

# Magnolia Messenger

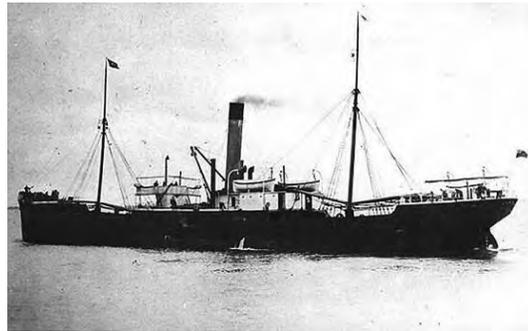
THE FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY  
NEWSLETTER

www.magnoliacemetery.com

*"Remove not the ancient Landmark"*

Fall 2020

## The Mystery of the S. S. Mobile



*No image is known to exist of the S.S. Mobile but this sister ship, the S.S. Vasco gives an idea of what the doomed vessel looked like.*

In Square 22 of Magnolia Cemetery stands a simple obelisk surrounded by granite curbing. Its base is marked "S.S. Mobile" and upon closer inspection it is a memorial to the ship and its crew lost "after sailing from Mobile, Alabama on December 28, 1900."

In a 1954 interview, the late Frank L. Roche (1876-1962), recalled sharing Christmas dinner in 1900 with a friend of his father's, a British steamship captain named Thomas Whittingham. The captain had brought a British favorite to the meal – plum pudding –which Roche recalled not liking it since "it had too much suet in it."

Frank's father Thomas Roche (1841-1904), had apparently met the captain down at his livery stables on Royal Street. The Waverly Stables, as his son recalled, "was a sort of a gathering place. There were offices on one side and there were benches and chairs all around where people would sit and talk."

The Waverly Stables by 1872 were advertising the rental of "Improved Carriages, Open or Closed, Buggies including very superior horses, Double or Single in hand or with Careful and Obedient Drivers. Wedding Parties, Private Calls Attended with Promptness."

Ten years later in 1882 Roche added a funeral directing office to the mix. Roche, an Irish immigrant and Confederate veteran joined with Peter F. McKay in 1880 and by 1886 they offered "Fine Burial Robes and Suits for Men, Ladies and Children." In 1895 their ads touted themselves as "Carriage Makers, Blacksmiths and Wheelwrights" as well as "Undertakers and Embalmers."

After Roche's death in 1904 his sons Frank and Thomas operated the business and converted a State Street home into a funeral parlor. In 1922 the firm moved into what today is Mobile's Carnival Museum on Government Street and the Roche name would be associated with Mobile's funerary business for decades to come. In contrast, their sister, Emma Langdon Roche was a talented artist and writer.

It is interesting to think that men would regularly gather to shoot the breeze in the same building in which bodies were being embalmed, but that is apparently how the friendship between a Mobilian and a Liverpool sea captain got its start. The Christmas dinner would have taken place at the Roche home which once stood on Lafayette Street, north of Spring Hill Avenue.



Matthew H. Horsley (1867-1925)  
owned the Horsley Line Ltd. which operated the S. S. Mobile

### The S. S. Mobile

There had been at least two other steamships previously named for Mobile. The first was the *City of Mobile* which ran between the UK and New York City in the 1850's. Her name was forever tarnished in 1857 when a group of 108 young Irish women boarded her in Ireland, part of a sponsored group seeking to escape the poverty and high unemployment of their native land. Only one "matron" attempted to supervise them and a large number were "led astray" by the ship's sailors.

According to later testimony those sailors slipped at least 26 of them off the ship after arriving in New York and took them to brothels while others plied their trade as streetwalkers. This was definitely not the sort of employment promised them as they left Ireland. It is unclear whether the *City of Mobile* ever came to Alabama and her fate is unknown.

The next vessel definitely came to Mobile in 1879 and the local press reported "*The Mobile*, the new steamship to ply between Liverpool and Mobile arrived at Mobile and was welcomed by the firing of cannon, the ringing of bells and the cheers of the people who turned out to see her. She brought over a full cargo. Mobile is not dead nor dying but preparing for a new and lasting prosperity."

Just how long this vessel was in operation is unknown but she apparently handled freight better than her predecessor had carried young Irish maidens, and retired with little notice.

### A Doomed Ship

In 1895 yet another ship was christened *Mobile*. This was also a steam powered freighter and had been built by the shipbuilding firm of Furness, With & Co. for George Horsley & Co. Both firms were located in West Hartlepool, a port city in northeast England. The 103.6' long steamship arrived in Mobile in early January of 1896 and the captain was presented with "a magnificent silver service and a handsome gold locket encrusted with diamonds in the form of an anchor."

On Monday, February 9, 1896 the *Mobile* left Alabama's port carrying "the largest and most valuable cargo that has ever left the port: 8,846 bales of cotton, 10,000 sacks of flour, 2849 oak staves and 500 loads of timber." The Horsley family had made a fortune as timber merchants and later expanded into ship brokerage and coal exportation.



