



Oakland Cemetery

By Frances James (1922 – 2019)

After the railroads came to Dallas in 1872-73, the population rapidly expanded and by 1887, the four separate downtown cemeteries, the Masonic, the Odd Fellows, the Jewish and the City Cemetery, now known as Pioneer Cemetery were running out of space. George Loudermilk, an entrepreneur, along with other citizens was making arrangements to purchase land in the area south of the city for a new cemetery providing perpetual care. Most of the other cemeteries in the county did not provide perpetual care and were eyesores most of the time.

The fifty-one acres of land this group eventually purchased for Oakland Cemetery located at 3900 Malcolm X, formerly Oakland Avenue, was a portion of the over 4400 acres of the league and labor known as the Thomas Lagow League. Thomas Lagow, had come to Texas in 1833 with the Reverend Daniel Parker, and had received bounty land from the Republic of Texas for his participation in the War with Mexico. Thomas Lagow never did come to Dallas, but among his four sons who each inherited a share of the land; two of them came to Dallas. Richard Lagow (1841-1885) lived on and farmed some of his land; he also donated and sold a portion of his land. Part of Fair Park is on the Lagow land. Richard purportedly traded that land for a team of oxen and a wooden plow! The land that was assembled for Oakland Cemetery by 1887 was on Burr Lane and the street name was changed to Oakland in 1894 because of the cemetery!

The Oakland Cemetery was dedicated on December 8, 1892. An organization, named The Cemetery Lot Owners, held a meeting in the offices of the association that were at 255 Main Street (upstairs) on Saturday May 25, 1899 at 3 o'clock for the purpose of selecting two trustees and other business.

In 1910 the City of Dallas purchased some land from the cemetery so that they could widen Oakland Street and place sewer pipes. In 1911, after several additions had been made to the original thirty acre site, a revised plat was filed for record. J.E. Cockrell was president of the Oakland Cemetery Company at that time. The influenza epidemic was devastating in 1918 and 1919. The Dallas newspapers kept a running list of the names of the people who died each day. Several thousand cases of influenza were reported and hundreds died. Nearly every family in Dallas had been affected by this extremely viral strain of the "flu." Lots were sold through the years for \$30.00 each and twenty-five percent was set aside for the cemetery's endowment fund.

In 1923 the ownership of the cemetery was transferred into a non-profit corporation known as the Oakland Lot Owners Association with the fund set up to care for the operation of the Cemetery. At one time the Trust Fund was administered by the Northern Trust Company of Dallas. In 2005 the Board of Directors consisted of W.C.

Miller, Dr. John McCoy, Barbara Spalti Rawson, Robert Reynolds, Betty May Exall Stewart and Janet Reynolds Tydlaska, all whose families owned lots in the cemetery.

The surrounding area has changed drastically since this land was selected for a cemetery. At that time certain areas of Dallas were segregated. Just to the north and slightly east is the Wheatley Place Addition to the City of Dallas. This addition was developed by Alex Camp in 1916 exclusively for blacks. Camp was the son of Aaron Camp who came to Texas in 1868 with William H. Gaston and established one of the first banks in Dallas County. After Aaron died in 1881 Mrs. Camp married J. F. Warren. For many years after Warren's death Mrs. Warren refused to sell or divide the land they both owned until 1915, when she allowed her son Alex to develop Wheatley Place.

On the east side of the fence line of Oakland Cemetery the City of Dallas purchased six acres of land to be used as a pauper's cemetery in 1901. This new space was necessary as the pauper's cemetery adjacent to Greenwood Cemetery on Oak Grove and McKinney, which had been in used by the city and county for over thirty years, was running out of space. The southernmost section of these six acres is the Confederate Cemetery. Both of these sites are maintained by the Dallas Park and Recreation Department.

There are over 29,000 graves in Oakland Cemetery, which was designed by Benjamin Grove a noted design engineer from Louisville, Kentucky. Many of the families who purchased lots or plots at Oakland were elected officials, owners of companies, bankers, and developers of the City of Dallas. A large selection of beautiful headstones, grave markers and other memorials has been placed here by families and friends. These tributes are some of the most beautiful in Dallas. Many of these early pioneers were re-interred in Oakland from other cemeteries because it did have perpetual care.

Each year this cemetery still has a few burials from time to time, members of families who own lots here. For a while it was closed as only early families and their members could be buried here. There was unused space and several years ago the lots were again being sold to the general public. The preponderance of plastic flowers, balloons and displays of other decorations show where the newest burials are. It is closed again now. There is a sexton on duty every day and he oversees the maintenance and does much of the work himself. Many of the old trees need to be trimmed and this will be a continuing problem. Through the years families have donated property, sterling silver tea sets, jewelry, and other valuables to be sold and the money to be invested in the trust account. Since first established the trust account has been seriously affected by the depressions and various investment opportunities that have been experienced in Dallas.

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Humble Living Philanthropist

Louis Antonio Pires (1841-1922) was just one of the notable individuals to be buried at Oakland. He was a Portuguese native who became an orphan on the trip to America. Both of his parents died of cholera on board the ship. When Louis and his brother arrived in America they were first placed in an orphan asylum. One little boy was adopted by a family in Pennsylvania and Louis was adopted by a family in Missouri. He served four years in the Confederate Army in the artillery. He was captured at Vicksburg. After the war was over he eventually made his way to

Shreveport, Louisiana, where he went into the fire insurance business and became an insurance adjuster. He moved to Dallas in 1878. Pires belonged to several Masonic bodies, was generous and believed in the principals, but was not active in the orders.

Pires was hard working and very thrifty, never married nor had a family, never had a nice place to live just roomed at the Dallas Club. He wore patched clothes. He had a gift for banking and purchased one of the first lots in Marsalis, a new addition in Oak Cliff, paying \$450.00 for a plot at the corner of Twelfth and Crawford. When he died he was originally interred in the James Charles O'Conner family mausoleum. He was later honored by his friends with a beautiful memorial designed by George Dahl and is buried underneath it. He died in 1922 and when his will was opened it stipulated that \$500,000.00 would be given to St. Paul Sanitarium, the Masonic Charities were given \$500,000.00; Buckner Orphans Home was given \$500,000.00; and Southern Methodist University had also been given \$500,000.00! There were also other \$40,000.00 gifts to his brother's family and friends. It is believed that when the First Methodist Church on Ross Avenue was being built in 1926 they needed more funding and were able to access the endowment funds at SMU that had been established by this gift from L.A. Pires.

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Two Lovers

There is a gravesite for a young Bavarian girl who stepped on a needle and blood poisoning set in. When she died her fiancée committed suicide and they are both buried at Oakland Cemetery. Barbara Rawson's father was on the Board of Trustees at the time, and it was decided they should inter these two sweethearts, at no cost, in the cemetery.

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There are many chapters of Dallas History buried in this large cemetery.

Frances James, "Dallas County History – From the Ground Up, Book II," 2009.



Oakland Gate

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