



# **Vintage Voices to Share Late Alton Residents' Stories Starting Oct. 7**

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ALTON - Alton history comes to life this month with the 22nd annual Vintage Voices tours at Alton Cemetery.

“It’s a walking tour of the cemetery,” explained Kerry Miller, a director with the program. “You have reenactors at various points in the cemetery who are in costume and they will then tell the story of what we call the decedents, who are buried at or near where the actors are located.”

Tours will depart every 15 minutes from noon to 2:30 p.m. on Oct. 7, 8, 14 and 15, 2023. A guide will take groups of 8–12 people through the cemetery to listen to the stories of deceased Alton residents, portrayed by local actors.

The Vintage Voices program began in 2001. This year, there will be nine stops with 14 actors. The walk through Alton Cemetery lasts a little over an hour and the path can include unsteady ground, so there is also a 5 p.m. performance at the Lovejoy Event Center on Oct. 15, 2023 for those who would rather skip the walking tour.

Lacy McDonald, the Genealogy and Local History Library Manager with Hayner Public Library, explained that the program aims to memorialize Altonians from different generations who helped make the town what it is today. McDonald works with her team to research the people buried in Alton Cemetery and decide who will be portrayed each year.

“We usually have a list...of probably 30 people, and then we look at the differences in generation and make sure that we have younger and older people and that we have African American and white ,” McDonald said. “We just try to make it balanced.”

This year, Vintage Voices will feature stories from the Civil War to Prohibition to the Vietnam War. One late Alton resident, Lottie Coleman, ran a boarding house for foster children and Civil War veterans like her father. Lillian Knight Graves was a fixture in the Alton Parks and Recreation Department, and her husband Clarence Graves started the first African American Boy Scout troop in Alton after he returned from World War I. Angie Rand Schweppe, a charter member of the Alton Woman's Home Association, helped found Riverview Park in the early 1900s.

These are just a few of the people to be portrayed through Vintage Voices this year; you can see a full list with descriptions at [this article](#) on [RiverBender.com](#). Miller noted that they sometimes decide who to feature based on where people are buried in the cemetery and what actors will likely be available. If a few graves are too close together, they might bump one person to the next year’s list; McDonald called this “the hardest part” to organize.

“To look at it from a director’s standpoint, you have an idea of who could play that role,” Miller added. “We do have open auditions, so anybody out there next year, if you’re interested, keep an eye out...Every year we have at least one new person who we’ve never seen before, and they end up showing up and doing a tremendous job.”

While the actors’ lives are much different from those they are portraying, they are often surprised to find common ground between them and people who lived in Alton centuries ago. For example, church organist and choir director John Meehan will be acting as Joseph Gratian, a musician and pipe organ builder whose organs were installed across the Midwest. Latasha LeFlore-Porter, principal at Lewis and Clark Elementary School in Godfrey, will portray restaurant owner Pearl Singleton who was also a member of women’s clubs and abided by the motto, “Loyalty to women and justice to children.”

To see these portrayals and more, you can purchase tickets at [Picture This and More](#) in downtown Alton, <https://VintageVoices2023.eventbrite.com>, or before the tours at the entrance of Alton Cemetery, located at Vine Street and 5th E. Street. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$10 for ages 6–18. Tours run every 15 minutes from noon to 2:30 p.m. on Oct. 7, 8, 14 and 15, 2023. The non-walking performance at Lovejoy Event Center will start at 5 p.m. on Oct. 15, 2023.





