

# SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES

## Summer 2016 Newsletter

### Save Austin's Cemeteries Board Members

Dale Flatt, President  
Sally Victor, Vice President  
Jan Root, Secretary  
Kay Boyd, Treasurer  
Karen Eshliman  
Terri Mirka  
Bobby Cervantes

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### Oakwood Cemetery Chapel Rehabilitation by Kim McKnight

The Oakwood Cemetery Chapel was constructed in 1914 by prominent Austin architect, Charles Page. It sits within the Oakwood Cemetery, a City of Austin Historic Landmark, a registered Historic Texas Cemetery, and a National Register of Historic Places site. In the subsequent 100



years since its construction, the building has suffered from uneven foundation settlement and deferred maintenance. Under the 2012 Go Bond funding for Cemeteries, PARD will complete a full rehabilitation of this historically and architecturally significant structure.

Rehabilitation of the chapel will include:

- Structural stabilization of foundation
- Surface drainage improvements
- ADA site access improvements, including creation of one parking space behind Chapel and new sidewalk
- Rehabilitation of single unisex restroom
- Mechanical, electrical, lighting overhaul
- Restoration of interior and exterior finishes, including doors, windows, masonry, roof, plaster, etc.

Once restored, the building will be programmed as a visitor amenity as recommended by the COA Historic Cemeteries Master Plan.

Construction drawings for the chapel are completed, and the project was released for bid in late spring of 2016. Pending council approval of the contract, construction will begin in fall 2016.

Kevin Johnson, Project Coordinator; Tonja Walls-Davis, Cemetery Manager; and Kim McKnight, Cultural Resource Manager; will give a presentation at Yarbrough Library on September 10 at 10:30 a.m. to provide an update on the project and answer any questions.



**Speaker Event: Pre-Planning Services with Tonja Walls-Davis** by Sally Victor

On July 16, 2016, the new Austin Cemetery Manager, Tonja Walls-Davis met with a number of folks at the Yarborough Library to review pre-planning services available when a member of the family or friends require burial services. It may seem morbid to be talking about burial pre-arrangements; however, when the need arises, there are many decisions to be made within a relatively short period of time.

There are five City of Austin Cemeteries: Oakwood Cemetery (the oldest), Oakwood Annex, Plummers Cemetery, Evergreen Cemetery, and Austin Memorial Park. Ms. Walls- Davis has been on the job since last spring and has been working steadily to bring procedures, maintenance, and the website up to date. The City of Austin Cemetery offices are located at the entrance of Austin Memorial Park located at 2800 Hancock Drive at the intersection of Bull Creek Road and Hancock Drive. Their hours are indicated below:

Business Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.  
 The business office is closed on official City of Austin holidays and Sundays.  
 Cemetery Gates open from 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. daily.

Ms. Walls-Davis and Boyce Freitag, General Maintenance Supervisor, reviewed the steps involved with having someone buried in one of the City of Austin cemeteries. One of the primary points made during the meeting was the importance of working with the Austin Cemetery Office with the multiple services that are available, e.g. where to locate an available plot, monument settings and leveling, grave revegetation, grave liner sales, and information on buying, selling, or conveying burial spaces.

Did you know that the Travis County Clerk's office has cemetery plots registered in their database? Unfortunately, these records only extend back to the 1960s. To locate cemetery deeds, refer to <http://traviscountyclerk.org> and search the recording tab for cemetery deeds. You can call or stop by the Austin Cemetery office for assistance.

Also present at the meeting was a person from a local funeral home and a representative from Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Texas. This organization provides consumer information on end-of-life options, [www.fcactx.org](http://www.fcactx.org).

Cemetery Manager: Tonja Walls-Davis  
Administrative Supervisor: Patricia Jacobson  
Customer Service Rep.: Miranda Garcia  
Administrative Specialist: K. Richelle Bass  
Administrative Senior: Kimberly Pendergrass  
General Maintenance Supervisor II: Boyce Freitag  
Parks Grounds Crew Leader: Joe DeLaCruz  
Parks Grounds Specialist: David Miles  
Parks Grounds Specialist: Dwight Carrington

For more information about public input on Cemetery Rules & Regulations, please contact [cemeteries@austintexas.gov](mailto:cemeteries@austintexas.gov).

