempted to keep the replacement material as close to original specifications as possible. The roof shingles have gone back to wood shingles as seen in the photo. The City is hoping to have some leftover money to purchase a replacement door and windows for the front façade. As of September 14, the roof was two-thirds complete with trim painting left to do.

This project has been made possible by the Texas Historical Commission's Certified Local Government grant program with matching funds from Save Austin's Cemeteries, and City of Austin bond money. The project contractor is L.D. Tebben Company. SAC commends the City and staff, particularly Kim McKnight and Kevin Johnson, for following through on this project as the project costs expanded drastically from original estimates due to hazardous materials and other project parameters.



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## Annual Photo Contest by Leslie Wolfenden

SAC is kicking off its fourth annual photo contest in September, starting September 16 and ending October 5. Shortly after that, the photo entries will be posted on the SAC website to allow the public to vote for its favorite top twelve entries.

The purpose of the contest is to increase public awareness and appreciation of the artistic and cultural value of Austin's city cemeteries. The top twelve (12) entries will be compiled as the 2014 SAC calendar. The calendar will be published via Cafepress.com and available for sale with proceeds benefiting SAC projects.

The entry receiving the most overall votes will be featured on the calendar cover and also receive a 2014 SAC calendar. The twelve winning entries will receive a one-year membership to Save Austin's Cemeteries.



Last year's photo contest yielded over 90 entries and many people voted for their favorites. This photo seen here is last year's winner by Harrison Saunders called Gathering Storm.

## October Elections by Beth Pickett

October marks the return of our favorite event—Murder, Mayhem & Misadventure—and it is also the time of year when we select board officers. The office of Vice President, being vacated by Kay Boyd because she has reached the term limit, is the only open position on the ballot this year.

Voting is open to any SAC Member in good standing who attends the annual meeting. Members may also vote by mail or email; all mail-in votes must be received by October 11 by close of the business day.

Mail-in ballots must be mailed to Save Austin's Cemeteries, PO Box 16411, Austin, TX 78761. Email votes must be sent to [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org).

I want to personally thank Kay for her service in the role of Vice President. She does a great job of looking after loose ends and keeping up on our toes, and we appreciate her continuing service on the board.

Following is the current elected board of directors.

President: Beth Pickett  
Vice President: Kay Boyd  
Treasurer: Barbara Surles  
Secretary: Leslie Wolfenden

The candidates up for the four elected positions are:

President: Beth Pickett  
Vice President: Sally Victor  
Treasurer: Leslie Wolfenden  
Secretary: Barbara Surles

### **Introducing Newly Appointed Board Member Sally Victor** by Megan Spencer

Save Austin's Cemeteries welcomes Sally Victor to the SAC Board of Directors. Sally has worked with SAC as a tour leader, a researcher, and general all-round great friend! Following is a brief autobiography of our new board member. Welcome Sally!

I started visiting cemeteries at a young age and enjoyed sharing the unique and decorative features with others in high school. I studied cemeteries professionally as a historic consultant during the 1980s in east Texas and marveled at the folklore and traditions exhibited. One of the most unusual grave markers I observed was a pair of wagon wheel axles at Sugar Hill Cemetery in Panola County, Texas. That experience led to preparing several National Register nominations for cemeteries near Amarillo and in San Antonio. It is an honor to serve on the Save Austin Cemeteries board of directors.

I have a BA degree in American Studies and a MS degree in Community and Regional Planning from UT, where I concentrated on historic preservation and history.

### **Introducing Newly Appointed Board Member Jan Root** by Megan Spencer

Jan has been a great supporter of Save Austin's Cemeteries for some years. She has always been there to help us with special events and planning. We are happy to have her on the board. Following is a brief autobiography of our new board member. Welcome Jan!

I'm a native of Austin and a UT graduate with a BA in American History. I have extensive knowledge and experience in the archives field, working eighteen years at the Austin History Center, twelve years at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, and two years as an archivist at Texas Parks & Wildlife. I also worked several years as a Historian for two private companies conducting historic surveys, including a project for the US Navy that took me to 37 states documenting Navy artifacts. As a Certified Archivist, I now hold the position of Associate Map Curator at the Texas General Land Office, working with historic maps and land grants.

I have always enjoyed and appreciated cemeteries and the link they provide to our past. Lots of historic information can be gathered just by walking through a cemetery. I'm especially interested in Save Austin Cemeteries because of the work that's done to document and preserve Austin's cemeteries, thereby preserving my hometown's history.

### **Guest Speaker Series: Historic Merriltown Cemetery** by Megan Spencer

On Saturday, July 13, Bob Brinkman with the Texas Historical Commission gave us a look at life in Merriltown, a very early settlement in northern Travis County. Its founder, Nelson Merrill, described its location as twelve miles north of Austin and four miles south of Round Rock. Nelson Merrill was in northern Travis County as early as 1837 and is one of the area's earliest settlers. In the mid-1880s, Merriltown had a population of thirty-five, but by the 1890s, the population had increased to 100. Merrill's 1870 house is still standing in Round Rock.

What is left of Merriltown can be found near the intersection of the north Mopac extension and Burnet Road. The five-acre cemetery has examples of all kinds of monuments, headstones, footstones, and pylons. Calvary Worship Center is the custodian for the Merriltown Cemetery. Bob shared with us two interesting books about the beginnings of Merriltown and Round Rock:

True Tales of Central Texas by Willie Kemp (1979)

Rich Little Poor Boy by Martin Parker

**Cemetery Preservation Workshop** by Dale Flatt

The Harris County Historical Commission in association with the Texas Chapter of the Association for Gravestone Studies will be hosting a cemetery preservation workshop from 10:00 – 2:00 on October 5th at the Tracy Gee Community Center in Houston. SAC board members Dale Flatt and Danny Camacho will be in attendance.

Presentations will include:

- Introduction to the Texas Chapter of the Association for Gravestone Studies
- Fruitful Cemetery Preservation Partnerships in Deep East Texas
- Lost Cemeteries of the Houston Area
- Sensitive Treatments and Repairs for Historic Gravemarkers

For additional information contact Anne Shelton at [anneshelton@gmail.com](mailto:anneshelton@gmail.com) or 512-799-3630.

**Update on Parks and Recreation Department Public Meetings** by Megan Spencer

Members of Save Austin’s Cemeteries have attended the public meetings regarding the future of Austin’s five city cemeteries. The Parks and Recreation Department has recently taken charge of the city’s cemeteries and they are seeking public input on the creation of a Master Plan for the cemeteries. At these meetings, citizens have had an opportunity to express their concerns and to provide input on what should be included in the plan. A consultant will be hired via the Request for Proposal process to help the City create a Cemetery Master Plan. SAC and other organizations to which we are connected have a great deal of knowledge to provide to the successful consultant. We look forward to the process.

**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).

**Calendar**

Please join us for these upcoming events!

September	Photo contest (see article above for details)
Oct. 5	Photo-documentation session at Oakwood
Oct. 12	Annual Board Meeting and Elections at Oakwood
Oct. 26	Murder, Mayhem & Misadventure Halloween Walking Tours 10-4 at Oakwood
Nov. 2	Photo-documentation session at Oakwood

*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).*