

Indianola Cemeteries
Victoria County Genealogical Society
November 12, 2007

It is indeed a pleasure to speak to genealogists who trace their ancestors. Perhaps you have a family member who immigrated through Indianola or is buried there in a marked or unmarked grave. Perhaps the family has moved this loved one to a different location.

Come join me! Tonight we are traveling to three Indianola cemeteries. Travel State Highway 87 for 27 miles to Port Lavaca. Stop by the Calhoun County Museum for an overview of Indianola and then follow 316 for 14 miles.^[1] You will end up at the tip of Calhoun County, INDIANOLA.

A stark, white, shallow, shell beach, broken only by shrub trees, sharp grass, and prickly pears greets you. Here lay three cemeteries interwoven into Indianola's history.

Now.....Travel back in time. During and immediately following the Texas Revolution, a series of seven military camps were established on Lavaca Bay. In 1837, the seventh and final camp was transferred from Cox's Point to Indian Point,[2] a jut of land that marked the oyster reef dividing Matagorda Bay from Lavaca Bay.[3] (Alcoa-halfway down the beach) Where were the soldiers buried who died at these military camps?

On January 21, 1839, the Republic of Texas required the Secretary of State to acquire a section of land on Matagordalsland to be surveyed as a seaport for western immigration.[4] The Texas

Revolution set the background for recognizing the importance of ports in the Lavaca and Matagorda bays. The deep water ports brought immigrants, and created towns and cemeteries.

In July 1844, the first immigrants arrived at Indian Point looking for the "Land of Milk and Honey," [5] promised by Prince Carl Solms-Braunfels. The next year, "In a Paradise Called Texas," Janice Shefelman writes about her great ,great grandmother as a young girl named Mina. She arrives at a damp, wet, flat, empty coast. Only cold, hungry people, living in shelters dug from a hole in the shell and covered with a blanket, greet them. Her mother dies from fever. The family walks up the beach to the burial site.[6]

In 1846, the year Texas became a state, it was estimated a thousand immigrants, stranded on the

coast, waiting for wagons and supplies, died due to epidemics of typhoid, cholera, and spinal meningitis.^[7] Many more died on the trail. About eight miles from Indian Point, a single little girl's grave is marked, "7 years." One individual grave, covered in deep ,tall, sharp grass and buried beside a salt water cedar. This individual grave was located by Curtis Foester, when he ran cattle on the property. This is a special child's grave because it had a marker.

Indian Point, also called Karlshaven by German settlers, is across the ridge from the Old Town Cemetery, also called Indianola Cemetery on the Ridge or Upper Cemetery.^[8] The Ridge Cemetery has the oldest marked grave of the three cemeteries in the Indianola area. James Chilton Allan died on November 17, 1851.^[9] Angelina

Everly, heroine of the Texas Archives War, is buried there although her original tombstone has disappeared over time.[\[10\]](#) Graves are marked and unmarked in this cemetery. Hurricane Carla washed over the ridge and removed the wooden markers. In 1979, Leonard McCown documented seventeen remaining stones.[\[11\]](#)

In 1849, Indian Point is renamed Indianola, meaning wave. Jim Foster establishes a large ranch on the Rio Chocolate and builds a shipping port called Powderhorn for his cattle.[\[12\]](#) A new addition promoted by John Henry Brown is known as Brown's Addition to Indianola.[\[13\]](#) The Powderhorn area is surveyed and included in this plan was a cemetery of a four block area. Four half blocks of the Brown Cemetery were deeded to the Presbyterian Church, Episcopal Church, Methodist

E.P. Church, and Western Texas Lodge, No. 28, Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

From 1850-1853, epidemics of cholera and yellow fever raised their heads.[\[14\]](#) There were few doctors and no trained nurses. The inhabitants died like flies. The Indianola Bulletin reported 176 deaths in those two years. The Cemetery has one remaining marked grave for 1852 that of a child, William D. Woodward.[\[15\]](#)

In 1856, a shipload of camels arrive, accompanied by Juan Gonzales and Joseph Mendez, camel drivers. The camels are refused by the Widow Watson. Penniless and unable to return home, Gonzales and Mendez settle at Indian Point where they marry.[\[16\]](#)

Thus the private, Zimmerman Family Cemetery was created. August Zimmerman was reported to

have donated the land for the family cemetery: however it is owned by the Gonzales family today.[\[17\]](#) The Zimmerman Cemetery is located west of the Old Town Cemetery on the Ridge. The property is across the slough from the Zimmerman home. A surviving descendent, Faye Paul, tells me “there are lots of people buried on that ridge.”

