

# Riverton Cemeteries

by Cecil Hayes

A few months ago, while visiting an old abandoned rural cemetery, I was somewhat surprised to find there a schoolteacher with her brood of fourth-grade students.

I fell in with the group and listened as the teacher explained to her class what a wealth of information and knowledge can be obtained by studying the old gravestones.

"With so much vandalism in our parks and cemeteries," she said to me later, "I decided to use some of our local graveyards as a study aid. My purpose is to instill in the minds of these children a respect for the grounds, and at the same time expand their education.

"It's amazing how much one can learn about the early history of a community or region just by studying its old cemeteries," she continued. "These old stones are like history books, telling us when this area was first settled, and what nationalities came here first.

"Yesterday we found an old marker from the War of 1812. Last week we found two graves of men who served in the Civil War. Before that we noted the resting places of World War I veterans, those of World War II, and even stones of those who served in Korea and Vietnam.

"My students increase their vocabulary by learning military abbreviations and words like stillborn," the teacher went on. "And they receive a health lesson by noting the infant mortality rate. "In the same way they get evidence of an epidemic because of the date of deaths on the stones. In the early 1900s, pneumonia and influenza were the number one and two killers in the U.S., just as heart disease and cancer fill those places today.

" There's no place like an old abandoned graveyard to remind us how short our lives are on this planet, and how soon we are forgotten once our remains are committed to the earth. I was told that there are between 50 and a 100 old burial sites in the hill country of northwest Colbert County, most of them virtually unknown to the people living there to-day.

Names once prominent in this region have passed into oblivion, and even their graves are erased from sight by nature's luxurious growth. Although they were the founders of our churches and schools and towns, it is as if they had never lived at all. We live in an age that has little respect for the past, and the wonderful and successful lives these ancestors set before us have made little impression on our present generation.

A couple of summers ago Ed Williams, who has spent all of his 84 years in the vicinity and knows the country well, acted as my tour guide in exploring some rather out-of-the-way places.

Ed amazed me with his stamina and agility in hiking over some of the roughest kind of hilly country. He also amused me with one story after another of the locality and the people who once live there.

According to Ed, there are at least a dozen old burial sites located in Hog Hollow alone. However, he could recall only six of them: the Till, Ross, Williams, Blanton, Davis and Bethune graveyards.

The Williams graveyard is located in Williams Hollow, which branches off from the head of Hog Hollow. This site contains about eight members of the Williams family, all related to Ed. Greenberry and Mary Elizabeth Williams were Ed's grandparents and took the first graves, some years before the Civil War. Not a single stone or marker indicates where they are buried.

The Ross cemetery, located in the center of Hog Hollow, near the old Waddell Spring, contains the bodies of four Ross family members, the parents and two young sons. They all died the same day, in May of 1863.

"One stone intact and the fragments of three other stones mark this site. Local legend tells us that they were gunned down when the Rosses refused to give up their cattle and horses to federal soldiers during the Civil War. The tragic story of the Ross family massacre has already been told in the Cherokee/Colbert News.

The Till Cemetery (sometimes known as the Bledsoe Cemetery) is by far the largest burial site in Hog Hollow. I was told that about 100 people are buried there. All but about a dozen graves are unmarked today.

This cemetery contains some of the most beautiful stones I have seen anywhere. It is located at the mouth of Hog Hollow, at the very edge of, Pickwick Lake, and many of the graves are actually under water.

Our first efforts to find this place were unsuccessful, because the entire area is lost in dense woodland. It was finally found in the winter by Hub Hayes and his son Will, after the leaves had fallen from the trees. It is a shame that such a memorable part of our local heritage has been so callously neglected.

Many of these old "buryin' grounds" have been 'the sources of strange folk tales and weird superstitions. Eerie lights that float in the night air and dark shadowy figures darting from one stone to another have been reported.

A local horseman riding past an Old graveyard at night, noticed a figure in white sitting on one of the gravestones. He watched the figure for a moment, waiting for it to move or speak, then he rode out to investigate. "That thing just sorta dissolved into a misty cloud and floated away like pipe smoke," the man reported.

The Bethune Cemetery (also known as Wilcox Cemetery) is thought to be one of the oldest burial grounds in Colbert County. This site is located near the top of Wilcox Hill, just off the road that runs from Hog Hollow to Lane Springs. It, like the Till Cemetery, is lost in a thickly wooded area. The three stones I found there were all of Civil War veterans.

According to local tradition, the Bethune Cemetery was first used as a burying ground for the Chickasaw Indians, long before the first white pioneers settle s here.

"The Chickasaws buried their dead on top of the ground, and without coffins," one person told me. "They scooped out a shallow place, put the body in, then covered it over with green poles. Then they piled rocks over the grave, making it into a large mound. This was to keep wild animals from digging down to the dead." If you visit this place today, you'll find numerous piles of moss-covered rocks, once carefully placed there by human hands, in some long-forgotten time.

This is a <sup>partial</sup> list of people we believe that are buried  
in the Davis Cemetery in Colbert County, Ala.

Daniel Wilcox born in Ky

Lucy Madison Wilcox born in Va.

William Jesse Hays born Western N.C.

Sarah Wilcox born Ky or Ala

Sylvia Hays Sherrod born Colbert Co. Ala

Andrew Jackson Sherrod born Lauderdale Co. Ala

Lizzie Belle Sherrod age 2

Infant Sherrod son

Mrs. Mary Hays age 9

Mary Sarah Hays Cryer married James Cryer Dec. 25, 1873

Catharine Hays Elom wife Charles Elom

Elysebeth Liza Anne Hays married Ira Baine March 11, 1865

Isaac Hays age 3 died

Henry D. Hays Private Co A 16th Ala Infantry

Two Suburban Children Hattie - boy

} Children of Andrew and Sylvia Sherrod

There are several members of the Davis Family  
buried in the Davis Cemetery. One a Confederate  
Veteran lived near us in Ala.

I don't know whether they are relatives.

The Davis Cemetery  
is on land donated  
by our ancestors  
in Riverton.

Daniel Wilcox of Ky.  
and

Lucy Madison of Va.

By Margaret S. Bearson

Both are buried there