

The Old Asheboro Cemetery

By Ricky J Allred

The Old Asheboro Cemetery, located on West Salisbury Street, has been a visible and continuous link with Asheboro's past for more than 150 years. The initial two-acre tract was deeded by Randolph County attorney and entrepreneur Benjamin Elliott to the Trustees of the "Methodist Episcopal Church, Asheboro Chapter of Randolph County" on October 25, 1834, with the stipulation that the trustees "erect or build thereon...a house or place of Worship for the use of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Compliant with the terms of the deed, a church building occupied the site from shortly after the property was deeded until First Methodist Church moved to its Fayetteville Street location.

The land surrounding the church structure was dedicated as a burial ground. The earliest marked, identified grave dates to 1843 (John Drake – a one-year old boy), although fieldstone markers in the vicinity of the Drake stone likely mark graves of even earlier vintage. The memorials that radiate outward from the former church site (the southeast corner of the cemetery) trace multiple generations, often within families, of individuals who contributed to many aspects of life in Asheboro over its early history. For many years, the Methodist graveyard was the only burial site in the town of Asheboro, and as such, came to be the final resting place of many citizens who were not necessarily associated with the Methodist Church.

In 1903, the Town of Asheboro acquired a little over an acre and a half of land north of the Methodist graveyard from the Burns and Page families for development as a municipal cemetery. Platting and construction of the drive (including the circle) appear to have been completed by 1908 (recorded plat Book 128 Page 586 shows 257 multi-grave plots) and the first plot (#4) was sold to Frederick D. Thorns on November 23, 1908, for twenty dollars. Additional tracts, totaling approximately half an acre, were acquired in 1924 to "even out" the eastern boundary of the cemetery. The markers in the "new" cemetery catalogue the lives of many who led and lived in Asheboro during its expansion and industrialization in the early 20th century.

In 1927, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (First Methodist Church) conveyed its property, to the City of Asheboro, under the agreement that the church structure on the site be removed within a year. The space formerly occupied by the church building was "never to be used for any other purpose than for Cemetery purposes, except by the consent and order of the Town of Asheboro." Thus, the cemetery acquired its current configuration.

Within the cemetery boundaries are the final resting places leaders of government – local, state, and federal. More than thirty Confederate veterans rest there – along with at least one who deserted his regiment and joined the Union Army. There is also a widow who lost her husband at Gettysburg. There are several members of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment, 30th Division, including two who were killed in France during World War I. There are also veterans of World War II, Korea, and Viet Nam. Other forms of service are represented

in the cemetery. There are firemen and law enforcement officers, including at least one who died in the line of duty. There are doctors, nurses, lawyers, industrialists, merchants, musicians, preachers and postmen (and women). There are judges, at least one murder victim, mechanics, and several undertakers. There are infants (some buried with their mothers) and there are those who saw their 100th birthday. In sum, The 1500+ graves in the Old Asheboro Cemetery depict much of life in Asheboro and Randolph County over the past century and three quarters.

Although there are still occasional interments, the stately oaks, dignified markers, and even the unmarked gravesites serve largely, and nobly, to remind the citizens of Asheboro and Randolph County of their collective heritage and to provide a place of quiet in the midst of bustle that characterizes the Asheboro of today.

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Cemetery area comprises 4.41 acres (per tax map), with southern boundary (and main entrance) on West Salisbury Street. The western boundary is along White Oak Street and the northern boundary is marked by West Ward Street. The eastern boundary is established along the rear lines of a series of properties on North Fayetteville Street. The site slopes generally upward from the outer edges toward the center and is highlighted by several majestic oak trees. The site also contains magnolia and cedar trees, as well as azaleas and other ornamental plants.

Property is bounded on the south and west by a brick wall capped with granite (south) or concrete (west) top stones. In 1914, a bequest from the estate of Cornelia Adeline Hamlet Askew Hoover Jolly (1838-1911) to the Methodist Episcopal Church was used to fund the construction of a new wall to enclose the church yard. This brick wall, which was originally topped with a wrought iron fence, forms the base of the present wall along Salisbury Street. The wrought iron fencing was lost during a repair and restoration work performed on the wall in recent years, although the pedestrian (White Oak Street) gates preserve a sample of similar fencing.

The “footprint” of the church structures formerly occupying the southeast corner of the cemetery can be seen in the open area behind the Walter Lindley tomb, near Salisbury Street. A few foundation stones are still visible in the ground.