

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Robert Crosser**

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Interviewer: Jane Goodsell

Transcriber: Olga Barr

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11 Pages



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Transcript

GOODSILL: This is Jane Goodsill interviewing Bob Crosser for the first time. We are at the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Office in Richmond, Texas. Today's date is February 1, 2011. I'm interviewing Bob so he can give us some information on the historic cemeteries of Fort Bend County. Good Morning.

CROSSER: Good Morning. These are notes that are in addition to information contained in each individual cemetery folder. I've got them in my head and we need to leave them for someone else when I'm no longer in this position or not available.

GOODSILL: Where are the folders located at this point and time?

CROSSER: The folders are located in two places. The master file is in the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Office. They are accessible with locks...with keys. There is another copy maintained in the Genealogical History section of the Fort Bend Library, the George Memorial Library, which is accessible to the public.

The first cemetery I'd like to talk about is the Armstrong Place Cemetery. An old black man, Taylor Gates, now deceased, pointed out this cemetery. He pointed toward the location of this cemetery from the Moore property north of this site. No grave markers are apparent. St. Augustine grass covers this site, which is about fifty feet north and south, by eighty feet east and west. Taylor Gates worked for the Armstrong family. That's the end of the Armstrong Place.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Armstrong Cemetery at FM 442, Needville, Texas, is known by two other names, New Prospect Cemetery and Prospect Baptist Church Cemetery. Known cemeteries are registered in Texas by main name, and State No., (FB-Cnnn), or Alternate Name. Where numbers are known not mentioned in the interview, they will be inserted parenthetically for convenience. The registered number for the Armstrong Cemetery is FB-C054.

The Fort Bend County Historical Commission maintains a listing of all known [cemeteries](#) on its website. Scroll over the link at the left to go to that page.

GOODSILL: Do you need to give us more of the location for posterity?

CROSSER: It's in the folder. The next historical cemetery I'd like to talk about is the Bain's Family Cemetery (FB-C032). It's near this cemetery. There's an 1850 vintage brick underground cistern that is in the pasture between the cemetery and Wallis Road. It is located at latitude 29°41.715N and longitude 95°54.348W, NAD83. It is probably where the Bain's home was.

The next cemetery would be the Blue Ridge Prison Cemetery. My informant, Gene Dinges, now deceased, once lived just north of the prison. He was a cattle man but he was raised near this cemetery. He said that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice moved some of the burials when they closed the prison, but not all of them. No markers are visible.

NOTE: See Sue Reese Dinges interview, Gene's wife, on the FBC Historical Commission website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=42788>

The next cemetery I'd like to talk about is the Beneficial Society Cemetery (FB-C100). It is bounded on three sides and enclosed within the Fort Bend Country Club golf course, not fenced. All markers are down. It is illegally used as a part of the golf course. If the golf course is sold, then this issue needs to be raised. But I see nothing to be gained by doing it right now. The next is the Brazos River grave. John Walker and I attempted to find the grave marker in the river. It had fallen in the river when the river was very low. We were not successful, and to date we still are not. But, we'll try again maybe when the river is low.

The next cemetery I'd like to talk about would be the Brick Church Cemetery (FB-C037). Danny Ryan, who lives on the north side and whose property adjoins the cemetery on Morton Road, has succeeded in mowing part of the cemetery. He implied there was a deed dedicating it. We haven't followed-up, but this needs to be done.

The next cemetery I'd like to talk about is the Burnside Cemetery (FB-C158) which is depicted on a 1917 map of the Fenn Plantation. Joe Fenn and T. J. Waller pointed it out to John Walker as being the Burnside Cemetery. They were present when the channel of Oyster Creek was being moved west, taking out part of the cemetery. They advised the person in charge that the cemetery was being encroached, to no avail. In 2009, the Fort Bend County Road and Bridge Department placed cemetery signs on county road right-of-ways adjacent to known cemeteries. After the department installed the Burnside Cemetery, a representative of the Sienna Plantation Home Owners Association (HOA) complained that the signs were placed on their property without their permission. The Road and Bridge Department maintain that the sign is in their road right-of-way. Sienna HOA says the street is private and there is no county right-of-way.

