

MAGNOLIA MESSENGER



The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery

"Remove not the ancient Landmark"

Spring 2013

From Oakleigh to Magnolia: A Look at Oakleigh's "Residents"

In 1935 Mobile's Historic Mobile Preservation Society was founded as a response to the increasingly common demolition of 19th century buildings in the city. Too many Mobilians had been shrugging off the disappearance of mansions along its prettiest thoroughfares as "progress." HMPS sought to slow that growing tidal wave of destruction.



"Oakleigh" as it appeared in the 1930's. Except for a brief period in the 1940's the property survived as a private residence until 1955 when it was purchased by the City of Mobile. Its period furnishings include objects and portraits once owned by a number of long time residents of Magnolia Cemetery (HABS Photo)

As one of the nation's oldest preservation groups, it is not surprising to find that members of the organization were instrumental in founding the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery. And just like the Friends, HMPS is charged with maintaining another city property: "Oakleigh."

The Oakleigh mansion which dates to 1833 was purchased by the city of Mobile in 1955 to become the official house museum for Mobile. The vacant house was turned over to HMPS which was charged with running the property and opening it to the public.

The challenge was that the city presented HMPS with an empty house. It was up to volunteers, like the late Nell Rutherford, to seek out period furnishings and artwork with an appropriate Mobile provenance. The spectacular result allows Mobilians and visitors alike a chance to learn more about the colorful characters and statesmen who once called Mobile home. Not surprisingly, the majority of these individuals now rest in Magnolia Cemetery.

The Oakleigh Mansion and its Current "Residents"

Upon entering the long entrance hall at Oakleigh a visitor is greeted by a portrait of Charles Gascoigne. Mr. Gascoigne has been a resident of a lot enclosed with a very handsome cast iron fence at Magnolia Cemetery since 1856 when his headstone indicates he died in Brooklyn, N. Y.

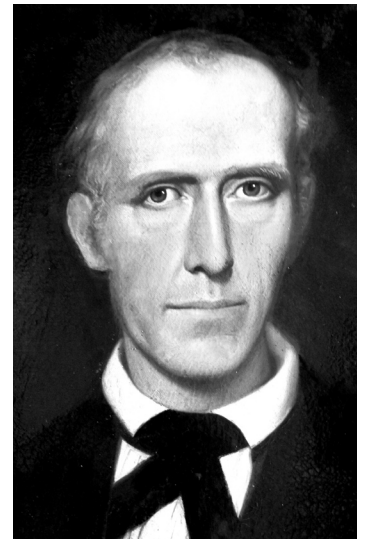
His marker also indicates that he was born in Sheffield, England in 1794. So here is an English born Mobilian with a very French name who died in Brooklyn. A search of newspapers around the time of his death revealed no obituary and thus we may never know why he was in Brooklyn.

Mobile's early city directories do indicate that Gascoigne was established in Mobile by 1839 and was listed that year in the city directory as a "Comm'l Merchant" with his business located at No. 13 St. Michael Street. His home address was given as No. 96 Government Street, an address numbered far differently than it would be today.

In 1848 records indicate the Mr. Gascoigne was an organizer of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. In that year a route was planned north from Mobile through Mississippi cotton lands and stretching to the Ohio River. The ambitious plan would result in the longest railroad in the world. The rails were imported from England and the work began.

In an odd twist of fate, it was Mr. Gascoigne who invited Alfred Irwin to Mobile to work on the plans for the new line. Mr. Irwin took him up on the offer and ultimately purchased Oakleigh from the Roper family.

Early city directories rarely listed anyone but the head of a household so it would take a trip to the Gascoigne lot at Magnolia to find that



Charles Gascoigne was a successful merchant who became instrumental in the founding of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad in the 1840's. He died in Brooklyn in 1856 but is buried in Magnolia Cemetery. His portrait hangs in the Entrance Hall at Oakleigh.

his wife was the former Deborah Post, whose marker notes that she was a native of New York where she was born in 1795. She died in 1843 at the age of 49, apparently in Mobile. Her marker is imprinted with the maker of the stone, "R.D. Brown, N.Y.," and the epithet Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

Twelve years later her husband was buried beneath a stone marked by Mobile's Jarvis Turner, which bears the inscription, "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright for the end of that man is peace."



