

ST. MARY CATHOLIC CEMETERY

RACELAND, LOUISIANA

Excerpted from the book

Walking Tours of Selected Cemeteries in Lafourche by Martin L. Cortez

St. Mary Cemetery in Raceland, one of the oldest cemeteries in Lafourche Parish has long been admired for its beauty and for its cleanliness. Attesting to this is the fact that many movies have been filmed there. St. Mary has the best examples of family brick sarcophagus tombs of any cemetery. At one time it had the most anchor/fleuree crosses, many of which had to be removed for safety and insurance purposes.

Tombs had been found in the past dating back to 1805. This author personally found one grave dating back to 1854. Most of the inscriptions and dates have been lost due to time, weather and the removal of all the iron crosses from the cemetery.

Begin the historical tour in the large grassy area next to the rectory. Walk to the first aisle facing the bayou (Div. 3), but walk on the cement walkway. Stop at the first large tomb on the **left** when facing away from the rectory.

1) This is the tomb of Freddie John Falgout (1916-37). He was a young man of 18 when he was drafted into the Navy. He was assigned to serve on the *USS Augusta*. The ship sailed into Shanghai, China on a mission of peace during the Chinese-Japanese War. While the ship was docked in the harbor, the ship's crew was watching a movie on the deck. Freddie John had seen the movie and went to the side of the ship to read a book. A bomb exploded near the ship and Freddie John Falgout was the only one killed. The date was August 20, 1937, the day before his 21st birthday. He is considered by many to be the first American service men killed in W.W.II. Honor Guard returned his body to Raceland for his funeral. The Raceland VFW is named in his honor.

The tomb is a family brick tomb with a triangular pediment. (You don't see the triangular pediment shape, as this is a later model from the original triangular pediment.) Above the tomb is a fleuree cross. Across the cross is a wreath of flowers (lily leaves) symbolic of resurrection and purity. They probably used these flowers because of his young age. On the cross is the anchor symbolic of the Navy and of Hope.

On the right side of the aisle across from the Falgout tomb is the Ghita Bananto (1841-1933) tomb and to the left is the A. L. Pertuit tomb. Notice how Pertuit is spelled Pertvit. Also buried in the Bananto tomb is Phillip Brocato (1901-20). Phillip was killed by a fast mill (train) while delivering groceries to the town of Bowie.

2) These tombs are known as Patriarch tombs. Walk around to the back and notice that the opening to these crypts is in the elevated area above the roofline. You will notice that the opening to these crypts is also in the back of the tomb. It is believed that this space was reserved for someone special in the family, possibly the father. The crypt was seldom used.

The Xavier Chauvin Co made this type of tomb specifically in this area around the turn of the 20th C. Some tombs are being made today with the same design but the opening to the special area is in the front and is square in shape. The Brocato family owned a store and sold vegetables from a horse cart. Philip was killed by a fast mill train at the main junction while delivering vegetables to Bowie Sawmill Town (1896-1917).

3) Next to the Pertuit tomb and on your right is the Guidry/Grabert Tomb. This is the tomb of Albert F. Grabert (1868-1941). Notice in the cement floor in front of the tomb the small "perpetual care" sign. This means that the church or cemetery for a fee binds itself to care for and maintain the burial location in perpetuity.

4) About three tombs up on the right side is the Edgar Robichaux Tomb. Edgar was born in 1845. This is a family brick tomb that is known as a Decorative Cement Pre-cast. It is made of cinder blocks. Notice the handles on the unused crypts. This was decorative as long as there were no burials. After the burial a marble monument replaced the handles. The tomb was made about the

1920's. Buried here are Joseph Robichaux (1874-1961) and Louis Robichaux (1888-1970) who worked at Bowie. He was married to Clothilde Mayet (1888-1978). Joseph was in maintenance and Louis was a sawyer at Bowie.

5) On the tomb up on the left side, look for a headstone. This is the Felix Thibodaux (1835-1894) tombstone. Notice that Mr. Thibodaux died in 1894 and that the tombstone is written entirely in French. This was the universal language of Louisiana even during the Spanish occupation when the Acadians came to this area around 1765. French continued to be the main language of the people well into the 1800's. It wasn't until the 20th C that French began to die out. To encourage English and discourage French, children were punished for speaking French on the school grounds.

6) Across from the Thibodaux tombstone on the right side is the Babin Tomb. This tomb is a Garden Bench Variety and a side-by-side double sarcophagus. The sarcophagus goes back to the time of the ancient Egyptian and the Pharaohs. It was the form of burial of the Pharaohs in the pyramids. The word sarcophagus means "stone coffin." It was called a garden bench because it was low to the ground and looked like a place to sit. This tomb dates back to the 19th C and early 20th C., when cemeteries were places of beauty to be admired and visit. At that time there were real benches in the cemeteries for people to sit and get their pictures taken among the memorials.

7) Next door on the right of the Babin tomb is the E. Robichaux tomb. Notice the cross. It is a Graded Fleuree cross. This cross was found mostly on tables used as altars in the homes of the sick. The ends of this cross terminates in petals that looks like the Fleur de Lis. The tomb is made of bricks cemented in squares giving it an interesting architecture. It is a garden bench variety.

