

Mary Anne Pickens and Willa Jepson gave a program on the Osage Community Cemetery to the Weimar Ladies Encore Lions Club on March 26, 2014. Mary Anne gave a short history of the cemetery and Willa told about early caretakers of the cemetery and the organization of the Osage Community Cemetery Corporation.

History of the Osage Community Cemetery

by Mary Anne Pickens

“Graveyards, I learned, are not primarily for the dead, but for the living,” wrote Terry Jordan in his book *Texas Graveyards, A Cultural Legacy*.

I have found this to be true, as I have gotten more and more involved in cemeteries. The residents of those cemeteries just rest in peace, and we, the living, are worried about not only the maintenance of the cemetery but about unraveling a bit of history and preserving the memory of those residents.

Let me tell you a little about the history of the Osage Community Cemetery. We could say the the cemetery’s roots go back to 1831 when Henry Austin received a Mexican Hacienda land grant of five leagues of land from his cousin Impresario Stephen F. Austin. The cemetery lies within that Hacienda. We can jump from there past the Texas Revolution, the Republic of Texas and the annexation to the United States, to 1852, the year that Henry Austin died.

In 1856, the administrator of his estate, Edward T. Austin of Galveston, subdivided the property and deeded ten acres to the trustees of Harvey Creek School for a school and a church for all denominations. Those trustees were: Michael Nave, C. C. Jones, F. M. Burford, William Goode, S. D. McCleary and Samuel B. DeHart.

Leap now to 1860 when one W. L. Adkins purchased tract 34 of the Austin subdivision. This tract happened to include the ten aforementioned acres, most of which is now in the county park across from the Osage Community Cemetery.

1860 happens to also be the earliest dated tombstone in our cemetery. Gideon McLeary, a young son of James Allen McLeary, also buried in the cemetery, is interred in a false crypt, similar to the crypts of his ancestors in Tennessee. There could have been burials prior to this because in those days, if there was a church, the surrounding grounds were often used as burial sites.

Some of you may know that there are two cemeteries in Osage. Ours, called the Osage Community Cemetery and the other one about a mile to the north, known as the Old Osage Cemetery. According to the Nesbitt Memorial Library website, in 1868, W. L. Adkins deeded four acres to the Missionary Baptist Church, two acres of which were for a grave yard. The earliest date on a marker in that cemetery, the Old Osage Cemetery, is 1866, which begs the question about the age of the two cemeteries.

In 1869, W. L. Adkins laid out a plat for the town of Osage. There were many settlers prior to this date, but they were scattered and Adkins apparently hoped his town of Osage would bring people together into one location.

In 1875, Rowan and Lenora Adkins Green, the daughter of W. L. Adkins, deeded an acre to the Osage Community Cemetery on the north east corner of the original 10 acre school and church tract. Thus the present cemetery boundaries more or less came into existence. I say more or less because the county roads eventually came to be, and we know that there are graves that are on the right of way of these adjacent roads.

The cemetery is fairly typical of a Southern cemetery as described by Terry Jordan in his book *Texas Graveyards, A Cultural Legacy*. Since many of the settlers of Osage came from the deep South, they brought their burial customs with them, along with their slaves, and their Southern cooking. Our families, the Burfords and the Shaws came from Tennessee, as did the McLearys. The Goode family came from Mississippi.

Willa, my cousin and co-presenter today, had an interesting experience when a local Weimar lady referred to the Osage Cemetery as that "English Cemetery." She quickly explained her definition of English as being not German nor Czech. For us, however, we think of it as Southern American in origin.

In fact, the settlers were so Southern, the men of Osage eagerly joined the Confederacy and fought in the Civil War. Their graves are proudly marked with CSA. One Civil War Veteran, William Bennet Scates, was also a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence and a veteran of San Jacinto. He was buried in our cemetery, but unfortunately for us, his body and his wife's body were relocated to the State Cemetery in Austin when those in charge of preparation for the big Centennial Celebration of 1936 were gathering up heroes across the state.

There are 12 Masonic emblems found on monuments in the cemetery. Again, fraternal organizations were a Southern tradition.

Among the oldest tombstones in the cemetery are several sandstone false crypts like that of Gideon McLeary which I have already mentioned. In these, the bodies are actually buried in the ground and the crypt set above it. Most of the crypts have weathered badly and only the two McLeary graves, Gideon's and his father James Allen's, still have inscriptions. Sandstone was easily accessible from Harvey's Creek, and probably easily cut, but was also quick to weather. Incidentally, Samuel McLeary, a brother to Gideon, is credited with naming the town of Osage for all the Osage Orange trees that grew along Harvey's Creek.

