

AN IRISH GRAVEYARD IN MISSISSIPPI

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From the names on the tombstones, the graveyard of the old frame church in Choctaw County, Mississippi, could easily be in Fairfield or Chester County, South Carolina. And most of those names probably could be traced back to County Antrim, Ireland.

Inscriptions on 19 of the gravestones say the persons buried there were born in Ireland. Of that number, 16 were born in County Antrim.

The church is Bethsalem Presbyterian Church in east central Mississippi, near Louisville. It was founded by the descendants of Scotch-Irish immigrants to South Carolina. In its cemetery are the graves of pioneers who pushed west to Mississippi in the mid-1800s to find new land and establish new communities in a frontier state.

Hannas, Kennedys, Gladneys, Thompsons, Turners, Woodwards, Stephenson. These are all Fairfield and Chester County names. Many go back to County Antrim, which poured Scotch-Irish immigrants into South Carolina between 1750 and the Revolutionary War. Land and bounty payments were offered to Protestant immigrants who would settle in South Carolina's back country. Most of the Scotch-Irish immigrants were Presbyterians.

Whole colonies of those Irish immigrants' descendants moved on to Mississippi when lands taken from the Choctaw Indians became available after the signing of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1833. Some arrived before the signing of the treaty.

The Bethsalem Church was established in Winston County, Mississippi, (on land now included in Choctaw County) about 1839.

The Woodward, Head, Potts, Kennedy and Brown families began a migration from Fairfield and Chester counties to Winston County about 1831. They founded a community called New Prospect. Most of the early families were Baptists. They founded the Old Concord Baptist Church. Later immigrants, including the Hannas, Thompsons and Moores, founded Bethsalem Presbyterian Church. It became the center of their religious and social lives.

The Fairfield County Hannas, who were my ancestors, arrived in Winston County in the mid-1830s after a stopover in Green County, Alabama. Ardent Presbyterians, they joined other Presbyterians in organizing a church. The church was named after a church the Hannas had helped build in Boligee, Green County, Alabama. My Turner and Kennedy ancestors from Fairfield came about 1845 and promptly joined the church.

The Mississippi pioneers' pride in their Irish homeland is reflected in the gravestones. Inscriptions on 16 of the old gravestones say the persons buried there were born in County Antrim. Two cite births in County Londonderry, Ireland; one in Derry County, Ireland; and three in Fairfield District, SC. A list of those whose gravestones mention Ireland and Fairfield District follows this story.

The Rev. L. A. Beckman Jr.'s history of Bethsalem states that the church was organized sometime between 1839 and April 2, 1840, when the Tombeckbee (sic) Presbytery admitted it to that body. The church was then in Winston County, Mississippi, but the area was made a part of Choctaw County in 1873. The church is on the Winston/Coctaw County line. The Rev. James Martin was the first minister. The church opened with 15 members.

I suspect that many of the families of those buried in the cemetery could be traced back to the congregation of the Rev. William Martin, who brought five boatloads of Presbyterians from his own congregation in County Antrim to South Carolina in 1772. Many of the family names from that group can be found on the Bethsalem gravestones.

Jean Stephenson, whose ancestors were among the immigrants, details this story in her book, "Scotch-Irish Immigration to South Carolina, 1772. The Rev. William Martin and His Five Shiploads of Settlers." I have not been able to make any definite connections, but it is quite likely that the ancestors of some of the 1830s and 1840s immigrants to Mississippi were members of the Martin congregation or were their neighbors in Chester County, SC. Rev. Martin at one time was a Covenanter minister in Ballymony, County Antrim.

My own Turner ancestors arrived in Charleston on the skow "James and Mary" in 1767 - five years before the Martin congregation sailed into Charleston. My ancestors came from County Antrim. Some of the Martin congregation immigrants were granted land joining my Turner ancestors' bounty land on Rocky Creek in Craven County, according to the Stephenson book. The land was later included in Fairfield County.

Rev. William Martin himself lived in the Rocky Creek area of Chester County and preached in the Jackson Creek area of Fairfield District, where my Turner ancestors settled. Among the family names of the original Martin congregation repeated on the gravestones of Bethsalem cemetery are Stephenson, Thompson, Hanna, Brown, Kerr, Johnston, Wilson and Boyd.

