

INTRODUCTION TO KIDWELL CEMETERY

Old Cemetery Road

Kidwell Cemetery is a little over one mile north of the Greeneville city limits. Heading north on Baileyton Road, one quickly comes to a nearly hidden and very narrow “path” that can barely be called a “road”. Proceeding along this old lane for perhaps a quarter of a mile, then off to the right and in the middle of a field, you see the cemetery. The small sign on the gate reads “Kidwell Cemetery Founded Circa 1800”. You are entering historic ground when you pass through this gate.

The earliest known grave is dated 1807 for a Kidwell family member. There is no way to know just how long this graveyard had existed before this date, or the true number of people buried here. The surnames found in the cemetery include – Cox – Gass – Hardin – Harmon – Johnson – Kidwell – all of whom lived nearby and well before statehood in 1796. They were true Pioneers of Tennessee. They were among the very first arrivals, many having served during the American Revolution.

The Beginning

These Pioneers built a multi-purpose log building with a massive fireplace which served as a Meeting House, a school, and a Church. One of the schoolmasters was Valentine Hardin. One of the Sunday School teachers was William Swatzell, who died in the Andersonville Prison Camp during the Civil War. The Church was nondenominational – sometimes there would be a Baptist Preacher and sometimes a Methodist Preacher. As the Circuit Riding Preachers came through, they would preach the Holy Gospel to those eager ears of the Congregation. The old log Meeting House stood until the late 1880’s when it burned to the ground.

The New Church

As the community grew a new brick Church was built in the 1860’s closer to the new road (Baileyton Road). The Church was called both New Kidwell’s Church and Hardin’s Chapel Church, and later Hardin’s Chapel United Methodist Church. Burials of Congregation members continued in the old Kidwell Cemetery well into the 1920s, but afterwards the cemetery began to fall into great disrepair.

The Restoration

During the late 1980s, the Men’s Bible Group of Hardin’s Chapel United Methodist Church undertook the restoration of old Kidwell Cemetery. Many of the old, original tombstones and the fieldstone markers – *of which there are many* – were broken beyond repair. The cemetery was cleared of debris and enclosed with fencing, although a number of graves with and without fieldstone markers lie outside of today’s enclosure.

Several military markers were obtained for Revolutionary War and Civil War soldiers *believed* to be buried in Kidwell Cemetery. If the military markers in the Cemetery

today are not found in the Buford Reynold's survey during the mid-1960s, this is a good indication those markers were placed during the restoration.

A commemorative marker for slaves was placed near the Kidwell burial plots. It is said some of these slaves belonged to Abigail Maltberger Hardin (1812-1873), the widow of Jacob Hardin (1788-1845), and they made the bricks for the New Kidwell's Church; however, at the time the new Church was built, Abigail Hardin does not appear in the 1860 Census as a slave owner.

The Hardin's Chapel UM Church maintains Kidwell Cemetery and on Memorial Day places American Flags on all of the soldiers' graves. The old tombstones at Kidwell have been cleaned, and many are as readable today as they were well over one hundred years ago when they were made. The engraving on some of these tombstones is remarkable.

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To the existing 1960's transcription by Buford Reynolds, a number of individuals have been added to the updated Kidwell Cemetery transcription based on a search of death certificates. However, because Kidwell Cemetery and the successor Church, Hardin's Chapel, both had burials in the early 20th century, an exact determination of burial place is impossible. The early death certificates state the place of burial as both "Kidwells" and as "Hardins"; and some tombstones have been found in one cemetery, when the other was named on the death certificate or funeral home record.

Therefore, as a guideline, "family has been placed with family" as much as possible. One example is the burials of six Whitson children, all of whom died between 1915 and 1925. Some death certificates state the place of burial as "Kidwell" while some state "Hardins", and one certificate states "Cross Anchor". There are no tombstones for these children at any of these cemeteries. The Whitson surname is found only at Kidwell Cemetery (Fannie F. Whitson, 1894-1898); therefore, the six unmarked graves for the Whitson children are included on the transcription of Kidwell Cemetery.

The latest commemorative tombstone was placed in 2012 for Revolutionary War Soldier John Harmon (1749/50-1838). Recent research revealed Kidwell Cemetery was on his land at the time he died. It is presumed he is buried here or nearby.

References:

Kidwell Cemetery Plot Map, prepared by Hardin's Chapel United Methodist Church
The History of Hardin's Chapel United Methodist Church
Historic Greene County and Its People, pages 377/378 and 389
First Families of Tennessee, A Register of Early Settlers and Their Present-Day Descendants, published by the East Tennessee Historical Society
Goodspeed Interviews
Olden times In Greene County, Volume One, by Harry B. Roberts, pages 84/85
The unpublished manuscript of Reverend Samuel Houston Harold (1848-1920)