

COMMUNITY



Photos by Jon Shapley / Staff photographer

Sara Westcott Haynes is part of a group that recently got the Texas Historic Commission to recognize the McDaniel Street Cemetery in the Eastex-Jensen Super Neighborhood.

Tiny cemetery gets historic recognition

Group hopes to restore collection of family plots found during cleanup in Crosstimbers neighborhood

By Diane Cowen
STAFF WRITER

Sara Westcott Haynes carefully walked through the tiny cemetery on the curve of a short street in the Crosstimbers area, watching out for fire ant mounds while reciting the names on toppled headstones and grave markers.

There's one for Almira Westcott, who died in 1887 at the age of 57, and another for her husband, R.D. Westcott, who died a decade later when he was 88. There are others for J.D. and Emma Westcott – Haynes' great-great-grandparents.

They're all part of Haynes' family tree, though until a handful of years ago she had no idea this cemetery even existed. Now, it's what she devotes much of her time to, resulting in its

recent recognition as a Texas Historic Cemetery. "I have a big vision for this (cemetery), and it will take a long time to do," said Haynes, who worked for many years in nonprofit fundraising before she retired. "This is the rest-of-my-life work. We are part of the community here."

Back in 2013, Pastor David Smith and his congregation at New Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church on Jensen Drive were determined to clean up trash and weeds in their neighborhood. They couldn't get the city of Houston to respond, so they picked up trash and mowed weeds themselves with volunteers from the church's own outreach group, the Houston Northeast Community Development Corp., as well as the Sunbeam Curry Civic Association and the Greater Northside Management District.



Haynes found many Westcott family graves at the cemetery, including this one for Richard D. Westcott.

Cemetery continues on D6

OPERA

Rice Opera revives production composed in a concentration camp

By Chris Gray
CORRESPONDENT

Even Death has a breaking point.

That's the idea driving Rice Opera's new production of "Der Kaiser von Atlantis," presented virtually Oct. 29-30. Originally composed in the Nazi concentration camp of Theresienstadt, Viktor Ullmann and Peter Kien's

chamber opera imagines what might happen if, one day, Death walked off the job.

Miah Im, who took over in July as director of opera studies at Rice's Shepherd School of Music, admits that at first she didn't realize the "social and political implications" of producing an opera about death at such a precarious societal moment. "Kaiser" is an old favorite, Im

explains, and she simply believed it would satisfy the university's COVID protocols.

"I chose the piece because I thought it had the right number of singers (and) the right number of orchestra musicians, and also it's a piece that I really love," she says. "I think it's musically satisfying; it has a really deep and powerful, empowering message."

Opera continues on D2



Jeff Fittlow / Rice University

Rice Opera's production of "Der Kaiser von Atlantis" offers an untraditional examination of the concept of death.

TV REVIEW: 'Bruce Springsteen's Letter to You' celebrates E Street 'blood brothers.' PAGE D2

HOME DESIGN: Modern Home Tour goes virtual this year. PAGE D6

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HOME DESIGN

Modern Home Tour goes virtual this year

By Diane Cowen
STAFF WRITER

Spencer and Leslie Oulmans' home in Rice Military is a study in efficiency: making the most of every inch of a 45-by-65-foot lot and a modest 2,000-square-foot home for a family of five.

In a part of town known for its tight lots with three- and four-story townhomes sprouting up, the Oulmans' modern two-story home stands out.

It's surrounded by a tall wood fence, so the home's beauty is off limits to passersby. But you'll get a peek behind the fence and inside the front door, as it's part of the Modern Architecture + Design Society's 2020 Modern Home Tour, held virtually Nov. 1.

MADS is using 3D imaging to take tourgoers through this and five other homes around the city. The Oulmans' home was designed by Rame and Russell Hruska of Intexure Architects + Boxprefab; the Hruskas also have a second home on the tour.

The other four homes include a 5,200-square-footer in Bellaire by Gary R. Chandler Architecture & Interiors; one in Upper Kirby by architect Scott Ballard; a modern, ADA-compliant home in the Boulevard Oaks area by On Point Custom Homes; and the personal home of architect Al Espinal.

Originally scheduled for spring, with special events for its 10th anniversary, the tour was put on hold because of the coronavirus pandemic. Like other home tours this fall, this one has gone virtual, with more sophisticated technology than hand-held cameras and Zoom talks. The tour will be conducted live at 10 a.m. Sunday at houstonmodernhome-tour.com. When you purchase a \$40 ticket, you'll get a passcode that will let you in the event. Seg-



Front exterior of a Blossom Street home designed by Intexure Architects + Boxprefab. It will be on the MA+DS 2020 Virtual Home Tour.

Houston Modern Home Tour

When: Live at 10 a.m. Nov. 1; recorded segments can be viewed online later

Architects and builders: Scott Ballard, On Point Custom Homes, Intexure Architects + Boxprefab, Espinal Architects and Gary R. Chandler Architecture & Interiors

Where: mads.media/2020houstonmht

Tickets: \$40 per device

ments will be recorded and posted on the site for later viewing.

The Oulmans' home is

interesting not just for its architecture and design but for its manufacturing process. It's a custom

prefab, built in two parts in the Hruskas' warehouse, then trucked to the tiny site and shimmied in past an aging pin oak tree and underneath power lines using cranes, trucks and crossed fingers onto a pier-and-beam foundation.

