

# MAGNOLIA MESSENGER



The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery

*"Remove not the ancient Landmark"*

Fall 2011

## PROVENANCE

Bessie Morse Bellingrath (1869-1943) was a collector of beautiful objects ranging from towering camellia shrubs to delicate porcelain. Countless purchases were made during the 1930's from individuals suffering from the economic depression. Many a shrub was bought after she had heard of a family's plight. Whatever she saw in bloom within the family garden was suddenly very rare and badly needed for Bellingrath Gardens. Hundreds of dollars often changed hands for a quite ordinary shrub but the seller was left thinking he had done Mrs. Bellingrath a great favor.

According to her nephew, Ernest Edgar, Jr., his aunt consistently wrote her checks out to "cash." It was not until after Mrs. Bellingrath died that her husband, Coca-Cola bottler, Walter D. Bellingrath began receiving bills from some of the finest antique shops in New Orleans. He requested an accounting and apparently it was only then that he began to discover how much his late wife had spent on good antiques.

Mr. Bellingrath called on antique dealer Sarah Curran to complete an inventory of his wife's collection in 1943 and again in 1947. By 1949, Walter Bellingrath had created a private foundation with its income destined to maintain his gardens and home as "a fitting memorial to my wife." The house would open to the public in 1956, just months after his death.

The Curran inventories and a guide to the Bellingrath Home written by Margaret Taylor Moore in 1964, offer



**The Bellingrath Home, completed in 1935, contains the original antiques collected by Bessie Morse Bellingrath who died in 1943. Inventories reveal that many of these objects once adorned both prominent and obscure homes in Mobile.**

*D. L. McCall Library*

Bellingrath Home is a small room which Bessie Bellingrath called her Day Parlor. The Gardens were open seven days a week and it was not unusual for her to see neighbors from Mobile who were down to enjoy the grounds with out of town visitors. This room allowed her to invite them inside for a chat and also served as a makeshift office where she could

information about the provenance, or source, for many of the antiques in the Bellingrath Home as well as elements of the famed Gardens. A great many of the prior owners of these beautiful objects rest in Magnolia Cemetery as do the Bellingraths themselves.

Some of these Mobilians were quite famous in their day. Others more obscure. Some rest beneath elegant markers while others are in unmarked graves. A look at some of these objects may give some insight into these former residents of our port city.

### A Painting

In the western wing of the



**Rachel Harris and her unmarried brother George, occupied this Government Street home, just east of South Georgia Avenue. The Bellingraths' Ann Street home was nearby. Both have been demolished.**

*D. L. McCall Library*

meet with antiques dealers whose trucks made regular pilgrimages from Royal Street in New Orleans.

In this room hangs an oil painting which formerly belonged to Miss Rachel Harris (1857-1944) of Mobile. Rachel lived with her brother George (1868-1932) who was the proprietor of the Mobile Coffee and Spice Mills. Neither Rachel nor George married and the two lived together at 1214 Government Street in a wonderful Queen Ann home that has long since vanished.

They were the siblings of Robert O. Harris (1860-1917) who owned R. O. Harris, a grocer on Dauphin Street who also advertised himself as a dealer in "feed, fruit and grain."

Inventories list this painting as being a scene in the harbor of Naples, Italy by an unknown artist. Whether Miss Harris bought it there as a souvenir or merely purchased it because of its waterfront scene is a mystery. She and her brother rest beside each other in the Harris family lot beneath matching full length markers.

### A Decanter

Displayed within the Bellingrath Dining Room is a silver overlay on ruby glass decanter standing 10.25" in height. Silver manufacturers began producing a product termed silver deposit ware in the 1880's. The decanter would have been first covered with a thick electroplated layer of pure silver. Portions would then have been removed, leaving the decorative open work design which was further enhanced by engraving.



**Decanter Owned By Mrs. Bellingrath.**



**Oil Painting Of The Bay Of Naples.**

The Bellingrath example is surrounded by a scrolling design, and just beneath the lip is a large reserve with the monogram of its former owner: W. J. According to the Bellingrath inventories, this formerly belonged to Winston Jones (1854-1922). At his death he was described as having been "one of the best known cotton factors in the south and operated cotton plantations on the Mississippi and Alabama rivers and was an extensive rice planter in the vicinity of Crowley, La."

The Jones lived on the south west corner of Government and George streets for decades where census records indicate they had a retinue of live-in domestics ranging from a butler to a coachman. Mr. Jones served as president of the Order of Myths and the couple obviously enjoyed an active social life in Mobile. The decanter certainly reflects a comfortable lifestyle.