A meeting was held with Mrs. Sandi Denton and Susan Alford, representing the HOA, in which the existence of the cemetery was proven. Next, they asked for a meeting at the office of Franklin Schodek, registered, professional land surveyor. He's the source of a copy of the map where we found the exact location Burnside Cemetery.

In the meantime, I received several emails from a homeowner, whose property faces the cemetery, wanting to know why the cemetery was not marked before. Bert Bleil and I arrived at the surveyor's office at the appointed time to find that Mrs. Denton and Mrs. Alford, along with the operations manager for the developer, had arrived considerably earlier and had presented their evidence to Mr. Schodek, evidence they claim proved that the Burnside Cemetery is now entirely in the altered channel of Oyster Creek.

I might point out that this HOA is still controlled by the developer, being represented by this operations manager. I disagreed and refuted the argument with the use of an aerial photograph. Mr. Schodek agreed with me. Next, the operations manager asked that the sign be moved to Steep Bank Trace, a thoroughfare away from the cemetery. I refused and he left. He said I would be responsible for the loss in value to the nearby real estate. I told him not I but the developer. Bert Bleil and I left, but Mrs. Alford stayed to discuss further locating the cemetery boundaries with the surveyor. I have not heard anything further. Joe Fenn told John Walker that he believes the developer had the same 1917 survey map, showing the Burnside Cemetery that we have, when his minions were told about it as they obliterated part of it.

The next cemetery is the Cartwright-McCrary Cemetery (FB-C040).

Bruce Harrison, the owner, died two days after entertaining our last visit two or three years ago. The ranch is now enclosed by a high game fence and a locked gate. The roads have been altered. The east-west part of Canal Road has been re-designated Bellaire Boulevard. The gate to the property is on the south side of what is now Bellaire Boulevard. The oldest existing home site, the Cartwright-McCrary house, is on this property, as is an old black schoolhouse, maypole, and remains of slave quarters.



*(L-R): Fort Bend County Historical Commission volunteers Charles Kelly, and Cemetery Committee volunteers Jess Stuart, Bob Crosser, Bettegene Coyle and Laura Dougherty with Judge Bob Hebert.
--courtesy <http://fortbendlifestylesandhomes.com>*

The Cockburn Plantation Cemetery (FB-C159) may be misnamed. Cockburn is on land once owned by a Cockburn, thus the name. More research is needed. I've never been to The Cole Land Grant Cemetery (FB-C159), nor has anyone on the Cemetery Committee. I only know about it because an archaeologist was doing excavations there and exposed a foot with a shoe on it. So, we know it is not prehistoric. We need to re-visit the site with the help of the archaeologist. We just haven't got around to it. That's all on the Cole Land Grant. I don't know if that's the name of it for sure. We just named it that for the lack of another name. We've done that with a lot of these cemeteries. We don't know what they are, so we just give them a name. We can change it later if we find out better. The next one is the Craven-Ellis Cemetery (FB-C058) in Stafford.

GOODSILL: Craven?

CROSSER: Yes. This cemetery was once owned by a cemetery organization, but it's probably defunct and the reason it's come up lately is that it had been surveyed. The City of Stafford had that information. We have that information. But some funeral homes were coming in there and burying people and not marking the graves properly. Some were getting outside of the boundaries. The county attorney is looking into this now as is the City of Stafford. Stafford wishes to close the cemetery. The county had had a contract to bury paupers there. So that will probably stop once Stafford closes the cemetery. There may be prosecution for those funeral homes that are using it without permission.

Next is the Community Cemetery, Arcola (FB-C057) is in Sienna Plantation. It's near the big house on...I can't remember the name of that road. Its limits are poorly defined. In fact, they're not defined yet. There are several people buried whose descendants still live in the area. The developer decided he wanted to widen the road that passed it and wanted to take ten feet off the north side of the road and asked a professional archaeologist to come in and determine if there were any graves along the north side of the road. As he was doing his investigation, it entailed scraping the surface. One of the descendants came by and stopped him and I was notified. We notified the Texas Historical Commission (THC). Representatives from the Archaeology Division of the THC came to visit the site and stopped him. They told them that in order to put in the road and take the ten feet off the south side of the cemetery, they would have to not only scrap the surface, but actually do what is called ground truthing, digging down to make sure there are no remains in that strip. This is very expensive.

