

MAGNOLIA MESSENGER



The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery

"Remove not the ancient Landmark"

Fall 2009

Mobile's Florence Nightingale

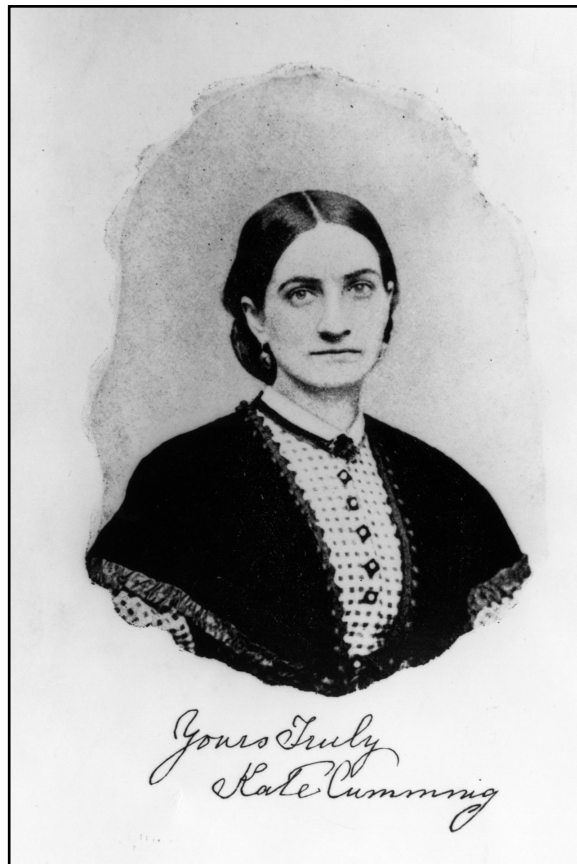
Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was born to a wealthy British family which vehemently opposed her decision to enter the field of nursing. She went on to become the most famous Victorian woman beside Queen Victoria herself.

In 1854 Nightingale went to Istanbul in the midst of the Crimean War. She arrived to find subhuman conditions for the injured British soldiers and with 38 volunteers worked to establish a sanitary barrack hospital. The mounting deaths from typhus, cholera and dysentery began to decline.

Her heroism and resolve was admired on both sides of the Atlantic. Within a decade Mobile could claim its own Florence Nightingale: Kate Cumming.

The Cummings

Kate Cumming was a Scot by birth, having been born in Edinburgh. (The exact date seems lost and ranges from 1828 to the date of 1836 which is on her marker at Magnolia Cemetery) Her family immigrated first to Canada, then New York and finally to Mobile in the 1840's. Her father, David Cumming, appears in the 1844 city directory with his employment listed as "Sexton, Christ Church."



Kate Cumming

Mobile's Kate Cumming overcame her family's objections to become the most famous nurse of the Confederacy. Her published journals give insight into ante-bellum Mobile as well as the horrors of war.

Courtesy: USA Archives

City directories later indicate that the Cumming family resided on Dearborn Street between Conti and Government streets. Her father, David, was then employed by the City Insurance Company while her brother, David, Jr. was listed as an architect with an office on Dauphin Street.

Ante Bellum Mobile

In her later years, Miss Cumming wrote *Gleanings from the Southland* in which she described the Mobile of her youth. Many of her descriptions still ring true while other sites are long gone.

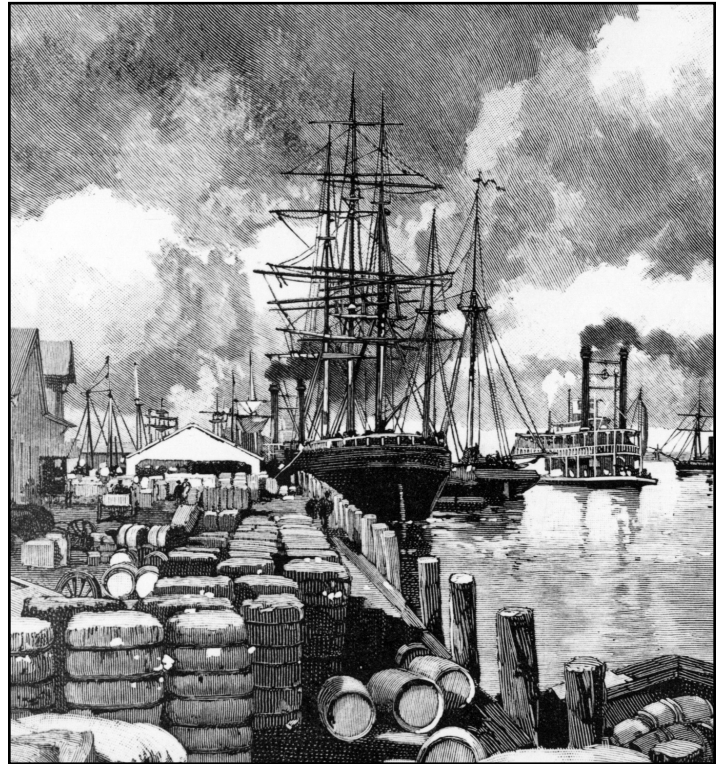
"Government Street, called the 'Prince's Walk of America' is a charming promenade and well deserves its name," she wrote. Until the conquest of the automobile in the 20th century this was certainly true.