Then their crews did the finishing work inside, installing the kitchen, bathrooms and other infrastructure over about



Colquitt Street home designed by Scott Ballard Architects



South Boulevard home designed by On Point Custom Homes

six months' time. Its energy-efficient qualities should ultimately earn it LEED Gold or Platinum certification.

The home's exterior is a mix of corrugated steel and HardiPlank panels, with composite decking arranged around an above-ground resistance pool so that Leslie can swim "laps."

A strategically placed window seat in the house allows Spencer and Leslie to look out into the play area to check on their children, ages 6, 4 and 1, as well as their two Westies, Gabri and Lucie.

Inside, the Hruskas used every inch of space: the stairwell has a window seat with built-in shelving as a reading nook. The rest of that

space has flat-panel doors that pop open to reveal storage.

Kitchen cabinets have the same sleek look, and floor-to-ceiling built-in cabinets in the living room provide a place to store books. Also on the first floor is a full bedroom and bathroom, with the bedroom serving as the kids' indoor playroom. The three bedrooms upstairs include the primary bedroom and its modest bathroom, plus another bedroom the three young children share. The final bedroom has a Murphy bed that Spencer – an engineer – has adapted to be an ingenious fold-down desk for working at home.

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CEMETERY

From page D1

"We started working on Turner, north of Tidwell, and decided to clean up a few streets at a time," Smith said. "Someone said, 'What about the cemetery?' and I didn't even know there was a cemetery back there. We wanted to bring back some dignity to the cemetery. It's exciting to know that when you come together ... there's unity, there's strength."

In the process, under all of the debris, they discovered this tiny cemetery, a collection of family plots for the Westcott, Schuller, McDonald, McDaniel, Farmer and Cours families who settled here in the 1850s on land that had been deeded to Josiah T. Harrell back in 1838, when it was part of the Republic of Texas.

The larger space is referred to as the McDaniel Street Cemetery – that's the name the Texas Historic Commission recognizes – and masonry walls separate the smaller family plots within the 1.3-acre cemetery. Along with the graves of men and women who lived to be parents and grandparents, there are nearly two dozen for infants and young children, too.

One short, red-brick wall along the Westcott family plot has been knocked down and looks like it was hit by a car that didn't navigate the street's curve. An arch – with tiles that say "Westcott" and "1920" – over an entrance on one side of the quarter-acre plot lays on the ground, too.

Those laid to rest here were more affluent in their day, farmers, business owners and civic leaders whose families intermarried, dividing and subdividing land along the way.

With the state historic designation, Haynes and others have started fundraising to pay for a master plan for surveying the land, documenting the gravesites and keeping it cleaned up. More



Sara Westcott Haynes hopes to raise funds to pay for a master plan and repair work that will follow to restore the cemetery.

than anything, she wants this slice of history to be a good neighbor to the Eastex-Jensen Super Neighborhood.

Steph McDougal, a historic preservationist and principal consultant at McDoux Preservation, helped Westcott and her board for the Westcott Cemetery Association – which works on behalf of the whole cemetery – with deed research.

In the 1800s, McDougal said, pioneers and settlers traveling across the country were often buried where they died, and those in rural areas were often buried, essentially, in their backyards. Professionally managed cemeteries that look more like shady parks – "lawn cemeteries" as McDougal called the cemeteries most used today – are a product of the 20th century.

The farmland those families once owned gave way to progress, smaller homes went up in the 1940s and 1950s and the Crosstimbers area was bustling with business: movie theaters, Prince's Hamburgers, a Weingarten's Grocery and appliance stores. The building of the East-



Those laid to rest at the cemetery were more affluent in their day, farmers, business owners and civic leaders who lived in the area.

remembers seeing Spanish-language movies at the Granada Theater on Jensen, and while she hasn't lived in that area in a while, she's glad to be part of efforts to preserve the cemetery.

Casares writes about many things – including cemeteries – on her ShoeGirl Corner blog, and a post several years ago about the Eastex-Jensen neighborhood and McDaniel Street Cemetery caught the eye of Haynes' sister, Gayle Roane, who was doing genealogy research.

Haynes, Roane and their other sister, Perry Baraban, all founded the Westcott Cemetery Association board, though Baraban rotated off the board after a year. Before then, none of the women knew anything about their Westcott relatives, other than they were on their mother's side of the family and Westcott is Haynes' middle name.

Looking forward, Haynes knows she has a lot of work to do. The cemetery needs to be surveyed with high-tech equipment that can detect where graves actually are, and grave markers need to be put back in place properly. Masonry walls need to be repaired and regular cleanup work needs to be arranged. Perhaps someday, Haynes hopes, the cemetery will be part of the National Register of Historic Places.

She has started raising funds to pay for a master plan and the work that needs to be done, and will include a Giving Tuesday campaign on Dec. 1. And she is looking for descendants of the Schuller, McDaniel, Farmer and Cours families as well as other branches of her own family. Progress is documented at westcottcemeteryassociation.org, the name of the group she organized on behalf of the whole cemetery.

"We want the cemetery to be a source of pride, and I think it will be," Haynes said.

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