

## Schertz-Cibolo Cemetery. NE San Antonio

### The Cemetery Story

The origin of this cemetery stems from the coming together of two waves of immigration, one from Germany and the other from Mexico. They came together to this part of Texas with the idea of fulfilling the same dream; to chart their own course in improving their lives and those of their families. The first immigration wave came from Germany in the mid 1800's. Brothers Ferdinand and August Dietz initially bought 500 acres out of the Genobeva Malpaz Survey (Texas land grant) which is now mostly developed into the Lone Oak Subdivision. A farmstead is created by clearing the land and farming supports the family's needs. The Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio railroad line also is established in the 1870's which connects San Antonio to Austin with local stops in Converse, Schertz, Cibolo and Marion and passes over the northern section of the Dietz' farm. The railroad stimulates the creation of more farms, and the advent of the cotton gin also makes it easier to process more cotton. Prior to the cotton gin, one bale of cotton was produced per day. After the introduction of the steam powered cotton gin, 100 bales of cotton could be produced in one day. Soon, cotton and corn are the predominant and profitable staples and, if the farms are to expand, a reliable labor force is needed.

The second immigration wave begins in the early 1900s, this time from Mexico. With political unrest at home (the Mexican Revolution) and work available in Texas, Mexican families now work hand in hand with the German families and the rural communities of Schertz and Cibolo begin to grow and prosper. Among the first families that come to work on the Dietz' farm and settle in the community are the Arizpe, Del Toro and Bermea families. Records show these families came from the small town of Rosales, (now Villa Union), Coahuila, Mexico and found comfort and strength in traversing south Texas together. The entry point was through Eagle Pass. The arrival of additional farmworkers and families stimulated local businesses, such as mercantile, banking and jobs supporting the farm including blacksmithing.

Oral history tells us that upon the death of a female child of one of the farmworker families, there was not a proper burial place for her. There were no community cemeteries in the area at the time. Most people are buried on private family farmsteads. Mr. Dietz (Ferdinand), took it upon himself to mark off an area of his farm for a burial ground located near the creek and under some majestic oak trees. It is said, this was also the area where the workers would eat lunch and take their breaks from the strenuous work. Because of this gesture, Mr. Dietz was respectfully remembered as "buena gente" or "a good man". A Dietz' family land deed from 1908 expressly sets aside this one acre parcel of land for a cemetery with instructions it never be sold. The farmworkers now had a place to bury their loved ones and burials have continued to the present day. The oak trees, which are now approaching 300 years old, continue to symbolically embrace those first farmworker families and provides enduring shade for descendants and visitors to the burial ground today.

The orientation of the tombstones in this cemetery is in a traditional east-facing direction conforming with Christian beliefs. The northeast section was initially set aside as the burial site for infants and babies. The earliest legible tombstone is that of Tomas Arizpe who died in 1925 at the age of 15 due to a ruptured appendix. He was the son of Tomas and Juana Arizpe, one of

the first arriving Mexican families. There is evidence of earlier burials, however, time has overtaken these grave markers, and their identities are presently unknown. Many of the early tombstones were made of concrete and appear to have been hand-made and hand-etched and some include tile inlay. You will also find some gravesites from the 1920's decorated with seashells. The use of seashells as a decoration has different meanings around the world. One is that it represents an ancient Christian symbol referring to religious pilgrimages and spiritual protection. In very heavy rains, the Cibolo Creek can overflow its bank. The catastrophic flood of 1998 caused damage to fragile gravemarkers as well as to the grounds of the cemetery. Several of the older, more fragile tombstones were not able to be recovered. All of the original wooden crosses and many ornate grave markers were swept away. The volunteers of the cemetery association came together and were able to repair much of the damage and re-set many of the tombstones. Fundraisers, usually dances, were held in the 1970's and 80's which helped to bring in needed funds during those years.

Ottomar "Pat" Dietz, grandson to Ferdinand Dietz, deeded the cemetery property over to the Schertz-Cibolo Cemetery Association in 1973 and the Association bought an adjacent two acres from the Dietz family in 1982. Through the decades, this cemetery has been referred by various names including Cibolo Cemetery, Dietz Cemetery, the Spanish or Hispanic Cemetery among other names. However, it is the Schertz-Cibolo Cemetery, a designated Texas Historic Cemetery, and all the original people buried here were farm workers of Mexican descent. The descendants of these early farmworkers have become professionals in their respective fields and businesses as well as becoming officers in all branches of the US military. They have maintained a strong bond to this cemetery with their volunteerism and, through their efforts, have maintained the honor and respect of this ancestral resting place. The most recent Presidents for the cemetery include Natividad "Tivi" Medina (1934-2014), Guadalupe "Lupe" del Toro (1939-2018) and, presently Miguel Arizpe Vazquez, MD

From Miguel A. Vazquez, MD