

Slave's monument

Grave of Civil War soldier Maj. Thomas William Brice



Photos by Perry Baker/The State

Faithful 'til the end

Isaiah Moore's tombstone is just outside the cemetery fence, near his master's grave

'As good as ever fluttered'

Solitary grave tells slave's story

By **BILL McDONALD**
Staff Writer

WOODWARD

The road winds slowly through the ancient, red clay hills in Fairfield County under a slate-colored sky, and no birds sing.

Time and the passing years have carried or chased away almost everything from this sleepy community. It is old now, and it is tired.

Brice's Store, set back a few dozen yards off U.S. 321, is closed, its windows and doors nailed shut, its dull, white wood peeling and rotting, a pale reminder of yesteryear.

Down the road a poke, about a half mile away, is the old Concord Presbyterian Church, built in 1818, and the old cemetery with its neat rows of the dead protected from harm by a black, wrought-iron fence.

Inside the fence, the tombstones are simple and unpretentious: a Confederate cross; a stone obelisk marking the grave of an infant; a bleached white urn full of dark rainwater; a cracked and leaning rectangle of stone rubbed smooth by the passing years, marking a plot of brown earth on a gentle slope.

It is to the gentle slope that a visitor has come this day.

According to local historians, a solitary granite marker on the western edge of the slope — outside the wrought iron fence — tells a remarkable, yet little-known, story in South Carolina history.

Time and the elements have almost obliterated the lettering on the simple marker, about 2 feet high and a foot wide. But the lettering reads:

"Isaiah Moore ... Died, Dec. 22, 1917, about 75 years of age ... As Good As Ever Fluttered."

Tender shoots of iris have begun to peep up, timidly, near the marker, the first evidence that spring is about to enter its glorious phase of balmy days and cool nights here.

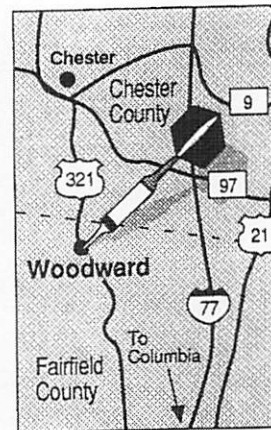
Who was Isaiah Moore?

What is there about his marker that, for decades, has attracted visitors to his grave?

Why is he buried outside the wrought-iron fence — "beyond the pale"?

Briefly sketched, this is Isaiah Moore's story:

He was born a slave, a few decades before the Civil War. At the outbreak of hostilities between the North and South, he followed his



State Graphic

master, a white man named Thos William Brice, off to war.

History tells us that Major Brice was one of Fairfield County's leading citizens. He fought with Co. I 6th Regiment, South Carolina Volunteers, and even lost an eye in a skirmish, which he thereafter covered with a black patch.

After the war, Brice returned Woodward, along with Isaiah, his faithful servant. He became a prominent merchant and farmer, as well as a churchgoer who faithfully worshipped at Concord Presbyterian.

In the fall of 1908, Brice died. Moore died nine years later, but his deathbed, he made an unusual request, that he be buried as close as possible to Brice.

This request was honored. Moore was buried outside the fence, a few yards from Brice's grave, on Dec. 22, 1917.

What else is known about Isaiah Moore?

Precious little, except these tattered facts:

Moore was an excellent student of the Bible and could recite the Shorter Catechism "from front to back and back to front." He even won a prize once for this difficult task.

Although a religious man, Moore was extremely superstitious. Qu often, he would heat a horseshoe hot, then, after it had cooled, hang it over his door to ward off witches.

He also played a fiddle, it is said. And on a balmy spring day, his licks could be heard throughout the red clay hills of Fairfield County.

BILL McDONALD



Columnist

Fleshing out Isaiah's saga

Several months ago, I wrote a piece about a slave who was buried near a country churchyard in the red clay hills of Fairfield County, a few feet beyond the iron fence of a white cemetery.

The slave had requested, on his deathbed, that he be buried as close as possible to his master.

The reaction to that piece was more than I expected. And what it says to me is that a lot of readers are interested in the history of those days, days that seem so far from our minds today. They're rich in images, images that tell us a little about our past and about ourselves — who we are and where we come from.

But I felt frustrated after writing the piece. I couldn't add a scintilla more to the story. The slave, Isaiah Moore, had loved his master; and the epitaph on his simple stone marker read, "As Good As Ever Fluttered."

Childhood memories

You can understand my joy, then, when a few weeks after the piece appeared, I received a letter from Thomas M. Patrick of Greenville. He had grown up in the community of Woodward, where the slave was buried, and had faint, childhood memories of those days.

"I was named after one of my ancestors, Thomas Moore," he wrote. "The Moores owned a good many slaves, and in her will, one of my great-great-aunts had left several slaves to the children of the Brice family. Isaiah was given to the future Major Thomas W. Brice.

"The two grew up hunting, fishing and playing together. Theirs was a bond of love, and it did not end until death separated them.

"During the War of Northern Aggression (not the Civil War, please), when the major lost his eye, the Confederate Army was in retreat. The major was so badly wounded, his compatriots had to leave him behind on the battlefield. He couldn't walk or ride his horse.

"When they got back to the campsite and told Isaiah about the major, he immediately learned from them where the major was lying. Then he took a horse and went in search of the major. When he found him, he put the major on top of the horse, then carried him to a safe place. He nursed the major back to health, and afterwards, the major fought in other battles."

Not a sinful sport

Patrick offered, also, a plausible, if not apocryphal, explanation for Moore's epitaph.

"Some people can't figure out the epitaph, 'As Good As Ever Fluttered,'" he wrote. "But I have been told on good authority that the major and Isaiah Moore did a lot of cock fighting where there's a lot of fluttering in the pit. It was not considered a sinful sport in those days, as long as your roosters won.

"Our home was across the highway from the cemetery and near Brice's old mercantile store. I was young then, as I was born in 1907, but I remember the major. I also remember Isaiah, and heard him play the fiddle (self-taught) many times. He also called for the square dance.

"He was quite a gentleman.

"I have a nephew, Dr. Earle R. Barron, a Presbyterian minister in Virginia, who likes to recount the story of Isaiah to his congregation. He tells them, "In Heaven, there will not be any fences."

A warm story

The story of Isaiah Moore warms my heart. I can only hope that the memory of who he was and what he was — and the things he did — will linger on.

It also reminds me, somewhat sadly, that if you want to find a lot of the history that's buried in South Carolina, you do not go out brash and willy-nilly, looking for it with a pick ax and bucket.

Instead, you poke for it with pins. You pry and pray it out. You sweep it up like forgotten bits of lint from an old room.