Cordelia Vass Jones outlived her husband by 20 years. The fortune which Mr. Jones amassed seems to have evaporated and by the 1930's his widow was in less than comfortable circumstances. Her two servants, William and his wife Bertha, remained, having no where else to go, and a local grocer delivered an order to her back door weekly but never sent a bill.



**Eternal obscurity: A young Cordelia Vass Jones whose husband's decanter now adorns the Bellingrath dining room. Although she once lived in a beautiful home on Government Street with a retinue of servants, she and her late husband both rest in unmarked graves.**

*D. L. McCall Library*

Mrs. Jones was buried at Magnolia Cemetery in January of 1942 beside her husband. Both rest in unmarked graves within a corner of Square 12. By February of 1947 her once proud home had been demolished and a small building had been moved onto the lot for the Azalea Trail headquarters. A set of apartments stands there today as do most of the handsome live oaks.

**A Porcelain Bust**

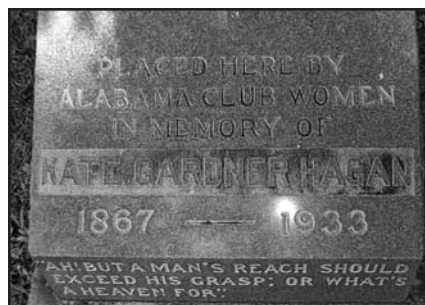
At the end of the upstairs hall in the Bellingrath Home is a cabinet housing a collection of Royal Doulton figures which Mrs. Bellingrath purchased at Goldstein's when that jewelry emporium was still located downtown on Royal Street. In contrast to these modern (1939-1942) figures is the allegorical porcelain bust on top of the cabinet. This beautiful woman is "Summer," one of the four seasons sculpted by artist Owen Hale in 1881 and produced by Copeland and Co. of Staffordshire, England.



**Porcelain Bust, Allegorical Of Summer.**

According to the Bellingrath inventory "Summer" once belonged to Kate Gardner Hagan (1867-1933) of Mobile. Mrs. Hagan was an accomplished musician, prominent clubwoman and founder of what became Mobile's League of Women Voters. Her father, William H. Gardner, was a cotton factor and city directories indicate that the family lived on Government Street, west of Hamilton Street before an 1881 move to St. Louis and North Conception streets.

She married Jamieson Fitzpatrick, a cotton factor in July of 1890 but was widowed six years later. In 1899 she married James R. Hagan whom city directories list as Mobile's "Superintendent of Wharves." Mrs. Hagan died childless in 1933 and whether this fine sculpture was purchased from her or her heirs is unknown. The family home on St. Louis



**Mrs. Hagan's Marker**



**May McIntyre Former Home**  
*D. L. McCall Library*

Street vanished decades ago as this once fashionable residential district became Mobile's "automobile row."

Mrs. Hagan was laid to rest beneath a handsome granite marker purchased by "Alabama Club Women" in her memory. It includes a quote from Robert Browning's poem, Andrea del Sarto: Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp; or what is heaven for?

**An Inkstand with a Story**

Mrs. Bellingrath often bought from individuals who knew she liked antiques and that she paid high prices. One day, she had a call from May McIntyre who lived in Mobile. Miss McIntyre had an old inkstand that she thought might be of interest to Mrs. Bellingrath who agreed to stop by and see it.



**English Inkstand**

When Mrs. Bellingrath arrived at Miss McIntyre's Church Street cottage, she was shown a figural inkstand. A reclining farmer beside sheaves of wheat covers a compartment for an ink well and sand caster. The pieces are unmarked and believed to be English.

Mrs. Bellingrath was curious as to why the farmer was missing a hand when there was no other visible damage to the piece. "Oh," the old maid explained, "he had a bottle of wine in his hand and I am a prohibitionist. No one is going to drink in my home, so I broke the hand off." She retrieved the broken extremity from a box and sold both it and the ink stand to Mrs. Bellingrath who promptly had it repaired.

Miss McIntyre, who worked as a clerk for the Mobile and Ohio Railroad died in 1937, and is buried in an unmarked grave in Square 19, within view of the Bellingrath-Morse monument.

**A Chinese Table**

Francis Edwin Overall (1860-1951) of Mobile preferred to be called Frank. In



**Massive Chinese Export Table in Bellingrath Home.**

March of 1867 his parents had purchased the Government Street home of Madame Octavia Walton LeVert whose double parlors were famous for their antebellum entertainments of celebrities.

Frank Overall prospered in the real estate business and in 1896 he remodeled his family home using architect William Hammond. He added a library and a conservatory as well as a Romanesque façade that all but obliterated the house that the late Madame LeVert would have recognized.

