

MAGNOLIA MESSENGER



The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery

"Remove not the ancient Landmark"

Summer 2010

The Van Antwerps of Mobile

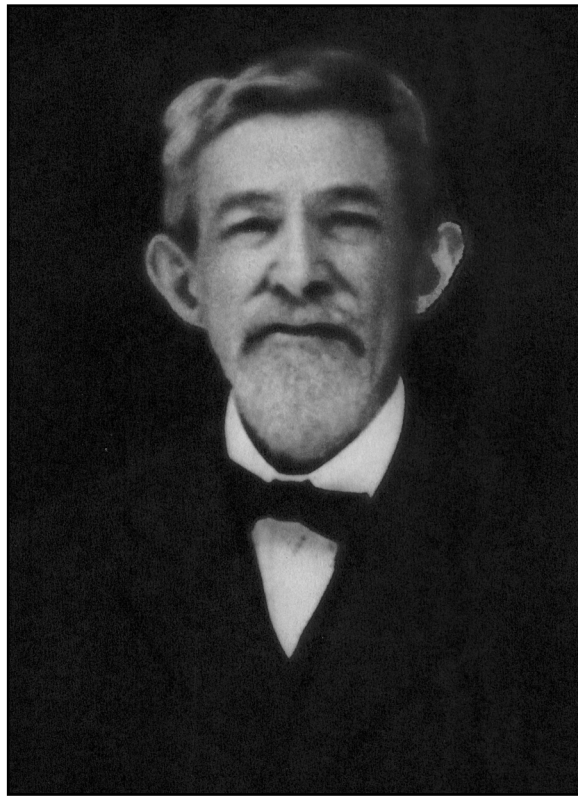
For over a century, the 1906-08 Van Antwerp Building has been a Mobile landmark. At 11 stories it has been described as the first skyscraper in the South, owing to its fireproof steel and concrete construction. The builder's monogram still graces the corner of the structure. Just who was the Van Antwerp behind this building?

Garet Van Antwerp was of New York's Dutch stock, and was born in that state's capital of Albany in 1833. At the age of 15 he moved down to New York City and clerked in a drug store where he apprenticed as a pharmacist.

The world of pharmacy in the early 19th century was in its infancy. It was an era of alchemy and conjecture and much of what was considered medical knowledge was in reality little more than unsubstantiated antidotes. While many were true a larger number were proved to be false.

Drugs imported from abroad were often adulterated to the point of being worthless. Orders of quinine used to cure fevers were routinely found to contain no quinine. Other drugs alterations could prove deadly. The U. S. Drug Import Act of 1848 established port inspections of incoming drugs. Within a year an estimated 90,000 pounds of drugs from Europe and China had been refused as substandard.

Van Antwerp was maturing as a pharmacist as many



**Garet VanAntwerp
(1833-1911)**

Courtesy Thomas B. Van Antwerp

of these improvements were being made. In 1858 he moved to Mobile, undoubtedly bringing the latest innovations in the world of pharmacy with him.

War Erupts

Although born in New York State, VanAntwerp made no move north when the Civil War broke out. Instead, he enlisted in Company A of the 21st Alabama Infantry. He was with Dr. Josiah Nott at Corinth, Miss. during one of the bloodiest battles of the war.

At the close of that battle 1,700 Confederates were dead, nearly 1,000 were missing and more than 8,000 were wounded. Nott and Van Antwerp worked tirelessly to remove the wounded soldiers from the battlefield. He was later promoted to Lieutenant Commander of the Confederate Navy and served as the pharmacist at the Marine Hospital in Mobile.

At the close of the war he joined pharmacist W. D. Prout who was operating a drugstore on the south west corner of Joachim and Dauphin Streets. In November of 1866 he married Catherine Lain of Mobile.

The 1869 city directory lists "G. Van Antwerp, drugs and medicines" as in business on North Royal Street, with his residence apparently over the store. A biography states he was in business with Richard

Wildman at this location which was between State and Congress Streets, in a prime residential area.

