

TX  
HO  
1.3

**HOUSTON'S OLDEST CEMETERIES**

**Cities of the Dead of Past. Generations Neglected and  
Some of them almost Obliterated.**

.....  
Within a dozen squares of the business heart of Houston, almost hidden from view with a matted growth of rank vegetation, that at this season is sere and dead, exists the city's oldest cemetery.

It is unkempt and forlorn and presents the appearance that is too often characteristic of old age. In the hallowed spot sleep many of those who helped to hew the sills of Houston's greatness. Their bones have long since changed to ashes and time has corroded the slabs that marked their resting places until the chiseled letters on the perishable marble are no longer legible.

The younger generations and later residents of Houston, perhaps, do not even know of the presence of this sacred old burial ground. But the old-timer who has helped to fashion the destinies of the city for the last half century is aware of its presence and not unlikely has dropped tears within its inclosure.

Adjoining the Sam Houston city park on the north side is a narrow strip of ground embracing some six or seven acres. It approaches within 100 feet of Bagby street, but a view of it is obstructed by houses that have long been built between it and the thoroughfare. A high board fence separates it from the city park, like the frail partition between the realms of life and death.

Many gay people as they have strolled through the park have paused and wondered what lay beyond the high fence. At one point a stone structure, bereft of roof, rears its scarred walls, like the ruins of some miniature monastery, above the fence. A half century ago it was a vault and within it were confined forms. Now it is a mere shell. A later generation has removed the bodies and placed them in other graves.

The burial ground is known as the old Episcopal cemetery. No records are obtainable as to when it was laid out, but by common consent it is accredited the respect of the most venerable cemetery in the city.

Years ago the city sought to condemn it, and similar steps have been taken at various times since. The right of the city to do so was always questioned and with sufficient force to prevent the action being carried out. Some two years ago the city also attempted to purchase the grounds. If the deal had been consummated it was the plan to remove the bodies and add the space to the city park.

\* \* \*

Burials have practically ceased there and not one is recorded during the past two years. In fact, from time to time bodies have been removed and placed in more modern



ORANGE COUNTY  
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

cemeteries, until now the little city of the dead has not half of its former habitants. A number of family lots in which reposed all that was mortal of whole families of two generations ago have been entirely depopulated.

Old slabs still lie scattered about and their simple graven announcements give thoughts to conjure by. With but few exceptions the graves are entirely overgrown and the matted mass of vegetation is so dense that parts of the grounds can not be penetrated at all. In many lots around which are fragments of iron fences trees have grown from the seed and the yearly reproduction of weeds and briars have flourished and withered, obliterating all traces of graves.

A few rambling notes gathered from old stones and vault slabs may be of interest and may recall faces that smiled generations ago and hands that performed their part in the ceaseless struggle of human life.

The tracing on many stones is entirely effaced or illegible, but from others here and there the following records are obtained:

"Sacred to the memory of **R. Wallace**, died September 8, 1858. Age 25 years."

"In memory of **Dr. B. C. Dewey**, Formerly a resident of Coldwater, Mich.; died in Houston, October 13, 1858. Age 35 years"

"**Abraham Payne**, died January 11, 1840"

"**Catherine Cartright Payne**, Died 1811, Age 22 years."

"**Mrs. Hannah Payne**, native of England, Died November 10, 1870."

A vault bears the following inscription, "Here lies the remains of **Remi Miville DeChene**, born Quebec, Canada, May 20, 17--, Died 1860.

"**A. J. B. Anderson**, born New York, October 25, 1807. Died September 1, 1858."

"**James B., W.P. and Hellen Massie**. Died October 8, 1859. Age 5." In the same lot is a shaft on which is carved the square and the compass, with the inscription, "**William P. Massie**, died March 7, 1876, age 50."

"In memory of **Sarah E. J.**, wife of **Dr. H. Earl Hartridge**, who departed this life May \_\_, 1855. Age 28." Also "**Luzzetta**, aged 2 years, died 1858."

"**J.A. Harris--**" the rest illegible, the stone being shattered and very old.

"**Anna Marie**, only daughter of **U. and S., Evans**, born February 6, 1851; died January 23, 1856."

"In loving memory of **Kate**, daughter of **F.S. and H. T. Rottenstein**. Died November 2, 1850. Aged 4 years."

"**A.M. Duval**, born December 29, 1779, Died April 30, 1860." The inscription is on a massive vault, now partially uncovered.

