



Photo courtesy of Paula Hinkel

# Savannah Update

*El Monte Cemetery Association*

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*September 2010*

Dear Members and Friends,

Over the past three months there have been many changes to Savannah both physically and organizationally.



I'll start briefly with the organizational changes. I am Justen F. Wiggins your new Board of Directors

(BOD) President. I was officially voted in at the July BOD meeting. I am Randy Wiggins' son and have had an interest in and a love for Savannah since my first memories. My other responsibilities include full time duty as an Army National Guard Officer as well as husband and father. I am not trying to bring accolades upon myself, but rather humility through expressing how dependent I will be as President on the members of our board and our gracious volunteers. The Board itself has changed as well. Heather Hooper has resigned as a board member after years of selfless service to Savannah. Just recently she has agreed to stay on as a historical consultant and is responsible for getting this newsletter out to you all. Randy Wiggins also resigned from the board. I hope to use my organizational skills to build upon the numerous things he has accomplished to continue to build Savannah. These are just a few organizational changes and I encourage all members and friends to contact me directly if you have any questions concerning the direction I see Savannah heading in.

To say the Memorial Day celebration this year was a success is an understatement. Many thanks to Janice for her unrelenting efforts to organize and execute the event. To memorialize the many veterans who gave the ultimate sacrifice and to honor those interred at Savannah is a great honor. Concurrently with the preparation to the Memorial Day event, the ever-present siege mortar got a well-needed freshening up. Thanks to Virgil and Walter for coordinating and overseeing the stripping and repainting of the mortar. Thanks as well go to Robyn and Bruce for donating the paint. The mortar looks

great and is ready for another centennial of watch over Savannah. A special thanks goes to the El Monte Parks and Services Department, specifically the graffiti abatement crew who donated the manpower and use of their equipment to efficiently strip the old paint off of the mortar.

While Savannah is not out of the woods, the climate of crisis I feel has passed. The focus now is going to be on improving the infrastructure of what makes up Savannah and more importantly creating a stable plan to sustain current and long term operations of the grounds and organization. The only way this can be successfully accomplished is not by the efforts of only one or even two persons but by the sum of all the actions taken by those who love and appreciate Savannah. This being said I would like to solicit all of you once again for whatever financial support you can spare to continue to sustain the infrastructure of the Savannah. More important than financial support I would also like to ask for your valuable time. If you have a heart to serve in any capacity, please let us know. If you have a specialized skill set that you feel would benefit Savannah, we would love to hear about it. The growth and continued prosperity of Savannah does not lie entirely in financial stability but in the hearts of the members, families, friends and community that support it. The history of Savannah makes that clear and it is evident that we need to make it a tangible part of Savannah once again.

Thank you,  
Justen Wiggins

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**NOTABLE QUOTABLE**

"From our ancestors come our names, but from our virtues  
our honors"

Unknown



## An Early Pioneer . . .

### Alfred and Huldah Johnson

In 1852, a wagon train captained by one William Johnson arrived in El Monte. Johnson is a rather shadowy figure in El Monte's history; while many of the early settlers are said to have arrived with this party, Johnson himself does not appear to have stayed in El Monte. It is my belief that this "Captain William Johnson" was William T. Barry Johnson, who settled in Plainsburg, Merced County, shortly after arriving in California. It is certain that W. T. B. Johnson did lead a wagon train to California in 1852, and that many members of that party—though not Johnson himself—were among the early settlers of El Monte. Among them were his parents, Alfred M. and Huldah (Sanford) Johnson, who did locate in El Monte.

Alfred Johnson was born in Rutherford Co., North Carolina, ca. 1800, the son of William and Margaret (Hawkins) Johnson. His father is said to have been an attorney, a delegate to the North Carolina convention that ratified the U. S. Constitution, and later a colonel in the War of 1812. Alfred settled in the area of Howard/Boone Co. Missouri around 1820; his marriage to Huldah Sanford is recorded in Howard Co. 11 March 1821. Huldah was a Kentuckian, the daughter of John and Nancy D. (Roberts) Sanford. She was the aunt of W. T. B. Sanford, John Sanford, and Rebecca (Sanford) Banning (Mrs. Phineas Banning), all prominent in early Los Angeles county.

The Johnsons farmed in Missouri for several years, and were among the founders of Perche Christian Church in Boone County. One early Boone County settler is quoted as saying

### Calendar of Upcoming Events

No events currently scheduled

that Alfred Johnson was "the largest man in the world."