She also noted that "No finer drive may be found than the one on the Shell Road down the bay where to the right are to be seen charming villas nestled among magnolia and orange groves, to the left, the broad expanse of the bay." That spectacular drive would be damaged by hurricanes and vanish under the development of Brookley Field in the 1940's.

She turned her attention downtown, admiring the waterfront view. "The white sails of ships of all nationalities ride upon the bay having brought merchandise and taking away 'King Cotton,' and steamers ply between the city and the different watering places on the eastern shore of the bay."

Mobile's port is still a busy one, but the white sails and bay steamers are long gone.

And decades before the establishment of Mobile's Azalea Trail, Miss Cumming gushed "In the Spring the city is one flower garden, for no where in the South do flowers grow more luxuriantly." She described a trip out to Spring Hill, "one of the healthiest spots in the states, the road being lined with elegant residences and embedded in shrubbery and exquisite flowers of every description."



Miss Cumming recalled Mobile's bustling pre-war waterfront with "the white sails of ships of all nationalities." Returning by steamer in 1865 she found the docks filled with "blue coats, cannon and ammunition of all kind," while the conquered city "had the quietness of the grave."

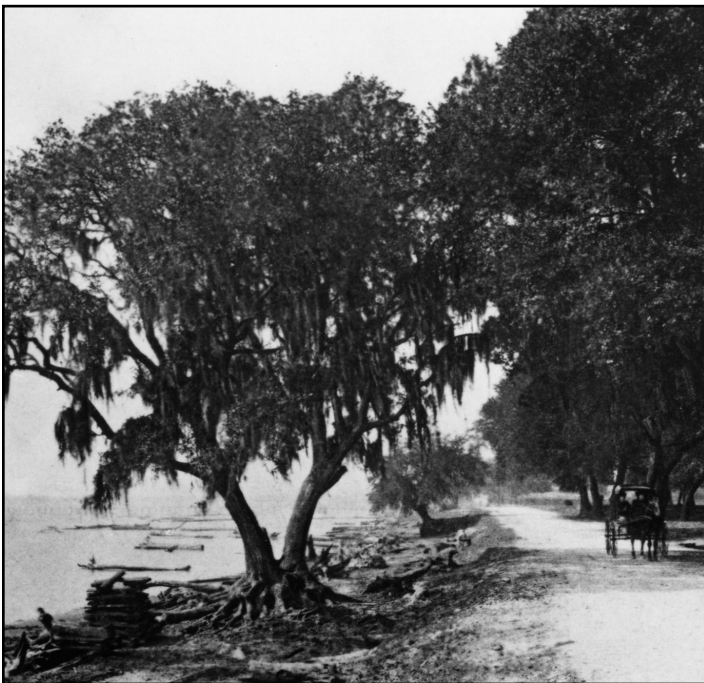
Courtesy: USA Archives

recalled that the attention of Mobile's ladies in 1860 was on politics. She wrote, "In the parlor, on the promenade, at balls and parties, and indeed everywhere, the subject of conversation was politics. We read the political speeches made North and South, and commented unsparingly upon their merits. We would leave our most important work to attend a speech or procession."

Lincoln's election was soon met with South Carolina's secession. In Mobile, Miss Cumming recalled that December day. "We heard the booming of cannon announcing that South Carolina had severed her ties with the Federal government. Boom after boom filled the air sounding like the knell of some terrible calamity about to befall us. That night the city was one blaze of light and scarcely a window in the whole city was not lit. The noise from the fire works and fire arms was deafening."

