



• THE • POLLEY *association*

June 2025

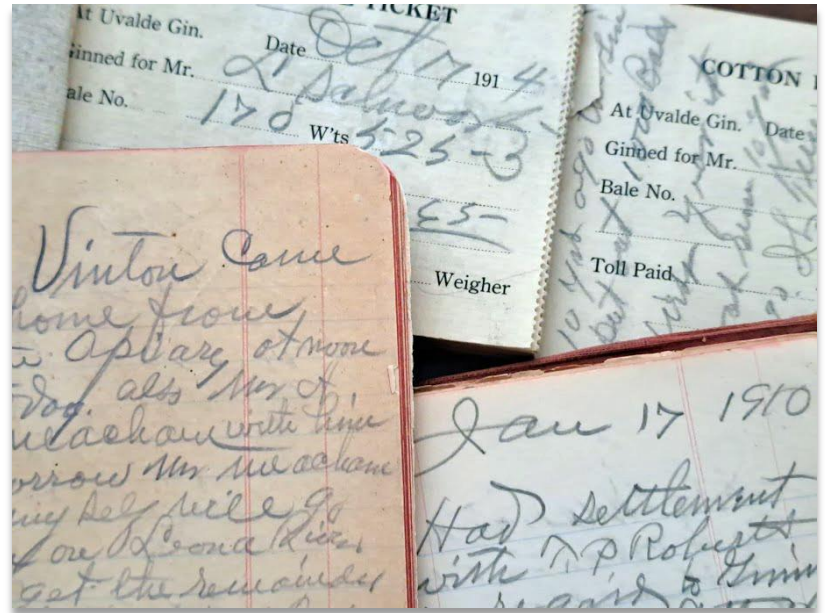
Message from the President

Katherine Goldberg

Do you keep a journal? I must confess that I do not. A half-baked attempt at writing my thoughts in a locked, fuzzy, brightly colored diary when I was a preteen, only to later find that diary, and cringe with embarrassment at whatever deep thoughts I had recorded for posterity was enough to keep me far away from the hobby. Later on when my children were born, I had grand ideas about recording all the things we did, along with photos, like a family yearbook. However, after doing all the things worth recording, I didn't have the creative energy left to pick up the pen and relive it all on paper.

As an amateur family historian, I greatly value all those who came before us and wrote their stories down. Through government birth, death, and marriage records we can piece together the puzzle of our family history, but nothing really paints the picture or fills the large gaps in the story like a well-kept journal from an ancestor. Some tales, like Bailey's Light, offer a full storytelling with details and commentary. Other personal journals, like that of Jesse Lane Tiner (Polley grandson-in-law) are much more sporadic, recording prices paid for goods, quantities of cotton baled, names of acquaintances, as well as short notations for major milestones, like the death of a child.

Reading through these stories is captivating and inspiring (and, honestly, sometimes boring, if on page 32 of cotton baling receipts), but never have I felt cringing embarrassment. I am so grateful for the window into the past. Fitting together the puzzle is so much more enjoyable when you have the handwritten words of your grandfather in front of you.



Handwritten journals and cotton gin receipts of Jesse Lane Tiner.

It beats sifting through government records any day!

I raise my glass to the journal keepers out there! You help us to confirm the who, what, when, and where of the family story. But more importantly, you help us to understand the why, and the how, and the impact that life had in shaping our family and making us who we are today.

I encourage you all to give journaling a try. It can take whatever shape you want. Even mundane facts like the weather report in old journals have illuminated story-altering details that we wouldn't have otherwise known. Holding the ever-loosening pages of an ancestor's journal, reading through the details of life they wanted to record is a direct communication with the past that can change how we view individual people and our history as a whole. What a powerful thing of which to be a part! I will give journaling another try, if you will!

Polley Family Cemetery

The primary function of the Polley Association is to keep the Polley Family Cemetery in good order, and we are happy to report that the cemetery is in good shape.



Thanks go out to the Lawn Medic crew of La Vernia, Texas for their monthly mowing services that keep the cemetery looking clean and well-kept.

Thanks, also, to Keith and Robin Muschalek for keeping an eye on the flags at the Polley Cemetery and replacing them when need be with flags provided by the Polley Association.