"Sacred to the memory of **Dr. John S. Duval**, born October 19, 1829. Died November 14, 1858." This record is likewise on a large vault slab, but it is in a fair state of

preservation.

"In memory of **W. D. Smith**, died February 13, 1858, in the fifty-second year of his age."

"Sacred to the memory of **John Dawson**, native of Northumberland, England. Died October 1840. Age 27 years."

"In memory of **Daniel M Cutter**, born October 21, 1790. Died April 26, 1866, aged 75 years."

"**James W. Oats**, born 1797, in Sampson county, North Carolina. Died in Houston March 5, 1870."

"**George Morgan**, infant of **G.A. Jones**. Died 1850."

"Sacred to the memory of **S. H. Skiff**. Died October, 1850."

"**Alberta Foster**, died 1857."

"**Agness**, daughter of **L. S. and H. B. Perkins**, died August 6, 1846."

"This mortal must put on immortality. In memory of **Leonard S. Perkins**, aged 49. Died October 22, 1858."

"**Sarah M. Perkins**, wife of **Rev. J. W. Tays**, died at Oxford, N. Y., September 24, 1870. **Eunice**, daughter of **A.S. and F. Perkins**, died November 18, 1859. They rest in hope."

An old iron fence bears the inscription, "**J.' N. Dupree**, 1857."

On what is perhaps the largest shaft in the grounds is the following: "Sacred to the memory of **Captain D. C. Farmer**, called from labor to reward August 4, 1870.

"Noble, generous and brave, with heart and mind exultant,  
Sweet with all of manhood's graces, tender, benevolent and just;  
His word inviolate and sincere; he lived as pure a man as  
Blessed the earth since time began. And at the Master's call  
With serene and Christian dignity, his faithful heart stood still,  
And melted away to the light of heaven.

"Husband and father, devoted and true the heart,  
Whose dearest bliss was in being yours,  
The babes so wondrously loving and beloved, look above  
The wreck of earthly home and happiness to  
The final reunion, when love shall be renewed.  
Faith merged in sight, hope with fruition,  
Blended and no grief obscures the light of God's eternal day.  
Mason, Holland lodge No. 1, A.F. and A.M.  
Who wears the square upon his breast does in the  
Sight of God attest and in the face of man  
That all his actions will compare with the  
Divine, the unerring square, that square  
Great Nature's plan.  
Over the River company Fifth Texas Regiment, Hood's brigade.  
On Fame's eternal camping ground  
Their silent tents are spread,  
And glory guards with solemn round  
The bivouac of the dead."

Near the entrance of the cemetery is a shattered shaft bearing the following:  
"Henry Benchley, died February 24, 1867, age 46 years. Erected by the Houston and Texas Central Railway company as a tribute of respect to an upright man and a faithful officer.

"Enter rest eternal, the kindest husband and most indulgent father, the truest friend and the most generous man."

\* \* \*

The oldest cemetery owned by the city is said to be the one in the outskirts of the Fourth ward, just off San Felipe street. It is now little more than a commons, as it is unfenced and stock graze at will among the graves. It is free-for-all and is much used by the colored people. It is located on the banks of the bayou and after freshets it is not uncommon to find the remnants of a coffin washed from a grave. Frequently bones are found protruding from the ground. An undertaker states that the ground has been buried over a half a dozen times and that in sinking new graves old coffins are encountered.

The city condemned this cemetery a few years ago and an effort was made to enforce the order. It was during the administration of Mayor Browne and Chief of Police Alex Erichson. A test that called into play six-shooters resulted.

Friends desired to inter a body in a certain lot, in which some of the deceased's relatives were buried. The late Dr. McElroy, who was then city health officer, refused to issue the necessary permit. The persons who desired the burial employed a man to go and dig the grave and in order to furnish him protection armed themselves and went along as guards.

Chief of Police Erichson dispatched an officer to head off operations. When the latter arrived the grave-digger was busy at work and had the hole a foot deep. The officer pulled his gun and, covering the grave-digger, commanded him to cease the work. The guards thereupon, as the story is now related, likewise covered the grave-digger and ordered him to go ahead. The grave-digger was in a pretty predicament, and fell on his knees in the half-dug grave and begged them to spare his life. A truce was struck and the opposing parties decided to adjourn to the city and settle the matter by arbitration. The corpse was in the interim buried and it is stated that the grounds have ever since been open for the use of all.

\* \* \*

There has been wanton desecration of this sleeping place of the dead. A sexton has not been employed there in years and evidence of the vile work of ghouls is discernible on every hand.

