

JCHC JOURNAL

J E F F E R S O N C O U N T Y H I S T O R I C A L C O M M I S S I O N

MOSAIC TEMPLARS OF AMERICA

BY LES MCMAHEN

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- September 21,
2022 3:00pm
- November 16,
2022 3:00pm

The Mosaic Templars of America was an African-American fraternal organization founded in 1882 and incorporated in 1883 in Arkansas. It offered illness, death and burial insurance to African-Americans at a time when white insurers refused to treat them equally. At its peak in the 1920s, the organization had an estimated membership of 100,000 individuals, and had chapters in 26 states and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. It later expanded its holdings to include

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(Picture source – Les McMahan collection)

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the Mosaic national Building and Loan Association, a Mosaic State Hospital, and the *Mosaic Guide* newspaper.

In addition to the various male-membership chapters, the MTA also had female-membership “chambers” as auxiliary units.

Of the several core operations of the MTA, a notable one was the monument department which sought to provide every deceased member with a custom-made Vermont marble marker engraved with the MTA symbol. Many of these headstones can still be found in cemeteries across the South, though some undoubtedly have been broken or weathered to the appearance of cast concrete. Examples can be found in several Jefferson County cemeteries.

Evergreen Cemetery (Beaumont) is home to at least 5 MTA headstones: Emerline Barkley-Queen of Neches Chamber #4791; Clara Hunter-Silver Leaf Chamber (number unknown); Alice Jenkins-Bradley Chamber #3605; Emma Hector-(name unknown) Chamber #3585; and, Jessie Bolden-(name unknown) Chamber #3309.

Pear Orchard Cemetery (Beaumont) is home to at least one MTA headstone: Roxie Reed-(name unknown) Chamber #3585.

Johnson Cemetery (Port Arthur) is home to at least three MTA headstones: Rosa Wiltz-Queen of South Chamber #3583; Laura Byrd-Queen of South Chamber #3583; and, Bertha Hudley-Pearl(?) Francis Chamber #5285.

All of the headstones must have been beautiful when new, but the ones noted above have worn to varying degrees. Clara Hunter’s headstone (photo on cover page) shows best the detail of the MTA symbol.

(Text source – The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture)



CATHERINE JEANETTE STENGELE

BY PAUL PROSPERIE

A person who has intrigued me is Catherine Jeanette Stengele. I learned of her story from a friend while photographing headstones in Magnolia Cemetery. According to him, Catherina was a seamstress who saved all her money and who, upon her death, had paid for an impressive mausoleum as her final resting place. I found this story odd because a lowly seamstress would never make enough to afford a mausoleum that covers 12 plots. So, the research began.

Early Beaumont was home to an entrepreneur in the form of the Dutch-born youthful Miss Stengele. According to her naturalization form, she arrived in this country in 1884, spent a few years in Baltimore learning the millinery business, and then moved to Beaumont in the late 1880s. The form also shows that she was born on February 28, 1856, and not 1866, as stated on her mausoleum. (I suppose that some people need to hold on to their youth even in death.)

Miss Stengele was certainly competent in the world of business. As a single woman in the 1890s, she made a good living with her millinery business and other ventures in the financial and real estate sectors. She had the help of lawyers for living trust claims and property claims, which also seemed to work well for her. Miss Stengele was so successful in finance that she placed an ad in the Beaumont Journal in May 1899 stating that she was "Going to quit the business! I am going to quit the millinery business, and from the date will sell my entire stock at very low prices."

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Catherina Jeanette Stengele seemed to be a natural when it came to finance and the lending market. So much so that she quit her day job, so to speak. Her investments would even finance a return trip to Europe in 1901. See the article in the Beaumont Enterprise dated January 6, 1900.

Although the records from 1900 until her death in 1909 tell the tale of a successful businesswoman, not every investment she made went according to plan. For instance, around 1905–1906, court proceedings show the bankruptcy of a rice farm in Langhorne in which she held a \$20,000 stake.

In April 1909, Miss Stengele left Beaumont for Los Angeles because of an illness. An article from the Houston Post dated September 16, 1909, states that she “underwent two surgeries for appendicitis during the summer.” Unfortunately, Miss Catherina Jeanette Stengele passed away the day before the article was printed, on September 15, 1909.

I found a few articles from the Beaumont Journal that reviewed the highlights of her life and the aftermath of her death, but her will is undoubtedly of considerable interest. According to hearsay, she was at odds with one of her brothers and left him nothing, though technically that’s not true.