We thank all of our members for your generosity and commitment to preserving our Polley family legacy.

For a list of who is buried in the Polley Cemetery, visit www.PolleyAssociation.org/polley-family-cemetery

Join Us in Membership!

Your membership is important and your dues help the association to preserve the legacy of Joseph H. Polley and his family. Association dues remain at \$25.00 for the year, and we would appreciate payment by July 15th. You can do this by credit card online by going to www.PolleyAssociation.org/get-involved, or you can mail a check to:

Melissa Lingwall
3326 Dunes Circle
Montgomery, Texas 77356

This Polley Association newsletter serves as an annual communication to Association members, but it also highlights current Polley Mansion renovations, Polley family research, and Polley descendant gatherings. It is a connection point for all descendants and friends who are kin to the cause of preserving the history of this pioneering Texas family. If you enjoy receiving this newsletter, please consider membership in the association that helps us to do this important work!

Congratulations Dr. Creech!

On April 24, 2025, Dr. Melinda Creech received the Texas Historical Commission's Award of Excellence in Preserving History at the annual Real Places Conference in Austin, Texas. She was recognized for her exhibit entitled "The Enslaved People of J. H. Polley Plantation, Whitehall, Sutherland Springs, Texas 1836-1865."

For this exhibit, Dr. Creech scoured records to find and list all of the slaves that had been at the Polley Plantation. Each person has their own story written out, with a quilt square created by Dr. Creech to represent their life.



The artistic display can be seen at the Polley Mansion, the Sutherland Springs Historical Museum, and on the Polley Association website.

Thank you Dr. Creech for beautifully filling in a large gap in the story of Whitehall, and congratulations on your well-deserved award!

WHAT DO YOUR DUES PAY FOR?



ANNUAL
NEWSLETTER



CEMETERY
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NEW FLAGS
AT CEMETERY



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Updates from Polley Mansion

Keith and Robin Muschalek have had a busy year which has included re-building the back porch on the Polley Mansion. As Robin put it, "We learned that tongue and groove wood is not a good fit for outdoor porches. The water doesn't drain properly and most of the porch was rotted. Lessons learned after ten years of restoration work." They also plan to rebuild the front porch in the coming year. Additionally, there was an old white wooden building that was being used as a garage out back of the Polley Mansion that was torn down this year.

The beautiful springtime brought several tours to the mansion. On March 1st, an African American Story Gathering Event brought together community members who made connections with the names of the former enslaved people of Joseph Polley. March 21st brought several members of the San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum (SAAACAM) to tour the mansion.



The Master Gardener plant sale on April 5th was a big success with almost 200 people visiting the Polley Mansion to purchase new plants for their gardens and take a tour of the historic mansion.

Lastly, an old friend of the Polley Mansion, Dr Richard McCaslin visited the mansion for the first time since 2018. Dr. McCaslin was the editor for *A Soldier's Letters to Charming Nellie* by J. B. Polley, and author of *Sutherland Springs: Saratoga on the Cibolo*. He enjoyed getting to see Mattie LeGette's etched signature on a window pane of the glass house.



Friends of the Polley Mansion

If you would like to contribute to the ongoing restoration and care of the Polley Mansion, you may send a donation to the **Friends of the Polley Mansion**, a non-profit organization, set up by Keith and Robin Muschalek. This is a separate entity from the Polley Association. All donations are used for the care, maintenance, and improvement of the Polley Mansion.

Optional donation card enclosed.



Top: Robin and Keith Muschalek in Polley Mansion entrance

Right: Polley Mansion, 2023, south side

Left: Visitors on March 1, 2025



10 Years at the Polley

It was 2015 when Keith and Robin Muschalek were moving away from military life and looking for something a little closer to family in Texas. They had seen the dilapidated Polley Mansion on the side of FM 539 in Wilson County and thought, "Wouldn't it be a fun 'retirement' project to fix up this old place."