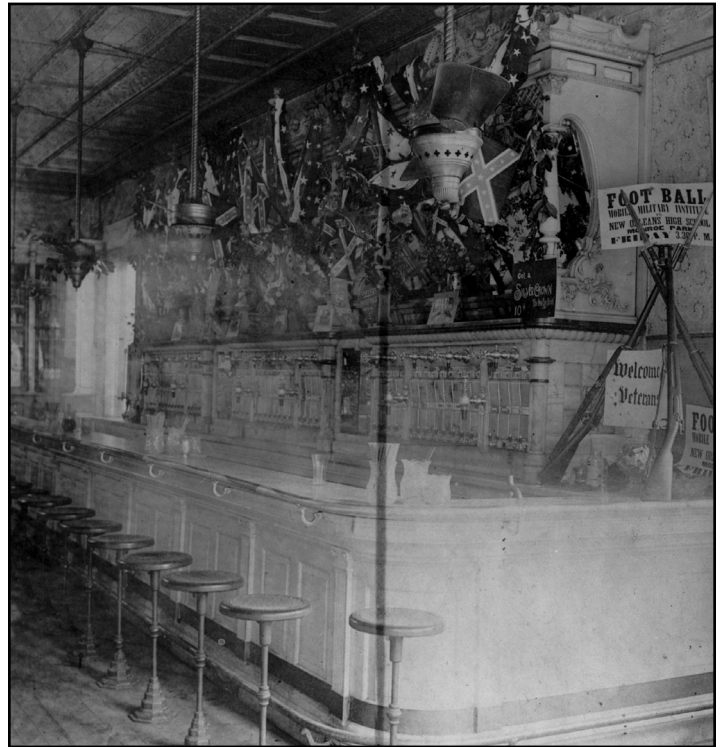
Royal and Dauphin Streets

After a period of working with druggist George Coster at 71 Dauphin Street, Van Antwerp went out on his own. He purchased an existing drugstore on the busy south west corner of Dauphin and South Royal streets in 1884. The corner had long held the drugstore of Soto & Primo.

Photographs from the late 19th century reveal a typical three story brick building facing South Royal Street. Interestingly Mr. Van Antwerp had expanded the business to sell not only prescriptions, but garden seeds. A sign bearing his name with a mortar and pestle proudly hangs above the main door.

A large advertisement reads “Bromo-Vin, for Head Ache and Neuralgia. There is Witchery in It.” Another offers “Bitter Apple Bitters.” Bitters appeared after the Civil War and came to encompass countless formulas for every ailment. Although the manufacturers were numerous the key ingredient was virtually the same: alcohol.

Within Mr. Van Antwerp’s establishment a marble topped soda fountain offered fizzy soda water to assist with digestion, a decade before soft drinks would come into vogue. The modern soda fountain had been popu-



The marble soda fountain within Van Antwerp’s circa 1900.

larized at an exhibit at the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876 and Americans were flocking to them in increasing numbers.

Business on the thoroughfare was apparently so good that Van Antwerp expanded his store to the south. The Van Antwerp family, which came to include 8 children, occupied a home at 250 State Street in what today is known as the DeTonti Square Historic District.

The First Van Antwerp Building

In 1899 the Sangrouber-Van Antwerp building was completed at the south east corner of Dauphin and Joachim streets. That structure in more recent times has held two of Mobile’s micro breweries. The corner had previously held the home of the late Edward Sangrouber, a Swiss immigrant, and was just across Joachim Street from where Van Antwerp had worked following the Civil War.

Perhaps the success of the Sangrouber-Van Antwerp Building combined with Mobile’s prosperity during the Edwardian era led to Van Antwerp’s decision in 1906 to rebuild his drugstore on Dauphin and Royal streets. He called on architect George B. Rogers, to design the ambitious new building.



Van Antwerp’s Drugs and Seeds opened its doors on South Royal and Dauphin streets in 1884. This photo dates to a decade later after the business had expanded into the building to the south.

Architect George B. Rogers

VanAntwerp surely would have been familiar with Rogers work to date. In 1903 the newly arrived architect had assisted in the design of the 7 story City Bank Building on North Royal Street with its two “high speed elevators” and Italian Renaissance styling. With the bank’s success he was called back to triple its Royal Street frontage and expand it back to St. Joseph Street. The bank and its handsome building were absorbed into the First National Bank in 1915.

South Royal Street saw architectural improvements as well. The palatial Hammel’s Department Store was completed on the east side of the street by 1902 and merchant Adam Glass was boasting in his advertisements that his was the store that had “Made Royal Street.”

Perhaps Van Antwerp saw that his prime corner looked a bit dated in the midst of so much new construction. Whatever his reason, Garett Van Antwerp and George B. Rogers created an 11 story skyscraper with a ground floor featuring the longest soda fountain in town. The address became 101-03 Dauphin Street.

The 10 floors above the drug store were designed for office space. While tenants filled the lower floors relatively quickly, the upper stories remained vacant. Prospective renters in Mobile were skittish to be so high off the ground. And although the building was advertised as fire-proof there were apparently unwarranted worries about its safety.

