

THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST¹

or

A Preliminary Report on the Projected

EPITAPHS OF GREENVILLE COUNTY PIONEERS OF THE 18th and 19th CENTURIES, AND THEIR DESCENDANTS: NATIVES OF VIRGINIA AND OTHER ORIGINAL THIRTEEN STATES: ALSO THOSE WHO ARRIVED DIRECTLY FROM ENGLAND, IRELAND, SCOTLAND, GERMANY AND OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES, MADE THEIR HOMES AND DIED IN GREENVILLE COUNTY: ALSO OUR NATIVE BORN SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

MILDRED E. (Mrs. Beverly T.) WHITMIRE

Some people collect old graveyard humor. Here are some beauties which I have purloined:

Beneath this stone, a lump of clay
Lies uncle Peter Daniels
Who too early in the month of May
Took off his winter flannels.

And another:

Here lies the body of our dear Anna
Who was done to death by a banana
It wasn't the fruit that laid her low
But the skin of the thing which made her go.

This is an amusing one:

Here I lie, between two of the best women in
the world . . . my wives . . . but I have requested
my survivors to tip me a little towards Tillie.

A widower at Lebanon Methodist Church, in lower Greenville County, played no favorites. He placed one monument to both his wives.

At Nazareth Presbyterian Church, across the line in Spartanburg County, where are seen handsome monuments in

¹ Editor's Note: Because of the "different" nature of this paper which is both a report of a committee of the Society and the sharing of a rich research experience, the editor has refused to do more than correct typographical errors for fear of destroying its appeal.

great numbers, the graves of a man and his second wife, are cosily side by side. The first wife is across a path in another plot. You can guess who arranged that.

In contrast, at Highland Baptist Church, formerly Dickey's Chapel, where some of our first textile manufacturers are buried, and where the old Dickey home stands nearby, there is a marble slab which reads:

Sacred to the memory of Nancy Weaver, wife of John Weaver
Esq. born in County Down, Ireland, 10th March 1794: died
19th Oct. 1834. Placed here by his last wife, according to his
dieing request.

John had lived twenty-eight years after his first wife died, so one wonders as he lay "dieing," why his last wife was asked to erect a monument to the first wife. Could it have been that John contemplated what Nancy might say to him for neglecting her monument all these years, now that he was to meet her in another world? That last wife rather evened things up. John's monument says: "Erected by she who loved him best."

But to serious things:

About two years ago Hattie Choice Schroder became chairman of a committee of the Greenville County Historical Society, to locate old or abandoned cemeteries and copy the epitaphs. Thus records of our pioneers would be preserved. She knew I had been copying some of the older stones and studying records of old Greenville County residents in various archives and record offices, and asked me to help her, and we have been partners on the project. Numerous other people have generously assisted.

I am substituting for Mrs. Schroder today, since she didn't live to make this report, which this Society scheduled for her more than a year ago. She possessed indomitable determination and loved this work, which kept her going long after a lesser person would have given up. Let us think of her, not with sadness, but with appreciation of her good humor, her meticulous accuracy in doing the work, and let us be glad that she had this project in which she was genuinely happy.

This is a serious activity, and the task has been and still is formidable. At least 8,000 names and dates have been recorded from 134 cemeteries, private, church, and public. But we did not

think it necessary to assume long faces and go about it in a morbid manner. Maybe it was a little presumptuous, but we considered ourselves historians, who were adding to the basic knowledge of Greenville's past. Most of the things we copied have been about people so long gone, they couldn't possibly care if we got a laugh as we went along.

In fact the way we go is a laughing matter, old slacks and shirts, head gear to keep from being caught up by the hair in branches and bushes, like Absalom of old, sun tan oil in summer because there are usually no trees in large cemeteries and it can really get hot from sun reflecting from white stones, extra heavy clothing in winter, for some records have been copied when gloves had to be worn. Try that for an awkward way to write!

And we don't smell so good either. Chigger repellent is not Paris perfume. But forget it, and the body acquires red freckles, and you go around scratching with great gusto.