She noted that at first things seemed to go on as usual. "Several Northern ships left carrying the stars and stripes, and not the least notice was taken of them."

In January, Mississippi followed South Carolina's lead. Florida left the Union the next day. Mobilians



In her book, "Gleanings from the Southland," Kate Cumming recalled "the Shell Road down the Bay where to the right are to be seen charming villas...to the left the broad expanse of the bay." Hurricanes and progress took this pleasure drive long ago.

Courtesy: USA Archives

Mobile's gardens and century old trees still receive our admiration and our visitors' praises today.

War Clouds

Although it would be another 60 years before women in America got the vote, Miss Cumming

awaited news from Montgomery and on the afternoon of January 11th the word came: Alabama had seceded. Once again Mobile erupted with bands, fireworks and marching military companies. Tar barrels lined Government Street, their contents set ablaze to light the night.

Miss Cumming went to the dock to see her mother, two sisters and a brother-in-law off for England in April. Upon their arrival there they were met with the news of Fort Sumter and the start of the American Civil War. They would not be able to return until the war's end.

War Time Mobile

Like most of the South, Mobile believed that the war would be brief. Kate Cumming was living with her father and brother as history proved otherwise.

At first the city went on as usual. "Concerts and theatricals for the benefit of the troops marked the first months of war. Troops were gaily feted as they left for the Virginian front."

The theatres were full, and Miss Cumming described one skit in which "the seceded states were represented by young ladies gaily attired while Maryland, Missouri and Kentucky were draped in mourning, weeping in despair at not being permitted to go with us."

As the battles mounted so did the death toll. Mobilians suddenly worried about a possible invasion and "everything was arranged for a sudden flight to the woods. No women or children would have been allowed to stay in the city in case of attack. The town bell was to be rung to alert us."

"We had a long, dreary, anxious summer. Some buried their valuables, others packed them in trunks, expecting to have to send them off if an attack commenced. We had trunks that were never unpacked the whole four years."

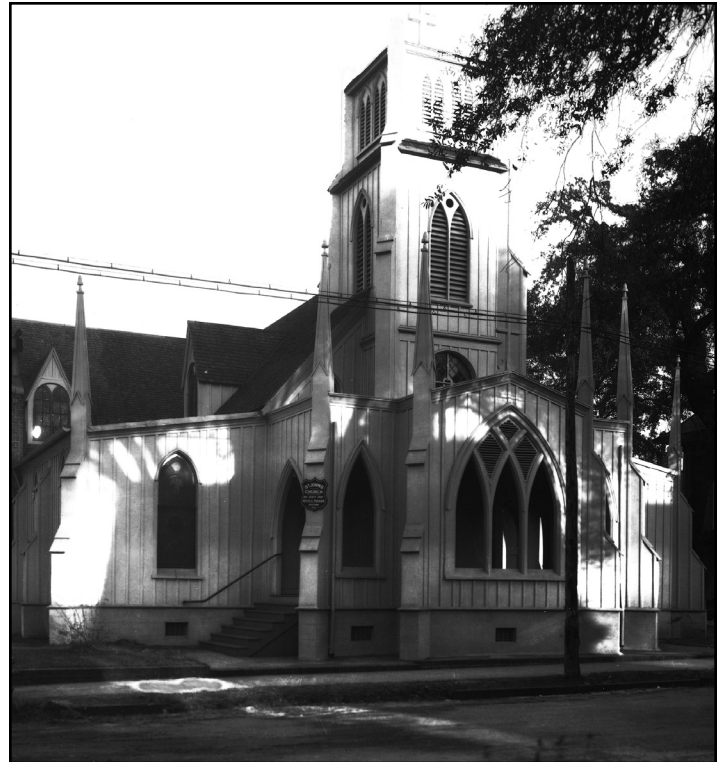
Following Her Minister

Miss Cumming and her family were Episcopalians, members of St. John's which occupied the corner of Monroe and Dearborn streets. She heard a sermon by her minister and family friend, Benjamin Miller, in which he urged Mobile's ladies to go to the front to nurse the wounded.