## Generations in Oakwood: Coming in the Back Door to my Family History by Suzanne Gage Faught

Both of my parents, and their parents, were native Austinites so I grew up hearing stories about our family members and visiting their homes. On my mom's side, I knew that her grandmother's grandfather Henry Hofheintz established one of the first stores in Austin. We often visited Mom's great-uncle (Herman Reissig), next door to the then-closed-up store building located at Third and Red River streets.

Uncle Herman sold the property in 1966 to Cleigh Nease and Thom Cowley, who restored the complex of buildings to become the Waterloo Compound. They also provided information for the Hofheintz-Reissig Store to become a

Recorded Texas Historical Landmark and National Register Property. The limestone store later housed Emilia's Restaurant and has been the home of Moonshine Patio Bar and Grill since 2003.



Henry Hofheintz, a widower, came to Texas from Germany and operated a freight-hauling business. He married Christiana and settled down in Austin. In 1852, he built a log cabin for his new family and used a pushcart to sell dry goods door-to-door until he could afford to build a combination house and store in 1854. He also built a "Sunday House" so that rural German families could come to Austin and purchase provisions, spend the night,

and attend church before returning home. The Sunday House still stands on the northwest end of the Waterloo Compound property, the last one remaining in Austin.

Hofheintz's daughter, Catherine, married Adolph Reissig and they made several additions to the store including a domino parlor and saloon with a wine cellar stocked with wine made from grapes grown on the property. They had several children and I was fortunate to know two of them – my great-grandmother and Uncle Herman, who married but never had children.



When Hofheintz died in 1880, the Reissigs purchased the property from the estate. Family members continued operating the dry goods store until 1952 when Uncle Herman closed it. My mom told me that he had a short

career as a printer, but was forced to return to managing the store when his mother, Catherine, was no longer able to do so. Mom said that Uncle Herman resented having to give up his printer's job and refused to be buried in Oakwood Cemetery on the Hofheintz-Reissig family plot.

The Hofheintz-Reissig Store was in continuous operation for 98 years and one of Austin's oldest businesses. Thanks to Cleigh and Thom, we have a wealth of family information and the beautiful pen-and-ink print of the renovated building.

The Hofheintz and Reissig families are buried in section 1 of Oakwood Cemetery.

## Death of a Cemetery by Dale Flatt

Oakwood, Oakwood Annex, Evergreen, Austin Memorial Park and Plummers: the five city cemeteries all have two things in common. Each cemetery is a collection of cemetery plots. A plot is a property that is sold once and after the sale, the city is obligated to care for it throughout time. Exactly how to care for the city cemeteries is now part of the City of Austin's Cemetery Master Plan. The Cemetery Master Plan is groundbreaking in that it addresses the needs of all five historic cemeteries and their long-term preservation needs. The master plan has already won many awards within peer groups and associations for its format and thoroughness of thought.

Often when people talk about municipal cemeteries, it is about how they are being cared for. In a sense, it is the "standard" by which the city cares for these sites. When a cemetery or a memorial park has active sales, it is in the best interest of the owner to keep the grounds well-watered, the grass cut, and the infrastructure functional. No one wants to think of their final resting place as something that will be neglected in the future. Once there are no more spaces to sell, the revenue starts to dry up, and then the cemetery starts the process of a slow death.

It might take about fifty years or so for the majority of the companion spaces to be used, and every now and then when someone passes, they are reunited with loved ones in a family plot. The city collects some monies in

the way of opening and closing fees, and occasionally family members have headstones replaced or leveled. A few dollars trickle in, all of which goes back into the city's general fund, but the cost to maintain the cemeteries far exceeds the cemetery income. Typically, those in charge of these historic sites do the best they can with the limited budget that they are allotted from the city each October during the budget cycle.

Typically, large projects are funded by Capital Improvement Projects (CIP), which are funded by voter-approved bonds. The CIP process, once on track, can take three to five years to complete. Engineering documents are assembled, a cost analysis is done, and impact studies are conducted before it goes to the city council and the voters.

