



Established in 1858

FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERY

A newsletter sponsored by the
Athens Cemetery Association

Vol. 7

October 2008

ATHENS CEMETERY NEWS



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The Athens Cemetery Association in 2008 has continued to maintain and improve the historic Athens cemetery. The approximately 17.5 acres which comprises this historic site are maintained by the Athens Cemetery Association and no public funding is involved. Reworking of the sprinkler systems, gate repairs and ant and weed control are all items which the Athens Cemetery Association routinely maintains. The Athens Cemetery Association salutes board member, Bob McDonald, for his untiring service to the maintenance and improvement of the cemetery. The Athens Cemetery Association also wishes to thank the Friends of the Cemetery which have helped fund many beautification projects over the last five years including the entry gate, wrought iron fencing on the east and south sides and the Celtic Cross and flower garden. In 2007, eight black gum trees were donated by individuals and planted to add beauty and to stand with the mature black gum tree that has been a majestic sentry to the cemetery for the last 75 years.

Future Friends' Projects

The Board of the Athens Cemetery Association has approved the construction of an information building to be located inside the main entry. This covered building will have a map, preserved under plastic of the entire cemetery along with a permanent record book of burial locations. This information center will aid family, loved ones and historians to find individuals located in the cemetery. Funding for the project will be from donations from the Friends of the Cemetery.



Cemetery Receives Challenge Grant - The Athens Cemetery Association has received a Challenge Grant to benefit the cemetery from the Athens Historical Preservation, Inc. The Athens Historical Preservation, Inc. is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation whose purpose is to maintain and care for designated historical sites located in Athens, Texas. In the event the Athens Cemetery Association can raise \$12,500 from donations, the Athens Historic Preservation, Inc. will provide a grant of \$37,500 to the Athens Cemetery Association. In addition to the grant of \$37,500, for every dollar raised by the Athens Cemetery Association, the Athens Historical Preservation, Inc. will match \$2 to every \$1 up to \$25,000. This means if \$12,500 is raised, a total of \$75,000 is available to the cemetery. These funds will be earmarked for restoring the roadway through the cemetery (estimated cost \$50,000) and be allocated to create beautification projects such as the information center (estimated cost - \$15,000) and other items. To date, there has been \$5,000 pledged to the goal of \$12,500, so \$7,500 is needed. In other words, if the Friends can raise \$7,500 more this year, the cemetery will get an additional \$62,500! So, please make your contribution to this great opportunity to improve and maintain our beautiful cemetery.

Historical Facts

Did you know there are five (5) state historical markers in tn the Athens Cemetery?

There are: Mrs. Dull Averiette (Accredited for naming Athens)
 R. T. Craig
 John Matthews McDonald
 J. T. LaRue
 State Historic Designation for Cemetery

A Bit of History

Albert Bacon Watkins - As a designated Texas Historical Cemetery, there are many former Athens citizens and leaders of our community buried within its boundaries. The Athens Cemetery had its start when one acre of land was donated by Pleasant Tannehill as a burial spot for members of the Masonic Lodge. Athens Lodge No. 165 was chartered by the Grand Lodge of Texas on January 24, 1856 and has been in continuous operation since that time. It is the oldest fraternal organization in Athens today.

There are many prominent Mason's buried within the Cemetery. One of them, Albert Bacon Watkins, was a member of Athens Lodge No. 165 and ultimately elected as Grand Master of Masons in Texas.

Watkins was born at Kemp, Kaufman County, Texas on August 4, 1857. His father was R. O. Watkins and his mother was Amanada (nee Polk) Watkins, who was a lineal descendent of President James K. Polk. R. O. Watkins was the first Presbyterian Minister ordained in the Republic of Texas. Albert B. Watkins was educated in the schools of his native County and at Trinity University where he received his A. B. degree in 1877. He was admitted to the State Bar of Texas at Kaufman in 1879. He moved to Athens in 1881. He was a member of the well-known law firm of Richardson & Watkins. He joined Athens Lodge No. 165 in 1882. In 1884, he was married to Miss Laura Murchison, a member of the prominent Murchison family in Athens.

He served this Judicial District as Judge from 1892 to 1894. "Judge Watkins was a member of the Presbyterian Church and a faithful, efficient teacher in the Sunday School. His manner was courteous, and gracious to all who approached him. In his private life, he was of exemplary habits, free from the little blemished that stain the characters of many otherwise worthy men." This description is taken from a Resolution of Respect authored by his Fraternity brothers who knew him best and appears in the Minutes of Athens Lodge No. 165.

Albert Bacon Watkins is the only member of Athens Lodge No. 165 to ever have been elected Grand Master of Mason in Texas. He assumed that post in December of

marked Past Grand Master Watkins' grave with a marker showing that he served the Grand Lodge of Texas as Grand Master. Not far from Bro. Watkins' grave lies Dr. Thomas Matthews, who was also an elected Grand Master of Masons in Texas. He served in 1882. He was a member of Athens Lodge No. 165 at the time of his death, but was a member of Pine Lodge No. 203 in Ben Wheeler, Texas when he served as Grand Master.

Albert Bacon Watkins died at home on Wednesday, February 21, 1923 and was laid to rest in Athens Cemetery on Thursday, February 22, 1923. Judge Watkins had suffered a paralytic stroke at the age of 65.

In an extraordinary session, the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A. M. was convened in Athens by then Grand Master of Masons in Texas the Hon. Mike H. Thomas for the purpose of performing the burial rites at the graveside of Past Grand Master Watkins, Rev. A. J. Crawford and Rev. R. W. Bengel conducted the memorial service for Judge Watkins.

Grand Master of Masons, Albert Bacon Watkins, remained an active member of the Lodge up until the time of his death, serving on many important Grand Lodge committees. In 1913, Judge Watkins conducted the cornerstone laying ceremony for the new Courthouse in downtown Athens. Judge Watkins is buried in the Pioneer section of the historical Athens Cemetery.

Not many cemeteries in Texas have two Grand Masters of Texas Masons buried within their borders. This is just of the many reasons we have to be proud of our cemetery.

4,000 lots are available including cremation lots. Call Bob McDonald at (903)681-1721 for further information.

Lot Prices:

Older, Historic Section - \$900.00

Celtic Cross Section - \$1,200.00

Multi-Lot Family Section - On a per square foot basis

Internment Fee - \$200.00 on non-holiday or \$250.00 on recognized holiday

"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."

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