

# St. John's Cemetery Foundation

Summer Newsletter

Issue No. 2 - Summer 2012

**Inventory Nearly Complete**

After hundreds of man hours, volunteers have made some surprising discoveries--namely, more people have been buried than previously thought.

Page 1

**Annual Meeting**

Set your calendar for August 23, 2012, 5:00-6:00 pm at the Gatehouse. Pay your annual dues. Officers will be elected, financial reports discussed, etc.

Page 2

**Cataloging Owners**

The St. John's Cemetery, Inc., which owns the cemetery, is teaming up with the Foundation to improve the ownership database.

Page 2



**Property acquired from Gulf Power**  
Page 3

**Recent Burials**

While things seem quiet at St. John's, the cemetery continues to perform its mission.

Page 2

**Railroad Bill found in SJC**

Page 3

**All Saints Service**

On November 3, 2012 there will be a All Saints Service at the Gatehouse from 9-10.

Please bring your favorite snack.

Page 3

## Inventory Nearly Complete

While earlier inventories focused upon markers within Sections, this inventory focused upon markers within lots and included unmarked graves.

In October, 2011, the Friends embarked upon an ambitious goal--physically to inspect and record the location of all markers, according to Section and Lot, and compare that data to the undertaker's records.

It was a daunting task. The cemetery is 26 acres and contains known graves of over 20,000.

The information on each tombstone was compared to the information already on the cemetery website, [www.stjohnsdb.com](http://www.stjohnsdb.com). Valuable footnotes like marriage and veteran status also were recorded. Another volunteer then inputted the data into the computer along with any unmarked graves in each Lot. Another volunteer double-checked the work.

Initially, two dozen volunteers--adults and scouts--participated and made headlines in

the *Pensacola News Journal*. The work was largely continued and completed because of the herculean efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers: **Ray Atchison, Frances Coe, Malcolm Davis, Jan Edmonds, Shirley Forchilli, Kay Friedrich, Becky Hice, Wesley Odom, Leigh Prahl, and Emily Walby.**

No one realized how many unmarked graves there were. Former officer, Ted Nickenson had predicted there were lots, but as the inventory winds down, much more have been found.

"Everyone was pretty astonished," said Wesley Odom (VP FSJCF and organizer of the project) "There are over a thousand unmarked graves. Some are folks who got buried in a potter's grave, a few are the result



While New Orleans has the grave of Marie Laveau, the Voodoo Queen, Pensacola has the grave of Mollie McCoy, the infamous madam. Gulf Coast Wilbert employees donated and installed the marker for free.

of undistinguishable markers worn with time, but most appear never to have had a marker purchased by their survivors."

One discovery was the resting place of Pensacola's most infamous madam, Mollie McCoy, of 15 W. Liberty Street. She had purchased half a lot and buried her husband, whose grave was marked with a large urn. A few years later she died, and her only daughter did not bother to leave a marker.

When St. John's Corporation president, Charles Green heard about the discovery, he persuaded Gulf Coast Wilbert, which has the only contract to bury in the cemetery, to manufacture and install a tombstone for this colorful person. "Maybe her grave will develop into an attraction, who knows?" he suggested.

The inventory activity prompted Marla Dooley to donate a treasure trove of information about people buried in the cemetery. As a hobby, Marla spent 10 years researching the background of people buried there. She obtained fascinating stories and photos. These have been donated to the Foundation, and slowly, volunteers have been adding the biographies and photos to the website.

The inventory has led to many great things over the last year. Thank you very much, volunteers, Gulf Coast Wilbert, and Marla!

## Annual Meeting

Come to the Annual Meeting on Thursday, August 23, 2012 from 5:00 - 6:00 at the Gatehouse at St. John's Cemetery. Wear something comfortable because there is no air conditioning. Members of the Foundation may vote on officers and directors. Dues are only \$25/year; however, many of our members donate more than that. Please make your voice known, and hear reports from the officers.