Charles Gasciogne and his wife, Deborah, rest within this neatly fenced lot. The cast iron base beneath the fence features urns and swags as well as "Rest in Peach" beneath the open gate. Mr. Gasciogne's monument to the left, is marked by Mobile's famed stonecutter, Jarvis Turner. His wife's is marked by a New York craftsman.

There is a third marker in the lot, that of the former Henrietta Flintoff, wife of Charles' son who died on September 11, 1853 at the age of 20. Tragically the marker also bears the name of Fannie Henrietta who died October 8 of that year, "Aged 1 month, 19 days."

A Mysterious Clock

Also occupying the hall at Oakleigh is a handsome tall case clock. On the face is the name "Charles White." Normally the name of the clock maker or its retailer but this name can not be found in either category in directories of the era.



Charles White's name adorns the face of this tall case clock in Oakleigh's Entrance Hall. The clock once stood outside the mayor's office in Mobile's city hall where generations speculated on just who Mr. White may have been.

Schwarz had John Fowler, of pre-Wrights brothers airplane fame, to put the clock in working order.

The mayor had no idea who Mr. White was.

A letter to Mr. Craighead a few months later, declared that this Charles White had been a volunteer fireman in early Mobile and had been president of the Fireman's Insurance Company. The elderly writer recalled Mr. White as "a man of wealth, of medium size and always neatly dressed."

According to the letter, White had arrived in Mobile about the same time famed clock retailers and jewelers such as James Conning and L'Hommedieu and Knapp were getting established. It was the writer's opinion that Mr. White had bought the clock, had his name placed on the dial and then presented it to the city as a gift.



It is believed that Charles White, whose name appears on the clock face at Oakleigh, rests beneath this monument within the lost belonging to the Mobile Fire Department Association. Its inscription explains that although he was a native of up-state New York he was "an honored citizen of Mobile" at his death in 1850.

Whether this was the case of just the recollection of an elderly Mobilian may never be known. What is known is that there is indeed a Charles White buried within the lot of the Mobile Fire Department Association. His corner grave is marked by a handsome obelisk the inscription on which explains that he was born in the upstate New York town of Whitestown, "But (he was) an honored citizen of Mobile, Ala., during nearly 25 years, Who died October 1848 aged 50 years. This monument erected by his brothers and sisters as a token of their love and his virtues."

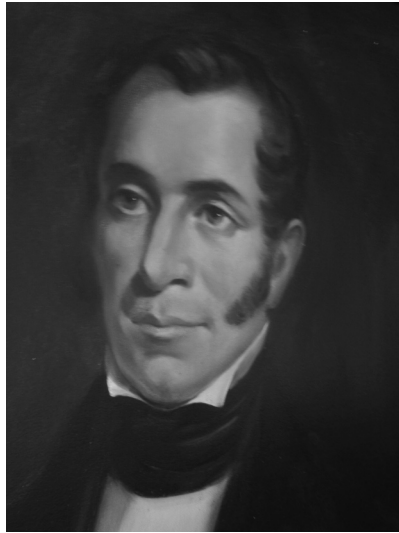
A Governor in the Parlor

A portrait in Oakleigh's front parlor depicts John Gayle, who served as Alabama's Governor between 1831 and 1835. Gayle was a native of South Carolina, and an 1813 graduate of that state's college.

He was admitted to the Alabama Bar in 1818 and established himself at Claiborne where he married his first wife, Sarah Ann Haynsworth in 1819. There he served as a state representative in 1822 and judge the following year. By 1829 he had moved to Greene County where he entered the legislature before becoming Alabama's governor in 1831.

