

Our Community Service

by William A. "Steve" Stephens

[Portions Taken from my report to the members of the Moffat Cemetery Assn.]

We begin with some background. We became involved in the cemetery shortly after we moved to Moffat area in 1975. In 1967 we were brought to Bell County by Wm. R. Courtney and Jim D. Bowmer, attorneys, to be general manager of the Bell County Abstract Co. in Belton, [now known as First Community Title Co.] which they had purchased after the former manager/owner had died.

When we became comfortable in the job, we moved my mother here from Angleton to Belton as my step-father had recently died. We then bought land joining the west side of the Moffat Baptist Church for my wife, Zilpha's mother and father from Dallas to retire in the Moffat area in April 1969.

We visited the Moffat area many times and enjoyed the people and the Moffat Baptist Church fellowship. We were made to feel like old home folks from the very beginning. Then we started to search for a place where we could buy, build and live in Moffat.

We eventually bought the land across the road from Zilpha's parents and began construction in 1974 and completed enough to move into it in 1975. After we settled in and began attending church and community dinners etc., we said we were only planning to make one more move and that would be to the cemetery.

We always were very interested in community service work and never seemed to have much time. We knew that they had been getting the community together to clean the cemetery and that it was not a perpetual care cemetery.

After living in Moffat for about a year, Clara Brown invited us to attend a Moffat Cemetery Association meeting that was to be held at the residence of Alex and Rhoda Brown so we went to see what it was all about.

Alex Brown was president, 'Hoss' Hyden was vice president and Olean Ludwick was secretary and Ruth Hyden recorded the purchases in a looseleaf binder.

We asked to see the maps and see where the lots were that for sale. We were told that they had no maps or inventory. The maps that had been in existence had been lost many years ago. We did agree to buy an eight place plot to become a member of the association to be able to care for the ones we knew that we were going to have to be responsible for.

We soon found that they had no system of selling the lots. They simply went out and found what appeared to be a vacant spot and mark it off giving it the next number as being sold. Alex

Brown and 'Hoss' Hyden usually did this and a portion of the lot sale price was paid to them for locating the lot.

As to the location of the lots sold was a simple statement that it was near 'Joe Blow' or 'Sam Jones' or some such reference and sometimes would state its size. Without knowing where 'Joe Blow' or 'Sam Jones' was you would not know where the lot was.

We began asking questions such as 'If someone should ask you where some one was buried out there how would you be able to tell them if you do not have maps or inventory'. The reply was 'We go and look for them'. I said that is crazy to walk over 11+ acres looking for a particular grave. You have to have something better than that. To that, the reply was 'when can you start' and that is what got us started in our work with the association. It was obvious there was no one there qualified to create maps or inventory. That made me feel as though we were 'called' to do a job that needed to be done that God had qualified us to do.

Of course we could not devote much time to community service of any kind as I was still working as well as Zilpha was working at the day care for First Baptist Church in Belton. I did start some research, however, from the office.

We found that the secretary, Olean Ludwick's nephew who was an attorney, had gotten the cemetery incorporated as a non profit corporation in the mid 1970's and that a Trust Agreement had been executed with the Temple National Bank but few funds were in it at this time.

We contacted the Secretary of State and ordered a copy of the incorporation papers to see just what we may be required to do under the by-laws etc. We found that the attorney that did the incorporation work had failed to provide any by-laws to operate under. All we got was a copy of the charter and incorporation as a perpetual non-profit corporation.

We checked with the association secretary to see what the attorney had given her, and she gave us blank copies of business type by-laws which did not fit cemeteries at all and the blanks in the copies were not filled out at all.

We later drew up the by-laws and got them approved and began to operate under them. These bi-laws provide [among other things] that anyone who has relatives/ancestors here or owns a lot here is a voting member of the association but you have to be present to vote.

We began our research as we had time and started to work out an inventory and plats of the entire cemetery. The cemetery currently covers 11+ acres and is made up of several tracts which I compiled from the deed records but will not detail here but have covered in my report on the history of the cemetery. A copy of that will be furnished upon request.

Moffat Cemetery originally began many years ago as a Masonic and family cemetery. The earliest recorded document found in the records of Bell County that gave any reference to the cemetery was a deed from J. A. Grimes in March of 1869. He sold his farm to Mary E. Dean and mentioned a reservation of two acres in the form of a square near the center of the 109 acre tract which had been conveyed to others for cemetery purposes that had a Live Oak tree in the center marked with a 'G'.

