

The History of the Old Cooper Burial Ground, Greene County, TN

The year this cemetery was established is not known. Christopher Cooper Senior purchased the land in December 1803 from Jesse Mossley. The farm remained in the Cooper Family until 1851. Prior to Christopher Senior's death in 1830, he deeded the land to his only son, Christopher Junior. Christopher Junior sold the farm in 1851 to John and Pheby Stine. Christopher Junior then migrated to Sullivan County, Missouri. The land has remained in the Stine Family since 1851, and the burial ground has never been disturbed. The cemetery remained buried under shrub, brush and vines for about 100 years, and perhaps longer.

The first clue that a cemetery existed was found in the Pension Papers of Sherwood Hatley, War of 1812 Soldier. Sherwood's first wife was Phebe Johnson. Phebe is believed to be a daughter of Zopher Johns(t)on Senior, who has a military marker at nearby Kidwell Cemetery.

Sherwood Hatley outlived three wives and married a fourth and final time. It was in the pension application filed by his fourth and surviving wife, Thena (Bethena) Reynolds Hatley, that the "Old Cooper Burying" Ground was mentioned. In an affidavit by James Graham, he stated that Sherwood's third wife, Sally Clark, had been buried there.

The Old Cooper Burial Ground was finally found in the Summer of 2005 by a professional, Greeneville researcher. After the removal of a century of tangled vines, undergrowth and trees, twenty-six old handmade markers were visible above the ground. No writing on the markers is visible, although a scant trace of a name is visible on one larger marker. Indentions in the ground give indication there are more burials than those marked by fieldstones.

There is no doubt this cemetery is on the Cooper Farm purchased in 1803 by Christopher and Jane Brown Cooper. The present owners, John W. and Margie Belcher Smith, inherited the land from John's sister, Mae Smith Stine. The original Cooper landowners were unknown to the present-day Stine/Smith family; however, they were well aware the cemetery was on a knoll on their farm. Spider Stine, for whom the present-day road to the property is named, said the last person buried there was a "Grimes" (Graham) woman. This burial would have taken place around the turn of the 20th Century.

In the early years when what is today Greene County, Tennessee, was still part of North Carolina, a state law mandated that all landowners set aside ground for a cemetery. The following is excerpted from the book, Olden Times in Greene County, by Harry B. Roberts, page 197, published in 1983:

"FAMILY GRAVE YARDS

A familiar landmark which usually characterized pre-Civil War farms and plantations was the family burial plot. One reason for this is the fact that when these early homesteads were first settled rural churches were few and far between.

Another reason lies in the fact that an early law of North Carolina, passed while the area now occupied by Tennessee was a part of that state, required every plantation owner to set aside a plot of ground in which all Christian people including slaves might be buried.

The law in part follows:

Every planter, owner attorney or overseer of every settled plantation in this government or that hereafter shall be settled, shall set apart a burial place and fence the same, for the interring all such Christian persons, whether bond or free, that shall die on their plantation; and that before the interring there shall be called, at least three or four of the neighbors to view the corpse, and if it appears to them that the person came to his or her death by any violence of any unlawful means, notice thereof shall be given forthwith to the coroner of the precinct so that proceedings may be

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had thereon according to law; and in case any of the persons so called shall refuse to come and view, he or she so refusing, shall forfeit and pay the sum of five shillings; to be levied by a warrant from the next justice of the peace and paid to the churchwardens, for the use of the poor of the said parish.”

It is my opinion that many, many of our early Greene County kin are buried here. Surnames could include all of the intermarried families of Brown, Cooper, Johns(t)on, Hatley, Foster and Graham. Most of these families were intermarried for well over 100 years. They lived in close proximity to each other back in Virginia (pre 1800) and in Greene County (post 1800). They sold land among themselves, and acted as bondsmen and witnesses to legal events. In the mid-1800's, the descendants of many of these families migrated together to Missouri and Illinois. There is every reason to believe that those who remained behind would be buried together.

The Family of Christopher and Jane Brown Cooper lived on this land from 1803 until 1851. They had seven children, of whom one went to Kentucky (Jane Cooper Blair), one went to Missouri (Christopher Cooper Junior), one went to Illinois (Phebe Cooper Johnson), and one went to Obion County, Tennessee (Lydia Cooper Maloney). The other three children died in Greene County and were Elizabeth Cooper Johnson (died before 1850), Catherine Cooper Maloney (died 1862), who is presumed to be buried with her husband at nearby Cross Anchor Cemetery although she does not have a marker, and Sarah Cooper Doty, who is buried with her husband at Doty's Chapel.

Thus, one must ask the question: “WHO are the twenty-six (or more) people buried in the Old Cooper Burial Ground?” The obvious answer to me is they are related kinfolk. They are Browns, Johns(t)ons, Fosters, Hatleys, and Grahams, most of whom died before the Cooper Farm was sold in 1851.

One may argue that the burial ground on the Cooper Farm was begun by the Stine Family in 1851. This is not the case. John (died 1880) and Phebe (died 1881) Stine who purchased the farm from Christopher Cooper Junior in 1851, had three sons, Rufus, Christian and David, and four daughters, Sarah, Susannah Catharine and Elizabeth. John and Phebe Stine are buried at the Cross Anchor Cemetery, as are the Stine's unmarried daughter (Sarah died 1901), and their son, Rufus (died 1892) and his family. The son, David, died in battle during the Civil War in 1863, and the son, Christian, migrated to Illinois by 1880. As for the daughters, Catherine Stine married Robert Brown (died 1898), a grandson of Jotham Brown Junior, and the daughter, Elizabeth Stine, married James D. Brown (died 1878), who was also a grandson of Jotham Brown Junior. Both of the Stine/Brown families are also buried at Cross Anchor. So, the burial ground on the Cooper farm is absolutely not a Stine Family Cemetery.