The 1926 Beckman book, in listing church officers and members, calls a roll of Fairfield and Chester County family names. A. Y. Hannah (of the South Carolina Hanna family mentioned above although Beckman spells the name "Hannah") represented the church at the Presbytery meeting at Starkville in 1845. James Moore, who was born in Derry County, Ireland, according to his gravestone, represented the church at another Presbytery meeting at Lebanon, Mississippi. Hannah, Moore and John A. Thompson were the first elders of the church.

As the church grew, more members arrived from South Carolina. Beckman states the largest number came from Old Concord Church in the Fairfield District. Transfers from this church in 1856 were John Johnston and family; Robert McDowell and wife; and W. J. Dunbar and wife. They were joined the next year by James Hutchinson Sr. and wife, Nancy Hutchinson; and James Stewart and his wife. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Corder arrived in 1858; John Caldwell, in 1859; and Sam G. Wilson, in 1872. John Kerr and his family from Catholic Presbyterian Church, Chester District, SC, joined the church in 1876.

My great-grandmother, Margaret Crawford (Herron) Hanna arrived from Alabama in 1854, a young widow with five children. She later married William Thomas Lemmey, a native of County Antrim. She and Lemmey are buried in the cemetery. Both the Herrons and the Hannas were from Fairfield District.

The first church was built of split and hewn logs. A few years after the organization, a new church was built of "hand-sawed and hand-dressed virgin heart pine lumber," says Beckman. This is the building still in use today.

My grandparents, Mary Ester Hanna and James Alexander Turner, and their children attended church in this building in the mid-1800s. They moved to Attala County about 1870 and attended the Old Stonewall Presbyterian Church at Ethel. This church may have been named for the Old Stone Church, also known as Old Lebanon, in Fairfield County.

The record of a March 17, 1861, session meeting reads, "William Hannah who had been appointed to visit Richard Gladney with reference to reports made about him, reported the duty performed and that Mr. Gladney acknowledged he had been guilty of the crime of Intemperance and thought it was the duty of the Session to suspend him. On motion, he was suspended from the privileges of the Church until he gave evidence of repentance."

Beckman recounts other cases in which members were disciplined for such "crimes" as profane swearing, dancing and telling falsehoods.

Preventing "promiscuous dancing" among the younger members of the church appeared to be a problem for the elders. Among those ordered to appear before the session on this charge in 1870 were James Hutchinson, Sarah Jane Hutchinson, Mary Gladney, David and William Kerr, Thomas Stephenson and Mary Stewart. Most and perhaps all of these young people were from South Carolina families.

Several of the young people, including James Hutchinson, pled guilty to dancing, but "gave no sign of penitence of reformation," according to church records. They were "suspended from the Communion of the Church" for six months.

The Hutchinsons and Johnstons were relatives of my cousin, Turner Catledge, who was editor of the New York Times. His great-grandmother, Sarah Hutchinson (not the one mentioned above) married a Johnston. Catledge wrote about his family's attachment to Bethsalem Church in his book, "My Life and The Times." He said his parents met at the church, although his father was a Baptist.

Gravestone inscriptions which mention births in Ireland and Fairfield County are listed below:

Jane STEPHENSON - b. in County Antrim (sic), Ireland, 1809
d. June 2, 1900. Age 92 years. (Dates are as given.)

David STEPHENSON - b. in Antrim County, Ireland in 1813
d. Aug. 1, 1885

Henry A. DUNBAR - b. in County Antrim, Ireland, Feb. 15, 1844.
Emigrated to America 1850 - d. Oct. 22, 1868

David PATTON - A native of County Antrim, Ireland
d. May 2, 1867. Age 97 years

William MOORE - b. in Derry County, Ireland - Nov. 12, 1821
d. Oct. 3, 1889

Robert Y. HANNA - b. in Fairfield Dist., SC - Oct. 15, 1811
d. Apr. 12, 1888. Age 76 yrs., 5 mos., 27 days

Thomas M. MOORE - b. in Fairfield District, SC -
June 25, 1836 - Mar. 4, 1883

Alexander MOORE - b. in Fairfield Dist., SC and fell at
Murfreesboro, Tenn. - Dec. 31, 1862.
Age 33 years, 1 mo., 9 days