8) Across the aisle on the left side are old brick sarcophagi. This was typical of the type built in the 1800-1920. The name of the owner has been lost.

9) Two tombs up the aisle on the left you will find a tomb with a small statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in front. This is known as a Gable Tomb because it has a gable roof. This tomb evolved after the birth of the triangular pediment tomb. It was an improvement on the original. Notice on the roof and on the front and back that there are

firewalls. This is an example of Cajun architecture. The owner is unknown. Across on the right is the triangular pediment tomb of Eugene Guichet (1877-1949). At one time Guichetville was the old Houma road.

10) On tomb up on the right is the tomb of Edmond Walker (1888-1931). He married Victoria Dufrene (1888-1930). This is another example of a Graded Latin cross. The Graded cross was also known as the Calvary cross. Across from the Walker tomb on the left is a double Sarcophagus one on top of the other. Look on the sides and notice the Gothic features in the brickwork. In particular the square column effect used as a buttress. The owner is unknown.

11) Next to it is a single sarcophagus step tomb with no name

At the crosswalk turn left

12) One tomb over brings you to a large middle aisle. You should now be facing a tomb with a large cross and an angel on top. The tomb is on your right once you make the left onto the main aisle. This is the Oscar LePine (1834-1892) tomb. This is the largest tomb in the cemetery and the most ornate. Notice the angel above the roofline. The three large steps were added to reinforce the tomb. Oscar was married to Rosella Folse (1838-1935) Rosella Plantation was named in her honor.

13) Four tombs up this middle aisle walk between the Mrs. Alexander Elias Adams (1875-1958) Caveau and the Yves Martin (1912-66) tomb. She was born Claudia Pierce. About two tombs from the aisle on the right is a very old bricked stepped tomb with two large round cement vases on the tomb. This is the tomb of Joseph Folse (1823-1876). He died in 1876. This step tomb was one of the first, built in the evolution of tombs. It is a typical 19th C tomb. For it to be classified a step tomb, the steps have to be on the top of the tomb, not in the front. Also notice that the marble slab (on top of the tomb) is signed at the bottom, Kursheedt & Bienvenu. These signature tombs are rare. Kursheedt was the predecessor of Albert Weiblan, who first employed Weiblan. Kursheedt retired in 1887. Bienvenu was Kursheedt partner. His work is rare.

14) At this spot while facing the rectory, look to your left. There are two small graves with recumbent (lying down) crosses. One of the recumbent crosses marks the tomb of Paul Martin (1893-1908). This cross is known as a Moline and is believed to have gotten its start in the sawmills that dotted south Louisiana landscape. Next to this grave is the Doris Martin (1944-45) grave. On it is a Fleuree Cross. It is also known as an old anchor cross because it is believed that the first fleuree crosses were made from old anchors from ships.

15) Return to the main aisle, face the big cross. One tomb on your right and three tombs behind it on the left is another example of an old brick sarcophagus. It is located next to the Edmond Knobloch garden bench variety sarcophagus. Continue up the main aisle. The next tomb on the left has a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a box. This is the Verna Falgout (1927-68) Tomb. The cross on this tomb is a Botonnee. It is a French cross that was usually found on Bibles or on pews in churches. Today it is one of the most popular crosses found in Louisiana cemeteries. It is also known as a Cross-Trefflee. Its ends are "Treffles" which symbolizes the Trinity or the Three Persons in One God. It is often used as cornerstones for churches. Some believe it to be of Latin design.

16) Continue up the main aisle. Two tombs up from the Verna Falgout tomb on your right is the Lafourche Parish Council Tomb. This tomb and the Priest's tomb are the only examples of Society tombs in St. Mary. It was usually built for organizations that wanted to be buried together. The family brick tomb came about the same way. The council tomb is used to inter paupers and other unknowns who die within the parish. It is a triangular pediment Small Greek Temple with Doric pilasters. In front is a flush monument on a slant base belonging to Wayne Colter (1953-85).

17) Straight up the main aisle to the tomb with the big cross is the Priest's Tomb. Here are buried the priest who have served St. Mary. The exception to this is Rev. Aristide Plotin, a friend of Father Eugene Vigroux. He came from Canada in the hopes of recovering from T. B.; but it wasn't to be. He died and was first buried in the old church. Later his body was transferred to this tomb. Also buried here are Father Manlier Simon (1895-1915), Rev. Jean Quionilliere, (1920-1922), Rev. Peter Nies, (1922-1958), Rev. Sabastian Arjonilla, (1958-

1963), Rev. Kermit C. Trahan (1968-1979) & Rev. Stanislaus Manikowski.

18) Turn left at the Priest's Tomb, walk six tombs up, look to your left. Notice on the tombs of the next few tombs picture holders of loved ones. There are at least three kinds of picture holders.

