
GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN--???



The phrase “Gone But Not Forgotten” is engraved on many grave markers, but I think in many cases that is not true. I’m sure families remember their loved ones who have passed on for a long time, but sooner or later the older members of the family will pass away and the graves of older family members may be neglected or forgotten. In some cases, families move from the area where family members were buried and are not able to care for the graves.

There are many abandoned cemeteries in every county. Some small cemeteries or family plots are completely lost. Sometimes the land is sold and the new owners may not even know there is a cemetery on the land they purchased. The laws regarding cemeteries vary by state. In Arkansas, cemetery laws apply to burial places with at least six commercial grave markers, but what about those that contain only one or two markers? Usually, laws protect the right of family members to access a cemetery, but sometimes problems arise when a landowner may not want people entering his property without permission.

Last month, I visited several old cemeteries taking pictures of grave markers for the find-a-grave web site. This helps those interested in genealogy and family history to document where family members are buried.

For this article, I want to concentrate on three abandoned cemeteries in Ouachita County. All three of these cemeteries are within a one square mile area near Stephens, Arkansas.

OLD SEMINARY CEMETERY

If you check older maps of Ouachita County, you will find a place called Seminary. It existed long before the town of Stephens was founded. The main road leading from Camden to the southwest was called Seminary Road on early maps. The only town between Camden and Seminary in 1865 was Buena Vista. There were no railroads or paved roads at that time. The area was just being settled and the main occupation was farming. When the railroad came through, it bypassed Seminary and that led to the emergence of the town of Stephens. Seminary declined as Stephens grew.

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Actually, there are two cemeteries at this location. Old Seminary Cemetery (white) and Seminary Cemetery (black) are about a quarter mile apart. The black cemetery is still active, but the last burial in the white cemetery was in 1939.

I first visited Old Seminary Cemetery in 2000 and recorded the names and dates on the markers I found. Most of the markers were in good shape then, but trees had grown up in the cemetery until you could barely see the markers. The cemetery is probably about two acres in size and contained 54 marked graves and I'm sure many unmarked graves.

I returned to this old cemetery in January, 2018. The road leading to the cemetery is just a trail with mud holes. I decided it would be wise to use four-wheel drive. Large piles of household trash were found on each side of the trail even though a "No Dumping" sign was posted. The timber had been cut around the cemetery since the last time I was there. I was glad to see that the loggers had protected the cemetery. The lack of standing timber to block the wind has caused some large trees to be uprooted around the edge of the cemetery. It is a shame that a cemetery like this one has not been maintained, but that takes money and there is nobody left to contribute to its upkeep.

I was not able to find all the markers that I had found 17 years ago. Some are probably lying under the fallen leaves. One interesting thing I discovered. There are 54 marked graves in this cemetery and 19 of those are children under the age of ten. That's 35 percent. That seems unusually high to me, but we must remember that in those days (1858 to 1893), childhood mortality was high due to diseases and the lack of medicines to treat them. The life span of most of the adults buried there was around 69 years. Two of them lived to be 86 years old and one man, R. R. Hodnett, lived to be 93. He was the last person buried at Old Seminary in 1939 and also happened to be the last Confederate veteran in Ouachita County. There were only nine burials at this cemetery since 1900. Of course, some may have not have grave markers.

The remains of seven people buried here (Gossetts and Holts) were reinterred at Stephens Cemetery in September, 2015 at the request of the family. The fact that Old Seminary Cemetery was being neglected was the main reason the family decided to relocate the graves to a larger cemetery that is well maintained.

This re-interrment process caused quite a stir in Ouachita County. A group was working to preserve this old cemetery and noticed that some of the markers were missing. A police report was filed and newspapers and TV stations reported that vandals had stolen some of the old headstones from this cemetery. The family member who authorized the re-interrment was living out of state but saw the reports on Facebook and set the record straight.

GREEN FAMILY CEMETERY

About a half mile southwest of Old Seminary Cemetery is another abandoned cemetery. It appears to be the burying place for members of the Green family. The Greens were a prominent family in that area in the late 1800s.

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George and Marie Phillips of Stephens showed me this cemetery in 2000. I would have never found it on my own since it's in a remote area well off the main roads. I found 17 grave markers and most of them are Greens. I returned to this cemetery last month and found it still undisturbed. I was unable to find one of the markers I had found 17 years ago.

The markers of Simon Green and his wife, Esther are a bit unusual. These are the oldest graves in the cemetery. The names are engraved on a slab of marble about two feet high supported by pillars. The sides were originally enclosed, but have been broken on Simon's grave. Esther's marker is still intact.