H. M. MOORE - Mason - b. in Fairfield Dist., SC, June 21, 1826
d. near Dalton, Ga., Feb. 16, 1864 -
Age 37 yrs., 7 mos., 20 days

Isabella MOORE - b. in the County of Londenderry, Ireland, 1796
d. Dec. 20, 1860 - Age about 64 years

James MOORE - b. in County Londenderry, Ireland, 1797
d. March 31, 1877. Age 80 years

John CALDWELL - b. in County Antrim, Ireland -
July 23, 1816 - Aug. 4, 1894

John JOHNSTON - Mason - b. in County Antrim, Ireland -
Mar. 15, 1804. Emigrated to S.C. in 1836 - Moved to Miss.
in 1855 - d. Apr. 16, 1877 - Age 74 yrs., 1 mo.

Margaret JOHNSTON - b. Mar. 17, 1798 in County Antrim, Ireland -
Emigrated to S.C. in 1836 - Moved to Miss. 1855
d. Aug. 21, 1882

W. J. DUNBAR - b. in County Antrim, Ireland -
Feb. 24, 1828 - Jan. 25, 1908

Nancy M., wife of W. J. DUNBAR - b. in County Antrim, Ireland -
Feb. 2, 1834 d. June 11, 1888

William T. LAMMEY - b. in County Antrim, Ireland,
1820 - Apr. 8, 1902

James LAMMEY - b. in Antrim County, Ireland -
d. July 2, 1854 - Age 54 years

Elizabeth LAMMEY - b. in County Antrim, Ireland -
d. Oct. 17, 1870. Age 86 years

John LAMMEY - b. in Antrim County, Ireland -
d. May 1, 1866 - Age 33 years

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Sarah HUTCHINSON - b. in County Antrim, Ireland -
d. Feb. 10, 1871. Age 74 years, 2 mos., 12 days

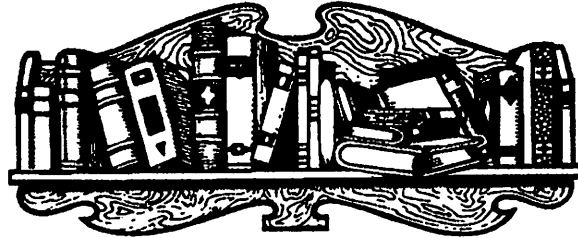
James HUTCHINSON - b. in Antrim, Ireland -
Jan. 1798 - Jan. 13, 1862

The church and cemetery can be reached from a black top road off Highway 15, about seven miles north of Louisville.

A sign on the Winston/Choctaw county line on the highway points west to the church. After a short drive through rolling hills and pine trees, the visitor comes to a gravel road which turns right. The church is a few yards further and the cemetery lies across the road from the church.



THE BOOK SHELF



Dutch Fork Cookery is an outstanding example of what happens when historians and genealogists get together to work on a project. This splendid book is an effort by Dr. James Kibler, Professor at the University of Georgia, who is a native of the Dutch Fork in South Carolina, and his mother who still lives in the Dutch Fork. It is a cook book that collects and publishes over 140 original German recipes from that famous area. There are a number of recipes which would, most likely, have passed out of our knowledge if Dr. Kibler and his mother had not interviewed elderly members of the Fork and written down those old recipes which were kept only in their head.

The recipes are introduced by essays which place them in historical context, making the volume light reading as well. It is more than the usual cookbook because it captures cooking and eating rituals of days gone by plus it also provides their history and an explanation of cooking customs and how they have been adapted from Southern Germany. The book is rounded off by an old-time Dutch Fork Christmas menu with descriptions of feasting customs in the old days. It is illustrated, has a hard cover and acid-free long-life paper. It is a limited edition which cost only \$17.00 plus \$3 shipping and handling. Order from, DUTCH FORK PRESS, 255 Bloomfield Street, Athens, Ga. 30605.

Some Descendants Of John Jennings (ca 1740- ca 1819) of Fairfield and Edgefield Districts, South Carolina. This new contribution was listed in the Edgefield Chapter's Newsletter as having been added to their collection. If you think you might have an interest in this book or this family, you should visit their library, or write to them at: Old Edgefield District Chapter, P.O. Box 468, Edgefield, S.C. 29824.