A Penthouse View

When Van Antwerp complained about this to Rogers, the architect rented out office space on the top floor and moved his office there. Other businesses took note and the building rapidly filled. With the best view in town, Rogers had the last laugh.

The Van Antwerp Building held the offices of a variety of businesses over the years but was very popular for physicians’ and dentists’ offices. Patients could ride the trolley car downtown, shop, go up to see their doctor for an appointment and have their prescriptions filled on the ground floor.

By 1910, what had been a simple drug and seed store was now known as Van Antwerp’s Drug Corporation with both a retail and wholesale division. Garett was listed as president and sons Andrew and

James served as vice president and secretary, respectively.

The drug store did a booming business and by the 1920’s it would be one of Mobile’s most popular spots for morning coffee for men and women working downtown. It was truly the Starbucks of its day.

Garett Van Antwerp only enjoyed his skyscraper a few years. He died on December 10, 1911 at the age of 78 and was buried in Magnolia Cemetery. He was survived by his widow and seven of his eight children.

In an editorial about the late pharmacist, the Mobile Register stated: Trustworthiness was the key to the character of the well known merchant who died yesterday morning. It was the reason for his success in life. In the business world his word was accepted as truth. He had courage and enterprise to meet the needs of a growing city and leaves as a monument the first modern business structure built in Mobile.

From Drug Store to Restaurant

In 1919 the Van Antwerp family sold their wholesale drug business to J. L. Bedsole. With former Van Antwerp employee Samuel Colvin, Bedsole established one of the city’s most profitable enterprises.

At the end of the next decade the Van Antwerp’s firm had been renamed the Van Antwerp-Aldridge



The Van Antwerp Building circa 1910, the South’s first modern skyscraper.

Drug Company with J. F. Aldridge president. Aldridge was married to the former Sarah Van Antwerp.

Number 101 Dauphin Street received a name change in the mid-sixties when Albright and Woods took over Van Antwerp's Drug Store. The change was brief. By 1970 an Eckerd's operated in the space but the address was listed as vacant in the 1974 city directory.

The building is no longer owned by the Van Antwerp family but it retains its historical name. A restaurant has restored the beautiful space designed for the family's once thriving drug store, but the 10 floors above are currently vacant. It remains a monument to a man who had the vision to build Mobile's favorite skyscraper.

Tom McGehee

President's Report

The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery have been notified by Mobile officials that our monthly allotment is being cut by 20% as part of the city's plan to deal with the projected financial shortfall due to declining sales tax revenues. Our treasurer, Joe Dupree, has worked very hard to come up with a workable solution to keep this cemetery running and maintained properly. Most importantly, the plan will allow us to keep our valued employees who are all experienced and well trained.

Our Horticultural Committee has obtained several trees for planting on the northwest side of the cemetery. This is a low lying area and the trees chosen have been found to grow well despite "wet feet." The Friends plan to continue to beautify the cemetery, despite the city's budget woes. Our staff takes pride in the way this cemetery looks and it shows.

Our May board meeting included an excellent power point presentation by H. F. "Tige" Marston, Cemetery Specialist for the City of Mobile. He traced the history of cemeteries from ancient times to the Victorian age when Magnolia Cemetery was created. His presentation included maps showing how Magnolia has grown over the years as well as excellent photographs of funerary art. He discussed many of the intriguing symbols to be found and what they meant.

Tige has given the presentation to organizations around Mobile Bay. If you know of one that needs a good speaker on a local topic of great interest please contact Tige at (251) 208-7307. The title of his program is "A 19th Century Cemetery: Death and Art in a Place of the Living" and may be done in conjunction with a walking tour.

Tom McGehee
President

Superintendent's Report

About ten years ago several cast iron fence sections and gates were stolen from the cemetery. Since that time the gates are locked nightly and theft and vandalism has greatly decreased. There are times during the day however that no staff member is present and I would ask anyone visiting the cemetery to keep an eye out for suspicious activity.

No contractor does work in the cemetery without a member of our staff present. If you observe anything that just doesn't look right, call me immediately at (251) 379-0611.

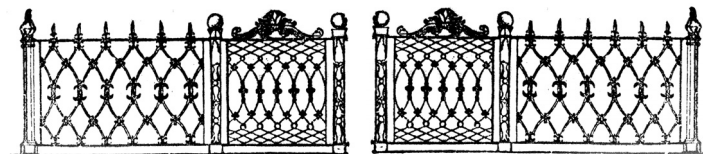
On a recent field trip to the Museum of Mobile with my daughter's 4th grade class, I saw a display of ironwork that looked very familiar. Two different fence sections were labeled as having come from Magnolia Cemetery. I later found the square and lot where each had once been in place.