I corresponded with a descendant of the Green family a few years ago and was told the family planned to erect a fence around the cemetery, but this has not been done. The earliest marked grave in this cemetery is that of Simon Green (pictured above on the right). He died in 1853 and Esther, his wife, died in 1866. The last burial here was in 1913 (based on the dates on the markers).

Of the 17 marked graves here, four of them are children.

According to an article published in May, 2017, the Green Family Cemetery is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Hopefully, the owners of this property will continue to preserve this old cemetery.

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GREEN-HUGHES CEMETERY

About a half mile south of the Green Family Cemetery is another abandoned cemetery with a few marked graves. It is called the Green-Hughes Cemetery because most of the markers have those surnames. This is an African-American cemetery.

A narrow oil field road provides access to this cemetery, but you won't be able to see it since it's about 150 feet off the road. I also recorded the names at this cemetery in 2000 and returned to it in January of this year. I found all the markers except one which is probably covered by leaves.

The dates on the markers range from 1851 to 1883. I saw evidence of several unmarked graves (ground depressions that I'm sure are graves). Some of the markers are quite a distance from other markers, so that leads me to believe this was once a fairly large cemetery. Of the eight marked graves here, five were children under age 10 which is 62%.



Here is a picture of one of the graves with a large tree growing so close to the marker that I was unable to get a good picture of the marker.

These are just three of the abandoned cemeteries I have visited over the last few years. Nevada County has 22 abandoned cemeteries that are no longer maintained and I'm sure Ouachita County has even more since it is larger.

Some think that a store-bought grave marker will last hundreds of years, but like everything else, if they are not maintained they will soon deteriorate. It is common for algae to grow on grave markers (some types worse than others). There are products available to clean old grave markers and, if done right, they can be restored to look new again. Some of the old tall grave markers fall over after many years and some of them break. Some of the smaller ones get covered by fallen leaves. Large trees left in cemeteries sometimes fall and break some of the markers. Some families purchase a newer marker to place at the grave site when the old one becomes illegible or is broken.

I'm sure these old settlers never imagined that someday their burial place would be completely neglected. Time marches on. People move away and some communities disappear like the old town of Seminary. It is a shame though that these burial places are not better maintained or at least protected better. All these people have descendants still living and a few of them become interested in their family history and would love to be able to visit the burial place of their ancestors. If you own land that contains an old cemetery, please protect it so that these old forgotten cemeteries will not be completely lost.

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RAINFAL RECORD -- February was a very wet month in our area. I recorded 14.1 inches at my house. Many roads were closed due to flooding and I'm sure there was much damage to the county roads. Ouachita County was declared a disaster area due to flooding on the Ouachita River. Flooding on the Little Missouri River also caused Hwy. 53 to be closed for a time.

ARMADILLOS



Those of us who live in south Arkansas are very familiar with armadillos. We usually see them lying dead on the highway after being struck by a vehicle. Armadillos have very poor eyesight.

They are a strange looking animal. They have been in this area as long as I can remember. They came to this country from Central and South America and are gradually moving further north. They sometimes root lawns looking for food and they dig holes in the ground, but I don't know of much serious damage done by armadillos.

It is said the first recorded sighting of an armadillo in Arkansas was in 1921 and that the first one seen in the United States was in 1849. Evidently, they were pretty rare in our part of the state in 1931. I found this news item in the local newspaper in Camden, Arkansas dated October 8, 1931.

An armadillo was shot near the cemetery by Joe Morris. These queer looking animals are usually found in Central and South America and a few have been spotted in Texas. Morris noticed the animal a few days ago and tried to kill it with a shotgun, but the shot bounced off the tough shell. He used a pistol this time. The animal is on display at the OK barber shop.

Several years ago I mentioned something about armadillos while visiting my wife's family in Missouri and they had never seen an armadillo in that area. According to a map I found, they have now reached as far north as central Missouri.

Here are a few facts about armadillos you may not know. These come from the Internet and I assume they are true.

1. Armadillos always give birth to four identical young of the same sex, the only mammal known to do so.
2. They are used in leprosy research because their body temperature is low enough for them to be able to contract the worst forms of leprosy.

