

SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

Winter 2014 Newsletter

Save Austin's Cemeteries Board Members

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Between the Dashes: Virtual Tours by Dale Flatt

My love of gabbing and my booming voice make me a natural to conduct historic walking tours in cemeteries, but let's face it I can't always be there. The city has printed walking tours but it is hard to keep the kiosk supplied. So we are trying something new: temporary signage at gravesites. We are using PVC plastic sign posts with small, slanted table tops. To the table top, we attach a laminated short biography and a photo (if available), and a QR code. A QR code (Quick Reader) is an app for a smart phone that uses the phone's camera to read the image. It can direct you to a website for more information. By placing these small information kiosks onsite, visitors can learn about the people buried in Oakwood Cemetery and we can give tours without being there.

The Parks & Recreation Department staff gave Save Austin's Cemeteries permission to set out ten of these mini kiosks for the tours that we conducted on February 1st for Black History Month. The kiosks were a great success. Visitors especially enjoyed hearing Ernie May Miller sing "Go Tell It on the Mountain" while standing at her gravesite.



Ernie Mae Crafton Miller was born in 1927 to Otto and Lizzie Anderson Crafton and raised in Austin. She was the granddaughter of educator L. C. Anderson and rests in the family plot in Oakwood Cemetery. Ernie Mae was a blues and jazz pianist and vocalist whose career lasted for more than fifty years. Several generations of Austinites grew up listening to her songs.

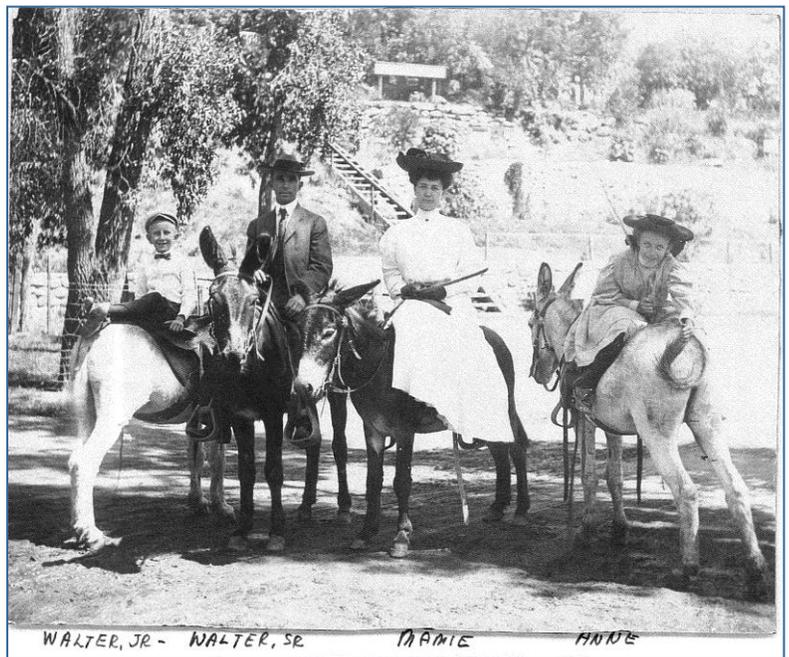
Speaker Event: The Bremonds and the Robinsons: High Society and High Jinks by Megan Spencer

On Saturday January 11th, long-time SAC member Ann Johnston Dolce shared her family history of the Bremonds and Robinsons. This double relatedness is the heart of the family's story. Ann led us on a photographic tour of 1800s Austin. John Bremond, a hatter from Philadelphia, came to Austin in 1846, and John H. Robinson, a sea captain, came to Austin in 1854. Both men established successful businesses on Congress Avenue, became friends, and built some beautiful homes in close proximity to one another on a block that is today referred to as the Bremond Block. Three Robinson children married three Bremond children starting a line of double cousins.