With further research it was discovered that these two pieces of ironwork were made from wax molds of the original fencing in the cemetery. They were cast for an exhibit that originally filled the Rutherford Carriage Room within the old museum on Government Street. So, we hope that the Museum will update their labeling to reflect the fact that they were manufactured for the exhibit and not removed from the cemetery to avoid future confusion.

Museum officials have generously offered to allow new casts to be made of their exhibit pieces should we be unable to find matching sections for restoring the lots.

Mention was made within other exhibits of Mobile's famed author Augusta Evans Wilson and educator Dr. John Le Flore. Both are buried right here in Magnolia Cemetery among so many other famous Mobilians.

Mark Halseth
Superintendent



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.

Take this quiz:

1. Why does Edwin Macartney have two headstones? Where were his widow's dentures when she unexpectedly awoke from a coma?
2. Which doctor testified that a man stabbed through the heart might have died from heart failure before the knife entered him? His murderess wife was acquitted as a result.
3. She once rode in private railway cars and thousands attended her father's funeral. She died a pauper and was buried in an unmarked grave. Who was she?
4. Two of Mobile's most prominent physicians were brothers who openly despised each other. They had to be pulled apart one day as they battered each other on the steps of a Mobile hospital. Who were they?
5. The sprawling home he built went up in flames in 1926. The property it centered has been one of the city's most popular subdivisions for over 100 years now. Who was he?

Who says history is dull? These tales and many more are intertwined with Mobilians who rest at Magnolia Cemetery and have been discussed in past issues of the Magnolia Messenger. Why not give a membership in the Friends to a neighbor, child or even a grandchild? Then they too will receive our newsletter and know the answers to the above questions and many more to come. Mobile's history is anything but boring. Spread the word!

Answers will be in the Fall Newsletter!

Cremation Grave Spaces for Sale

Presently there are 34 cremation burial spaces remaining in Section 29, near Confederate Rest. The price is \$500 per space. Please call the Friends office if you have an interest. (251) 432-8672.

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.

CLIP AND RETURN THIS FORM TO

Friends of Magnolia Cemetery • P. O. Box 6383 • Mobile, Alabama 36660
(251) 432-8672

- 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.

THE FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY, INC.

P.O. Box 6383
Mobile, Alabama 36660
friendsmagnolia@bellsouth.net

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 422
Mobile, AL

**Memorials to the
Perpetual Care Trust Fund**

<i>In Memory of . . .</i>	<i>Given by . . .</i>
Sanford Bernard Burch	Peggy & Blacksher White-Spinner Mr. & Mrs. Arthur W. Williams, Jr. Judge Lionel W. Noonan
Betty Maury Cobb	The Family of Robert Hunter
Sylvia Cushing	Mr. Billy Walker & Friedman's Fine Jewelry
Lottie Gibbons	Mr. Billy Walker & Friedman's Fine Jewelry
Richard Overbey	The Family of Robert Hunter
Nell Schley Rutherford	Mrs. Guy C. Oswald Mr. Billy Walker, Mrs. Marguriete Walker Gabriel & Friedman's Fine Jewelry
Wydell Walley	Mr. Billy Walker, Mr. Don Johnson & Friedman's Fine Jewelry

Officers & Board Of Trustees

Officers:

President: Mr. Thomas C. McGehee
Vice-President: Mr. Thomas B. Van Antwerp
Recording Secretary: Mr. John Holmes Smith IV
Corresponding Secretary: Mr. John R. Macpherson
Treasurer: Mr. A.J. Dupree, Jr.
Executive Director: Mrs. Janet Savage

Board of Trustees:

Mr. Sumner G. Adams	Mrs. H. C. Slaton
Mrs. C. Thurmon Bell	Mr. John Sledge
Mrs. Loresa Bell	Mrs. Ronald A. Snider
Mr. Agee S. Broughton, III	Mr. Selwyn H. Turner
Mr. Charles E. Christmas	Mrs. Robert M. Whitaker
Mrs. A. J. Dupree, III	
Mr. Arthur Green	
Mrs. Lyle Hutchison	
Mr. Douglas Burtu Kearley	
Mr. E. Bradford Ladd	
Mrs. Norman McCrummen	
Dr. William P. Rodgers	
Mr. Eladio Rubira, II	

Advisory Committee:

Mrs. F. Michael Johnson, Mrs. John M. Morrisette, Jr., Mrs. Guy C. Oswald,
Mr. John D. Peebles, Mr. Joseph E. Ringhoffer, Mrs. Ian Rutherford,
Mr. David L. Sanders