Then, there is the tool basket which must go along. Sometimes we call it by another name - the Ghoul basket. In it are long clippers for cutting a path through briars, poison oak, or whatever bars the way, small diggers for uncovering stone half buried in earth, spray wall cleaner, rags and paper towels, for cleaning off mud and moss, brushes, chalk, tissues, paper and pencil, and sometimes a camera. If the place is isolated and only women along, my little .22 pistol occupies the bottom of the basket, ready for any variety of snake which might come along.

An old cemetery, not visited for years, or one vandilized, with pieces of marble thrown into open graves, is difficult to copy correctly. Sometimes one stone takes a half hour to clean and read, and some can never be read. We keep in mind that chalk will be washed off by rain, and that nothing should be done to injure the inscription. We started too late, and many are lost forever. We have done our best to list missing records by telephoning older members of families, writing letters to descendants in other states, asking them to give missing names and dates, from Bibles or other official sources. I wonder why churches don't all keep lists, at least of the names of persons in their cemeteries. Christ Episcopal Church had one made in

recent years. Washington Baptist Church is using our copy of their cemetery to compile a list for their church office. Records of the oldest undertaker in the county go back only to the 1890's.¹ Family Bibles and tombstone inscriptions seem to be the only source of authentic information about those who lived long since. So, tombstone records are important.

Locating family burying grounds has often been difficult. Usually they are tucked away on hilltops, in woods, in fields, or on abandoned roads. We must have been the first persons, for many years, to visit some of these. If you too are searching for one, look for a clump of cedar trees, with periwinkle covering the ground, then cut away rose runners and bushes, look under the trees, and you will probably find a few marble stones, and rock markers.

The big map we use shows churches, their cemeteries, and some community burying grounds. We have marked with numbers those cemeteries already copied. The task is perhaps half done. What is now needed is volunteers who will copy family burying grounds, or cemeteries, in their communities and send them in. It's volunteer work. Anyone who is careful to be accurate can do it.

People in almost every community so far visited have assisted in reporting locations, or showing the way to them. They are too numerous to be named here, but they will be recognized in the final report. However, I have to tell you of Miss Sarah Nash, and her sister Mrs. J. W. Ropp in lower Greenville county, who have copied whole large church cemeteries, and have found and recorded several isolated family burying grounds. Miss Nash ended one of her reports with "We met a snake." Mr. and Mrs. John Gilreath have also worked the entire two years, even though Mr. Gilreath was at the same time working on his recently published, excellent book on the former Sheriff Gilreath.

Dixon Davis has reported numerous locations. A grateful "thank you" to everyone who has helped. Also our appreciation goes to the Colonial Dames for records of seven cemeteries

¹ Mackey's Mortuary.

they copied some years ago and to the *South Carolina Historical Magazine*² for permission to copy their re-printing of death notices which appeared in the *Greenville Mountaineer*. These began with 1828, and include both people who died here, and those who moved away and passed on elsewhere. To each of these names has been added information for finding their wills or administrations in this county. Since these notices relate personal things about the people they are perhaps the most interesting section of this study, unless it is a separate list of Revolutionary War soldiers who lived and died here. Special care has been taken to copy tombstones of veterans of all wars, whether old or recent.

A few of these notices from the *Mountaineer* show:

Walter Ashmore drowned in Reedy River, near Thompson's Mill, seven miles below Greenville.

Mrs. Nancy Austin, widow of William Austin, age 92, died in 1832. "In a few more months, the couple would have been married 70 years."

Solomon Douthit froze to death in Pickens District. Samuel Earle died in that district at age 72, in 1833. Richard M. Harrison left a widow and ten children. Henry Springfield froze to death in 1836. One of Pierce Butler's children was burned to death. William Thruston, a Revolutionary soldier, passed away at age 75, in 1828. Nathan Vannoy, another veteran of that war, died of measles at age 87. Rev. Lewis Rector, pastor of Brushy Creek Baptist Church, for 30 years a minister in upper South Carolina, died April 14, 1827. Harriet Jane Thomas, consort of Dr. John P. Thomas, died in 1835 and Mrs. Caroline Wickliffe, consort of William E. Wickliffe, at age 28, leaving four children.