Kate Cumming decided to follow her pastor's advice. Some 40 women volunteered to go including author Augusta Evans. Miss Cumming's father was opposed but she won out. Although she admitted to having never set foot in a hospital she wrote a friend "I knew that what one woman (Florence Nightingale) had done, another could."

On April 6, 1862, Reverend Miller announced that a crisis was at hand and that his band of volunteers would leave the next morning. With the battle of Shiloh raging the women headed north through Mississippi. The majority of the women went home after only a few days. Like Miss Cumming, they had never been in a hospital, much less a makeshift one filled with bleeding soldiers. Miss Evans was among those who headed home.

Kate Cumming stuck it out. She worked first at Corinth where she recalled "nothing that I had ever heard or read had given me the faintest idea of the horrors witnessed here." Houses and hotels had been hurriedly converted to hospitals to care for injured soldiers.



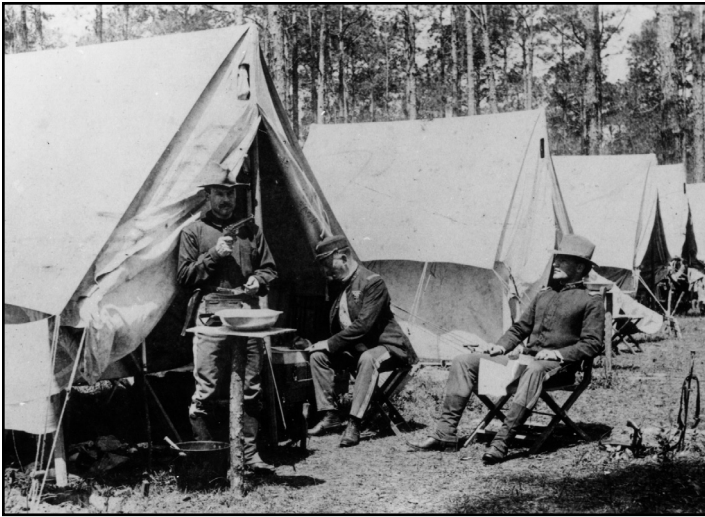
Mobile's third oldest Episcopal church was St. John's which occupied the south east corner of Dearborn and Monroe streets and dated to 1853. The rural Gothic structure was designed by Kate Cumming's brother David, a local architect, and their father served on its first vestry. It was here that a minister inspired Kate to become a nurse at the battle front. In 1953, just after celebrating its centennial the congregation moved west and wreckers destroyed this landmark structure.

Courtesy: USA Archives

These men were “mutilated in every imaginable way, lying on the floor on their blankets, just as they had been taken from the battlefield; so close together that it was almost impossible to walk without stepping on them.”

Having no training as a nurse, she did what she could, giving the injured water and writing letters for them. With time she learned other nursing skills.

She moved on to Chattanooga on August 30. It was not until the next month that Confederate laws would be changed to allow the employment of women in hospitals and Kate Cumming was officially enlisted in the Confederate Medical Department.



This view of a well ordered army camp gives no hint as to the gore which Kate Cumming encountered in the military hospitals of the day.

Courtesy: USA Archives

A Surprising Mobile

Miss Cumming spent the beginning of 1863 in Chattanooga, but by July had begun to work in a series of hospitals in Georgia. In January of the following year she was able to visit Mobile. After dealing with hundreds of injured soldiers and hearing first hand of the horrors of battle she was unprepared to find Mobile “gayer than ever.”

She observed parties where Mobilians were enjoying the luxury of “coffee mixed with rye whiskey, sugar and milk served with wheat bread and butter. Lights burned late as Mobile strove to forget the war.” In August the Union would focus on Mobile but in the meantime the parties continued.

In January of 1865 Miss Cumming returned to Mobile after serving in a series of Georgia military hospitals. Despite the Federal blockade, she observed that “Mobile was never as gay as it is at present; not a night passes but some large ball or party is given. Same old excuse; that they are for the soldiers; and indeed the soldiers seem to enjoy them.”

She noted that in Mobile the Alabama soldiers were well dressed and commented that “a large steamer, laden with clothes ran the blockade lately from Limerick, Ireland.” Despite the partying she also observed that local churches were open daily for prayer services “imploing the Most High to look down in pity on us, and free us from this fearful scourge.”

War’s End: Mobile in Blue

Miss Cumming returned to Georgia and was in Griffin when Richmond fell. On April 19 the enemy marched in and she observed “the burning of warehouses and the sad work of destruction.” She was able to make her way to Mobile by May 27 arriving in the port by steamboat.