[\[18\]](#)The oldest grave is Georchem Wedig who died in 1852.[\[19\]](#)His daughter married John Gonzales.

August Zimmerman is a son-in-law of Joe Mendez.[\[20\]](#) The cemetery is divided into two family groups, Zimmerman and Gonzales with one grave, between, noting a family consort. This private cemetery is still being used today.

Surprisingly, Joe Mendez has no visible marker in the Zimmerman Cemetery. You can read about him in the next issue of The Quarterly.

To travel on in time, During the Civil War, Indianola was occupied by both Confederate and Union troops. Confederate soldiers were buried in side the Indianola Cemetery fence and Old Town Cemetery. Black and white Federal soldiers were buried outside the fence in the Hospital Cemetery in separate groups.[\[21\]](#) The Negro soldiers who died from Cholera had lime used around their graves.[\[22\]](#) There were a total of 110 burials of Union Soldiers. J.L. Puckard, the surgeon of the 115thUSCT was buried in the public cemetery. After the war, these bodies were moved to the Brownsville National Cemetery .[\[23\]](#)There are still some Negro Federal tombstones at one location away from the cemetery. They are covered to prevent vandalism.

Travel to Indianola's final days. Unseen

forces of nature were brewing a terrible disaster for the coast town. On September 16, 1875, a raging, howling hurricane swept in. Before the fury of its force subsided, Indianola was a mass of ruins. The prairie was covered for miles with wreckage and under the wreckage were many human bodies from which the terrific storm had torn every vestige of clothing. It took weeks to find all the bodies.

Many had been swept out into the bay.[\[24\]](#) People were buried where they were found.[\[25\]](#) A few individuals were found by family members and were buried in the cemetery.[\[26\]](#) The storm swept the fence away, upset tombs, and injured other tombs in the cemetery.[\[27\]](#) The force created new physical landmarks.

Again, on August 16, 1886, there came another hurricane in which fifty people lost their

lives. A kerosene lamp left burning during a hasty escape exploded and ignited a fire spreading into all the buildings. The last storm doomed the town.[\[28\]](#) Almost everyone abandon Indianola. As they moved away, they also moved the remains of their loved ones from the cemeteries.[\[29\]](#)

The three cemeteries, Old Town, Zimmerman, and Indianola, graves, marked and unmarked lay abandon, rapidly encroached by native vegetation, brambled bordered lagoons, and dense growth of salt cedars.

In 1951, Mrs. Dennis Valentine, who had accompanied her husband on hunting trips to the area, wrote Governor Allan Shivers concerning the rundown cemetery and its need for restoration.

Governor Shivers forwarded the letter to Mrs. Ben Jordan of Victoria, President of the James W.

Fannin Chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. The chapter took the Indianola Cemetery as a project and began the “Indianola Fence Fund” to fence Indianola Cemetery and Indianola Cemetery on the Ridge. An association was formed. Letters were mailed to relatives of former residents soliciting funds.[\[30\]](#)

The chapter sold chicken dinners for the Indianola Pilgrimages. A China Indianola plate was designed. Post cards, cold drinks, candy, and gum were sold. No item was too small to sell. Mrs. Jordan was a capable business manager. Five years later, in 1956, a ceremony marked the completion of fences around both cemeteries.[\[31\]](#)

A remarkable feat!

Today Calhoun County Commissioner Roger Galvan mows all three cemeteries and maintains

the county right of ways and parking lots. At the Indianola Cemetery there are 67 tombstones,[32] including Captain Mainland's vault, which was built above ground.[33] The Calhoun County Historical Commission Cemetery Committee is committed to repairing the broken tombstones in all three cemeteries using Texas Historical Commission standards.

County Commissioner Galvan is working with the Commission to repair the Zimmerman Cemetery . It is a highly endangered cemetery. The cattle have scratched their backs and broken the stones in half.[34] Mr. Galvan has put up a temporary fence and the Calhoun County Historical Commission is obtaining written permission from the owner.