One notice reads: "Died on July 4, 1835, Mrs. Sarah M. Crittenden, consort of Dr. John Crittenden, great Episcopalian." She is interred in Christ Church Cemetery. She died of measles. Another notice states: "Died on July 20th, 1833, Mrs. Floride Croft, consort of Edward Croft, great Christian lady of this place."

²Formerly the *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*.

To those who have reported locations of cemeteries, which have not been reached, apologies. Mr. and Mrs. John Gilreath and I have been trying to complete them, but the task seems impossible. It must be remembered that many of the private cemeteries are older than those at churches, and that they date back to the time when primitive existence was the pattern of life in Greenville County. Lack of churches, except in a very few places, no roads, and perhaps the habit brought from Virginia, Pennsylvania or from wherever they came, of having private burying grounds accounts for the fact that almost every large plantation here had its own graveyard. Pioneers had to rely for transportation upon horseback, pack horse, sleds, and boats where the streams were not too swift. None of these were a way to conduct a funeral procession any distance. Then, there must have been a natural desire to have graves of loved ones nearby, so that they could be easily reached, cared for, and protected.

Settlers were in Greenville county both before and after it ceased to be Indian territory, but the county was not opened for general occupation until 1784, when the land office for Pendleton District, of which Greenville was then a part, was established. Even then the Indian threat was very real. Benjamin James' *Digest of the Laws of South Carolina*, published in 1814, thirty years after the land office opened, shows that every man, except those in Charleston, was required by law, when he went to church, to carry a gun or pair of horse pistols, with at least six charges of gun powder and ball. Those failing to do so, and church officials failing to report a man who arrived without his arms, were carried to court, and fined. So the first church goes in this county must have packed their guns.

Arbors were used in lieu of churches in some communities, and there is still one to be seen, adjoining the Pierce cemetery, in the upper county.

Private cemeteries were usually enclosed with high rock walls, and some had wrought iron fences, or banks of earth. Some graves are covered with piles of rock or brick. You wonder if this was a practice adopted from the Indians who, in time of war, placed mounds of rock over hastily constructed, shallow graves as protection from wild beasts. Thousands of graves of first settlers, and some later ones all over this county

are marked with field stones. There are a few at Springwood. They were called "tomb rocks," a new term to me, and they are still so designated in areas where they are most commonly found. Some inscriptions, if only initials and dates, were cut into these stones, but the material being soft, most of them cannot now be deciphered. There are exceptions. In one place, a number, evidently carved by one man, can still be read. He wrote "bornd" and "dide," but you know what he meant and respect his skill. At Mt. Bethel, just across the line in Laurens County, a whole hillside is covered with these "tomb rocks" of ancient age, huge ones, with still clear inscriptions. But many a pioneer sleeps beneath a stone which gives neither name nor date.

The first marble markers used here had engravers who often signed them, much as an artist signs a painting. We are keeping a list of those. At first, some stones came from as far away as Richmond, Va.

Styles in monuments change. This is vividly shown in Christ churchyard. The newest fashion is flat ones, on the ground. They are fine where the earth around them is covered, but where mud has accumulated on them think of what a task is being built up for the tombstone copiers of the future.

It's good that they have finally shied away from the old inscription seen all over Greenville county: "Remember me as you pass by, as you are now, so once was I. As I am now so you must be. Prepare to die, and remember me." And there's one, evidently intended to express religious faith: "Not dead but sleeping." I've caught myself muttering "Try the heck to get up."

General Robert Maxwell did get up without trying. He had a hard time keeping his head. First, when he was a soldier in the Revolution, King George offered a price for it. Then in 1797 someone shot him as he crossed Saluda River Shoals, where the Piedmont Mill dam was later built. Recently, vandals moved heavy stone slabs from his grave in the Golden Grove section, stole his head, and took it home, and hid it in a closet. They were caught and the skull recovered. The generous owner of the land where the Maxwell burying ground is located just

north of Pelzer, put the general's head back where it belonged, and restored the graves. Mrs. Maxwell was General Robert Anderson's daughter. General Maxwell was the first sheriff of Greenville County, and both families have been distinguished through the years.