Gayle first appears in Mobile's city directories in the mid-1840's. By that time his first wife had died and in 1839 he had married Clarissa Stedman. The former governor was listed as an attorney at 57 Royal Street, and a residence given simply as "country."

When Henry Clay made his famous visit to Mobile in February of 1843, it was Gayle who gave the welcoming address. While in town Clay was treated to a visit to the theatre, two grand receptions, a concert in his honor and joining in a grand firemen's parade in which he rode in an open carriage pulled by four gray horses.



A portrait of John Gayle hangs in the front parlor of Oakleigh. Gayle had an illustrious legal career and serviced as the state's Governor from 1831 until 1834. It was Gayle who welcomed Henry Clay to Mobile in 1843.

The 1855 directory notes that Judge John Gayle had an office on the corner of Royal and Government, a convenient location given that the intersection shared the county courthouse at the time. Gayle's daughter Amelia married Josiah Gorgas who would preside over the University of Alabama in 1878. Their son, Dr. William Crawford Gorgas is credited with wiping out yellow fever.



John Gayle's obelisk (left) at Magnolia Cemetery provides a full listing of his public life as a judge and governor as well as a sentimental farewell from his survivors.

Gayle, who died in 1859 lies beneath a grave marker, inscribed In the family his highest and best qualities were revealed. *To the Public he was the patriotic Citizen, loved by all. A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children.* The lot also holds his second wife, Clarissa, who died in 1881.

One of the saddest of Magnolia Cemetery's monuments is also found in the



Gayle's lot contains this somber reminder that even Mobile's most prominent citizen's lives were touched by grief. Here is a memorial to his granddaughter, Nannie, who died in 1857 just short of her second birthday.

Gayle lot. A sleeping child atop a pedestal marks the grave of Nannie Aiken, a grandchild of Gayle's. The inscription reads: *Nannie, Only child of H. K. and Mary (Gayle) Aiken. Born September 30, 1855, died July 17, 1857.*

The Batre Bedroom

The entrance hall of Oakleigh runs parallel to the double parlors and ends at a cross hall. At either end of this corridor are two large rooms which at one time or another have been the master bedroom of Oakleigh. Today, the one at the south end is interpreted as a library while at the opposite end is the master bedroom, named in honor of Miss Adele Batre who bequeathed its furnishings to HMPS.

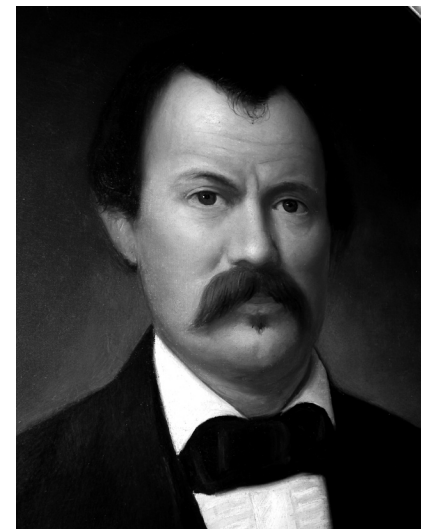
Miss Adele's father and brother's portraits adorn the walls here. The larger portrait is of Alfred Batre (1823-1871). Mr. Batre first appears in the 1855 Mobile city directory where he was listed as an "Exchange Broker" with partner with T. P. Miller.

A visit to the Batre lot at Magnolia reveals that Mrs. Alfred Batre's large monument offers a great deal of information, including that the couple were married in New Orleans in 1854. In 1855 the newlyweds were residing in Mobile on North Jackson Street between St. Louis and St. Anthony streets.



The Batre Lot. Patriarch Alfred is beneath a cross. His wife Hortense at center lived to the age of 97 and her monument notes that the couple was married in New Orleans in 1854. Their son, Lloyd, rests to the right.

According to information in the Mitchell Archives, Mrs. Batre was a founder of the Alabama Society of Colonial Dames and born to an old Maryland family. Her father had traveled to New Orleans to become a cotton broker, where she grew up and married. According to her obituary, "French was almost her mother tongue."