Those unable to attend may make their checks payable to "Friends of St. John's Cemetery Foundation", and mail them to 610 N. Spring St. Pensacola, FL 32501.

The dues supports the publication and distribution of this newsletter, website, and on-going cemetery database.

## Cataloging Owners

Maintaining the ownership records of SJC has been meticulously handled since 1876. For years, the yellowed 3x5 cards have been kept in three file drawers.

Impressed with the work the Foundation was doing with the inventory and improving the database, St. John's Cemetery, Inc. president, Charles Green, approached the Foundation about taking the system into the 21st century.

Instead of relying solely upon the cards, the data also will be stored electronically in the database of the website. A new map will be created. Spaces already purchased will appear "red" and open spaces will appear "green". Prices to purchase open spaces will be available also.

SJC has pledged \$1000 toward the programming of this project.

Foundation volunteers already are hard at work transferring the data from the cards to prepare for computerization.

Vice president, Wesley Odom believes the new technology will help SJC and FSJCF manage the data easier and more efficiently. Hopefully, this project will be completed by the end of this year.

## Gatehouse Work

For years, the Gatehouse has needed a facelift on the inside. During the Fall, change will begin.

Boy Scout Troop 495 will be doing an Eagle Scout project, in which all the plaster and lathe will be removed from the chapel and office. This one day marathon project will be intense.

The Foundation is supporting the project by paying lunch for the scouts. If you would like to assist, please volunteer (a subsequent date will be forthcoming) or send a donation.

Once the plaster and lathe have been removed, the building will be inspected for wood rot, and it will be rewired. Later, new sheetrock will be installed, and hopefully a heating and air conditioning system will be installed also. To do all these later things will involve more money.

## Relative Visits from Scotland

Scotsman, Jim Russell was surfing the internet doing genealogical research when he discovered the Foundation's website, [www.stjohnsdb.com](http://www.stjohnsdb.com). He was astonished when he saw the tombstone of the relative he was researching--William Miller. What's the odds of that?

He contacted the Foundation offering information and asking questions. Soon, VP Wesley Odom responded to his request and found how Miller died.

According to the local newspaper in 1898, Miller's ship had one last night in port before getting underway. Miller evidently had one too many drinks that

night, and he missed the step in getting into the ship's boat. He sunk into the Bay, where he drowned.

To honor his great grandfather, Russell flew to Pensacola with his wife to pay his respects. Odom and volunteer Leigh Prahel welcomed the Scottish couple to the cemetery. Thereafter, he and his wife visited the Naval Aviation Museum and returned to Scotland.

If not for the website and the thorough work of Foundation volunteers, the Russell's probably never would have visited.



**Jim Russell came from Scotland to pay his respects to his great grandfather, William Miller, who drowned in Pensacola Bay in 1898.**

## Burials Year to Date

Bell, Calvin Alexander  
Brown, Loam, Jr.  
Carroll, Mary Elizabeth  
Day, Janice C.  
Georgiades, John Dimitrios  
Hubbell, Betty Jane  
Jenkins, Grace  
Johnston, Kenneth  
Langham, Justin Saul  
Novak, Karen Sue  
Painter, Virginia Marsh  
Payne, Walter D., Jr. MD  
Poston, Sarah Jane  
Sherman, Lawrence Way  
Van Matre, Mildred Lucile



## Property Acquired from Gulf Power

Years ago, Ted Nickinson and Jack Fleming negotiated an agreement with Gulf Power, which owned the vacant land across the street from the Gatehouse. As long as the Foundation maintained the property, it would have the right to purchase the land for \$1.

Upon noticing that Gulf Power was trying to sell the property, Foundation officers, Rick Fountain (President) and Wesley Odom, informed the power company that the Foundation wanted to exercise its option.

Gulf Power honored the old agreement and offered the Foundation evidence that there were no environmental problems with the property.

