



WINTER 2023

THE BONAVENTURE BULLETIN

BONAVENTURE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The *Bonaventure Bulletin* is a publication of the Bonaventure Historical Society (BHS). Established in 1994, BHS is a nonprofit 501 (c) 3 organization dedicated to the restoration and preservation of Bonaventure Cemetery in Savannah, Georgia.

To schedule a guided tour of the Cemetery or to join BHS, please visit our website at www.bonaventurehistorical.org.

BHS memberships, starting at only \$20 per year, make thoughtful and unique gifts.

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Brandt gravesite restoration complete!



BRANDT CLEANUP CREW

A PROJECT ON THE BHS RADAR SINCE 1999 and actively nurtured for the past two years is officially complete, as of a November 2022 cleanup at Bonaventure H-94. Armed with garden gear and landscaping tools, a team of dedicated volunteers put the finishing touches on the restored grave of Carl Brandt, first director of the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences.

“Although the tomb itself had been stabilized and cleaned by professionals, the grounds still needed attention,” said Kathryn Tanner, who coordinated the restoration and cleanup. “BHS volunteers removed garden debris and invasive lantana, smilax, wild grapevines and other weeds that were crowding out the azaleas.”

The project was funded in part by BHS with generous support from local donors rallied by Dale Critz.

“We’re grateful to Dale Critz not only for donating significant funds but also for encouraging financial support from other local donors,” said Tanner. “Plus, he was present at every important stage of the restoration, including cleanup.”

CONTINUED INSIDE

ABOVE: (STANDING, L-R) KATHRYN TANNER, TINA SCHMID, CAROL CORBETT, PATTI MARNELL, CELESTE DOPPEL-CAVET, DALE CRITZ, TESS SCHEER, WILMA WHETEN. (CROUCHING, L-R) LISA HOLBERT, GOWAN LIMBACH.

LEFT: GARDEN TILE IN TIC-TAC-TOE PATTERN FROM FULLER GRAVE IN BONAVENTURE.



FROM THE CHAIRPERSON'S DESK

IT WAS SUCH A PLEASURE to see so many of you in November as we rounded out another great year with fellowship, a delicious dinner and a fascinating presentation from Emily Beck, Interpreter for the Coastal Heritage Society. As you may know, BHS will cosponsor the restoration of 19 Revolutionary War era cannons recently recovered from the Savannah River. The finished display will showcase Bonaventure at the Savannah History Museum and go a long way toward educating the millions who visit the museum about the Cemetery.

Congratulations and thanks to our first annual Volunteer of the Year award winners Chris Rader for Visitor Center and John Gentry for Camellia & Gardens group. While we appreciate the time and talents from every one of our volunteers, these two gentlemen consistently go above and beyond.

I look forward to working with our new vice-chair, Bonnie Buckner, a long-time BHS volunteer and board member. Many thanks to outgoing vice-chair and preservation director, Kathryn Tanner for her hard work and dedication.

I'm also excited about working with Sam Beetler, new Director for the Department of Cemeteries. I share his vision for Bonaventure's future and our role in moving forward yet preserving the past.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to each of you. Whether it's time, money or ideas, your contributions make us what we are.

Wishing you all the best for 2023!

Pat Alhouse, Chairperson
Bonaventure Historical Society

PHOTO ABOVE: DEPUE MONUMENT CO. MOVING 1200-LB. MARBLE SLAB FROM BRANDT TOMB.

AT RIGHT: VOLUNTEERS AT WORK. RESTORED MARBLE IN FOREGROUND.

Garden tiles found

As part of the cleanup, volunteers also tended the adjacent unmarked grave of Eleanor Fuller (1872-1906), Carl's daughter-in-law, married to his son Dr. Erdman Brandt. (Erdman is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery near the Brandt home in Hastings-On-Hudson, NY.)

Although Fuller's grave is listed in the *BHS Index of Sections A - H*, the garden tiles marking it were mostly buried by shifting sand, a natural effect of the site's incline toward the Wilmington River. In addition, her name in the *Index* is erroneously recorded as Eleanor Tuller Brandt, probably misread from cursive on an old, faded document. Tanner was able to locate another document confirming the spelling as Fuller.

Restoring the tiles to their original positions was a painstaking process.

"With digging tools, we followed the interior perimeter to identify and uncover the buried tiles," said BHS volunteer Tess Scheer. "Using tent spikes and rope to find and mark the interior perimeter ... we were able to replace the tiles exactly where they were originally."

To allow sufficient footing for stability but ensure visibility for the next century of shifting sand, the tiles were buried at roughly half their height.

"We back-filled, wet and tamped soil on the front and back sides of the tiles and added material to the inside area for extra support," reported Scheer.

Inexpensive alternative to marble in hard times

Following the Civil War, many Savannahians couldn't afford marble gravestones so they turned to wood-fired brick border tiles as an inexpensive but aesthetically pleasing alternative. Popular patterns include tic-tac-toe, silver dollar, starburst and cathedral. Tiles at the head and foot of Fuller's grave are decorated with full-sun designs while those at the sides feature a tic-tac-toe pattern. All were in "amazing" condition with no significant damage and well-preserved glaze, according to Scheer.