Alfred Batre remained in business with Mr. Miller until sometime after 1861. From 1866 until 1869 the city directories show him to be a partner in "Batre and Masson, Bankers" with an office on St. Francis Street.

Alfred Batre (1823-1871) prospered as a cotton merchant in Mobile but died at the age of 48. His daughter, Adele, lived to the ripe old age of 86 and was the donor of the furniture within Oakleigh's master bedroom. Sadly, no image of Adele or her mother, Hortense, has been located.

James H. Masson left the partnership in 1870 to

become vice-president and then president of the First National Bank, a position he would hold until 1904. He died in Japan three years later while taking a trip around the world.

In 1870 Batre had joined forces with John Haynie to form a cotton brokerage firm at 30 St. Michael Street. He died a year later at the age of just 48. In 1950 Adele Batre recalled that her father had died of "consumption." And on his monument at magnolia are these words: *Simply to thy cross I cling.*



A portrait of a young Lloyd Dulany Batre (1861-1913) also hangs in the master bedroom of Oakleigh. Batre was a successful banker and founded the Thames and Batre Insurance Co., which is still in business after more than 120 years.

The other portrait in this room is of his younger son, Lloyd Batre, who was born in 1861 and would prosper as both a banker and founder of today's Thames Batre Insurance Company. He died a bachelor in 1913 and his maker reads: *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to live justly and love mercy. Of generous manhood, steadfast for the right, Passed from earth's shadows, to the perfect light.*

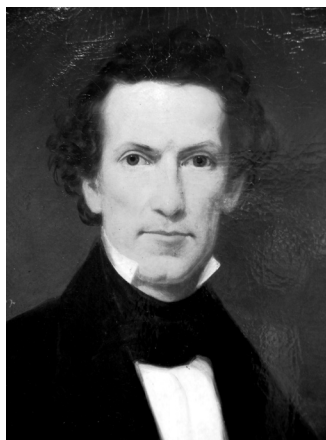
Adele Batre lived with her widowed mother Hortense at 400 Church Street. After her mother's death she opted for a room at the Admiral Semmes Hotel. The Batre women outlived the men. Miss Adele lived to be 86. Her mother, 97.

The Gallery

A wing was added on to the back of Oakleigh to provide a bedroom above a family dining room. The hall leading to the bedroom today serves as a small gallery. On one wall are a pair of very handsome portraits identified as William Dickson Dunn and Mrs. William Dickson Dunn.

According to an editorial which appeared after his 1881 death, Dunn was a native of Nashville where he began a law practice in the 1820's. By 1829 he had moved to Mobile and by the 1830's he was listed as practicing law with Joseph W. Lesesne at 37 Royal Street.

He served in the state legislature in the early 1840's and was recognized as a leader of Alabama's Whig party. Although he continued to be listed in Mobile as an attorney with a Royal Street office as late



Louise Dunn's devoted husband, William Dickson Dunn, was a Mobile attorney and once presided over the Mobile and Montgomery Railroad as well as the Fireman's Insurance Company.

as 1850, he had largely turned his interest into insurance and railroads.

He presided over the Fireman's Insurance Company (as had Charles White of clock fame) and served as President of the board of trustees of the state's medical college in Mobile.

In 1869 he was presiding over the Mobile and Montgomery Railroad Company with an office at the north west corner of Front and St. Francis streets. Dunn was credited with getting Mobile citizens to agree to vote through a \$1 million bond issue to make the railroad a reality.