On the Bellingraths' Riverside Porch is a circular library table of carved and pierced Chinese blackwood measuring 50" in diameter. Mrs. Bellingrath purchased it from Frank Overall and it may well have originally been selected for his new library on Government Street. The family sold the house to Dr. Paul Acker in 1906, just days before that year's spectacular hurricane blew out many of the windows.

The Overalls had architect George B. Rogers design a new house for them on the north east corner of Government and South Ann streets. It was here that Mrs. Bellingrath, whose town house was just around the corner, bought the table. To date no images of this home have surfaced.

City directories indicate that the Overall house vanished in the late 1950's to make way for expansion of



**Francis Edwin Overall died in 1951 and is buried in the Overall lot at Magnolia Cemetery. Neither of his former Government Street homes survive.**

*D. L. McCall Library*



**Gibson Overall purchased Octavia Walton LeVert's home on Government Street in 1867. Some thirty years later his son, Frank, enlarged and remodeled the house with a Richardsonian Romanesque flourish. The house was razed in the 1965 to make way for unrelenting expansion of the county courthouse.**

*D. L. McCall Library*

an adjoining gasoline station. Frank Overall died in 1951 and rests with his parents in the Overall lot in Square E of Magnolia Cemetery.

### A Pair of Dickens Characters

Within Mrs. Bellingrath's collection are dozens of figures representing some of Europe's finest porcelain factories. Figures were originally made of sugar to grace royal dessert tables but by the 18th century porcelain had become a more permanent form of decoration. The modelers took their ideas from literature and art and many of the pieces within the Bellingrath Home may be traced to popular French engravings and paintings.



**Porcelain Figures of Sam Weller and Mr. Samuel Pickwick**

The English factories naturally looked closer to home and the firm of Ridgway and Robey of Staffordshire are credited with creating a pair of figures depicting Mr. Samuel Pickwick and Sam Weller from Charles Dickens popular novel, *Pickwick Papers*. Engravings accompanying the 1836-1837 publication of Dickens novel, depict Mr. Pickwick first meeting his comic sidekick Samuel Weller.

*Pickwick Papers* was originally published in serial form and was Dickens' first big success. When Chapter 10 hit the press and introduced the comic Sam Weller a publishing phenomenon occurred. There were bootleg copies produced as well as theatrical performances. A popular book of Sam Weller jokes appeared as did many other related items for sale such as these figures.

As Ridgway and Robey closed in 1840 it is evident that these two were produced when the novelty of Dickens new chapter and Sam Weller was at its height.

The early Bellingrath inventories indicate that these came from the home of George A. Tuthill (1807-1883) in Spring Hill. That house stood on Old Shell Road and was lost to fire in 1897. Many of the family's possessions were saved by Spring Hill College students who joined with neighbors in salvaging what they could. Mrs. Bellingrath purchased them from a granddaughter, Ellen Mordecai Garrett (1870-1955), an Ann Street neighbor in Mobile.

While the Tuthill house was lost to fire, the Garrett home was lost to progress. A parking lot for All Saints Episcopal Church fills the site today. The Tuthills and the Garretts rest within the Tuthill lot at Magnolia Cemetery.

### The Lion

On a terrace overlooking Bellingrath Garden's Mirror Lake stands a life sized lion of cast iron. This massive garden ornament was purchased in 1930 from Carrie Purvis Marshall who lived at 952 Government Street. The lion once stood on Mrs. Marshall's front walk where he was a favorite with neighborhood children.



**George Tuthill & Wife Phebe rest beneath this angel monument.**



**Majestic Cast Iron Lion at Bellingrath Gardens Since 1930.**

The lion which is nearly six feet in length is attributed to the Philadelphia firm of Robert Wood & Co. which produced a nearly identical version for that city's centennial celebration in 1876. As early as 1852 ads for Robert Wood & Co. appeared in Mobile newspapers offering "Iron Railings, Statuary, Greyhounds, Lions, Hat Stands, Tables and Settees."

Mrs. Marshall's late husband was John H. Marshall, a partner in the wholesale grocery and liquor business with John Bradford Davis. City directories indicate that the couple was residing on Government Street by 1877 and that Mrs. Marshall was a widow by 1892. Neither a grave marker or obituary has yet to be located for Mr. Marshall.

Carrie Marshall died in 1941 at the age of 93. Following a funeral from her home she was buried beside her parents in the Purvis lot at Magnolia Cemetery. Her Government Street home was eventually lost to commercial encroachment but her lion at the ripe old age of 135 continues to delight children at Bellingrath Gardens today.