Just because there is a master plan does not mean that funding is available to implement the plan. While some funds were set aside years ago, there are restrictions for their use. As funds become available, the various projects recommended in the Cemetery Master Plan will be implemented.

### **SAC's Current Role in the Cemetery Master Plan**

One of SAC's goals is to raise awareness and to educate the public and city staff about the importance of preserving these sites in various ways.

#### Historic Walking Tours

SAC conducts research and offers free tours to help tell the stories of these cemeteries. During tours, we also try to point out the needs of these sites. The master plan identifies "notable persons" at each cemetery by name and their primary reason for being on the list. We already have extensive lists for Oakwood and we have shared this with the city. During documentation days at Oakwood, volunteers continue to collect the information and so the list grows.



We have created an electronic folder for each notable person along with a copy of a biography, photos, and detailed historical information, like where a person lived and perhaps worked. We use this research for our tours. If you have a knack for research or want to learn how to do this, drop us an email at [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org) and we can put you to work.

#### Speaking engagements

SAC volunteers are available to speak at civic group meetings. We like to talk and share our stories and knowledge. We never know when we might catch the ear of that one person who could be the key to providing support for a project that they also find very important.

#### Work the Rooms of City Hall

SAC volunteers also attend meetings and keep up with where the Parks Department is on their planning and implantation process. It is easy to sign up as a group of citizens to speak. Taking the time to write city leaders

and to tell them about your loved ones at rest at the city cemetery makes a real difference. Putting a face and a name to a request for funds is very important. Citizens and SAC membership make the biggest impact.

### Documentation and Preservation

SAC has documentation covered with the help of our many fine volunteers! We find out what information is needed and we search it out. Preservation, however, is more complicated. There is a double-edged sword that we keep running into: as in many cemeteries, the city's stand is that the monuments are the private property of the families and that (the city) has no responsibility for them. On the other side is the fact that Oakwood (for example) is a city landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places and, as such, the monuments are protected as part of the historic fabric of the site. There are a number of steps to take to protect family rights and to insure that no harm is done while preservation projects are underway. Documentation is the key to ensuring this happens.



The SAC Board of Directors, as well as the members and volunteers of Save Austin's Cemeteries, will continue working with the Parks Department and the City of Austin to insure the Cemetery Master Plan is implemented. It will not collect dust sitting on a shelf. It will be the "go to" resource for guidance on maintaining and preserving our city cemeteries as historic treasures.

### **A Celebration of Life** by Megan Spencer and Kay Boyd

On Saturday June 25<sup>th</sup>, approximately 150 people came to the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) to remember and celebrate the life and accomplishments of our dear friend, Danny Camacho. It truly was a day of celebration with Danny's family, his many friends, fourteen SAC members, members of the Austin History Center and the Austin History Center Association, city staff, elected officials, and a writer of the local newspaper all meeting one another and sharing stories.



The entry way of the MACC was decorated beautifully, and delicious food and beverages were served. Dale Flatt made sure that there was a popcorn stand and encouraged everyone to enjoy one of Danny's favorite snacks. A huge bulletin board was a remembrance wall where people took time to write down a favorite memory.

Judge Bob Perkins emceed the event with a big smile and a warm welcome. Others joined him to share their thoughts and remembrances, including former City Councilman Gus Garcia, Representative Lloyd Doggett, Gloria Espitia, Marketing/Outreach Representative - MACC, and Danny's sister Dolly Camacho-Watson, who wore Danny's purple top hat and his glasses and entertained us with some great stories told from Danny's unique perspective! As Michael Barnes from the Austin American Statesman wrote, "His sister, Dolly Camacho-Watson, turned in a bravura performance that told Danny's life story."

The Austin of his childhood has come and gone, but all along the way, Danny stayed close to his family and he was adored in his neighborhood and beyond. He gifted us with his passion for history, his never-ending research, and his loving heart. We are richer for having known him.

