

Old Cemeteries Hold History

(Editor's note: The following article was written by Mrs. T. LeRoy McMeekin, a member of the Fairfield Garden Club.)

History may be recorded in strange places. The development of the United States has been rapid for a new nation. We have come from foot paths and wagon roads to jet airports in a relatively short period.

We should not lose sight of our frontier forefathers in the rapid changes. It would be worthwhile to make notes of family dates on tombstones in old field cemeteries and deposit the information in a public library or museum. These sources of information are fast being neglected and forgotten. They contain accurate information of the existence of families.

Prior to about 1860, county or family cemeteries were in common use for a variety of reasons. There is continued interest in these old field cemeteries, though many of them are completely neglected. It is common for individuals from other Southern states as Louisiana, Texas or Arkansas to search for monuments and records of

their ancestors in Fairfield County.

Also, there is considerable interest in these cemeteries locally. Mrs. E. D. Whaley has recently published a large book on the cemeteries of Union County, listing the information from monuments in 129 cemeteries and showing the location of each cemetery on a map of Union County. Many of the cemeteries listed are family cemeteries. Mrs. Louise Kelley Crowder has compiled tombstone records of Chester and Fairfield counties in a book that is the Fairfield County Library. Personal collections of Fairfield County tombstone book on the cemeteries of records have been made by the late Mrs. Cleo Clowney Hall and also by Bill Wall of the Columbia Post Office.

The Gibson family cemetery is typical of country cemeteries. It is located in Fairfield County about five miles southeast of Jenkinsville on Hwy 294. Some of the many descendents of Jacob Gibson, Sr., who came to Fairfield in 1762, are buried in this cemetery.

According to Mills' Atlas, written thirty years after Jacob Gibson's death, "he spent forty years of his life to

the propagation of the gospel and sowing the seeds of literature and refinement in a scarcely civilized settlement." The Gibson meeting house, which he founded, was a forerunner of the present Little River Baptist Church.

The monuments in the Gibson cemetery are largely those of the close relatives of Stephen Gibson Jr. (1800 - 1889). The cemetery is across the road from where Stephen Gibson's house stood. It occupies about one half acre and contains twenty-two rather impressive monuments of the heavy marble box-type, two eight-foot tall monuments, and three modest granite markers as well as a number of unmarked graves. Most of the deaths recorded on the monuments were during the period of 1840 to 1860, which was at the peak of southern culture, slavery and cotton production. It was, also, perhaps, a time of malaria, tuberculosis and typhoid fever. Of the ten children of Stephen Gibson, Jr., and his wife Nancy, only four reached maturity. This is in sharp contrast with previous Gibson generations who lived in the same area. Stephen Gibson, Sr., had thirteen children to reach maturity, as compared

to his father, Jacob Gibson, Sr., who saw ten children become adults.

One of the unique monuments in this cemetery in a tall marble one placed there by Stephen Gibson, Jr. inscribed, "To my mother, Martha Pope Gibson, daughter of Barnaby Pope, dated fifty-four years after her death. Barnaby Pop was a famous Regulator and lieutenant in the Revolutionary War. This inscription on the monument has been used by some of the descendents of Stephen Gibson to gain admission into the Daughters of the American Revolution.

The Gibson cemetery today is shaded by cedars and has a ground cover of vinca minox, common to old cemeteries. Over the years the McMeekin family descendents of the Gibsons, have occasionally removed the vegetation from the cemetery. During the past ten years, the cemetery has been cleared systematically by mowing and cutting. It has reached a state where the shade from the cedars and vinca prevent understrable growth. The marble monuments were cleaned with bleach and by scrubbing with a wire brush.