The families were close in life and in death. Both families are buried in Oakwood Cemetery – numbering one hundred nineteen in all. Prominent monuments of both families can be found in Sections One and Two. The family story can be seen in the generations of monuments. The earlier generation's monuments are unadorned, while the next generation's monuments are ornate and grander in appearance. The descendants were the beneficiaries of the prior generation's hard work.

There was no lack of hijinks and fun. Photographs brought back images of an old Austin, where kids rode donkeys, played in the alley between the big houses in Bremond Block, went swimming and camping, and of course, celebrated lots of family weddings. Keeping donkeys is a tradition that started with John H. Robinson and his good friend and business associate, John Stelfox, and it continues. Fifth-generation Austinite Ann keeps two donkeys and her grandkids love them.

(Walter Bremond Family photo courtesy of Ann Dolce Johnston)



Longview Park Project by Bob Ward

Save Austin's Cemeteries is currently involved in a project to document, protect and preserve the cemetery located inside Longview Park in southwest Austin. The cemetery is the remnant of an older community that included a school house destroyed by a tornado in 1922. There are several grave plots in the area, including one that features the graves of the Bargsley family, two of whom were killed in the tornado. Two other grave plots are known and there are indications of other possible unmarked graves. In addition, there are remains of old sections of fencing that are being uncovered along with the remains of the school.



The project began with a request from Save Austin's Cemeteries' very own Dale Flatt to the city to secure and define the cemetery portion of the site and develop a long term preservation plan. Both Longview Cemetery and Longview Park were donated to the city years ago and have been part of the city park system. The cemetery portion, however, was never adequately defined and the boundaries were encroached upon by trails and a basketball court. The concern was that with inadequate definition and protection, the cemetery would be further encroached upon in the future.

Kim McKnight, of the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department, put together a coalition of interested parties that includes not only Save Austin's Cemeteries, but also the Texas Historical Commission, the Travis County Historical Commission, and the Travis County Archeological Society. These groups have provided volunteers who have been working at Longview over the past few weekends to remove brush and make the area accessible for documentation. Last weekend, archeologist Ron Ralph used a leaf blower to uncover the foundation of the school and nearby cistern while other volunteers removed brush from other sections. In the next few weekends, volunteers plan to survey the site, define boundaries, and document all existing cultural features.

One Grave at a Time - An Update by Kay Boyd

Save Austin's Cemeteries began the "One Grave at a Time" project in October. We continue work on the all-marble Townsend lot across the street from the chapel. So far about eighteen hours of work have gone into cleaning the balustrade. We will continue to work here as part of our Volunteer Action Day on the first Saturday of each month as weather permits. Join us when you can.

If you would like our assistance in cleaning an old tombstone on your lot, let us know. We will be glad to help you get started.



Generations in Oakwood: The Strombergs by Kay Boyd

Adolph Nelson, my great-great uncle, was the first family member buried in Oakwood. He died in 1886 of consumption only a few years after arriving from Sweden. He is buried in a single grave in the older part of Section Two. I found this information in the sexton's records at <http://www.austinlibrary.com/ahc/oakwood.htm>

His sister Adelina Stromberg (1850-1944) and her husband R. E. Stromberg (1844-1908) had five children; four of them, Sarah Mogi (1873-1962), Nele (1874-1939), Ingeborg (1878-1970) and Ada Raney (1880-1969) are buried in Oakwood in the family lot with their parents. Also buried in this lot are Ada's husband, another

brother of Adelina's, and a granddaughter. The burials here range from 1908 to 2002 leaving several openings in the lot. The fifth child, my grandfather Hjalmar, is buried with his wife and three children in the Oakwood Annex Cemetery. Below is a photograph of R.E. Stromberg with his five children. The youngest boy, seated in front between his father and his older brother, is my Grandfather Hjalmar. This photo was taken between 1886 and 1889 shortly before the family left their farm and moved into the Swede Hill neighborhood.



If you would like to share a family history story about your ancestors buried at one of Austin's city cemeteries, please send us a couple of paragraphs with a photo to info@sachome.org.