I went to the Belton Library and Ms. Lena Armstrong dug into some old files and came up with a copy of an old inventory made about 1960 by some historians by walking through the cemetery. I prevailed on her to let me take that copy to my office to make copies and returned the originals to her.

I took the old inventory and made a card file on each name including all information the inventory offered. From this we started trying to walk the area and locate these names. We found there was no system to the way they were listed and we would have to do differently.

A group of Boy Scouts from Temple asked if they could inventory the cemetery for an Eagle Scout Merit Badge. I gave them permission but their report was not as good as the old one we had but it did give us another check for errors in case we missed some one. All items that were different were double checked. I do not know if the Scouts got their merit badge or not as I was never asked to verify their work.

The old portion east of the main road was in such a disorganized manner that we could not just go down the rows. Some graves were in rows and others were mixed in between and some even facing a different direction so we concluded that we had to just make a graph of the area. We drew a line from north to south about midways of the large part calling the West ½ as Section A and the East ½ as Section B then attempted to measure off in approximately fifty foot squares. We called the rows going north & south as rows A, B, & C in each section from west to east and then numbered each 50' block in the rows going from south to north as 1 to 12. If a grave is listed as being in Section A @ 9/C it would be in the first section east of the main road and the grave would be approximately 2/3 of the distance to the north and between 100 and 150 feet east of the road.

We inventoried the old part of the cemetery and gave the location of each by the grid of the 50 foot squares and designating which square each marker was located. My wife, Zilpha, and I walked the cemetery many times over several months and years to find all the graves that had markers and show their location. A few of the names listed on that inventory were not found I have been informed that there are others we had no name for who probably had only temporary markers which were destroyed by time and there were many unmarked graves we could not identify. Also many of the old stones were so weathered we were not able to read. And there were many errors in the old inventory.

We retired in 1989 and could spend more time. We then drew plats of each section of the newer part and locating the names thereon that had markers and on the lots that were sold since incorporation and mapping lots on all the vacant area and giving them a lot number in the section they were located.

We have declared the portion east of the main road as the 'old part' and that we were not going to sell any more lots in those sections due to the fact that there are no records showing ownership and there are many areas that are claimed as family plots where there may only be one or two graves there as of now but more were planned for the future. We could not argue with anyone who may claim family plots.

We have since sold lots by the lot number and section and all these, and the inventory, are now on computer and up to date. We now have over 1400 names listed which include names of purchasers of lots but they are not deceased.

We felt that since the cemetery was old that a historical designation would be a prestige step in the right way. We researched and recorded many graves for war veterans, Civil War, WW1, WW2, Korea, and Viet Nam, as well as some historical figures, pioneers, political figures etc., and took pictures etc.

We submitted this to the Texas Historical Commission in Austin and after almost three years research, many letters, and phone calls, we got our designation as a historical cemetery in October 2003.

Then the job of raising funds to buy the marker came. We got this done by sending out letters to the known contributors and persons who had contacted us about the cemetery that we had kept their address and raised over \$3000.00. We had specified the estimated cost would be something over \$1000.00, but as it turned out, we spent about \$1800.00 on the marker. We had also specified that any surplus would be placed in the trust fund which we did.

Then we ordered the marker and later dedicated it on Saturday, Nov. 27, 2004. At this time I had my good friend and former boss and prominent attorney, Jim D. Bowmer who also had ancestors of his wife in the cemetery and who also had erected the gateway to the cemetery some years earlier, to give the dedication speech. We had approximately 50 to 55 attending.

We had notified the news media and the historic commission as requested and expected to have a good crowd to attend but none from the commission or news media came.

More information and inventory down to 2006 about the cemetery can now also be found on the web under "[Moffat Cemetery](#)".

The Historical marker reads as follows:

THIS BURIAL GROUND BEGAN AS A FAMILY
AND MASONIC CEMETERY. ALTHOUGH
MANY, POSSIBLY OLDER, GRAVES EXIST,
THE OLDEST MARKED GRAVE IS THAT OF
MARY MARSHALL (9d. 1861). IN 1869, EIGHT
YEARS AFTER MARSHALL'S DEATH, J.A.
GRIMES SOLD HIS FARM TO MARY E. DEAN,
THE PARCEL OF LAND EXCLUDED TWO
ACRES SET ASIDE FOR A GRAVEYARD. IN

1893, DEAN DEEDED ADDITIONAL
PROPERTY FOR THE CEMETERY TO THE
LEON MASONIC LODGE NO. 193, AF&AM.. R. J.
AND HATTIE GOODE CONVEYED
ADDITIONAL LAND TO THE LODGE IN 1916.