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SPECIAL NOTICES.

MAGNOLIA NURSERY.
Fruit, Shade and Ornamental trees
for sale by M. Kaltonbach, Spindle
top.

LESSONS IN EMBROIDERY.
Mrs. Flora Shea will give lessons in
embroidery and Battenberg, and sells
material also. Stamping done to
order. **Stengele** building. 12 12

SPECIAL NOTICE.
Having sold my millinery business
and being compelled to go to Europe
next year, it will be absolutely ne-
cessary for me to collect all accounts
that are due me. All those knowing
themselves to be indebted to me will
please call and settle at once, or their
account will be placed in the hands of
attorney for collection. 12-14
Mlle JEANNETTE STENGELE.

You may notice the name Stengele Building highlighted in yellow above the article. Miss Stengele also owned a three-story brick building at 345 Pearl Street in Beaumont, which had housed her millinery shop as well as several of her tenants.

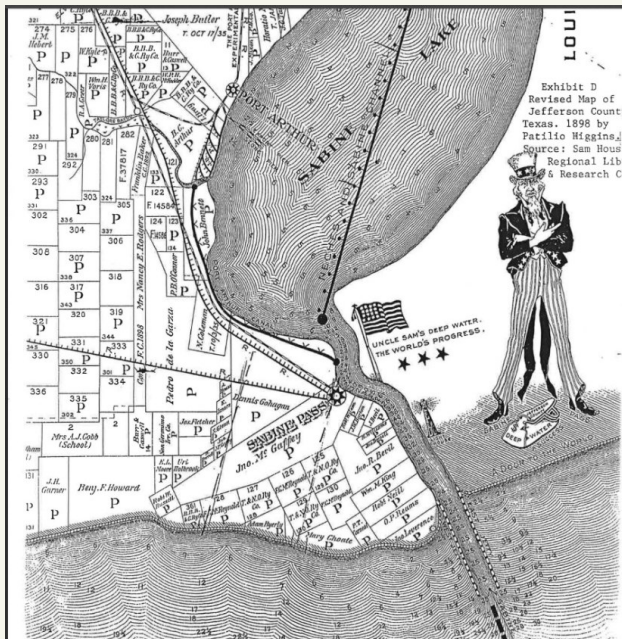
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Browsing through her will, I found that she did leave a detailed list of her heirs and her final wishes. Her wish for the St. Catherine of the Wheel statue was originally included in the first draft of her will in 1908, but the mausoleum was only added in May 1909. She had many family members, both locally and in Holland, to whom she bequeathed her wealth. Her assets were around \$120,000. That's the equivalent of \$3.1 million today. Not too bad for a lowly seamstress—or should I say, a milliner?

MARKER SPOTLIGHT

THE CITY OF SABINE AND SABINE PASS

Sabine Pass Lions Park - 7th and Broadway



The first known settlers in this area were John McGaffey and Thomas Courts, who arrived in 1832. Sam Houston assisted Manuel de los Santos Coy in acquiring a land grant here in 1833. Two years later Houston and two partners purchased Coy's property holdings. On January 19, 1839, Gen. Sam Houston signed the charter that established the city of Sabine. Houston was active in promoting the sale of 2,060 town lots. The city soon flourished. Houston and his partners lost title to the town when the General Land Office determined that John McGaffey held original claim to

the lands. The city of Sabine developed into a major port. In 1860 the State Legislature, in approving a new charter for the city, changed the name to Sabine Pass. It was the scene of a major Civil War engagement in 1863, with Confederate forces preventing a Union attempt to capture the port and gain major inroads into Texas. The Federal Harbor Act of 1882 led to construction of jetties here and development of inland ports along the Neches and Sabine rivers. By the early 20th century Sabine Pass began to decline due to hurricane damage which prevented railway maintenance.

PROJECT UPDATES

JCHC MEMBERS ARE INVOLVED IN A VARIETY OF PROJECTS AROUND JEFFERSON COUNTY

Cemetery Inventory— The Texas Historical Commission has asked each County in Texas to participate in an effort to update the cemetery section of the THC Atlas (found at <https://atlas.thc.texas.gov>) The JCHC has completed a desktop-level survey of approximately 60 cemeteries and will continue through the end of 2022 to survey and research additional cemeteries within the county. Progress has been made by multiple JCHC members to identify World War 1 Veterans buried within the county.

