



Found on a Farm

By RON WENZELL
A State News Bureau Report
CHESTER — DeWitt T. Wellborn Jr., a Chester cattleman, has found a slave cemetery on his 1,200-acre farm.

The discovery is likely to bring historians running as it is thought to be one of the very few slave graveyards that can still be seen in South Carolina.

Wellborn came upon the cemetery while hunting. It is about two miles from his house — a two-story white clapboard that has been in his family for five generations.

The country is wild and beautiful and the cemetery is inaccessible by automobile. The only way to reach it is on foot or horseback. Riding a horse it takes about 30 minutes to get there from Wellborn's house.

As nearly as can be determined, there are about 40 graves. Only two of them have headstones. The rest are marked by plain rocks. Some of the graves have sunk a foot or more.

The headstones are inscribed. One reads:

"In memory of Sam — a faithful servant of G. L. McNeil, Esq. who died Jan. 15, 1851 in 21st year of his age."

And the other one:

"The grave of Rachel who died 25th March 1854 aged 65 years. This stone is erected to her memory by her owners in token of her fidelity, piety and dutifulness. Blessed are the dead

There is a foot stone on Rachel's grave.

Wellborn doesn't know who G. L. McNeil, the name on Sam's headstone, might have been. He wasn't an ancestor.

It's possible, Wellborn said, he may have been a neighbor who used the cemetery for burying his slaves. It was the custom to bury slaves in a special burial ground on the plantation where they worked.

The slaves were probably the property of John Douglas, the first owner of the farm and the great, great, great grandfather of the present owner.

Douglas and his four sons had one of the largest cotton farms in the state.

The farm went to Fanny Walker, a niece, after the oldest son, Robert Douglas died and she willed it to Mrs. D. T. Wellborn, Sr., DeWitt's mother.

Wellborn said an old Negro woman died a few years ago who claimed to be over 100 years old and she said she had been a slave on the Douglas plantation.

The woman lived all alone in a house Wellborn let her have at the back of the farm.

"She knew the entire history of the place and claimed to know personally some of the slaves buried there," he said. "No one knew exactly how old she was, but there was talk she was 110 when she died."

Wellborn himself raised cotton until last year, but he quit that and has turned all of his attention to cattle farming. The only crops he grows are feed for the cattle.

One of his hobbies is finishing antique furniture to put in his 200-year-old house. Wellborn, his wife Joyce, and their three children spend many hours exploring the farm on horseback.

"I never tire of riding over this land," he said. "there's a lot of history here and I never know what I might find."

Several years back he plowed up an old rifle. He fixed it up and it's hanging on the wall in his house.

Census of Cemeteries Writer to Preserve C

(By Charles Edward Thomas,

The editorial in this week's "News and Herald" and Mr. Atmar's letter on the care and preservation of historic sites inspires an appeal to some Fairfield County group or individual to make a census of cemeteries in the county. Much of the history of the county is recorded in its cemeteries, and much of this is fast being lost in Fairfield County, through the ravages of time and more tragically through the thoughtless vandalism of mis-directed people. Mr. Morrow points this up in the tragic condition of the ancient Woodward tombs just off the highway between Simpson and Rockton. Vandals have recently smashed some of the heavy marble slabs covering these historic Woodward and Gadsden graves in this pre-Revolutionary burial ground, one of the really important historic sites of the state.

This spring while my nephew Lee Thomas was at Ridgeway for spring vacation from Virginia Episcopal School, he and I spent two days studying local Ridgeway history in some of the older burying grounds of lower Fairfield. Many of the earliest graves in the county were on private plantations, and often only a few of the graves were marked with carved monuments; therefore many of these are lost or at best, difficult to locate after the growth of years, loss of homes, and abandonment of farms. For instance, in an entire afternoon's search we were not successful in finding what is said to be the oldest pre-Revolutionary burying place near Ridgeway on "Cedar Tree" Plantation, now owned by Mrs. A. J. Van Exem, just north of Ridgeway on the Winnsboro highway.

The earliest marked grave in Airwell Cemetery, Ridgeway, appears to be that of Samuel Rosborough, born 1809, died December 14, 1830. He was one of the eight children of John Rosborough, 1774-1842, and his wife, Annie Cubit, to the Mount Hope Burying Ground.

Beyond the St. Stephen's Churchyard to the north is the Davis Family Slave Burying ground. I have not visited it since I was a boy at Ridgeway about 1920. However, I remember several carved stones there to Negro slaves of the Davis family. The Davises had given the adjoining land on which St. Stephen's Church is built.

None of the colored cemeteries in the Ridgeway area appear to have tombstones of graves before the late 1800's and early 1900's. There are carved stones in the Bethlehem Baptist Church cemetery, a mile beyond that church, which is west of Ridgeway. The colored Presbyterian Churchyard, south of Ridgeway on the Columbia highway, is a well-kept and the best marked colored cemetery in the area, but none of the graves ante-date this century. The same is true of the Pisgah Churchyard, east of Ridgeway on the Longtown highway.

There are some interesting and imposing monuments in both the Longtown Presbyterian and Baptist cemeteries on the Old Camden road, but I have not checked the dates there for the earliest graves. Colonel Nicholas A. Peay, the builder of fabulous "Melrose" was buried in the Baptist cemetery in 1857, and thereby was credited with...