Save Austin's Cemeteries has created a memorial fund for those who wish to make a donation in Danny's memory. These monies will be used to continue his work in preserving and presenting the history of minorities in Austin. Friends may send a check to SAC, PO Box 16411, Austin 78761 with "Danny" on the memo line.

### **SAC Grant Program: An Update** by Sally Victor

In 2015, the new SAC grants program was promised. It is now available! We have a modest amount of funding available for cemetery nuts-and-bolts projects.

SAC grants are for cemetery preservation, legal survey documentation, fencing, signage, repairs, construction, or other projects associated with cemetery public service projects within Travis County. Grants are for capital improvements only, not for general cleaning or maintenance. Appropriateness of projects will be assessed at the discretion of the SAC Grant Committee.

Funding amounts range from \$100 to \$1,000 with a maximum of \$1,000 per organization per twelve-month period. A budget must be supplied with the grant application. Grant projects are reimbursed at the completion of the project. Receipts and volunteer logs must be provided in order to receive reimbursements.

- Do you know of a family cemetery in Travis County that needs fencing? We can help.
- Do you know of a cemetery that needs to be officially surveyed? We can help.
- Has your cemetery never been surveyed, locating each known burial with birth and death dates? We can help.

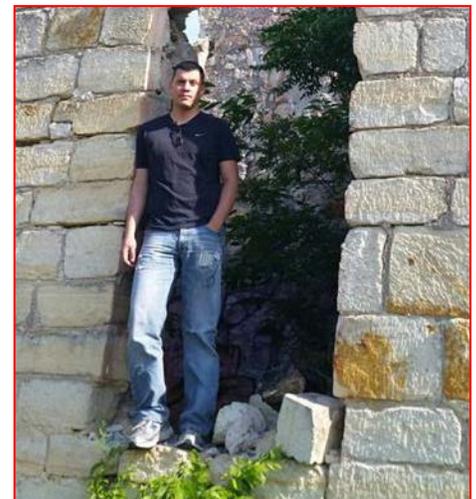
Also included in this newsletter are the grant application and sample application budget. Please use these forms and forward to our website: SAC website at [www.sachome.org](http://www.sachome.org).

Thanks for keeping cemeteries in Travis County recorded and maintained!

### **New SAC Board Member Bobby Cervantes** by Kay Boyd

Save Austin's Cemeteries is pleased to announce that Bobby Cervantes has joined the board of directors. He is a first grade teacher in the Eanes Independent School District, graduate student, and preservationist. He is a member of the Travis County Historical Commission.

Bobby's passion for several years has been the preservation of the Sneed Mansion built in 1850 by Judge Sebron G. Sneed. Bobby's Facebook page "Save The Sneeds" records his efforts to work with the city, the land owners, and the family. He grew up in south Austin, and as a kid, he played at the Sneed Mansion when the home was still standing. He was our guest speaker in January and told us about his work. Bobby's interest in Austin, history, and cemeteries made him an ideal choice as a member of the board of directors of SAC.



**Interment Rights: Keeping Your Records Up to Date** by Dale Flatt

Ownership of burial property is usually by purchase or inheritance. This is outlined in Texas Health and Safety Code § 711.039. *Rights of Interment in Plot*. Simply being related to someone does not establish ownership or a burial right. The City of Austin's Rules and Regulations clearly state that it is the owner's responsibility to insure that the ownership records are up to date at the cemetery office.

The cemetery management staff is reviewing existing forms and policies with the city legal department to insure that families can get their paperwork together in advance and have it on file, so at the time of need, this step of the burial process is seamless. However, until this process is finalized, here is what we suggest.