The Cemetery on the Ridge has a new chain link fence purchased by Shoreline Enhancement

Association with a grant from the Dow Foundation.

[35]The SEA was headed by Gwen Salyer, who has Miller family members buried there. There are two vaults to repair at this location.

Fifty years later, today, the once beautiful strong hurricane fence installed by the Daughters of the Republic of Texashas rusted and crumbled beyond repair. Roger Galvan has built a dike around the cemetery. The fence is falling downlike"London Bridge."

Mrs. Jordan's granddaughter, Joella Smith , of the James W. Fannin Chapter and Shirley Burnett are spearheading District Seven's Indianola Cemetery Fencing Project. A tax-free donation may be made to the Indianola Cemeteries Restoration Fund. The first stage of the new fencing has begun. It is desperately needed because of recent vandalism.

When the fencing and stone repair is completed, the tombs will be recorded and photographed and the information will be on the TXGenWeb, Calhoun County, Texas and Cemeteries of Calhoun County, Texas. www.cemeteries-of-tx.com/Etx/Calhoun and www.rootsweb.com./-txcalhoun/indianol.htm.

Tonight, you have briefly traveled through three cemeteries, representing thousands of individuals who perished at Indianola, looking for the “land of Milk and Honey.” The existing gravestones stand as sentinels, guarding their loved ones as they rest in the shallow, shelly soil..... Consort, wife, and husband buried next to each other.

If you are looking for individual names, they are in Leonard McCown’s , Cemeteries of Indianola, Texas, on the back table. Travel the 41 miles to Indianola. View the two public cemeteries.

Recreate in your mind the horrors of the epidemics and storms.

Thank you again for inviting me. I have a special friend, Joe Ella Smith, granddaughter of Mrs. Ben Jordon, who would like to share some of the experiences of the famous chicken dinners with the Indianola Association.

Mary Belle Meitzen

Calhoun County Historical Commission

Cemetery Chair

[1] Texas Official Trail Map

[2] Linda Wolff, Indianola and Matagorda Island 1837-1888, p. 6

[3] Port Lavaca Wave, "Indianola Trail Visitors Guide," May 2003, p.1

[4] Woll, p. 7

[5] Cuero Record, "A History of Indianola," 1931, p.1

[6] Jordan Shefleman, A Paradise Called Texas, 1983, pp.43-58

[7] Indianola Trail Visitors Guide, p. 16

[8] Ibid, p.4

[9] Leonard Joe McCown, Cemeteries of Indianola, Texas, 1979, p.57

[10] [www.Cemeteries of Texas, Cemeteries of Calhoun County Texas,"](http://www.Cemeteries of Texas, Cemeteries of Calhoun County Texas,) Old

Town Cemetery”, p.1

[11] McCown, p.67

[12] Linda Wilff, p.23

[13] Indianola Trail, p.1

[14] Brownson Malsch, Indianola, The Mother of Western Texas, 1977, pp. 42,45,85

[15] Leonard McCown, p. 28

[16] Linda Wolff, p. 37

[17] Calhoun County Appraisal District, Property 40427 & 20102848, Sept. 20, 2007

[18] Mary Meitzen, ”Interview with Faye Paul,” March 2007

[19] McCown, p.71

[20] Mary Meitzen, ”Interview with Quanita Madden,” March 2007

[21] George Fred Rhoades, Map 1988

[22] Euroda Moore, “Recollections of Indianola,” Indinola Scrap Book (Victoria: Victoria Advocate, 1936), p.118

[23] www.cemeteries-ob-Tx.com, Cemeteries of Calhoun County, Texas, June 17,2003

[24] Leonard McCown, p. 3

[25] Wolff, p.37

[26] Mary Meitzen, Oral interview with Jody Brett, May 2007

[27] Leonard McCown, p. 14

[28] Brownson Malsh,

[29] Leonard McCown p.15

[30] Ibid, p.22

[31] Ibid, p.24

[32] Mary Meitzen, Indinola Cemetery assesstment, October 28, 2007

[33] Alice Freeman Fluth, Indianola, Early Gateway to Texas, (San Antonio: St. Mary’s University, M.A. theses, 1939)p.64

[34] Mary Meitzen, interview with Quanita Madden, May 1007

[35] Mary Meitzen, Interview with Gwen Salyer, April 2007