The director of the Archaeology Division, Jim Bruseth, suggested that they move the road south, away from the cemetery, but to check on the current south side of the road as it exists to make sure there are no graves there. Since then, the archaeologist hired by the developer, has stopped. There appears to be no more development. I think partly because of the economy. There's no work being done to put this road through to what was old 288 but is now State 521. There is a map that shows the cemetery and its boundaries. But it is in question because people think there are graves outside of that. It covers several acres of prime real estate.

The next cemetery, or actually grave, that I would like to talk about is the grave of Deaf Smith, well-known hero of the Texas Revolution and scout for Sam Houston. There is a marker at the corner of Sixth Street and Houston, in Richmond, right near the Fort Bend County Museum, which states that Deaf Smith is buried in this vicinity.

There is a copy in the county deed records of the layout of the city of Richmond. Someone apparently had taken a pencil and drawn in a little rectangle near this intersection. They may have put "grave" by it also. I understand people have dug there and not found any remains. Hilmar Moore said his grandfather and a friend were digging a swimming pool when they were young men near the Moore home, which is now part of the museum. They encountered some human remains, at which point, their mother stopped them and made them cover it up. Hilmar thinks that that excavation could well be under where the Long Smith cottage is now. So, it's in the vicinity of that part marked on the map.

A couple of decades ago, there was a crew from the City of Richmond Water Department, laying a water line along the west side of Sixth Street. They encountered some bones, and the foreman just said ignore them, cover them up, and keep going. That's the story given to me secondhand from a man who knew someone who was working on that crew. That foreman is gone. He's dead and everyone that participated is dead. So Deaf Smith is probably buried in that vicinity, and we just show an area in the folder on this grave that is shown somewhere near that intersection. I've asked the city the next time when they go to do any excavation, putting in water lines, or resurfacing those streets, to let the Historical Commission know. Maybe while it's uncovered, we can do some exploration there to see if we come up with any of Deaf's bones.

The next cemetery to talk about is the Dickson-Murphey Cemetery (FB-C069). The cemetery was not well maintained. But there's a man named Kruse who has taken over the maintenance of the cemetery, cleared it, put some white crosses in, and claims to own the cemetery.

He has a couple of documents titled the Declaration of Dedication of the Dickson Cemetery, he says. Through some, I would say questionable documents, he had the cemetery deeded to him by some corporation that his son owns. So, in effect, he has color of title to this cemetery. It cannot belong to him. He really has no claim of title and can't prove it. The documents that I refer to are in the folder.

The next one I'd like to talk about is what is called the Duke Cemetery (FB-C139). We first discovered the Duke Cemetery six or seven years ago when Virginia Scarborough and I visited the area. Liz Stamey is a Fenn. She was still living there with her husband on the Fenn property near this cemetery. But we had never been to the cemetery; we knew it was in the area. So, Liz took us to the cemetery, but she had to go a circuitous route because most of it is located on property owned by Mary Broussard.

Mrs. Broussard did not want anyone crossing her property to get to the cemetery. At that time, we knew it as the Fenn Family Cemetery. Later on, through research done by John Walker, it turns out the proper name is really the Duke Cemetery. There was a settlement named Duke in that vicinity. It not only has the Fenns, but Perrys and other early settlers buried there. There are no grave markers. The dedication of the cemetery prohibited any grave markers. That's in the file. The Fenns and Perrys then decided to fence the cemetery and clear it, which they did. John Walker mowed a path to it across the Broussard property. A nice, well-erected, hog wire fence had signs on it that the cemetery was closed according to the dedication of it. It had been closed at that time. Recently, a couple of years ago, or a year ago, Mary Broussard died. The obituary was not published in the paper except there's a little local paper where it was noted that Mrs. Broussard had died and would be buried in the family cemetery.