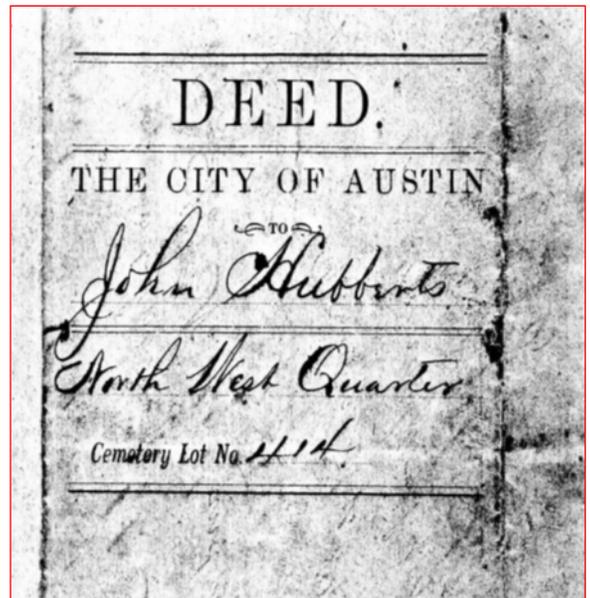
It is important that you file with the City of Austin's cemetery office any documentation you have that demonstrates that you are the legal owner of a burial space or a family plot at one of the city's cemeteries. While some families have a copy of a deed, many do not. Due to the age of many of the city's cemeteries, in some cases you may be six or seven generations removed from the original person who purchased the space. More recently, families have chosen to file an "Affidavit of Heirship" with the cemetery office to update the ownership records. A similar form can be found: <http://comptroller.texas.gov/taxinfo/taxforms/53-111-a.pdf>

Keep in mind that it is not the responsibility of the city to determine legal matters. When someone files an affidavit, they sign it in front of a notary and the document is notarized. By doing so, you are attesting that the facts presented in the document are true; the notary is merely confirming the identity of the person signing the document. Once the document is filed with Travis County and the cemetery office, then the city has a document on record.

Some families are large and extended; sometimes, distant relatives do not know each other. If, by chance, another individual were to go through the same process, thinking they may own the space and also file an affidavit with the cemetery office, then the city would have conflicting affidavits and most likely would inform both parties to resolve the issue within the court, and then the city could use the direction of the court to proceed.

It is in your best interest to research the facts and place them in a document. Have your affidavit recorded at the county records office; take a copy of the recorded document to the cemetery office and place that document on file. It can be used to guide your family and the cemetery staff, so that arraignments can be made in a timely manner.

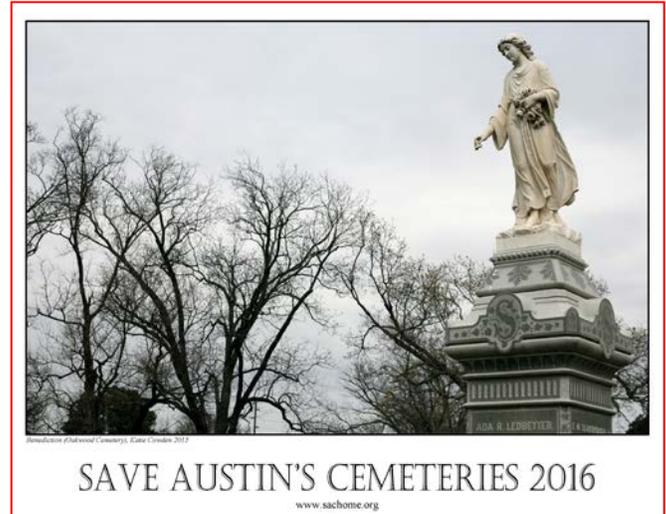
It is a great practice to have an "important documents" folder at your house and keep originals in a safe deposit box. Let your loved ones know where to find these documents. You can get a pre-need package from a local funeral home or you can do it yourself using online resources. This documentation is the best gift you can give to those you leave behind.



## 7<sup>th</sup> Annual SAC Photo Contest Underway by Leslie Wolfenden

Get your cameras clicking! The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Cemetery Photo Contest is underway. Send in your favorite photos of statues, flora and fauna, headstones, and scenic shots from Austin's five city cemetery (taken at any time, not just in the last year). Austin's five city cemeteries include Austin Memorial Park, Evergreen, Oakwood, Oakwood Annex, and Plummers. Entries will be accepted through August 31 at midnight.