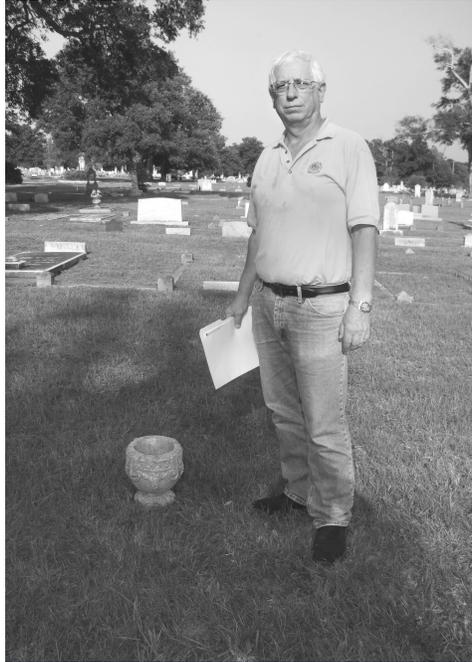
By owning the property, the Foundation can either convert it to a parking lot once the Gatehouse gets renovated or sell it and use the funds.

## Railroad Bill Found

*After over 100 years, the grave of Railroad Bill has been found.*

In July 2012, author Larry Massey inquired about the grave of Morris Slater. Wesley Odom easily was able to locate the unmarked grave thanks to the work of the volunteer project. He then met Massey at St. John's and showed him the spot in Section 42--an old black-only area of the cemetery.

Massey is completing a book about the infamous black railroad robber. According to Massey, Slater was a



**Author, Larry Massey stands at the grave of Morris Slater, better known as Railroad Bill, the infamous black L&N Railroad robber of 1896.**

turpentine worker with his great grandfather at Bluff Springs until Slater exchanged gunshots with a deputy from Pensacola one day in 1894. Slater thereafter became "Railroad Bill", conducting robberies on L&N trains, wounded two brakemen, became engaged in a gunfight with about a dozen railroad employees at Hurricane Bayou, killed a deputy named James Stewart at Bay Minette, killed Sheriff McMillan at Bluff Springs, and finally was killed at Atmore in March 1896.

The undertaker from SJC embalmed Slater before his body was sent to Montgomery to be verified. Thereafter, the body was returned to SJC, where the undertaker and Mayor removed the gunman's pistol and rifle, then sealed and buried the body in a metal coffin.

In the 1920s Slater became an item of folklore, and a Negro ballad emerged titled "Railroad Bill." It swept the south. Carl Carner in his classic book, "Stars Fell on Alabama," dedicated a chapter to him. He was often written about in retrospective local newspaper



articles. In fact, when John Lennon met Paul McCarthy for the first time, John was performing at Woolton with a new band he called The Quarrymen. One of the songs he sang that day was "Railroad Bill."

The last photo of Railroad Bill has been put on the website along with the robber's biography. Thank you, Larry Massey, for sharing this bizarre story. All will want to purchase Massey's book when it is released in 2013.

## All Saint's Service

*Back due to popular demand, an All Saint's Day Service is scheduled for November 3, 2012 from 9-10 am.*

A minister will officiate over the ceremony inside the Gatehouse. Refreshments will be provided afterwards.

If you would like to bring some refreshments, please contact wodom@armadaadvisors.com.

## Photos or Bios

*If you have photos or biographies of relatives buried in SJC, the Foundation would like copies.*

By clicking onto a person's name on the website may reveal his/her photo and a brief biography. If there is nothing, that means, no one has supplied this information to the Foundation. If you would like to memorialize your relative, simply email an electronic image of the relative and the bio. Contact Wesley Odom at 497-6167 or wodom@armadaadvisors.com

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Non Profit Organization  
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Pensacola, FL  
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*Celebrate with the Saints!*

SATURDAY

November 3, 2012

9:00 - 10:00 am

**Service in the Gatehouse**

*Bring a snack for a reception afterwards.*