Tom McGehee

## IN MEMORIUM

**Agnes Lott Bancroft**

**The Board and Employees of the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery are sad to report the death of Agnes Lott Bancroft on September 9, 2011. Mrs. Bancroft was a former board member and a long time supporter of this organization. Our condolences are extended to her daughters and their families.**

### Superintendent's Message

As another summer comes to a close, I would like to introduce you to our operations staff. They never get the credit they deserve, for the difficult working conditions encountered every summer in Mobile.

Roy Fancher worked for us from 1989-1998. He then spent 8 years working for the City of Mobile parks department, and came back to us in 2006. Roy takes care of all flower beds, and all mechanical issues involving equipment. If Roy isn't watering, planting, or pulling weeds, he is working on equipment.

Curtis Crockett has been here since 1999. He is the trimmer foreman, in charge of the string-trimmer crew. He is also in charge of the funeral crew. Since he was hired in 1999, he has been directly involved in over 90% of our funerals. His crew consists of two men; Marcus Kennedy, who started in 2006, and Christopher Lee, who has been here since 2007.

Alonzo Wilson is our mower foreman. He started working here in 1997. Alonzo and his crew take care of all mowing in the cemetery. His crew consists of three men. John Watts has been here since 2004. He is a seasonal employee, working March-October. Eddie Anderson started in 1999, and is also seasonal. He works from May-September. Timothy Perryman has been here since 2006. He is also seasonal, working from May-September.

It is our goal to cut and trim every lot in the cemetery every two weeks. I'm happy to say that 99% of the time we are able to achieve this goal. If you have any questions regarding your lot, please call me at 251-379-0611.

Mark Halseth

### Mark Your Calendars For:

Stories Among the Stones

*A Walking Tour of Magnolia Cemetery*

**Saturday, November 12, 2011**

**10:00 A.M.**

**Free for Members of the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery**

*Please Don't forget your Friends!*

**October is Renewal Month**

**THANKS!**

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

### *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.

### President's Message

The summer which is rapidly coming to a close has been thankfully quiet at Magnolia Cemetery. Near drought like conditions were followed by torrential rains making the challenge of keeping the grass cut and trimmed a challenge. A visit to the cemetery will show you that our crew is doing an outstanding job.

October is renewal month so please watch for renewal information in your mail. Our funding was severely cut due to the city's financial situation so your continued participation is crucial. Thank you in advance for your continued interest and financial support.

Our fall will be highlighted by a series of cemetery tours in November. Tige Marston and I will be conducting tours on three Saturdays starting at 10:00 AM and lasting until Noon as follows:

Saturday, November 5: Tige Marston: Victorian Burial Customs and Traditions

Saturday, November 12: 9:30 AM Fence Dedication and Dedication of Memorial to Fence Benefactor Arch Winter. Followed at 10:00 AM by Tom McGehee's Stories Among the Stones.

Saturday, November 19: Tige Marston: The History, Legends and People of Magnolia Cemetery.

The city of Mobile is considering making November a time to remember and explore our cemeteries. Please support us by coming out, enjoying our great fall weather and learning more about this historic site and the stories of the people who rest here. We would like to limit the groups to 25 and so we do ask that you call in your reservation to our office at (251) 432-8672.

Tom McGehee



### 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.

## Memorials to the Perpetual Care Trust Fund

### In Memory of . . .

Margaret White Abbot

Frederick G. Helmsing

Selwyn H. Turner, Jr.

### Given by . . .

The Family of Robert Hunter

Mr. & Mrs. Augustine Meaher, III

Mimi & Thurman Bell

Missy & Don Foose

Officers, Directors and Staff

The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery

The Family of Robert Hunter

Mr. & Mrs. Thomas C. McGehee

Dr. & Mrs. G. C. Oswalt

Mr. & Mrs. John D. Peebles

Mr. & Mrs. Thomas B. Van Antwerp

## Grave Spaces For Sale

At the present time there are only cremation spaces available for sale within Square 29. Please call our office for further information.

### Q & A by H. F. "Tige" Marston

*Q: I have my grandfather's deed to the cemetery lot he bought in Magnolia Cemetery. Doesn't this prove that I own the lot?*

**A: The short answer to your question is no. Possession of a cemetery deed from the City of Mobile in itself does not prove burial rights to the lot. Without proper binding legal documentation to the contrary, burial in a lot descends from the original purchaser to his or her children and their descendants. In each successive generation, the family members have equal rights to burial in the lot until all the space is used. If you have any questions about a lot, gather your papers and contact me at (251) 208-7307. Remember that each situation is unique and it is important that you understand your rights in advance of need for the lot. The more you do in advance of need, the easier it will be for you and your family when an emergency need arises.**

**THE FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY, INC.**

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Mobile, Alabama 36660  
friendsmagnolia@bellsouth.net

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