From affection or family pride, people tend to say something good about those who have gone before, be it deserved or not. We haven't tried to copy these tributes, for the sake of brevity, and for the same reason we have used numerals for months, days and years. We say, as in Caesar of old "We come not to praise," but to record.

On one trip in an abandoned place, deep in some woods, some of us were scraping dead leaves from the top of a marble slab covering a woman's grave. A descendant who was with us said, "Hurry up. I can't wait to see what they said about her. She was supposed to be the meanest woman in the world." The inscription read, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." Older tributes to men usually say: "He was a loving husband, a good father, a kind master." Of the women they say: "She was a kind mistress." That last must puzzle the younger generation, who knowing nothing of slavery, regard the word "mistress" in a different light.

Some family plots and most churchyards have been well kept through the years, but others are in deplorable condition. Time, vandals, roads, and real estate developments have done their worst. We do have strict laws against disturbing even a bush in a cemetery, but no one seems to pay any attention to enforcing them. The Picket brothers, Revolutionary soldiers, lived up Highway 25 above Greenville. We stopped looking for their cemetery when we learned the highway cut right through it.

Old Few's Chapel, where the original church was started in a log dwelling, has been reduced from a round cemetery to a half moon. A road was cut through one side. Someone, evidently with a sledge hammer knocked the monuments off their bases at the Wilson cemetery at Greer, supposed to be cared for by the town of Greer. We have pictures of what was done to the Westfield cemetery on the lawn of a textile plant on Old Pelzer road. Only five stones there could be put together and read.

At the HughsStokes family ground, just off Augusta Street, near the first entrance to the Greenville Country Club, marble markers have been broken and thrown into the graves. Neither Mrs. Schroder nor I being built of a size to recover the broken pieces from six feet down, and as the sides of the graves were straight, giving no way to get out once you got in, we had to leave them there, uncopied.

A whole slab top slipped sideways into a grave near Augusta Road, across from the Air Base. I was able to slide down it, clean and copy the stone, and get out again. If anyone knows of a way to recover broken stones from the bottom of a six foot grave, with reasonable success, we could use the information.

The ancient graves usually appear to be completely empty of occupants. The supposition is that some have been entered for the purpose of securing jewelry which might have been buried with a person, which may account in part for so many open ones.

At the George Green farm, east of Greenville, Mr. and Mrs. John Gilreath and I spent an afternoon probing beneath vegetable mold and earth to find and put together several once handsome markers, some without success. George Green's will and estate records at the Court House later helped to fill in the missing parts of names and showed his tomb of built up marble had cost \$100. That's the place I stepped down into the partially sunken grave of Diana Green to get parts of her broken headstone. Mr. Gilreath will probably behead me for telling this, but as I stood there, I asked "Do you think this lady has been dead long enough to be all gone?" She died over a hundred years ago. Mr. Gilreath replied in his gentle, well mannered voice, "If she starts to holler, get the heck out of there." That doesn't mean that we have been irreverent, but you can't copy old gravestones for any length of time without getting a little wacky. The only distressing thing, really, has been the rows of little graves of children who died before milk was pasturized, or immunization shots were known, and young wives and their babies buried together. There is pathos too in some little graves in the upper county where tiny Christmas trees, toys and small wrapped Christmas packages were seen.

But enough of sadness, now let a little indignation take over. A real estate development has swallowed up the family burying ground of John Young, brother of Capt. Billy Young, both Revolutionary soldiers. John left a will setting aside, forever, land for a family burying ground, already established during his lifetime. His stone is between two houses and the rest of his family under houses.