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4. They are good swimmers. They can hold their breath for up to ten minutes which enables them to walk across the bottom of streams and ponds. They swim to cross larger bodies of water.
5. Their teeth have no enamel and they actually have very few teeth.
6. Their main food is insects.
7. Because of their low body temperature, they do not do well in very cold areas. Despite this, they are continually moving further north.
8. Baby armadillos have soft shells similar to human fingernails which get harder as the animal grows.
9. It is illegal to keep an armadillo in Maine and several states prohibit them from being imported to those states. Montana classifies them as livestock.
10. In some areas of the country, people eat armadillos.
11. They are mainly found in the South, mainly in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida.
12. The word armadillo means “little armored one” in Spanish.
13. One armadillo can have as many as fifteen burrows—one for a nest and the others for hideouts when danger is near.
14. Armadillos have been known to share their burrows with other animals.
15. Armadillos are clean animals. They change their nesting material frequently and bury their wastes like cats.
16. They have four toes on their front feet and five toes on the back feet.
17. They are good at digging and can completely bury themselves within two minutes.
18. The life span of an armadillo in the wild is about 16 years.
19. The armadillo helps control fire ants.
20. The main enemies of the armadillo are dogs, bobcats, coyotes, foxes, mountain lions, man, and the automobile. The main reason so many are found dead on the road is because they jump straight up when startled and hit the underside of the vehicle.
21. They can outrun a human for short distances and mainly defend themselves with their claws. They will not bite because they have no teeth in the front part of their mouth.
22. According to the U. S. Public Health Service, there is no hard evidence that armadillos can transmit leprosy to man, but they can contract leprosy from man.
23. They were called “Hoover Hogs” during the Great Depression when many people ate them blaming President Hoover for their lack of food. Some shops in China Town in San Francisco sell them as a gourmet food item.

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I think God must have a sense of humor. He gave us many beautiful flowers and animals, but He threw in a few others that are not so beautiful except maybe to another of the same species (armadillos, hippopotamus, giraffes, and opossums to name a few). And don't forget, He gave us the skunk, mosquitoes, gnats, ticks, snakes, and other unpopular species.

SOME THOUGHTS

Most of you have seen this before. For some time, I have been sending out questions to my email contacts on various subjects (sort of like a discussion group). At the end of the article I will tell you the answers I received of who should be honored on a memorial similar to Mt. Rushmore.

Last week I sent out a question for you to name four Americans you felt should be honored with their faces sculpted on another memorial similar to the one on Mt. Rushmore. I did some thinking on that one trying to decide which four people I would pick. I finally narrowed my choices down to four prominent people who I felt were decent human beings who had made some valuable contributions during their lifetime.

If you gave this much thought, you probably found it was a little difficult to come up with four names. No human is perfect. A person may have made valuable contributions to mankind, but he or she may have had some problems in other areas of their life which took away from the contributions they made.

Some of the people I first thought about turned out not to be Americans such as Alexander Fleming, who invented penicillin and Albert Einstein. That got me to thinking about who has made the most contributions to mankind—Americans or people from other countries. Give that one some thought. You have to remember that the United States has only been a country for 242 years and some of the other countries of the world have existed for centuries.

I also thought about maybe picking a woman as one of my four choices. That got me to thinking about American women who had made great contributions throughout our history. I thought of names like Susan B. Anthony, Betsy Ross, Clara Barton, Amelia Earhart, Grandma Moses, and Helen Keller. Women have probably not received enough recognition for their contributions. They say that behind every good man is a good woman. Without the support of their wives, the men in our history may not have turned out quite as well as they did. Also, in the early part of our history, women were not as involved in things as much as men. They couldn't even vote until 1920.

Another way of looking at this is thinking of people who have had the greatest effect on mankind. That could be either good or bad. I think some of the "bad characters" in history have had the greatest impact on mankind or changed more lives such as men like Adolph Hitler. Just think how that one man affected the lives of good people all over the world including some of our own families. One could come up with a long list of cruel rulers of countries who have been responsible for millions of deaths throughout recorded history. I guess we could call it the "Hall of Shame" instead of the "Hall of Fame". We are still dealing with people like that today and I suppose that as long as the world lasts, there will be a good supply of power-hungry people who wish to take over other countries and cause hardships for their people in the process.

When it comes down to it, those most responsible for the success of this country are the millions of ordinary law-abiding citizens who go to work every day, raise their families, and spend their money which keeps the economy going. This includes farmers, teachers, factory workers,

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doctors, nurses, sales clerks, service workers, and a thousand other occupations which make up the so-called “middle class”. These people do the work and pay the taxes that keep the government functioning. It’s too bad many of our politicians seem to have forgotten this. We must not forget all those in the military who help to keep us free.

We have been fortunate to live in a country where we have many freedoms, although I fear that some of these freedoms are being gradually taken away from us. Some of this is due to the recent terrorist attacks or other acts of violence. We will lose some of our privacy as more and more cameras are placed in public places to monitor people. We are subjected to our bags being searched at airports and even a pat-down of our bodies before boarding a plane. Certain items are prohibited at some public events or public buildings. It is a shame that all this is necessary, but public safety demands it in these perilous times. Even your emails, Facebook postings, and cell phone conversations may be monitored.