Update on Parks & Recreation Department and the Cemetery Master Plan by Megan Spencer

The Austin Parks and Recreation Board made a recommendation to City Council for the award, negotiation, and execution of a contract with Amatterra Environmental, Inc. for the development of a Cemetery Master Plan. City Council approved this recommendation on February 27. To be included in the proposed contract are consulting services to develop a Cemetery Master Plan and to conduct a tree survey for a total amount not to exceed \$207,648. The Request for Proposals process for the Cemetery Master Plan followed an extensive engagement process with cemetery stakeholders.

The purpose of this project is to develop a master plan for five historic city cemeteries. The master plan will provide guidance for the preservation and development of the cemeteries by examining the conditions of the cemeteries, establishing goals, and providing an Implementation Guide to achieve the goals. The plan will include contexts for history, culture, and nature of the cemeteries. The project will include maps, charts, and GIS data. It will also cover condition assessments, preservation/conservation, landscape plan and tree survey, compliance, funding and revenue, potential partnerships and heritage tourism, and future cemetery development and expansion.

For more information about the Cemetery Master Plan project, go to the City of Austin link: <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/cemetery-master-plan>

Basics on Caring for Your Family Photos: Part 1 by Jan Root

Jan Root, board member and archivist, has written a four-part series on the Basics on Caring for Your Family Photos. This is part one.

We all have them. Family photos in boxes, envelopes and albums. And with the introduction of digital media and its conveniences, we may have hundreds, if not thousands of photos that document our families and friends. The problem some of us face is how to properly store and care for our personal photo collection. Here are just a few basic tips to proper storage for photos and negatives.

Storage

Each type of photograph or negative has its own specifications for storage. Here are some suggestions for safekeeping, ensuring they'll be around for future generations.

1. **Heat** – You want to keep photos and negatives in a dry, cool environment. Ideal conditions for the storage of these items would be around 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit, with 45-50% relative humidity and should remain constant. While these constant conditions are mostly unattainable in the average home, there are areas that are extremely destructive and should be avoided. Photos and negatives should be kept out of the attic or garage where temperatures and humidity can greatly fluctuate. These fluctuations can cause the emulsion on negatives to separate from its base and cause photos to curl and stick together if not sleeved.
2. **Light** – This can cause fading in photos, especially color photographs. They will lose their color fast if constantly exposed to light, be it natural or man-made. It is best to keep prints and negatives in an archival storage box, or a safe photo album where prints and negatives are sleeved in archivally safe sleeves. Those can be ordered online from various archival companies who specialize in the proper storage of paper, photos, negatives and clothing.

Prints and negatives can be stored in plastic boxes if you do not have archival albums and sleeves, but be sure they are not sealed with a lid. Photos and negatives need some air circulation and when you close a lid on them, they can produce harmful off-gassing. They are basically “stewing in their own juices.” A build-up of off-gassing can speed up the deterioration process.

3. **Moisture** – This can be devastating to photos and negatives and can come in several forms. It can be large amounts of water due to floods to small amounts like household spills and fluctuations in heat and humidity. Whatever the cause, some photos are beyond help if they become wet, especially if they are stacked. Moisture will cause photos to stick together, making it almost impossible to get an undamaged print when separated. The best way to prevent moisture damage is to keep photos and negatives in individual sleeves and in an archival photo album.

Austin's Historic Oakwood Cemetery: The Book by Kay Boyd

We will soon announce the publication date of our long-anticipated book about historic Oakwood Cemetery. We are hard at work editing and fine-tuning the contents. It will be a compilation of narratives and photographs that we hope will make connections between Austin's beginnings as an 18th century wild outpost to the modern 21st century city we know today. Details coming soon!

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.

Calendar

Please join us for these upcoming events!

April 5	SAC photo-documentation and clean-up session at Oakwood Cemetery. 9:00 a.m.
April 12	Guest Speaker Series: A House Divided: The Holland Family in Black and White at Oakwood Cemetery at 10:00 for onsite walking tour. Speaker: R. G. Ratcliffe
May 5	SAC photo-documentation and clean-up session at Oakwood Cemetery. 9:00 a.m.

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