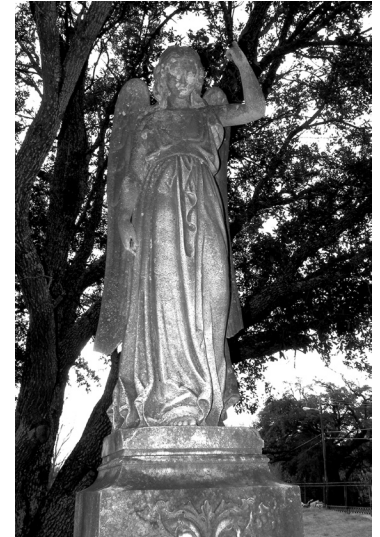
By the 1870's he was listed without an occupation, residing on St. Anthony Street, "3 west of St. Joseph." His wife, Louise died in 1871 at the age of 43.

In January of 1880 the assets of the Mobile and Montgomery Rail Road were purchased by the Louisville and Nashville. The 82 year old Dunn died the following year.

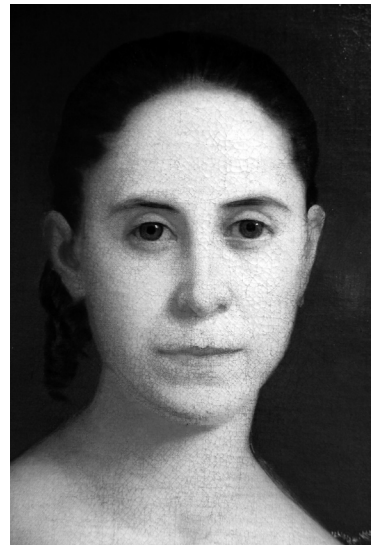
At his death, the Mobile Register termed him "a man of great force and character, of unbending will and tireless energy. His hospitality was unbounded and he was noted for the elegance of his entertainment and the warmth and cordiality of his reception of his visitors."

The newspaper account noted that his funeral was conducted from the Jackson Street Presbyterian Church where he had been an attendant for 50 years, but had only become a member within the last twelve months.

It is sad that Mr. Dunn did not write down his memoirs as the paper also described him as endowed with a most remarkable memory, and his recollection of persons and events was extensive, accurate as to details and covered a long period of years.



This life size angel stands high atop a pedestal marking the resting place of Louise Horton Dunn. While the front is adorned with a sentimental inscription about Mrs. Dunn, her husband's on the reverse simply relays the dates of his birth and death.



A particularly fine painting of Louise Horton Dunn (1828-1871) hangs at Oakleigh. Her grave is adorned with one of the most imposing angels within Magnolia Cemetery.

The Dunn family lot at Magnolia cemetery is an impressive one. It features an elaborate cast iron fence with Gothic arches and urn finials. In the shade of a great oak is one of the cemetery's most remarkable angels standing atop a pedestal, her hand pointing heavenward. On the front is this inscription: *Louise Horton, Wife of William Dunn: A sincere Christian, A devoted wife and mother, A firm friend, Lovely in person, Accomplished in mind, She adorned all the relations of life.* Her husband's name and birth and death dates occupy the reverse.



A handsome gothic cast iron fence once surrounded the Dunn lot. Here a corner survives.

The Irwins

There are no fine oil paintings depicting any member or the Irwin clan at Oakleigh today, despite that family's long residency here. The Alfred Irwins purchased the house in 1852 and owned it for six decades. In a display cabinet on the ground floor is a coin silver vase which was presented to Mrs. T. L. Irwin in January 1866 by the Striker's Independent Society, Mobile's oldest mystic organization. The reverse of the vase is beautifully engraved with the organization's emblem, but unfortunately there is no maker's mark.



This coin silver vase was a gift from the Strikers Independent Society recognizing the marriage of Lee Fearn Irwin to Mary Brooks in 1866. The goat heads are symbolic of the Strikers, Mobile's oldest mystic organization. It is one of only a handful of items belonging to a member of the Irwin family to be found at Oakleigh.

According to a member, these vases were at one time presented to its members on the occasion of his marriage. Theodore Lee Fearn Irwin married Mary "Mollie" Brooks on January 18, 1866. The groom was known as Lee.