The possibility exists that our Revolutionary War Soldier, Zopher Johns(t)on Senior (died c. 1835) is actually buried in the Old Cooper Burial Ground, as are his sons John Johnson (died 1855) and Joseph Johnson (died 1872), the husband of Elizabeth Cooper Johnson. Although Zopher Johnson has a Military Marker at nearby Kidwell Cemetery, it must be acknowledged that this marker was placed very recently, probably in the 1980's. When Kidwell Cemetery was transcribed by Mr. Bufford Reynolds and his colleagues in the late 1960's, no Revolutionary War soldiers, including Zopher Johnson, were on the listing. This clearly indicates there was no (readable) marker at that date. The present marker at Kidwell contains many errors, including Zopher's year of birth, year of death and the place of his Revolutionary War service. There is also no old stone or marker near the present Military marker at Kidwell Cemetery.

Christopher Cooper Senior, a Revolutionary War soldier from Virginia, died in 1830. Zopher Johns(t)on, also a Revolutionary War soldier from Virginia, gave an affidavit for Christopher, attesting to Christopher's service. Zopher Johns(t)on died after 1832 and before 1836. Christopher and Zopher were friends. They were in-laws. And, they were near neighbors. Zopher's farm on Roaring Fork is equal distance between The Old Cooper Burial Ground and Kidwell Cemetery. One must wonder if Zopher would have been buried with his old friend and fellow soldier from Virginia. My personal opinion is that he was.

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The close familial bonds of these intermarried families of Cooper, Brown, Johns(t)on, Foster, Graham and Hatley survived through generations, and it is my opinion they slumber together in death in the Old Cooper Burial Ground, united for eternity by these bonds of kinship. The 1878 Affidavit by James Graham in the Pension Application of Sherwood Hatley, War of 1812 Soldier, follows:

AFFIDAVIT BY JAMES GRAHAM, 10-14-1878 PENSION FILES OF SHERWOOD HATLEY, WAR OF 1812 SOLDIER

“State of Tennessee County of Greene

On the 14th day of October A. D. 1878 before me V. S. Maloney, Clerk of the County Court of said county personally appeared, James Graham aged seventy six years, a resident of Greene County Tennessee, well known to me, whom I certify to be respectable and entitled to credit, and who being duly sworn according to law, doth on his oath make the following affidavit relative to Thomas England, former husband of Bethena Hatley, now the widow of Sherwood Hatley viz

This affiant States, that he was personally acquainted with said Thomas England and said Bethena, while they lived together as husband and wife in both Greene and Hawkins county late of Tennessee; that sometime before the late war of the rebellion, this affiant heard that said England had been sent to the penitentiary from Hawkins county aforesaid for shooting a boy or young man and this affiant has never known or heard of said England returning to his home; that during the late war of the rebellion some rebel Soldiers came into affiants neighborhood, and one of them was offering to sell a rifle gun, which he said was or had been, Tom Englands – that they had found him in the Mountains near Kingston Tennessee, and arrested him and put him under the guard of one rebel Soldier, and when the other Soldiers went to a house near by, Tom England shot his guard, and then tried to make his escape, but was overtaken and killed, and the gun which was offered for sale, was the same gun taken from him
Affiant further states that it is the general understanding that said England is dead, and he has never seen or heard of said England alive since. Affiant heard of his death as aforesaid.

He further states that Bethena, the widow of said England remarried with Sherwood Hatley of said county of Greene. He further states that he was also acquainted with said Sherwood Hatley while he lived with a former wife named Sally or Sarah, and that her name before her marriage to said Sherwood was Sally Clarke – that at the time said Sally died in said County of Greene, this affiant lived within one and a half miles of said Sherwood and wife, Sally – that he did not see her dead but knows from the neighborhood talk, that she died in the winter of 1864 or in the Spring of 1865 and was buried at Coopers burying ground about two miles from affiants residence

He further States that he is not interested in the prosecution of said Bethenas claim for pensions now pending under act of March 9, 1878, and that his Post Office address is Cross Anchor, Greene County, Tennessee.

James Graham “X” his mark

Witness: A. C. Harmon & W. G. ??? (surname not readable)”

Transcriber’s Comments:

James Graham, born c. 1800, died on 7-2-1880, “age about 80”. He is buried at the Cross Anchor Church Cemetery, about 1 ½ miles from the Old Cooper Burial Ground. In 1806, Sally Johnson married John Graham, bond by Jotham Brown. Sarah is believed to be the daughter of Zopher Johns(t)on Senior. There is no marker at Cross Anchor Cemetery for John and Sally Johnson Graham.

V. S. Maloney is Valentine Sevier Maloney, the son of Robert and Catherine Cooper Maloney. Valentine died in Greene County after 1880 and before 1900. His burial place has not been found. Valentine Maloney’s brother, John Maloney, died between 1871-1879. John’s burial place has not been found.

Bethena Reynolds England Hatley, fourth wife of Sherwood Hatley, died on 5-26-1897, age 88 years. She is buried in the Malone Family Cemetery in Ottway, about 2 miles from the Old Cooper Burial Ground.