19) Four or five tombs up this aisle on the left is the Frank (1880-1951) Tomb. He was a sawyer with the Bowie Lumber Company. Victoria Tindol's monument (1877-1913) is to the right of Frank's. It is an obelisk that originated with the Romans before the time of Christ. She was married to W. L. Walters.

20) Turn left and walk between the Frank & Victoria Tindol graves to the brick sarcophagus with the pointed headstone on top. This is the Louis Martin Tomb. Louis was a confederate soldier during the War Between the States. This allowed him to receive a CSA headstone. He belonged to Co. B of the Louisiana Cavalry. I believed that he probably belonged to the 7th Regiment of Cavalry. Company B was under the command of William Ira Hargroder and the entire regiment under the command of Louis Bush from Thibodaux. They made raids in the Bayou Lafourche region in 1864-65. Most of their fighting was in Lafourche and St. Mary Parish.

21) Retrace your steps to the main aisle; turn right toward the Priest's tomb. Pass the Priest's tomb and a few tombs up are the tombs of Emile Toups (1867-1935) and the Camille Daigle (1868-1918) Family. Looking between these two tombs you will see a brown brick looking sarcophagus. This is the oldest tomb left in the cemetery dating back to 1854. It is believed to be the tomb of a woman named Baudoin. Due to time and the removal of the iron crosses the exact information has been lost.

22) Continue on this aisle two or three tombs on your right to the Banane Thibodaux Tomb. Banane is French for "banana". Could this have been his nickname? Nicknames are very popular in Louisiana.

23) Continue up this aisle to the next main aisle running from the highway to the back of the cemetery. On the corner to the left is a CSA headstone for Toussaint Babin. He was with the Louisiana Militia who were state volunteers. Turn left here (Div. 5) and walk 5 tombs toward the back of the cemetery on your left. Walk past the George Ledet (1911-63) tomb to a similar tomb with the name not

showing. Look on the back of that tomb you will find the name Kent Guidroz(1956-94). Notice the full-marbleized picture on the cover. Pictures like this can be found in many cemeteries today.

24) Go back up the main aisle toward the highway turn left at the aisle that crosses in front of the Priest's tomb. Two tombs on the left you will find five small graves that look alike. Each has a cross on it. These are called Caveaus. (pronounced Ka-vo). This is also known as the "poor man's tomb." It is one of the most popular tombs in rural Louisiana today. Sometime two caveaus are placed one on top of the other for two burials. The first caveau belongs to Emile Hidalgo (1891-1989). The fourth caveau is Anna Breaux (1910-57).

25) Continue up this aisle three tombs on your right. Look between the Irvin Gros (1923-82) tomb and the Philip Dufrene (1902-74) tomb toward the front of the cemetery. You will see a fenced in area with black post and white fencing. This is our only example of a full enclosure of wrought iron. On the white fence are fleur-de-lis symbolic of the Blessed Virgin Mary and also French Heritage which at one time was painted either black or dark blue. The plot belongs to Mary Ann Smith (1828-1871) who was the godmother of St. Mary Church's first bell. She is buried there with her daughter. (1855-1874) who died in the explosion. She died in 1871 along with her daughter after an explosion aboard a steamboat in the New Orleans harbor. Her husband, Charles G. Thibodeaux and son are buried in Greenwood Cemetery in New Orleans in a plot identical to the one in St. Mary. The headstones are signed Foy monuments. Prosper & Florville Foy (father & son) were leading builders in the 19th C. They were free persons of color. Many of their works are found in St. Louis I & II in New Orleans, however, there are a couple of examples in St. Mary's.

26) Continue up the aisle in front of the first oven receptacles. (This is what most people call a mausoleum). Take St. Gabriel's Patio between the second oven receptacle and the third. The name of the walkway, "St. Gabriel Patio" is on the walkway floor. Crypt # 6 is on your left and is that of Yako Dias (1933-87). Mrs. Dias suffered all her lifetime as a result of the bombing of Japan in WWII. On August 6, 1945 when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Yako was only nine years old. She lived outside the city, but the next day she and her family went into the city to search for family members who

were missing. Doctors attributed the cause of her death to complications arising from the exposure to radiation from the bomb.

27) Continue up this aisle past the 1st and 2nd oven receptacles on your right. Enter the 3rd oven receptacle through the “Queen of Peace Patio” (name found on floor). Go through the breezeway and on the left are square crypts. These are Columbariums for vases of ashes.

St. Mary’s Cemetery in Raceland, La. is known to many as one of the most beautiful above the ground cemeteries in the world. You may want to retrace your steps and visit some of the monuments you may have missed or try to identify some of the tombs we did not point out in the tour. Most especially we hope you have enjoyed the wonderful world of our beloved dead. Please pray for them. *Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.*

2 Maccabees 12:38-46: Judas rallied his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the week was ending, they purified themselves according to custom and kept the Sabbath there. On the following day, since the task had now become urgent, Judas and his men went to gather up the bodies of the slain and bury them with their kinsmen in their ancestral tombs.

But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had been slain. They all therefore praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge who brings to light the things that are hidden.

Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas warned the soldiers to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.