“As we neared Mobile my heart sank at the desolate appearance of everything. Instead of carriages and crowds of familiar faces that used to grace the landing on the approach of a steamer, nothing was to be seen but ‘blue coats’, cannon and ammunition of all kinds.”

Her arrival was just 24 hours after Mobile’s Federal Magazine had exploded, killing and injuring hundreds and causing an estimated loss of over \$725,000. She noted that “whole squares are in ruins” and that the blast had “destoyed a number of steamboats.”

She observed that the ladies of Mobile “make no more notice of the Federal officers than if they were invisible. A friend told me they would prefer the ladies give them impertinence than treat them as they do.”

Miss Cumming commented that she found a defeated Mobile to have “the quietness of the grave. Scarcely a soul was to be seen in the streets. Every blind was closed and the whole place looked more as if the plague had entered it instead of our ‘deliverers.’”

Kate Cumming’s detailed journal of her life as a military nurse was one of the first such accounts to be published. It was turned over to a publisher in the fall of 1865. Nearly 30 years later she wrote a second book, *Gleanings from the Southland*, about more of her



At war's end, Kate Cumming was finally able to make it home by steamship, arriving just a day after the city had been rocked by a blast from 200 tons of explosives, destroying much of the waterfront and warehouse district. Faulty handling of the explosives by Federal troops has long been blamed for the disaster. A correct tally of the dead could never be reached.

Courtesy: USA Archives

memories leading up to the war years.

In the mid-1870's Kate Cumming and her father moved to the new city of Birmingham, Ala. Perhaps Mobile's lagging economy prompted the move. She obtained a job as a school teacher and also taught music. She was very active in the congregation of the Church of the Advent, a newly formed Episcopal church there.

She died in Birmingham in May of 1909.

Her Return to Mobile

A funeral was held for Miss Cumming at St. John's Church in Mobile. Almost 50 years earlier a minister at this same church had inspired her to leave her home and family and become one of the most famous nurses of the American 19th century. Despite her family's objections she had risked her life to help injured sol-

diers in an era of medicine which seems medieval by today's standards.

After the 5:00 PM service, her casket was taken to Magnolia Cemetery for burial. Whether due to finances or just an oversight of her relatives, Miss Cumming remained in an unmarked grave for the remainder of the century.

In the 1990's Friends' Board member Art Green discovered that her grave had never been properly marked and contacted the Department of Veteran Affairs. In light of her military service they provided a



Kate Cumming's grave remained unmarked for almost a century. Friend's Board member Art Green corrected this oversight with the help of the Department of Veteran Affairs. Her marker notes that she was a member of the Medical Department, CSA.

marker and the United Daughters of the Confederacy added a bronze plaque at its base.

Her military marker reads: "Kate Cumming, Medical Department, CSA. 1836-1909."

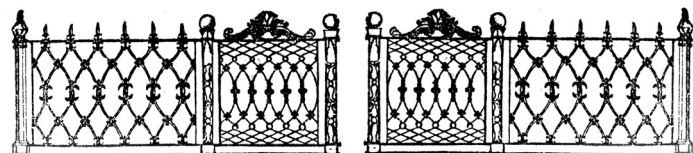
Tom McGehee

Grave Spaces for Sale

The following spaces are available within Magnolia Cemetery. Call us for further information.

Square 28 lot 122 (2 spaces)

Square 29, Cremation spaces



Looking for a Gift?

If you know someone interested in Mobile's history, why not give them a gift of a membership in the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery? Their membership will help preserve this historic site and provide them with a year's subscription to the Messenger with its historical insights.

Please
Don't forget your Friends!
Renew Your Membership Today
THANKS!
(Memberships also make great gifts)

Lest We Forget

The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery is the sole beneficiary from the sale of Harry Myers' book *Lest We Forget*. All proceeds go into the Perpetual Care Trust Fund, due to the generosity of his sons who made it possible for the book to be published.

Order Form for *Lest We Forget* by Harry E. Myers

Name _____

Address _____

City / ST _____ Zip _____

Books are \$25 when picked up at Magnolia Cemetery or \$29 when mailed.

Make checks payable to Friends of Magnolia Cemetery.