Adjacent to the Duke Cemetery, just outside of it, is the grave of Claude Broussard, Mrs. Broussard's husband. When the little paper published that she was going to be buried in the family cemetery near her husband, one of the daughters objected to this publication apparently they didn't want it known. The Fenns and John Walker were concerned that this burial may be placed within the Duke Cemetery. John Walker went to the funeral home that had been named and informed them that the cemetery proper was closed, that Claude Broussard's grave was outside of it and they shouldn't be going into this cemetery. It helped that the funeral director was pretty responsible.

In the meantime, one of Mrs. Broussard's daughters, she had two, said they were going to have a big gathering there, politicians, and some well-known for this big burial. They would expect a big crowd. The signs were removed by someone that was on the cemetery, saying it was the Duke Cemetery, and it was closed. The Fenns and Walker called the deputy sheriff and pointed this out to him and filed a complaint. The next day, someone had taken down the fence and stacked the wire. We don't know who did that. The sheriff's department has declined to pursue it, saying it is a civil matter.

Apparently, the Broussards feel like they own that cemetery. They do not because it was excepted from the conveyance to the predecessor in title to the Broussards. The way it stands now is that the Fenns and the Perrys have been informed that they really need to get themselves a lawyer to have the cemetery surveyed by a licensed land surveyor. Then they will probably have to go to court and file suit to prove their title to that land. That way, if the Broussards get on the land, it would be trespassing. Until that's done, the Dukes, the Fenns, or the Perrys will not put the fence back up.

The next comment is on the Duty Grave (FB-C075). The only thing I would say about the Duty grave is that it is buried in the front yard of the Duty's home. It's on Sawmill Road, out under a large oak tree in the front yard. There's no marker. They sometimes plan to put a marker up. We suggested that.

Next is the Foster Family Cemetery. (FB-C)146) This is the grave of the children of George Foster, who was at one time, the county judge of Fort Bend County. It is on the edge of the right-of-way of Front Street. The county and the city intend to widen Front Street, but they say they will stay within its current right-of-way. There are no markers there. The location is easily defined, but it is not marked. It's a far better description where it is; it's in the northwest corner of the Calder House yard. Actually, there are two cemeteries located next to each other. At one time, we grouped them together and called it the Gaston-White Cemetery. The Gaston Cemetery (FB-C059) is enclosed within a brick wall, which is partially down. The developer, at one time, cleared the cemetery, which is, again, overgrown with vegetation.

There was a settlement nearby that was known as the Gaston Settlement. We had a little trouble getting access from the developer. They have now agreed to give us access, but they did not want us going across most of their property. They are in the process of giving us access through Bellaire Road to the Gaston Cemetery. They intend to fence the road and the area around the cemetery, give us room for access around it, provide a locked gate, and provide us (the Historical Commission) access.

To date, weather hasn't been very cooperative. I can see where they have cleared a path to it from Bellaire Boulevard, but they have not done construction yet. We have it in mind to submit an application for this cemetery to be designated a Texas historic cemetery, which it should be. The developer at first was not cooperative, but we feel like they are very cooperative now. What we need to do with them, after they've built the new road to it, is give them our work plan, which includes the application for the designation. We plan to offer, at that time, that we will control access to the cemetery. We will accompany anyone who visits the cemetery, to see that they stay within the bounds designated by the fenced road and the fenced area around the cemetery.

When anyone calls, wanting access, they can refer them to us. That will take that responsibility off the developer, and we can handle it. There are known descendants of the Gastons and one of them has expressed interest in visiting the cemetery. This family donated two portraits to the Fort Bend County Museum, one of which hangs in the museum now on display. The other is curated by the museum. I was put in touch with one of the Gastons because the Gaston family bible, is curated by the museum association. She thought I was a cousin, emailed me, and said, "Dear cousin..." I pointed out I was not, but that we would be interested in having her visit the cemetery. Once I told her I wasn't her cousin, I haven't heard from her.

There is a description in the deed records of the Glasscock Cemetery (FB-C091). The state has this in their records and insists that it stay there, but the cemetery, I believe, is in the river. It's on the east side of the Brazos River, right near the railroad bridge. The description of the cemetery says it's located behind the house, and it's a half acre. The house is not there; it's long gone. The river at the time was the main communication thoroughfare. There was a divorce. The land was sold. In looking at the old aerial photographs of the river, the earliest one being 1930, then going along with a GPS locating the current high bank on the east side of the river and looking at a map that was done earlier of where the river was, it seems to have been eroded by about 600 feet.

