

Strong it stands

The mighty Hammond Oak

By Velmarae Dunn
Alone it stands--this live oak, whose age is unknown but whose leafy branches form a lacy canopy in the spring and the summer for those buried within the small old Hammond cemetery situated on a lot fronting 100 feet in the fifth block of East Charles Street and extending south for 50 feet.

For years this oak, with its spreading multi-branches, rough bark, and gnarled roots was a haven for singing birds of bright plumage, for playful squirrels leaping from branch to branch, and for rabbits nibbling tender grasses. For years it was a playground for boys who were climbers and swingers of branches and for girls who played dolls in the land of make-believe castles in the recesses of the roots. For years it was a refuge for lovers who enjoyed the beauty of nature, for old folks who stopped to rest under its inviting shade, and for the tired and

troubled who meditated and communicated with God.

For years it has been a mecca for school-age boys and girls and adults to relive its history of yesterday. There is no doubt that in earlier days, drivers of teams of oxen hauling tall timbers, traders, people seeking adventure, and settlers wishing to homestead exchanged ideas or gave information valuable to others under its great boughs.

Originally this burial place was circular, but with the passing of time it has assumed a rectangular shape. The old wire fence has disappeared and a high wire fence now protects three sides. In front there are sturdy posts connected by draping chains, placed there by the late Mr. Charles Cooks and the late Mr. Steve Ladew, a task of love inspired by the late Mr. W. L. Jennings, the project promoter, through whose efforts the money had been raised for the un-

dertaking.

At a meeting of the Commission Council, March 26, 1949, it was voted to donate \$50. to the Peter Hammond Cemetery fund and to place the cemetery in the park system, which means perpetual care of the spot where the founder of Hammond and members of his family are buried. It was also decided that money donated by the city authorities would be used to purchase azaleas and camellia plants for further beautification of the grounds.

In 1950 the Louisiana Department of Commerce and Industry erected in this picturesque cemetery a marker bearing this inscription: "Under this oak is buried Peter Hammond, of Sweden, who founded Hammond, Louisiana, about 1818. Nearby are the graves of his wife, three daughters, and a favorite slave boy."

Buried in this plot are Peter Hammond and

Caroline Tucker Hammond and four of their daughters, Sarah, wife of Jefferson Davis Hughes and later Francis Robertson; Clorinda, wife of U. De Souge; and Charlotte and Mariah. A single marble monument marks the burial places of the founder of Hammond and his wife and possibly Charlotte. Ground slabs inscribed with the names of S. Robertson, F. Robertson, W. S. Wall, and Eliza Wall designate other graves.

An informative monument inscription exposes Clorinda Hammond DeSouge's resting place.

Peter Hammond first used this site as a graveyard when a favorite Negro slave child, Gaston, died of yellow fever. As a child, this writer remembers a plain wooden rectangle with a circular top placed near the gate entrance. Perhaps this mound of earth fanned by swaying palmettos was the grave of

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