Thanks to BHS volunteers and contributions from the Savannah community, the Brandt project was a success on multiple levels. It restored an historical grave to

reflect its importance, uncovered another chapter of Brandt family history and highlighted a unique art form.

"I was humbled and grateful to be part of [the project]," said Scheer. "It was an honor to restore [Fuller's] tiles as a loving tribute to her and preservation of the historical use of garden tiles as grave markers. I believe projects like this are the ultimate definition of 'volunteer.'" ■



SCATTERED IN BONAVENTURE:

“The Monocle from Georgia”

HIS MONOCLE, CIGAR AND EXPRESSIVE EYEBROWS are familiar to fans of classic movies from the 1930s through the 1950s. Nicknamed The Monocle from Georgia, actor Charles Coburn was born in 1877 in Macon to Emma Louise Sprigman and Moses Douville Coburn. The youngest of seven children, he spent the first 19 years of his life in Savannah and began attending performances at the old Savannah Theatre on Chippewa Square at age eight. As a child, he fell hard for the profession’s glamour and exhilaration, saving his pennies for matinees, haunting the stage door for glimpses of his idols and distributing programs in exchange for free admittance to plays. Working his way up the ladder, he became the youngest manager in the history of the Savannah Theatre



at the age of 17.

Charles was 19 when his mother, Emma Louise, died in 1896 and was buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery. (She was later moved to Bonaventure A-297 in 1902 to be interred next to her husband, Moses.) By the time of her death, Charles had progressed steadily in the business of theatre but his ambition to act was as yet unfulfilled. Like so many aspiring thespians, he moved to New York where he worked as a department store bundle wrapper, an usher and professional bicycle racer while he waited for a chance to perform.

Eventually, he was able to hone his craft in road companies that played the midwest and upstate New York. In a 1905 production of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, he met and fell in love with Ivah Myrtle Wills, a diminutive, dark-haired beauty. They married in 1906 and formed the Coburn Shakespearean Players, one of America’s first theatrical groups to perform outdoors. The couple’s partnership flourished and they appeared frequently on Broadway as a team beginning in 1916. In 1928, Charles opened the Coburn Theater in Manhattan but it became a casualty of the Depression in 1932.

Ivah’s death in 1937 ended the Coburns’ 31-year collaboration and left Charles childless and drifting. He turned his attention to Hollywood and auditioned for the role of Judge Hardy in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s *Andy Hardy* series but didn’t get the part. He did however catch the eye of director Clarence Brown, who cast him in *Of Human Hearts* as Doc Shingle, a kindly but drunken country doctor. Thus began a distinguished career as one of the most recognizable faces of mid-20th century film. As a monocled, cigar-smoking character—often with a tony British accent—he appeared opposite Lucille Ball, Marilyn Monroe, Cary Grant, Irene Dunn and many more.

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ABOUT CARL BRANDT

CARL BRANDT (1831–1905), FIRST director of the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, was born in Holstein, Germany. His father, a medical doctor, began teaching young Carl to draw at the age of six. With his natural talent, the boy was studying under the president of the Guild of Master Painters in Hamburg by age 14.

After serving in the First Schleswig War of 1848–1850, he emigrated to the U.S. and settled in New York City. There, his flair for portraiture soon gained him an enthusiastic—and lucrative—following among affluent society families. His clients included John Jacob Astor and Mr. and Mrs. William B. Astor.

While living in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, Brandt became friendly with Georgian Henry Rootes Jackson and painted a portrait of William Hodgson, husband of Margaret Telfair Hodgson. He was probably introduced to the Telfairs through Mary Few, close friend of Mary Telfair and aunt to William Few Christie who owned the property where Brandt’s studio was located.

In 1883, Jackson reached out to Brandt to become director of the Telfair Academy housed in the Telfair mansion bequeathed to the City of Savannah. Brandt proved uniquely qualified to convert the private residence to a public institution and acquire the world-class art to fill it. The first public art museum in the South, the Telfair Academy has evolved into three separate facilities housing more than 6300 works of art. ■



Bonaventure Historical Society
P.O. Box 5954
Savannah, GA 31414



LUCILLE BALL AND
CHARLES COBURN IN
“LURED” (1947).

“MONOCLE FROM GEORGIA” CONTINUED...

In 1944, Coburn took home the Oscar for Best Actor in a Supporting Role in *The More the Merrier*, and in 1960 he was awarded a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Throughout his career, he took an interest in mentoring young actors and encouraged colleges and universities to offer drama instruction. In 1957, Coburn donated his theatrical mementos to the University of Georgia at Athens. The collection includes books, scrapbooks, autographed photos, sheet music, plays and stage props now housed in the Georgia Room at the University of Georgia.

Coburn’s death in 1961 ended a 60-year career encompassing hundreds of roles in theatre, film and television productions. According to his wishes, some of his ashes were scattered over the graves of his parents in Bonaventure A-297. The rest were paced at the at the foot of a tree planted in his beloved first wife’s honor in Manhattan’s Gramercy Park and along the Mohawk Trail from the highest peak between Albany, NY, and Fitchburg, MA. ■