

FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERY

A newsletter sponsored by the
Athens Cemetery Association

Vol. 6

October 2007

NEW SOUTH SIDE FENCE COMPLETED



Thanks to the Friends of the Cemetery, the new, decorative wrought iron fence shown above has been completed along the entire southern boundary of the cemetery. It replaces the old chain-link fence that had stood for many years and was showing its age. The cost of the latest section, completed earlier this year, was over \$15,000 and was paid for by donations from the Friends of the Cemetery and matching funds from three generous benefactors of the cemetery. Our thanks also go to cemetery association director Bob McDonald, who directed and supervised the construction of this beautiful new fence.

It is through your continuing generosity that the cemetery association can plan and realize additional beautification projects in the future. If you have not yet joined the Friends, please consider doing so now. And to those of you who have already become a Friend of the Cemetery, thank you for your continuing support which makes these beautification projects possible. Be assured that your cemetery association will always strive to maintain our beloved cemetery as a beautiful and serene site for reflection and remembrance of our loved ones.

Eight Black Gum Trees Dedicated

Funded by donations from the Friends of the Cemetery, eight black gum trees were planted at the main entrance to the cemetery this past spring, as memorials to loved ones resting in the cemetery. Each tree has a native stone at its base that bears an inscription memorializing these loved ones.

These trees were planted as replacements for the Athens landmark black gum tree that is in serious decline and in all probability cannot be kept alive many more years. This old, magnificent tree has been admired by generations of Athenians each fall as its leaves turned to red. But despite the best efforts of tree experts from across Texas and the continuing efforts of the cemetery association, disease, old age and several lightning strikes have taken their toll. In time these new trees will form a beautiful black gum replacement "court" for this historic tree.

A BIT OF HISTORY

(From the 26 January 1928 issue of the *Athens Weekly Review*)

"The following bit of history is given today, the data being furnished the Review by J. H. (Babe) Richardson of Poynor, who was a young man and who lived in Athens at the time written of in this article.

According to Mr. Richardson, the first person to be buried in the Athens Cemetery was John Brantley, father of Mrs. Anna Williamson and Mrs. Georgie Richardson, and first husband of the late Mrs. J. M. Pickens.

Mr. Brantley was a large planter and prominent citizen of the county and was the first officer to fill the position occupied now by the County Superintendent of schools. His duties covered several counties known as a district, the district being formed following the establishment of the State Free school system.

Mr. Brantley's death brought forcibly to the minds of Athens citizens the lack of a suitable burying ground.

The Masonic Lodge of which Mr. Brantley was a member, purchased one acre of ground at the site of the present cemetery and set it aside as a last resting place for members of their order, Mr. Brantley's body being the first to be interred there.

The next burial to occur was that of the daughter of a Mr. Word, who lived some distance southwest of Athens. The father came to Athens and arranged with S. M. Richardson, father of J. H. (Babe) Richardson, to prepare a grave. On seeking permission for a burial permit Mr. Richardson was told by individual members of the Masonic Lodge, that no single member could give permission for the interment of the young lady's body in the Masonic burial plot; such sanction would have to be given by the members in regular or called session.

As the time was too short to permit of assembling the lodge members, Mr. Richardson purchased an acre adjoining the Masonic burial plot, had the grave dug as he

had promised, and in it the body of the young girl was placed. Later another acre adjoining the first two burial plots was purchased by N. P. Coleman and was added to the nucleus of the city cemetery.

An unpleasant circumstance occurred in connection with the early history of the cemetery and was recalled by Mr. Richardson during his talk with the writer.

A man whose name Mr. Richardson thinks was Helliman, came to Athens and established a newspaper which he called the "Athens Courier". The paper was published only a short time, its cessation occurring in the following manner.

"Grandma" Deen and her daughter, Mrs. Bradshaw, decided that the bluejack thicket covering the new cemetery should be cleaned off and securing help proceeded to have the work done. Mrs. Deen had the timber cut from the ground, hauled to her home (the old Deen Hotel) to use for firewood. For some mysterious reason the Courier editor saw in this, something reprehensible and his next issue contained a scathing editorial arraignment of the ladies, whose only thought had been to render a needed public service. They were pictured as "robbers of the dead" and "desecrators of graves" for their "unwarranted removal of shade trees from the burying ground." The article wound up with the asserted intention of the editor to bring the "guilty parties to justice". He actually brought the matter before the authorities and seemed to be making headway in making good his threat.

Mr. Richardson, who had purchased the acre, ended the trouble by having the deed to the burial plot made to Mr. and Mrs. Deen.

So much ill feeling toward the editor of the Courier was engendered by his fiery, unfounded and senseless attack, that he was forced to suspend publication of his sheet and for his personal safety, go back to Galveston from whence he came.

Thus ended the short life of the "Courier", one of Athens' early newspapers."

CEMETERY INCOME/EXPENSES

The annual expense of maintaining our cemetery is approximately \$73,000. Much of this is the cost of mowing and trimming the grounds for about ten months of the year. But other expenses involve such things as repairing and maintaining the roads and sprinkler system, fertilizing the grounds, fire ant control, tree trimming and removal, trash pickup, insurance and legal fees, and, as funds permit, cleaning and leveling headstones.

Since the cemetery association is a non-profit organization and is not supported by the budget of the City of Athens, income to cover these expenses comes from lot sales and donations. The cemetery depends upon lot sales to provide the majority of the needed income.

LOT AVAILABILITY

There are over 1,000 lots available in the old, more historic section of the cemetery, and another 1,200 lots available in the newer Celtic Cross section. In addition, the northwest part of the cemetery is available for expansion as the need arises, and is currently available for large, multi-lot family sections, several of which have already been purchased and platted there.

Lot prices:

Older, historic section- \$900

Celtic Cross section- \$1,200

Multi-lot family section- on a per-square foot basis.

Interment fee- \$200 on non-holiday

Interment fee- \$250 on recognized holiday.

To make the purchase of lots as convenient as possible, an Easy Payment Plan is available so that a purchase may be paid for in equal installments over a twelve-month period without interest. (The Easy Payment Plan is available for "pre-need" purchases only.)

For more information about lot sales, contact:

Kathy Killingsworth

Office: 903-675-9203

Cell: 903-288-1449

Editor's Final Note:

Cemeteries, I learned as I grew older and hopefully wiser, are not primarily for the dead, but for the living. My initial forays into cemeteries many years ago were clouded by a sense of guilt at disturbing the dead. I felt like an intruder and trespasser in an afterworld where I did not belong, and I hastily snatched the desired surnames and dates of my ancestors before fleeing back to the domain of the living. Only gradually did I come to regard the cemetery as a proper place for live people. Cemeteries, after all, reflect the customs, beliefs and social structure of the survivors.

The living come to cemeteries to commune with the dead, to contemplate lives well lived, to manicure and beautify graves, to record biographical data concerning their ancestors, and sometimes to make rubbings of fine old tombstones.

Too, I found that rural and small town folk do not distinguish so sharply between life and death as do those from the cities. Death is, for us, intertwined so tightly with life as to be inseparable. Life, death, and the afterlife merge in the culture of the burial ground. The living have every right to be there.

For all who visit our cemetery, may it remind them of all those who have gone before and of the nobility of life well lived. Remember that nothing is ended until it is forgotten. Whoever is kept in memory still endures.

Art Hall

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