Mail your order to Friends of Magnolia Cemetery, P.O. Box 6383, Mobile, AL 36660. The Friends' office is located at 1202 Virginia Street. If you need additional information call (251) 432-8672.

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**Friends of Magnolia Cemetery • P. O. Box 6383 • Mobile, Alabama 36660
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- Please find enclosed my tax-deductible membership contribution of \$35.
- I would like to make an additional contribution of \$ _____ to The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery.
- I would like to make an additional contribution of \$ _____ to The Perpetual Care Trust Fund.
- Renewal I am a new member.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Square _____ Lot No. _____

- Please contact me to work on volunteer projects.

Superintendent's Report

Veteran's Day

Our second annual Veteran's Day flag display will take place from November 6th – 11th, 2009, so please mark it on your calendars. Over 50 flags will be flying along our Avenue of Heroes and it is well worth seeing.

Landscape Plans

Last fall we completed Phase I of our long range planting plan, concentrating on several varieties of Japanese magnolia trees. During the Fall of 2009 we will once again concentrate on these varieties, but also adding various trees and shrubs throughout the entire cemetery. If you have questions about a specific area of the cemetery please call me at (251) 379-0611. The Friends would welcome donations specified for this wonderful, long range plan.

Ants

As always, ants are a constant problem in the cemetery. While we regularly use 3 different types of ant killer we just cannot get them all. If you are having problems on your lot please notify us at (251) 432-8672 and I will take care of it.

Group Tours

Group cemetery tours are available throughout the year by special appointment. Contact our office at (251) 432-8672 for details. There are also self-guided tours available. Don't miss a tour of Mobile's premier open air museum, with its incredible funerary art and fantastic Victorian symbolism.

Thank you Michelle!

I would like to thank Michelle Flirt who was our summer intern, for her outstanding work. She is a graduate student at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, Ga. As a Public History Major, Michelle is working on her Master's degree. Her project, "Survey of Magnolia Cemetery's Ironwork" will stand as a valuable tool for many years to come. Thanks Michelle.

– Mark Halseth

President's Report

The summer at Magnolia Cemetery has been busy. Mark Halseth and his staff have kept the grounds in immaculate order despite weather ranging from drought to monsoon.

Our historic ironwork has received needed attention via research and restoration. Our summer intern, Michelle Flirt, tackled the monumental job of photographing and cataloging the numerous iron fences, posts and mausoleums throughout the cemetery. She carefully documented where each is located, producing a valuable record for the Friends - all free of cost.

Michelle also studied the photographs taken in the cemetery in 1936 for the Historic American Buildings Survey. She carefully took current photographs of the earlier views and the amount of missing ironwork is staggering, but an important tool to assist us with further restoration.

On May 3 the Friends with great help from Janet Savage, sponsored a reception honoring this year's donors of memorial Fence Sections. Despite the generous bequest of Arch Winter, there are still many sections of fencing needed to complete our perimeter. What a difference this project has made as rusting chain links make way for handsome iron fencing.

Fall is coming and that means it is time to ask you to renew your membership in this organization. Thank you in advance for your continued interest and support!

Tom McGehee
President

New Fence Sections 2009

<i>In Honor of . . .</i>	<i>Given by . . .</i>
Imogene Fitzrandolph Dickinson & Eloise Randolph DeWinter Moore	Mrs Ruth V. Cooner
Charles Ernest Edgar, Jr.	Mr. Walter Bellingrath Edgar
Sophia Hunter Ethier	Mr. Raymond H. Ethier
Lenore Gibson Boyd & William Lightfoot Ross, III	The Ross Family Trust
A Gift of the Alletta Turner Trust	The Alletta Turner Trust
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THE FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY, INC.

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Perpetual Care Trust Fund**

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Judith Anthony Baumhauer	The Family of Robert Hunter Officers, Directors & Staff The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery
Sandra Gray House	The Family of Robert Hunter Ashley Sullivan & Murray Thames
John C.H. "Jack" Miller	Mr. & Mrs. Walter B. Edgar Officers, Directors & Staff The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery
Barbara Cowan Peebles	Officers, Directors & Staff The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery
Ruth Rhodes	Officers, Directors & Staff The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery
Robert S. Willcox, Jr.	Mr. & Mrs. Walter B. Edgar Mr. & Mrs. Ernest F. Ladd Mr. & Mrs. Thomas C. McGehee Mr. & Mrs. Augustine Meaher, III
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