Memorial to the men lost on the S. S. Mobile in 1900.

The cargo ship was one of hundreds plying the Atlantic to various ports and led what would seem to be an uneventful existence until a fateful day in December of 1900. On the 28th she steamed out of Mobile bound for Bremen, Germany with a crew of 26 men. The holds were filled with grain and cotton and it would have appeared to have been a routine trip into the calm waters of the Gulf.

But, the *Mobile* never reached Bremen. On February 19, 1901 a news account stated: "There is still no news of the *S. S. Mobile* which is now 26 days overdue in a voyage from the port of Mobile to Bremen and all hopes of her safety are practically abandoned."

In 1900 when the *Mobile* left on her final voyage there was no radio equipment on board to send out a distress call. The Marconi Telegraph and Signal Co. had patented wireless radio transmission in March of 1897 but it would be some years before ships had the technology. In fact, the Marconi firm had such a grip on their creation that they required only Marconi employees to be aboard ships handling their equipment.

This arrangement only worked for the company when passengers were willing to pay for the service and the ship's messages took a back seat. This was of course a fatal lesson learned in the *Titanic* disaster but that would be more than a decade in the future. In 1900 surely no

cargo ship could have afforded the luxury of a wireless on board so when disaster struck there was no way to call for help many miles from shore.

The exact date of the installation of the memorial obelisk at Magnolia Cemetery is unknown. It is centered on half a family lot in Square 22 where it is surrounded by a low granite curb.

Its inscription explains who paid for its installation: "The Captains, Officers, and Crews of the Horsley Line Steamers and their Mobile City Friends." Just how the subscription was arranged and by whom has yet to be uncovered.

Two sides of the monument are needed to list the 26 men lost at sea. The names are given by rank with the captain or "master", Thomas Whittingham's name listed at the top with his officers beneath.

The British Board of Trade concluded that the ship sailed "in an unseaworthy condition," but this remains a 120-year-old unsolved mystery. Unlike countless other ships that sank in the era before radios might have brought help, this one at least has a memorial to the men who lost their lives.

—Tom McGehee



*Following the Civil War, Rufus Dane opened his Waverly Stables in this building which stood on the west side of North Royal Street, just south of St. Michael Street. The roofline was originally adorned by a pair of horse heads. In the early 1880's Thomas Roche took over the business and added funerals to the mix offering embalming and "fine burial robes" to the mix. It was in this building that Roche apparently befriended Thomas Whittingham, captain of the *S. S. Mobile*. This image, taken in the late 1950's shows that the building had been greatly modified with blank spaces where the horse head sculptures were originally. As it neared its centennial the wreckers arrived and replaced it with a parking lot.*

## ADDENDUM

There have been five U.S. Navy ships to bear the name *Mobile*:

1. USS *Mobile* a side-wheeler steamer was launched in Baltimore as the *Tennessee* and lost in a hurricane in October of 1865.
2. The second USS *Mobile* was originally launched in 1908 as a passenger liner called the *Cleveland* by the Hamburg-Amerika line. It was seized during WW I and re-named for *Mobile* in 1919. Scrapped in 1933.
3. The USS *Mobile* launched in 1942 was a Cleveland-class light cruiser which earned 11 battle stars during WW II. Sold for scrap in 1959.
4. In 1968 the USS *Mobile*, an amphibious cargo ship was launched and saw service in both the Vietnam and Gulf wars, earning 15 awards. Currently berthed in Philadelphia in the navy's Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility.
5. The current USS *Mobile* is a LCS-26 and was launched by Austal USA in December of 2019 and is currently completing her acceptance trials.

## Two Fallen Heroes Are Remembered

On Friday, October 16, 2020, the long unmarked graves of two fallen *Mobile* police officers finally received markers. Pine Crest Funeral Home donated the markers and the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery waived the installation fees.

The two officers were:



Christopher Martin Dean, age 56, was killed on January 22, 1926 while walking his beat. He went to check on four suspicious men who shot him before he could draw his weapon. A suspect was later convicted of the crime and executed.



William Franklin "Happy" Murphy, age 28, was fatally shot on October 18, 1929 after stopping a speeding vehicle on Broad Street near Conti. The car, later found abandoned in Mississippi had been stolen.

The families of the two officers had been unable to afford to purchase markers after their funerals. The newly installed markers were arranged by the Family of the Fallen Foundation, Inc.

—Tom McGehee

PLEASE, DON'T  
FORGET YOUR  
FRIENDS!