Two Woodmen of the World monuments are of interest. I had no idea who Woodmen of the World were until I did a little research and learned it is actually a life insurance agency that was begun in 1890. The company donated monuments for their deceased

members up until 1920 when it became too expensive to continue. The usual tree stump such as one in our cemetery designates a "life cut short."

Dousing for graves is not recognized as completely scientific, but in the hands of an experienced douser, it can be amazingly accurate. We have been fortunate to have had Ursula Keierleber who I believe some of you know to help us locate unmarked graves. As she has located them, she has taught my husband Bob how to douse also. He has mapped all the marked graves in the cemetery and is now in the process of mapping the unmarked ones.

In 2001, Dorothy Albrecht and others put up a monument, a cenotaph, to memorialize some of the people known to be buried in Osage but whose graves are now unmarked.

I learned something about one of these names on the cenotaph just two days ago. I was told by Susan Rogers in the County Judge's office that a young man was buried in Osage under the cover of darkness because he had died of small pox. Well, yesterday I finally found the source of her comment in the first two issues of the Weimar Mercury on January 3 and January 10, 1891. I learned that Mat York had died of small pox in January 1891, after being ill for about a week. His brother Hatch York, a constable in Weimar, the attending physician, Dr. W. T. McLeary, and a black man who had already had small pox buried poor Mat in a grave that had earlier been dug by friends of the family. These friends, of course, had left the premises because of the fear of the disease. Under these circumstances, it is doubtful that his grave was ever marked, but his name now appears on the cenotaph.

Hatch York subsequently contracted small pox. He had been a witness to the Stafford shooting in Columbus and one of the trials regarding that shooting was delayed because Hatch could not appear due to having small pox. He survived and died in the line of duty in 1896. He is buried in the cemetery with a tombstone.

Dr. W. T. McLeary, the attending physician was a brother to Gideon McLeary buried in our cemetery and to Samuel who named Osage. Sally Weeks, a member of our board of directors, is a descendant of W. T. and owns property just across from the cemetery. Her daughter, Carol Weeks, has done our website for us.

Willa and I had a great uncle, Arthur Burford, who is buried in the cemetery and also died as a young man in 1900. He had just graduated from the University of Texas law school and established a practice in Columbus. His father, W. T. Burford, was sheriff of Colorado County. The Stafford shooting and subsequent trial figures into our story also. The trial had been moved to Bastrop and young Arthur rode the train to Bastrop along with his father. Upon arrival, he wrote a sweet note to his mother saying they had arrived safely, that the Rangers were there, and no one anticipated any trouble. The next morning, before the letter reached his mother in Columbus, young Arthur had been shot and killed. She received word of his death by telegraph before she received his letter. The judge had postponed the trial and as everyone left the court house and walked

down the street, Arthur was murdered. He is buried near his grandparents, Francis Marion and Cordelia Ann Shaw Burford. Two infant siblings are buried near him.

Since I am talking about Burfords, let me tell of Arthur's brother, Ned, who happened to be on the giving end of a gun rather than the receiving end. Do you remember I told you about the Woodmen of the World monuments? Well, W. A. Tolleson whose grave is beautifully marked by one of their tree monuments was shot by Uncle Ned. It seems there was a confrontation at the Towell and Shaw gin in Columbus and Mr. Tolleson cut the throat of E. C. Pinchback, one of our cousins. Ned Burford then turned around and shot Mr. Tolleson. Two senseless deaths in a matter of moments. These people lived in violent times and obviously there were many violent people. Ned Burford was never sent to prison and he died of cancer in 1946.

One more story--about one of the few non-southern people in our cemetery. John Heinsohn, a German, moved to the Osage Community in 1888 with his wife Maria Louisa Brune and their two small children. When he was 39 years old, he was caught in a rainstorm, contracted pneumonia and died in 1894. Again, his death illustrates the many hardships these early Osage folks endured on a regular basis.

While this is a new project for me to try to unravel some of the mysteries of the cemetery, I think it is important. I have applied for a historical Texas cemetery designation and hope that in time we will have a historical marker at the Osage Community Cemetery. Any information that any of you can shed on residents of the cemetery would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you so much.