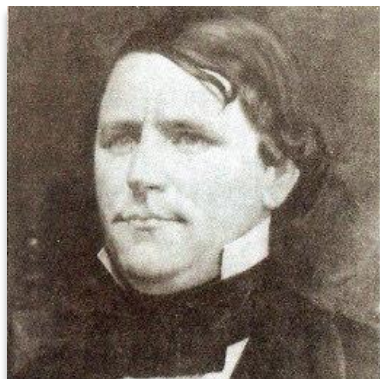
That same year (and honestly for many years before), Polley family descendants and local historians were praying for a miracle. The Muschaleks were the answer to that prayer.

What has taken place over the last ten years is a complete rebirth of the Polley Mansion and its legacy. Little could Keith and Robin anticipate the discoveries, historical research, and family connections they would encounter, but it has been a joy for us all to bear witness to all of the wonderful restoration work they have done both on the physical property, and in the historical record of Wilson County.

Thank you to Keith and Robin for your hard work, dedication, and commitment to uncovering and preserving the legacy of the Whitehall property. You are not merely stewards of, but contributors to and participants in that legacy. Congratulations on 10 fruitful years!

The Polley Cemetery's First Residents

The fall of 1848 was a relatively happy time for the Polley family. The Mexican-American War had come to an end in February of that year, with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo confirming the border of Texas to be



John James

at the Rio Grande River, and granting vast territory to the west of Texas to the United States of America. The Polley family had moved west to the Cibolo Creek, in 1847, at the urging of their new son-in-law, John James. James was a land surveyor in San Antonio who was making

quite a name for himself in charting out new towns and plats that became towns like Castroville and Bandera. He even confirmed the proper boundaries of the town of San Antonio after the geographical confusion created in the rapid transition from Spain to Mexico to the Republic of Texas, and finally to the State of Texas within 25 years time.

John James and the 3rd Polley child, Emeline Elizabeth (named after her father's sister), were married in August of 1847. By the fall of 1848, Emeline and John James were expecting their first child and presumably living in San Antonio, where James had lived since 1837, or in the area along the Cibolo Creek where James was recorded in the census of 1850. At the same time, Mary and Joseph Polley were expecting their 10th child while living in the stake house (primitive cabin of vertical logs) along the Cibolo until the larger Polley Mansion could be built in the coming years.

On December 14, 1848, Mary Polley gave birth to Jonathan James Polley (named after his paternal grandfather). But, as is often the case on the Texas frontier, happy times soon turned to tragedy. Seven days later, Emeline would give birth to her daughter, but would not survive the experience. Childbirth on the Texas frontier, and even in San Antonio (a town of 3,168 people in 1850), carried many risks. There were a couple of known midwives in the area at the time, however, doctors or medical care as we know it today was non-existent for child-birth. For perspective, in the late 1840's and early 1850's ether and chloroform were

sometimes used to help women through the pain of labor.

We do not know the specifics of Emeline's death, beyond "childbirth." She was a mere 16 years old at the time of her death. Within a month, a Cholera epidemic would break out in San Antonio. Was it a matter of disease, poor sanitation, the young age of Emeline, the lack of medical knowledge and assistance, or just or horribly unlucky circumstance? We don't know. But we can imagine what a heartbreaking event this must have been for the Polley family.

As a result of Emeline's tragic death, the Polley Family cemetery was created near where the family's future home would be built. According to one account, Emeline's daughter, Emeline Elizabeth James, was possibly taken care of by her Polley family during her infancy, potentially raised in tandem with her one-week older uncle, Jonathan James Polley. However, by the 1850 census, little Emeline is living with her father in the area that would become La Vernia, Texas, just shortly before her own childhood death of unknown cause. Both beloved daughters of the family are buried side by side in the Polley cemetery.

John James would remain a friend and business partner of Joseph Henry Polley for the rest of Polley's life. He became part owner in a lumber mill in Bandera in the early 1850's, which is where the cypress wood for the Polley Mansion was milled. John James would go on to remarry and settle in San Antonio where he and his second wife would have 11 children. There is a park in San Antonio named for John James.



Headstones for mother and daughter at the Polley Family Cemetery.



*Of note: Emeline Elizabeth James likely died in 1851, as she was alive for the 1850 Census taken in November.