Dick Lane and I have been over that side of the river. It belongs to a development now. We could find no sign of a cemetery, no sign of a house. I visited with the members of the Blasdel family that lived on this land back in the forties. Their house is gone, the river got it. There are people who have offices and live near downtown Houston and Richmond, who have seen, they say, coffins floating down the river, which makes me think that this cemetery is long gone. It may still be there, but it's highly unlikely. We've told the THC that we believe it's gone, but they insist on keeping it designated.

A comment on the Goss Cemetery (FB-C043). This is the smallest cemetery on the south side of Winner-Foster Road. There is drainage, some sort of ravine. The only comment I want to make on this cemetery is that there are some numbered markers in it, meaning that these were convicts. The same was so for the Arcola Community Cemetery. There are grave markers in there with convict numbers on them. This goes back to the time before the establishment of the prison



***Historic Prison Cemetery Preserved** – In December 2016 the city of Sugar Land and the Fort Bend County Historical Commission unveiled a Texas historical marker at the site of a prison cemetery that's more than 100 years old. --courtesy of Fort Bend Independent*

farms in the early 1900s. At the turn of the century, these convicts were leased out. These obviously were convicts who died on lands where they were working,

Next is information on the Grand Central Cemetery (FB-C083), on Oyster Creek. It's adjacent to the St. Isidro Cemetery which is a Catholic cemetery, well maintained. The Grand Central Cemetery is not well maintained, and it's not very accessible. But still there are some graves being placed in there.

The story on the Grand Central is a little muddy but this is where some of the workers for Sugarland Industries or Imperial Farm were buried. I think it's mainly a black cemetery. It is not owned by St. Isidro. There is some research that needs to be done on the history of it. It seems to be still active at times. I don't know who manages it, if at all.

Mr. C. F. Voskamp, who at one time worked for this landowner, reported the Griffin Cemetery (FB-C164). This cemetery is bounded on the east by Flat Bank Creek. It's not very accessible. It's sits way back off Thompson Ferry Road. The first we heard of it was that Ed Gearke, who knew Mr. Voskamp, because they both worked for the George Ranch. Ed's no longer here; he's in Houston now. He introduced me to Mr. Voskamp, who had this grave marker in his yard, for Polly Branch, who died November 9, 1896, age ninety-nine years.

Several of us, including Louise Hearn, Virginia Scarborough, and Willie McColloch, along with Mr. Voskamp, went out to the landowner's place to view this cemetery. Well there's a locked gate there. There happened to be one of the people who worked for the landowner named Herring come up. We asked to be permitted to go in and look at the cemetery. He called Mr. Herring, and Mr. Herring said that he was there with his family and really did not want to be bothered.

The short of the story is we have never been to this cemetery. Mr. Voskamp said he didn't know if there is anything existing there because when he was working for the landowner, he found this grave marker that he still has at his house, leaning up against a tree behind the trailer house out there, which backed up to Flat Bank Creek. We need to access it, to look at the cemetery to see if there are any other markers. It should be noted that there is development going on in the area, too. From aerial photographs, it looks like there is a road for a subdivision leading in toward where this cemetery is.

CROSSER: Griffin Cemetery. This may not be the correct name of the cemetery. The only thing that I use to come up with a name for it is that about the time that Polly Branch lived there, this land belonged to someone named Griffin.

Looking at the aerial photograph of the Griffin Cemetery, here is Flat Bank Creek to the east, here is the trailer house referred to in the folder. Right in the area, right in here around this tree is where Mr. Voskamp said he found this marker leaning up against the tree.

GOODSILL: But we really don't know where the grave is, do we?

CROSSER: No.

GOODSILL: Um. It's a mystery.

CROSSER: Uh. Well if we had ground penetrating radar we might...

GOODSILL: Be able to figure it out.

CROSSER: Right!

GOODSILL: Thank you, Bob. Very interesting information. It's nice to have it down for posterity.

Interview Ends