It is time to renew your  
annual membership

AND

don't forget a membership  
will make a welcome gift to  
friends who enjoy *Mobile's*  
colorful history.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Another successful year for the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery is coming to a close. Take a look at some of our accomplishments:*

- **Tours:** *Tours of the Cemetery given by the Friends were cancelled during the Covid pandemic.*
- **Restoration:** *During the past year the Friends contracted with the Chicora Foundation from Columbia, South Carolina, one of the leading concerns in preservation/ conservation of historic stone, to stabilize a number of high priority (determined to be high risk) monuments in Magnolia.*
- **Donations:** *We have been fortunate to have received donations from various individuals and local foundations with stipulations that they be used for restoration in the Cemetery.*
- **Old Hebrew Burial Ground:** *Working with the Alabama Historical Commission an historic marker was fabricated and installed to tell the story of the first Jewish cemetery in the State of Alabama.*
- **Perimeter Fencing:** *We continue to install fence sections at Magnolia Cemetery Two on the south side of Virginia Street.*
- **Landscaping:** *I am pleased to report that despite a very wet Summer season, the staff of The Friends of Magnolia routinely mowed and trimmed all four sections of Magnolia Cemetery once every two weeks.*



**National Cemetery Gatehouse- Friends Office:** *The Friends are scheduled to move out of the Gatehouse before year end so that the Veteran's Administration can begin work on restoring the c. 1880 structure. Our office will remain in the stone building located on the cemetery's north side until restoration of the Gatehouse is complete.*

**City of Mobile Cemetery Manager Tighe Marston:** *I am sad to report that Mr. Marston retired at the end of July after serving as the City's liaison in the co-ordination of funerals and burials, etc. after 25 years. In an agreement with the City of Mobile, the Friends have assumed his duties and will be performing these services.*

*Douglas Burtu Kearley, Sr.  
President*


**MEMORIALS TO THE PERPETUAL CARE TRUST FUND**
  
 ~ Fall 2020 ~

<i>In Memory of...</i>	<i>Given By...</i>
<i>Emmabel Campbell</i>	<i>Stephanie Bond &amp; Bret H. Smith</i> <i>Mrs. Claudia M. Delorme</i> <i>John &amp; Angie Leon</i> <i>John Miller</i> <i>Betty E. Wiggins</i>
<i>Alice Carwie</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Ronald A. Snider</i>
<i>Marian McPherson Currie</i>	<i>Ann B. Hearin</i> <i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Douglas B. Kearley, Sr.</i> <i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Ronald A. Snider</i>
<i>Martha Greer</i>	<i>Tenne &amp; Mike Johnson</i> <i>David L. Sanders</i> <i>Officers, Directors and Staff</i> <i>The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery, Inc.</i>
<i>Joseph Russell Jones, III</i>	<i>Rudy &amp; Emily Boutwell</i> <i>Jamie &amp; Greg Saad</i>
<i>Margaret Wilson Luce</i>	<i>Alix W. Hardie</i>
<i>Nancy Rhodes McCrummen</i>	<i>Tenne &amp; Mike Johnson</i> <i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Thomas C. McGehee</i> <i>Mrs. Courtney McGowin</i> <i>Officers, Directors &amp; Staff</i> <i>The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery, Inc.</i>



# OFFICERS & BOARD



## FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY

### PRESIDENT

Mr. Douglas Burtu Kearley, Sr.

### VICE PRESIDENT

Mr. T. Bragg Van Antwerp, Jr.

### RECORDING SECRETARY

Mr. Cartledge Blackwell

### CORRESPONDING SECRETARY

Mrs. Amelia Lyons Bell

### TREASURER

Mr. A. J. DuPree

### EDITOR *Magnolia Messenger*

Mr. Thomas C. McGehee

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mrs. Janet Savage

### TRUSTEES

Mr. Sumner G. Adams

Michael Berson

Mr. Charles Christmas

Mrs. Joan Christmas

Mrs. David D. Dukes

Mrs. Margaret M. Fowler

Mr. Allen Ladd

Mrs. Willson McClelland

Dr. Stephen McNair

Mr. George Oswalt

Mr. D. Pratt Paterson

Mr. William Peebles

Mr. Joseph Ringhoffer

Dr. William Rodgers

Mr. David Rose

Mr. John Schley Rutherford, Jr.

Mr. William Ross Seifert, III

Mr. John Holmes Smith, IV

Mr. David L. Toifel

Mr. Selwyn H. Turner, III

### ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mr. Agee S. Broughton, III

Mr. William M. Lyon, Jr.

Mr. John P. C. McCall

Ms. Marion Oswalt

Mr. John D. Peebles

Mr. S. Wesley Pipes

Mr. N. Campbell Rayford

Mr. Wythe L. Whiting, Jr.

### CLIP AND RETURN THIS FORM TO

Friends of Magnolia Cemetery • P. O. Box 6383 • Mobile, Alabama 36660

(251) 432-8672

- Please find enclosed my tax-deductible membership contribution of \$35.
- I would like to make an additional contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery.
- I would like to make an additional contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to The Perpetual Care Trust Fund.
- Renewal     I am a new member.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Square \_\_\_\_\_ Lot No. \_\_\_\_\_

**THE FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY, INC.**

P.O. Box 6383

Mobile, Alabama 36660

friendsmagnolia@bellsouth.net

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.

U.S. Postage

**PAID**

Mobile, AL

Permit No. 422