The Rev. Lewis Rector, already mentioned, now sleeps in a cattle pasture. He should be at Brushy Creek, the church he founded. A Gresham family is under a large tree, in another cattle pasture, off Scuffletown Road. The cattle share the shade with those buried there and cows chew their cud, while lying on the cool stones in the heat of the day. Near this place is a little tumbled down rock building, which must have been a chapel. The Stairley stones have been carried away. Lester stones are still there. These were some of the first textile manufacturers in this county. So was John Weaver, who wanted the monument erected to his first wife, Nancy. This was also the section where the first settlers made their homes. Here waters of the Enoree and Tyger rivers furnished power for both the necessary saw and grist mills and cotton yarn factories. This was where Jacob Hite, living on the Enoree, at what is now known as the old Morgan place, was killed by Cherokees in 1776. There was once an old cemetery at this place. Now, there are no tombstones, only a few rocks to mark the site.

It seems "Sacred to the memory" means little to some people. But there are others, who finding burying grounds on places they purchased, have guarded them carefully. John H. Morgan is one of these. The site of old Lima church and cemetery is on a hill behind his house. It has Trammell and Lynch stones, among others. Mr. Morgan keeps weeds cut and proudly points to the site of the old chapel. One lady with such grounds near her place, knows nothing of the people buried there, but she says she goes there, when tired or discouraged, to get the feeling of restfulness. I have felt it too, even in cemeteries close to highways. It always seems quiet and peaceful, and about the only sound you really hear is birds singing.

To say which is the oldest church or the oldest burying ground in Greenville county, would be risky business. Reedy River Church was founded in 1778. James McCullough gave

land for Columbia Baptist in 1782. Lebanon Methodist was founded in 1785, and Fairview Presbyterian in 1786. Yates Snowden in his *History of South Carolina* says Brushy Creek is the second oldest, but gives no dates.

The oldest person who died in this county, so far found, was Mary Sullivan, at Old Lebanon, aged 115 years. A person with the initials "E. R. 120 years" is in a small cemetery in a real estate development off Hudson Road, or was when we were there recently. We have not been able to secure the full name.

The most fascinating place yet visited is the site of Old Lebanon Methodist Church, mentioned by Bishop Asbury in his diary. It is about a mile from the present church, near the Old Indian Boundary Line and Laurens county. The Rev. R. A. Petit, the young minister there, took a hoe and shovel and went with me to find the place. You ride some and walk some, and cut your way through briars that grab at you at every step. And you don't know what might be under the heavy growth of periwinkle. Reaching the center of a large circle, you find that a log chapel once stood there, with a well a short distance away, and the graveyard surrounding the chapel. The whole circle is surrounded by an "Indian fence." This is a high wall of earth, with a deep ditch on the outside. It was used for worship as well as a refuge from Indian raids. The spot has not been cleared off in years. Tombstones stand like grey sentinels, almost invisible, against the bleached and fallen trees. Mr. Petit found some stones, on the ground, hidden under layers of decayed vegetation, and also rescued some broken ones. I was glad he was there to verify Mary Sullivan's 115 years. Mary and her husband Charles Sullivan were both born in 1722.

There is also a cemetery at the present Lebanon church, where a plaque bears the names of fifty-six Revolutionary war heroes and heroines. Duplicates of some of the markers to soldiers in the old cemetery have been placed at the "new" one. The present building is the third used by this congregation, and was built by slaves, who made the brick.

Not being satisfied to merely copy names and dates, an effort has been made to bring identity to the early settlers, from every available source. Probably estate records are the most

reliable source in identifying persons for whom only initials and dates have been found. In the case of Benjamin Boswell this was true. The Boswell burying ground is on the top of Neves Hill, off Rabbit Farm Road, near Mush Creek Church. After climbing Neves Hill, beating off swarms of mosquitos and cleaning the hand hewn stones, only one was found to have a full name, that of Frances Boswell. Benjamin Boswell's will proved Frances was his wife and also supplied names which matched initials on the stones.