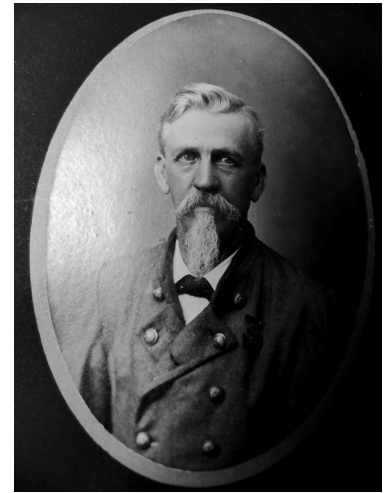
Lee Irwin and his brother, Thomas, both attained the rank of colonel during the Civil War and both were wounded during the battle of Atlanta. Thomas had the distinction of serving as aide-de-campe for President Jefferson Davis.

As the war came to a close, both sons were miles from home. When Mobile finally surrendered northern troops marched into town and scouted out the area's finest mansions to be confiscated to house

federal officers. When Thomas and Lee's mother found a squad of soldiers in blue on Oakleigh's front lawn she reportedly unfurled a British Union Jack from the balcony. She announced that she was Margaret Kilshaw Irwin, a British citizen, and that the property was subject to the English crown.

The Union soldiers moved on, completely unaware that the lady's two sons were well respected Confederate officers.

By 1869 Lee Irwin was back in Mobile residing in a raised Creole cottage on the south side of Government Street just east of Charles Street where the St. Charles Apartments stand today. His profession, according to directories of the day, was "internal revenue officer."



Lee Fearn Irwin served as secretary for Mobile's Athelstan Club as well as the city's Chamber of Commerce. For 30 years he also had charge of the Mobile Theatre where almost every world famous actor would make an appearance in the late 19th century.

He went on to become president of Cherokee Cotton Mills Company of Mobile and was appointed assistant postmaster for several years. He served as secretary of both the Chamber of Commerce and the Athelstan Club and for seven years was the commercial editor of the Mobile Register.

In 1904 the Irwins built a large house on the north east corner of Selma and Ann streets. Information from city directories as well as the 1910 federal census indicates the house was occupied by the Irwins and their two unmarried children. Miss Mollie K. Irwin gave her occupation as stenographer for a real estate firm while her younger brother, Leslie simply listed "real estate." The house was also occupied by a 31 year old cook in 1910.

Mrs. Irwin died in 1918 and Lee Irwin passed away in 1923. His death resulted in a lengthy obituary in the Mobile Register along with an editorial which described him as "having adopted duty as his watchword when a young man; for he faithfully met every call, and with cheerfulness and courage performed sincerely and thoroughly his part in life. Colonel Irwin was of kindly disposition, generous, straightforward, and a worthy representative of a good old stock of Southern people."

Lee Irwin's funeral took place in the family home on Selma Street and as noted in his obituary, he was buried in Magnolia Cemetery. He and his wife share a simple upright marker.

Oakleigh is open daily, Tuesday-Saturday. For further information call (251)432-6161 or www.hmps.org

President's Message

The cooler weather has slowed the rampant growth of our sub-tropical vegetation and allowed Superintendent Mark Halseth and his able crew to finally catch up on grounds' maintenance. Rainfall continues to make some of our unpaved roads impassable so please remember to only drive on paved surfaces.

Good News!

The Ben May Charitable Trust has granted sufficient funds to the Friends to allow the installation of historically accurate iron gates flanked by two sections of fence to front the Old Hebrew Rest, the oldest Jewish burial site in the state of Alabama. The original gate and fence vanished decades ago, perhaps as part of a World War II scrap drive.

Period photographs will allow us to replicate the missing gates and over time it is hoped that the remainder of the fence around this important section can be replicated and installed. The gates and two fence sections should be ready for installation later this Spring.

Virginia Street Fence – Nearly Complete!