Shortly after that, the photo entries will be uploaded to the internet where you will then have a chance to vote for your top 12 favorites. The 12 photos with the most votes by the end of September will earn places in the 2017 SAC calendar. The winning photographers will win a one-year membership to SAC. The first place photo earns the calendar cover! This Fall, we will have the 2017 SAC calendar available for sale.



## Austin Museum Day: Sunday, September 18<sup>th</sup>

The Austin Museum Partnership (AMP) will celebrate its 19<sup>th</sup> annual Austin Museum Day on Sunday, September 18<sup>th</sup>. AMP promotes the day as a free, community-wide rediscovery of Austin museums. For the sixth year in a row, Save Austin's Cemeteries will join the day of fun and welcome curious visitors to Oakwood Cemetery, an historic outdoor museum. SAC will offer guided tours and answer questions.

## 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Murder, Mayhem and Misadventure Tour – Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup>

Yes, indeed, this year we will be offering our **10<sup>th</sup>** Annual Murder, Mystery and Misadventure Tour! It will take place on Saturday, October 29 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. If you would like to be one of our presenters or storytellers, please let us know. We will divide the day into sessions from 10-1 and 1-4, so we will need about 16 people to fill both time slots.

SAC will provide the information for the people and the presenters can write their own script to make it personal. We will include a few old favorite stops with a new twist and we will add a few new and never-heard-before tales.

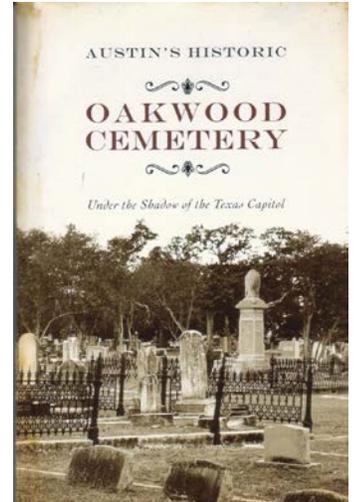
Among the stories to be included are:

- A man who committed suicide
- A father and son who were shot down the same day
- A man who drowned in the same location as his brother.
- A Mexican painter who took his own life
- A man run over by a train



## Oakwood Cemetery Book for Sale

Our book, *Austin's Historic Oakwood Cemetery: Under the Shadow of the Texas Capitol*, is still available and will make a great addition to your or a friend's library. It tells the history of Austin by connecting Austin's past to the present with stories from the quiet shade of Oakwood Cemetery. This little book is a treasure chest of stories of early life in Austin – of the pioneers, immigrants, businessmen, and extraordinary women who helped make Austin the exciting city it is today.



### Book pricing:

Pick up: \$16.25 (includes sales tax),

Shipped to you: \$22.20 (includes sales tax and shipping).

Contact us at [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org) to place your order.

On Sunday September 18, Austin Museum Day, and October 29, MMM Tour Day, our books will be sold as tax-free items, so you can save a little and enjoy the many stories.

## Website Assistance Needed: Can You Help Us?

Save Austin's Cemeteries is searching for someone who can redesign our website. If you or anyone you know would like to talk with us about it, please contact us at [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org). We'd love to talk to you.

## 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).

## SAC Board Meetings

SAC Board Meetings are the second Saturday of each month, typically at Oakwood Cemetery at 10:00 a.m. If you are interested the city's cemeteries, please join us. Contact [info@sachome.org](mailto:info@sachome.org) to confirm the time and place.

## Calendar

Please join us for these upcoming events!

Aug 1	Photo Contest for 2017 SAC Calendar opens
Aug 31	Photo Contest submissions due by midnight
Sept 10	Yarbrough Library 10:30am Update on Chapel Rehabilitation Project
Sept 18	Austin Museum Day 9:00-11:00am at Oakwood Cemetery
Sept 30	Voting ends for 2017 Photo Calendar contest
Oct 1	Photo documentation session starts again at Oakwood Cemetery, 9:00 a.m.
Oct 15	Oakwood Cemetery 10:00 a.m. Tour with the Thankful Hubbard Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution
Oct 29	10 <sup>th</sup> Annual MMM Tours at Oakwood Cemetery 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Annual MMM Tours

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).