Maybe the pioneers used rocks for tombstones, and had little cash, but they often had handsome homes, more of which are still standing out in the county, than can be found in the city of Greenville. Here it seems to have been thought the smart thing to do to tear down historic buildings. So, now that the day of restoration has arrived, both nationally and state wide, we have precious little to restore, though many such places still stand in the county. I wish we could follow Virginia's example, and get one of the churches in each of the four sections of the county, north, south, east and west, to set aside sections of their cemeteries, where graves from isolated family plots could be moved for safety and protection. It could be done by some persons or some organization taking the lead. Only the stones could be removed, if that was desired. Some have been moved to Tyger Church from a cemetery which was in the Greenville watershed, and there are a few in the town cemetery at Simpsonville (the old Baptist Church Cemetery) which have been brought there from other places.

I wish I could relate more of our activities, and tell you about getting into the Dr. Miller cemetery on Woodruff Road, where there is no gate, and weeds are waist high, by climbing up one side of a tree and down on the other; of Mrs. Schroder and me going through a field where there were head high plants, holding hands to keep from losing the way, and finding Issac West and his wife in a small wrought iron enclosed area; of Issac Green at White Oak Church; of the huge cemetery at Fairview, and another at Washington Church, with their interesting inscriptions; of climbing mountains, and getting into poison oak, of the Rev. Mr. Powell and his five wives and long ministry; of the beautifully kept Adams and Huff cemeteries; of the James Harrison whose child was killed by the Cherokees in the Hampton

family massacre, and the Harrison family burying ground at the site of the Battle of the Cane Brake; of Solomon Jones making tombstones for his first wife and daughters at the Hart cemetery near River Falls, and the stone he made for himself; of the many inscriptions for the hundreds of early residents who came from Ireland and other countries across the seas; and of many other things, which time will not allow.

A little later, if you wish, you will see monuments in Christ Churchyard, some being very old. Many are concreted over, with no identification. Could that have been a carry-over from the horror Charleston people had of seeing their names in public print? Many of those people out there came originally from Charleston. The lack of names and dates is puzzling, since even the old "tomb rock" makers managed to scratch an inscription. There must be some reason besides the ravages of time, for the large numbers of such slabs without identification. Can anyone solve the mystery?

Records of both this churchyard and Springwood Cemetery were purchased from the University of South Carolina. They were copied by the W. P. A. in 1934 and appear to be accurate, except for the omission of some of the older, hard-to-copy stones. This was the only way these cemeteries could be included in this study, due to the enormity of the task of copying them. At that, they had to be placed in alphabetical order, typed, and indexed.

Each cemetery we have done had been numbered, and indexed alphabetically and numerically, as to name. The index of individual names is also alphabetical, with the cemetery in which the name is to be found indicated. A publisher has expressed an interest in printing the whole record, on a royalty basis, and the Society may make a profit when we get the book to print. Much editing will have to be done.

Springwood is the oldest cemetery in the city, having been started when Chancellor Waddy Thompson, in 1812, buried his mother-in-law in his garden. She was Mrs. James Williams, widow of one of the heroes of the Battle of Kings Mountain killed in that battle. Later, in 1845 Chancellor Thompson himself was buried there. It became a public cemetery in 1829. Christ Church cemetery dates back to 1837. An odd thing there is a tombstone dated 1829 for the daughter of Dr. William Butler,

and supposition is that it must have been moved there from some other place, but there is no proof.

If there is one thing we have learned, it is that Greenville county has had many outstanding residents, in every walk of life. Had we time, their names could be recalled, and you would recognize them as having been distinguished. Finding their monuments has been quite thrilling, almost like a treasure hunt. They have left us a proud heritage. We must preserve it, and never lose a presence of the past. Recently Mr. Adger Bowen wrote that every person should write his or her own epitaph. Col. Elias Alexander, father of Mrs. Vardry McBee, did his. It started; "Here lies the dust of Old Elias . . . who spoke his mind without a bias . . . was firm and brave . . . his country's friend . . . to more than that he did not pretend." There were other verses and it ended with: "Enjoyed his friends . . . would have his fun . . . and rarely missed an useful pun . . . from active life henceforth he burst. . . a meet a God whom he thought just."

Now, I'll sit down, contemplate my own epitaph, and hope it won't be "She was forgotten before she went," or "She did the best she could with whatever brains she had." If anyone dares write "Remember me as you pass by," I'm coming back to haunt them.