The first ten amendments to the Constitution are known as the Bill of Rights including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right of bear arms, protection against unreasonable searches and seizures, and others. I think some would like to do away with some of these rights and use any incident to justify it. A freedom lost will most likely be gone forever.

There is a great problem with apathy in this country—people who just don’t care about things as long as they have plenty to eat and have some money to spend. Many of these people never vote (which may be a blessing since they are so uninformed) and many of them have little knowledge of how our government works. It seems to me that the schools have either stopped teaching basic things students should know or else some of these people were sleeping in class.

My hope is that this country will forever remain strong and free and that we are able to confront any challenge that comes our way. We are facing problems today that we never thought about twenty or thirty years ago and nobody knows what the future holds for us. We like to think that the best days for our country are still ahead. I hope that’s true, but I see many serious problems facing our country and I’m not sure we (the government or the American people) are prepared for what might lie ahead.

I am reminded of that sentence we always typed in typing class—“Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country”. President Kennedy said, “Ask not what the country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”. It seems the prevailing thought these days is how much can I get from the government or how many government programs can I sign up for. Our government has encouraged people to be dependent on the government instead of encouraging them to do things which would improve their lives so they could become productive citizens. Some people really do need help, but I think many are using the system to become professional freeloaders and this is passed on from one generation to the next. I once asked a high school student what she wanted to be when she got out of school. She told me she wasn’t going to work—she was going to get on welfare. That was in 1970. I wonder how she has spent the last forty plus years and what her children are doing.

Answers received—Jonas Salk, Neil Armstrong, Ben Franklin, Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs, Red Skelton, Grandma Moses, Billy Graham, Laura Bush, Tesla, Robert E. Lee, Robert Jarvick, Elvis Presley, Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, Jesus Christ, Ronald Reagan, Betsy Ross, Paul Revere, Eli Whitney, Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, Crazy Horse, Henry Ford, Bill Gates, Susan B. Anthony, Bob Hope, Louis Pasteur (Some of these were not Americans)

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23 Years After the Oklahoma City Bombing, a Poetic Tribute - by Don Mathis

The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was blasted into infamy 23 years ago this month. At the time (April 19, 1995), the tragedy was the most deadly terrorist attack on U.S. soil. A plaque on the site today offers words of healing:

“We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the impact of violence. May this memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity.”

Last month in Austin, a serial bomber detonated several blasts before killing himself. School shootings seem to happen more and more frequently. Terrorism happens all the time.

Terrorism has become a part of contemporary politics, and cannot be eradicated, said historian and author Andrew Bacevich during a lecture in San Antonio soon after the Paris attacks in 2015. “The best we can hope for is to reduce it to tolerable levels.”

When senseless violence occurs, we must grieve or seek retribution, but eventually we go on with our lives. The following is a poetic tribute from my visit to The Oklahoma City National Memorial soon after it was dedicated in 2000.



Twin portals bracket the moment of destruction. The East Gate, marks the time of the morning on April 19, 1995, and represents the innocence of the city before the attack. The West Gate reads 9:03, the minute after the blast. Image courtesy Oklahoma City National Memorial.



Empty chairs represent each of the 168 victims who died in the Murrah Federal Building bombing. Photo by Don Mathis

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Lest We Forget - by Don Mathis

You pass through the portal
and squint against the sun,
the time, forever, “9:01.”

A twin portal stands
on the other side of the street
forever reading, “9:03.”

In between is the minute
that never should have been
in 1995, April 19.

A pool, for reflection, inches shallow,
infinitely deep in its sorrow.

Walkways to nowhere, no destination,
leads anyone, quickly,
to quiet contemplation.

The power of the empty chair –
think of those who are not there
at the dinner table, the office,
those we miss...
Imagine, 168 empty chairs such as this.

Glass shards and stone
once showered a tree.
It gives me hope to see those leaves.
It’s still alive, still survives,
a symbol of the will of the people.

A chain link fence is not a barrier,
it’s a carrier,
a link to the memory of many,
to leave a possession,
to release an emotion.

A fireman’s helmet is hung,
faded and bleached in the sun,
emblazoned, “We will never forget you,”
and signed by a team
that performed the rescue.

A single Teddy Bear brings a tear
for the children that were here.

On the fence, flowers are tied.
Dozens have died.
Thousands have cried.

On the next block,
granite blocks of black,
symbolize the children
who will never come back.

A statue stands, “Jesus Wept.”
This is, after all, the Bible Belt.

Chips and stones from the destruction
now line the paths, their journey done.

Someday,
the feet of grief
may stop its step.
But the Murrah Memorial will still be here...

Lest We Forget.



Across the street from the memorial, local
citizens honored the memory of the
children that were lost. Nineteen granite
blocks surround a statue—Jesus Wept. –
Photo by Don Mathis