About 1844 Alfred and Huldah and their several children moved to Crawford Co., Arkansas, settling near his brother, William Hawkins Johnson, who was in Franklin Co. They continued to live there until 1852, when their oldest son William T. B. Johnson returned from California and urged them to return with him to the Golden State. They left Arkansas 17 April 1852, and traveled a Southern route, entering California at Ft. Yuma in October or November. Among those traveling with them were Alfred and Huldah's daughters Armenia, Huldah, Margaret (and her husband John Marshall James), Lucy (and her husband J. C. C. Russell, as well as his parents) and son Francis M. Johnson (later assessor of San Bernardino Co.). Another son, John, had recently married and stayed in Arkansas, though after the deaths of him and his wife, W. T. B. Johnson returned to Arkansas again and brought his three nephews to California.

Alfred died of typhoid fever at El Monte 22 August 1855, and is buried in the Savannah Cemetery. Huldah and several of her children continued to live in El Monte for a few years, but by the early 1860s most of them, including Huldah, had relocated to San Bernardino. Huldah died there 25 Nov. 1879, and is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery. Their descendants have spread throughout California and the West, and include former State Supreme Court Chief Justice Donald Wright and long-time Lassen County sheriff Olin Johnson.

*Submitted by Richard O. Johnson*

OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS



- |                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Don & Mary Alley       | Marilyn Morrison Kuper  |
| Meredith Babbott       | Ken Pike                |
| Myrna & Daniel Brown   | Pino's Place Fundraiser |
| Roi Brown              | M. C. Gill              |
| Elizabeth Cox          | Joan Skaggs             |
| Dinsmoor Museum        | Richard & Betty Tovey   |
| George Ann Ford        | Claudia Turner          |
| Nancy & Stan Goldbloom | Renay & John Wallace    |

In Remembrance  
Jack Bezner



★ SIEGE MORTAR ★

Savannah's siege mortar (the canon) was in desperate need of a "makeover". Thanks very much to Raul Zamora and his Community Service Workers for donating their time and the materials necessary to paint it.



Mortar - before



Mortar - after

As a police officer, one of the most difficult assignments is to deliver a death notice. Again I have been called on to deliver bad news. Jack Bezner and his wife Susan were brutally stabbed to death in their Rosemead home August 9, 2010. Their granddaughter, Sophia Christo, and a male, Rudolfo Lopez were arrested in Texas and charged with the stabbing deaths. The Bezner's, who had been raising their 14-year-old granddaughter, had been having discipline problems with her.

Jack and Susan had been married 41 years. They have three sons: Daniel, David, and Brian. Also surviving is Mrs. Vera Maude, Susan's mother. Dr. Stuart Maude (deceased), Susan's father and former Mayor of Rosemead, hired Jack as the part-time caretaker of Savannah in approximately 1970. Jack was also a lead custodian at Temple City School District until retirement. Jack served Savannah for 36 years, caring not only for Savannah's grounds, but also preparing the final resting place for many of our family members. Jack was a quiet man who took his responsibilities very seriously.

Jack and Susan chose to be buried by her father, Dr. Stuart Maude, at Rose Hills. Services were held at The Church of Our Savior Episcopal Parish on August 21, 2010. Jack was a member of the Rosemead Masonic Lodge. Masonic funeral honors were bestowed by Chaplain Brother Josh Bernal. Please remember the Bezner family in your prayers.

Savannah Board of Directors will plant a tree and place a plaque or bench in memory of Jack at Savannah Cemetery. Contributions to help with this memorial may be mailed to Savannah Memorial Park at P. O. Box 4247, El Monte, California 91734.

Randy Wiggins

***Your Current Board of Directors***

- Justen Wiggins, President*
- Walter White, Vice President*
- Dwain Crum, Secretary*
- Janice Wiggins White, Treasurer*
- Virgil Erwin*
- Jeff Foutz*
- Dan Glass*
- Robyn Steele*

THANKS, M. C. GILL CORPORATION

Again we must thank Stephen Gill and the M. C. Gill Corporation for their very much appreciated and extremely generous donation to Savannah Memorial Park. Without this donation and those of our other supporters, we could not continue to preserve and protect this historic cemetery which is such a valuable resource to the community and the region.

El Monte Cemetery Association  
P. O. Box 4247  
El Monte, California 91734