

INTRODUCTION TO THE FORTNER-GASS CEMETERY

Whitehouse Road

Legend has it that this site was once an old Indian burial ground. Numerous Indian artifacts have been discovered on this farm, and the legend may very well be true. In recorded times, the land was once a part of the large holdings of Revolutionary War soldier, John Gass (1758-1840), who is buried in the Gass Graveyard, now the old section of Cross Anchor cemetery. When John Gass wrote his Will in 1837, he bequeathed 300 acres of his large holdings to the family of his deceased son, Hezekiah Balch Gass – the farm on which Hezekiah died in 1836. Hezekiah was buried in the Gass Graveyard.

Hezekiah Balch Gass left seven minor children, two daughters and five sons. One of these sons was James A. Gass. The Fortner-Gass Cemetery began on the farm of James A. Gass (1836-1891) and his bride, Jane Hardin Gass (1835-1908), who are buried at Cross Anchor. Five of their young children are buried in the cemetery on Whitehouse Road, including young Hezekiah who died in 1863 at the tender age of eighteen months. Their children who survived childhood are buried at Cross Anchor. James A. Gass sold his 98-acre farm on May 30, 1883.

The next owner of the farm was William “Billy” Fortner who paid James A. Gass \$972 for the farm. Billy was a Civil War Veteran who had been wounded while serving as a sergeant with Company E of the 8th TN Cavalry. Billy built the Fortner Mill near today’s bridge on Fox-Mays Road. Billy Fortner (1820-1906) and his second wife, Sarah Ann Williams Fortner (1833-1911) are buried in the cemetery.

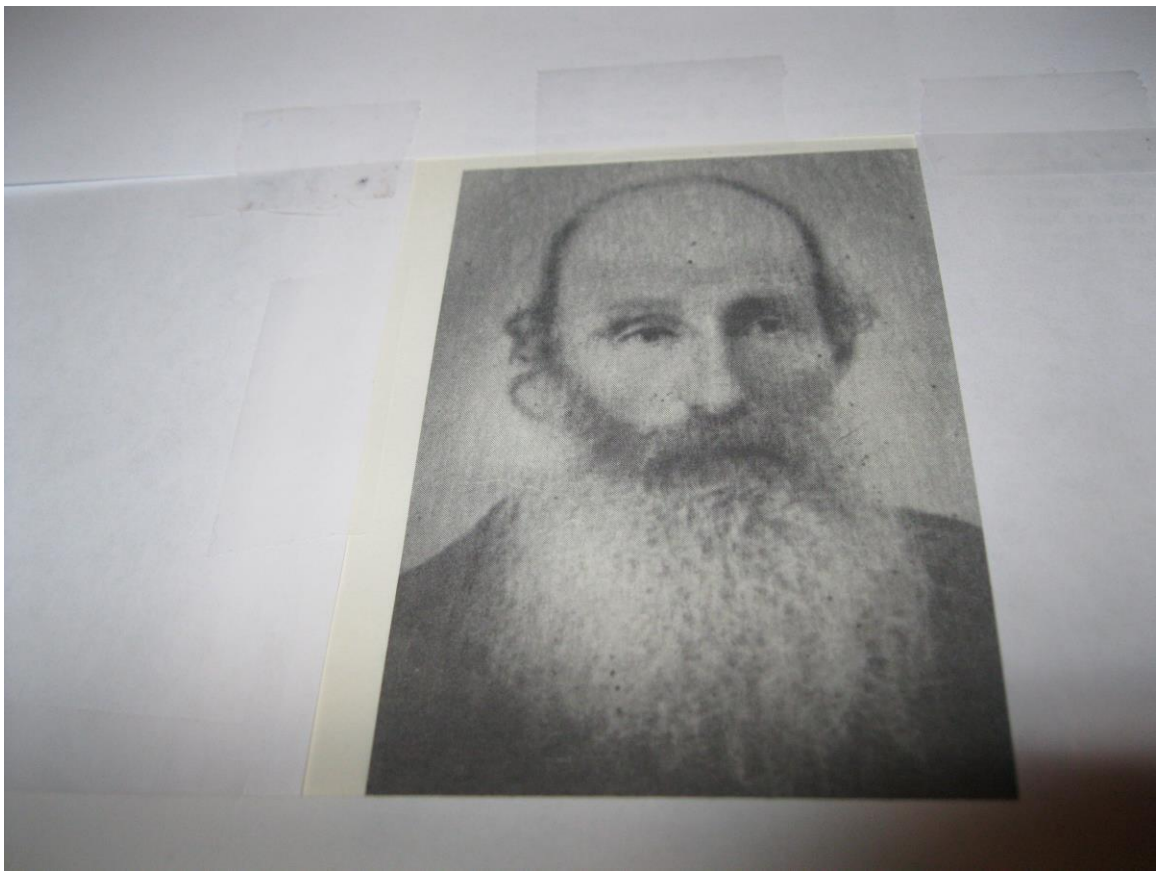
Billy and Sarah Ann Fortner had only one child, a daughter Hattie Susan Fortner, who inherited the farm. The family lived in the log house opposite the cemetery on Whitehouse Road. Hattie married Charlie B. Brown on November 30, 1892. The family tells that Charlie wasn’t given a middle name, so he went by “Charlie B.” to distinguish himself from other men of the same name. Charlie helped his father-in-law run the Fortner mill and they, too, lived in, but enlarged, the old log house to accommodate a large family of nine children, four sons and five daughters. Charlie Brown (1868-1958) and Hattie Fortner Brown (1876-1949) were laid to rest next to Hattie’s parents.

The next occupants of the old log house on Whitehouse Road were Charlie and Hattie Brown’s daughter, Ethel Margaret Brown who married Paul Belcher. They raised a family of two children. Even as late as the 1940s, times were much as they had been in earlier times when Billy Fortner set-up his Mill. The old log house was not electrified until 1947, and when the well went “bad” with the strong taste and smell of sulfur, then water was hauled from the creek that had once powered the Fortner Mill.

Charlie B. Brown was the last person interred in the Fortner Cemetery in 1958. Charlie’s daughter, Ethel Margaret Brown Belcher, now age 94, lives in Town. Ethel’s daughter, though, lives just down the road from the Fortner farm on Whitehouse Road. The Mill is gone, but the original farmstead sits as it did over a century ago. The old log house and the outbuildings still stand. The Fortner Cemetery on Whitehouse Road is enclosed and lovingly maintained by the Family.

WILLIAM “BILLY” FORTNER 1820-1906

Picture from Historic Greene County and Its People, page 106, Courtesy of Janice Johns



CHARLIE B. AND HATTIE SUSAN FORTNER BROWN
MARRIAGE PHOTO
11-20-1892



Picture courtesy of Margie Belcher Smith, Charlie B. and Hattie's granddaughter