Historic Resources Survey— Our Historic Resources Survey, being performed by HHM, from Austin, TX is approximately 66% completed. In 2023 the project will continue with more public meetings and the creation of a county-wide preservation plan.

Historic Markers— The JCHC Currently has 4 markers in process with the Texas Historical Commission in Austin. The Methodist Church in China marker is tentatively scheduled to ship on September 2, 2022 . A marker relocation for the former Trinity Lutheran Church in Port Arthur was completed on Wednesday, August 31, 2022. A special thanks goes to Precinct 2 Commissioner Darrell Bush and the Precinct 2 Road and Bridge department for their help on this relocation. We are currently awaiting approval from the THC for another marker relocation for First Baptist Church of Beaumont to its current home on Major Drive. The church was formerly located in downtown Beaumont.

Sabine Pass Cemetery Ground-Penetrating Radar Survey— THC Archaeological Steward and prospective JCHC Member, Matt Reeves has coordinated with the Fort Bend Archaeological Society to perform a survey of the Sabine Pass Cemetery with ground-penetrating radar. The GPR will provide a better idea of what lies underneath the surface of the cemetery, which has undergone so many changes since its earliest days. Sabine Pass and the Sabine Pass Cemetery have long been subjects of interest to Jefferson County historians due to their importance in early Texas history. We are looking forward to reading the report, which will be graciously provided by Bruce Grethen of the Fort Bend Archaeological Society. Special thanks both to Mr. Grethen and Matt Reeves for their work to begin this long-awaited project.

BLACK WWI VETERANS BURIED AT JOHNSON CEMETERY

JCHC member Les McMahan recently worked to locate and photograph the markers at the graves of all Black World War I veterans buried at Johnson Memorial Park (aka Johnson Cemetery) in Groves. With a time investment of approximately 22 hours, Les was able to identify 93 veterans and photograph their graves. The list and photos will be used in the future on the JCHC website as research resources. The information has also been provided to Greenlawn, which oversees Johnson Memorial Park as well as to the Port Arthur Library History Center. Below are a sample of the photos and information gathered.



Above:

Evans, Jimmie Samuel

Enlisted Alabama, Boy 1st Class, US Coast Guard

Born – date unknown, died February 7, 1942

Below:

King, Dave

Enlisted Texas, Private, US Army, 341st Labor Battalion

Born – date unknown, died January 28, 1919,



Above:

Prater, Joseph

Enlisted Louisiana, Private, US Army, 65th Pioneer Infantry

Born – date unknown, died September 29, 1931



UPCOMING EVENTS

September 10– American Heritage Merit Badge opportunity presented by American Legion Post 33. Scout will have an opportunity to earn their American Heritage Merit Badge by participating in a tour of historic downtown Beaumont. RSVP by emailing: Pipkinparkhonorguard@gmail.com

September 15– “Sea of Mud: Retreat of the Mexican Army after San Jacinto, McFaddin Family at San Jacinto”. 6:30pm– 8:00pm at the McFaddin-Ward House Visitor Center. For more information visit: <https://mcfaddin-ward.org/events>.

September 29– Music in the Gardens: Jazz and Juleps. McFaddin Ward House gardens. 6:30pm-8:00pm. For more information visit: <https://mcfaddin-ward.org/events>.

October 5– The Revival of Extinct Native Cultures– The Karankawas. 6:30pm– 8:00pm at the McFaddin-Ward House Visitor Center. For more information visit: <https://mcfaddin-ward.org/events>.

October 20– 2nd Annual historic Magnolia Cemetery Tour. 4pm– 6pm. Hear stories of Beaumonters of the past and enjoy the peaceful historic Magnolia Cemetery grounds.

October 20– Folk Master: A Portrait of America. 6:30pm– 8:00pm at the McFaddin-Ward House Visitor Center. For more information visit: <https://mcfaddin-ward.org/events>.

October 21– THLA Open House and Educational Opportunity. Join the Tyrrell Historical Library Association and the staff of the Tyrrell Library for an open house from 4pm to 6pm to learn more about the operations of the Tyrrell Library, notable Beaumonters and how you can become a THLA member.

October 22– 2nd Annual historic Magnolia Cemetery Tour. 10am– 2pm. Hear stories of Beaumonters of the past and enjoy the peaceful historic Magnolia Cemetery grounds.

GET IN TOUCH

JCHC Offices: 1149 Pearl Street—3rd floor

Beaumont, TX 77701

409-835-8701

www.facebook.com/FRIENDSofJCHC