And speaking of fences, eight more fence sections will be installed and dedicated along Virginia Street this spring. This leaves only 18 sections before the entire 120 acres of the main cemetery are completely fenced. If you or someone you know has an interest in purchasing one of these sections to honor or memorialize someone please contact the office as soon as possible.

The City of Mobile will be seeking donations to begin a similar fence section across Virginia Street to enclose the annex known as "Little Magnolia." Corner features matching those surrounding the main section of the cemetery are planned and the city will be assisted by the Friends as this project moves forward.

Board Changes

At the January board meeting we said good bye to board members Bradford Ladd, Ritchie Macpherson and John Sledge, whose terms have expired. We welcomed back Sumner Adams, Tom McGehee and John Homes Smith IV. Please refer to a listing of our current officers and board members printed elsewhere in the Messenger. It is only with the help of these dedicated volunteers that the Friends can continue to maintain Magnolia Cemetery as a place of

both beauty and serenity forever.

Cemetery Tours

Our thanks to Tige Marston and Janet Savage for conducting three tours this fall. Tige also presented special tours to students from Baker High School and Semmes Elementary. On January 20 the SCV conducted their annual Lee/Jackson salute. Our tours and programs continue to promote this cemetery and teach visitors about both history and funerary art. Far too many Mobilians are unaware of this beautiful landmark in their own backyard.

Avenue of Heroes

Our Avenue of Heroes flag massing continues to grow. Donations of 4 additional casket flags bring our total to 56 to be flown annually on both Memorial and Armistice/Veterans Day.

And Thanks...

Your membership and donations to this organization helps us to restore and maintain this historic cemetery. Please stay current and encourage your friends to join us as we work towards our next 175 years!!

Douglas Burtu Kearley, Sr. AIA, NCARB
President

Mark Your Calendars!

Mobile's Historic Homes Tours

This Year: From Mansions to Shotguns

Friday, March 15 and Saturday March 16

For further information, call HMPS at (251)
432-6161

Memorials and Honorariums

In Honor of... *Given By...*
Mrs. C. Thurmon Bell Mr. & Mrs. Robert H. Meaher

In Memory of... *Given By...*
Paul M. W. Bruckmann Mr. & Mrs. John D. Peebles
Amanda Hunter Inge,
Robert Douglas Hunter &
William Christopher Hunter

Robert Hunter Jean Arnold Dodge
Mary Alice Floyd

Christopher G. Hume Mrs. Guy C. Oswalt
Mr. & Mrs. John D. Peebles

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Peggy Murray Billy Walker & The Staff of
Friedman's Jewelry

Barbara Sims Billy Walker, Don Johnson &
The Staff of Friedman's
Jewelry

Peggy White-Spunner Mr. & Mrs. John D. Peebles

What's in a name?

Q & A by

H. F. "Tige" Marston Cemetery Specialist, City of Mobile

Q: I know cemeteries are serious places, but has anything every happened to you in your job there that you found funny?

A: I once had a man come into the office looking for his grandmother's grave. The only problem was that she had died "30 or 40 years ago," her last name was Smith and he only knew her first name to be "Granny." He could not provide any other information on her nor the name of anyone who might be buried in the same lot. Although at first he angrily demanded that "I do my job," he later seemed perfectly satisfied when I told him I had checked all our databases and old interment record cards and could not find a "Granny Smith."

Another day a young woman came in asking for help in finding her great grandmother's grave. After telling her I would be happy to help, she stood there in silence. Finally I asked her what her great grandmother's name was. She answered that she had no idea what her ancestor's name might be, but was sure I could look it up under her name. Still confused, I asked, "Why, were you named for her?" Her response: "How would I know? She died before I was born!"

Next issue: Being a cemetery professional is a serious business, and Tige always does his best to assist visitors. In the next issue stand by for even more interesting questions and situations experienced in Mobile's most historic cemetery.

Please

Don't forget your Friends!

Renew Your Membership Today

THANKS!

(We regret that as a non-profit agency we cannot afford to send newsletters if your membership has expired.)

THE FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY, INC.

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