Tiner House: A Most Endangered Site

Each year, Preservation Texas, a non-profit organization that works to recognize and assist in the preservation of historically significant buildings, presents a list of "Most Endangered Places." The Polley Mansion made the list in 2016, just after the Muschalek's purchased the home. This year, the Tiner-Hendricks Home in Sutherland Springs, Texas has made the list.

Connally Finley Henderson, daughter of Susan Rebecca Polley Henderson Brooks and granddaughter of Joseph and Mary Polley, married Jesse Lane Tiner, of the local Wilson Co. Tiner family in 1879. Jesse Lane Tiner had been one of the cowboys who had worked with the Polley family. The couple settled in Sutherland Springs, building the Tiner home in 1887. They would have 11 children in Sutherland Springs (their 12th child would be born in Uvalde after the family moved away). The house would later be sold to the Hendricks family.

Jesse Lane Tiner kept journals throughout his life, and that is one thing that helps to make the Tiner home so special. From detailed construction notes to scenes of daily life for a growing family in the late 1800's, his journals bring the home to life.

Currently, the home is situated on private land, and the current owner is willing to have the home moved off his property so that it can be preserved elsewhere. Wilson County owns land three blocks away that could provide a suitable site for the home. The Wilson County Historical Society has pledged \$50,000 toward the project. Dr. Melinda Creech is meeting with the Commissioners Court in June to discuss the plans and seek approval. Then fundraising for the \$196,000 to move the home will begin.

If you are interested in helping with this project, or have any questions, please contact Melinda Creech at mjcreech@mac.com or 832-978-8501. She will send out regular updates.



Connally Finley and Jesse Lane Tiner on a wedding trip to Galveston, c. 1879



*Current state of the Tiner-Hendricks Home
Sutherland Springs, Texas, 2025*



*Connally & J. L.
Tiner and their
grown children.
c. 1930.*

Small World

There are in fact two Tiner connections within the Polley family. Connally Henderson married Jesse Lane Tiner, and her cousin Blanche Josephine Baylor (daughter of Mary Augusta Polley Baylor) married J. Frank Tiner, Jesse's brother.

If you really want your head to spin, J. Frank Tiner's first wife was Mary Bailey Polley's niece, Amelia Evaline Rector (daughter of Elizabeth Bailey and Claiborne Rector), before she passed away.

Call for Polley Artwork

When going through my grandfather's things after his passing, we discovered two watercolor sketches of the Polley Mansion. While the two amateur paintings are not exactly high art, they do illustrate just what a hold the Polley Mansion can have on those who have seen and loved it.

I know that Keith and Robin Muschalek have been gifted various sketches, photographs, and paintings of the Polley Mansion over the years. But I have a feeling that there are more out there. It would be fun to collect digital images of any Polley-related artwork that may be out there among all the family treasures. While we have no space for physical items, you can scan any images and send them to the email below, and we can create little Polley artwork gallery on the Polley Association website.

Submit to: PolleyAssociation@gmail.com



*Top & Middle by
Cassandra Hager*



*Bottom by Joseph
Polley Paine*



Family Historical Markers

The state of Texas Historical Commission has released a new app that shows the sites of museums and historical markers around the state. The Texas History Navigator app can be downloaded for iOS or Android devices. The Polley family can claim connection to several of the over 18,000 historical markers across the state. Here are a few of them:



- James Briton "Brit" Bailey (Angleton, Texas) – Father of Mary Augusta Bailey Polley
- "Brit" Bailey Plantation (Angleton, Texas) – Near the former site of Bailey's home
- Whitehall (Sutherland Springs, Texas) – The Polley Mansion
- Polley Cemetery (Sutherland Springs, Texas) – Family Cemetery of Joseph and Mary Polley
- Sutherland Springs Cemetery (Sutherland Springs, Texas) – Burial site of several Polley descendants
- Brahan Lodge #226 (La Vernia, Texas) – Masonic Lodge where a couple of Polley sons-in-law were members
- Claiborne Rector (La Vernia, Texas) – Brother-in-law of Mary Bailey Polley

For a look at more Polley-connected historical sites across Texas, visit our website at:

www.PolleyAssociation.org

If you know of Polley family historical markers in other states, we would love to list them on the website. Please email us with info.

Great Ways to Connect



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