ON JULY 23, 1921, THE MASONIC LODGE
DEEDED THE PROPERTY TO THE MOFFAT
CEMETERY ASSOCIATION, WHICH LATER
ACQUIRED ADDITIONAL LAND FOR THE
BURIAL GROUND. THE ASSOCIATION
INCORPORATED IN 1976.

THE CEMETERY IS THE FINAL RESTING
PLACE FOR NUMEROUS AREA SETTLERS,
INCLUDING PIONEER ISAAC THOMAS BEAN
(1821 – 1899), WHO CAME TO TEXAS IN 1823
WITH HIS FAMILY. THE NAMES OF
PROMINENT FAMILIES AND MILITARY
VETERANS ARE FOUND ON THE NUMEROUS
MARKERS, WHICH INCLUDE VERTICAL
STONES AND STONE CAIRNS.

HISTORIC TEXAS CEMETERY - 2003

Copies of the by-laws, history or any other information will be furnished upon request.

Our regular meetings have been held on the 2nd Saturday in October at 9 am at the
Community House [the former school house] when we elect officers and give the financial report

and we would like for as many as could to attend these meetings but few seemed interested except the elderly of the community.. We always are open to new input.

The Moffat Homecoming which has been held each year on the last Friday and Saturday of July at the Community House and was the first and probably was the only fundraiser for the cemetery for many years and still serves that function to some extent but now seems to be playing out as the older people of Moffat die off. Hopefully it will continue so we can go and visit some old school friends and make some new friends. We have many newcomers to Moffat as many new homes are being built in the area and I would like to see them join in and continue the homecoming.. This gives you more opportunities for community services.

The trust agreement that the Temple National bank had been in charge of had not produced the desired income and the bank had been charging fees which had taken most of the income that was produced.

In December 1991, the Temple National Bank wrote us stating that the account was 'too small for them to be profitable' and requested we take it back. We took it back effective at the end of that year.

There was considerable discussion as to what we should do with the funds. As things turned out, I was requested to look into the investment possibilities. After some research, I suggested that we should invest with Edward D. Jones Co. and request they invest only in federal home loan type securities such as F N M A which we did. The original amount the bank returned to us was around \$35,000.00

When these funds were invested, we requested that interest only payments be transferred to our general account. As these funds built up, we invested more along with the donations and funds from lot sales. These funds grew as I did not charge a fee for lot sales and neither did Edward Jones Co. except a small fee when a transfer was made. Now there is \$145,000.00 +/- in that account.

The only person being paid is our landscape man who does the mowing etc. This includes any expenses he may have in the spraying for grass burrs and anything he needs for road maintenance or other landscape work.

The cemetery is always in need of road repairs as there are numerous potholes in what roads we have. Due to the rock in the front area of Section E which is just west of the main entrance has now been reserved as parking area and possibly a mausoleum and office building the future

We recently discovered that there is a water line which was installed across the southwest corner of the cemetery property. This presents a problem for the future development of that part of the cemetery and as presently located eliminates several proposed lots. Surveyors have been in the area and there are rumors that the highway department has in their extended plans, the widening of the highway which would take some of the property. If this is the case, my suggestion would be to let them have what they want in exchange for them relocating the water line within 10 feet of their right of way line. This would give us access to several lots we cannot sell now.

In view of the above we will wait to see what the future brings so we have directed that no lots be sold south of the water line and no lots sold within 20 feet of the north side of the waterline

and no more lots sold near the highway until further notice awaiting to see what the highway department plans to do. They may relocate some of those already buried near the highway.

I want to thank all who have participated in the Cemetery Association and contributed to the success thus far of this project. I thank God for allowing me to be able to do this community service work, it has been a rewarding experience to see all that has been accomplished since we have been involved but much more needs to be done.

I now have resigned from the office as your president hoping everyone comes forward and take the responsibility of checking the obits. in the paper every day, recording them and maintaining the records, do the correspondent work, keeping the flags up, and take care of the phone call inquiries and generally coordinate the work that may be needed from time to time. I am now 86 years old and have trouble with my blood pressure and not able to get around as good as I should.

At our October 10th 2009 meeting, we elected others to take over all the cemetery duties and responsibilities. It has taken some time to get everything transferred but when that is done, there will be a big load off my shoulders and I feel those elected will carry the work forward with God's blessings.

Steve

Wm. A. [Steve] Stephens, President Emeritus

Moffat Cemetery Assn.