

PRAIRIE GROVE CEMETERY HISTORY

by Susan Parks-Spencer
August, 2014

The Prairie Grove Cemetery is located next to Highway 62 West on the west end of downtown Prairie Grove. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church, built in 1887-1888, sits on the southeast corner of the cemetery. This section of land is owned by the Arkansas Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and no burials are on this site. The first owner of the cemetery property, known today as the "Original Addition," which then included the church property, was Rev. Andrew "Uncle Buck" Buchanan and his wife, Sinai Buchanan. Highway 62 on the south side of the cemetery is Buchanan Street, named after Andrew Buchanan and his family. Rev. Buchanan and his wife sold a little over two and a half acres of land for \$25 to members of his Prairie Congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Stipulations of the sale in the 1838 deed included the congregation's promise to construct a church, a school, and to use a portion of the land as a cemetery.

Later, at an unknown date, the church donated over half of the western section of the property to the Prairie Grove Cemetery Association. The Cemetery Association, which was granted non-profit status in 1985, continues as the current owner of the cemetery and raises funds to help pay for its maintenance through sales of cemetery lots as well as donations.

The cemetery was expanded in 1900 with the Baggett Addition on the west side of the Original Addition. In chronological order, the next Additions were the Cummings Addition north of the Original Addition in 1917, the Dodson Addition north of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church property in 1958, the Rogers Addition north of the Cummings Addition in 1960, and the Loyd L. Baggett Addition west of the Original Addition in 1966. In 1985, the Cemetery Association purchased 5½ acres northwest of the Prairie Grove Cemetery. This land was partitioned into four 20'x12' Additions. Only two of these Additions have been named. The Bell/Carl Addition is on the southeast corner, and the Blakemore Addition is on the northeast side. The southwest and northwest Additions are unnamed and not in use at this time.

Many hand-carved marble and sandstone markers are found throughout the older Additions. There are several gravestones with the wood stump features of the Woodmen of the World's fraternal organization. Marble columns in the oldest Additions are visible from Highway 62. Inscriptions on some of the older monuments are almost unreadable due to age, and there are gravestones that are broken. Field markers made of rock or stone mark unknown graves from the 1800s. These markers are scattered among the older Additions, and many have been hit by mowers or moved around by people throughout the years. In years past, there were numerous unmarked graves discovered throughout the Dodson Addition by the local funeral home workers as they were digging new graves. That section of the cemetery was eventually abandoned for others, since they were unable to find unoccupied plots.

There is no cemetery sign or main entrance. Instead, there are five entryways leading into the cemetery: two from Highway 62 on the south side of the cemetery, two from Kate Smith Street on the cemetery's east side, and one entrance off of Parks Street in the northwest section. All are paved, with the exception of the road that marks the northernmost entrance off of Kate Smith Street, whose boundaries make up the northern edge of the Rogers, Cummings, and

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Dodson Additions. The south side of the cemetery is bordered by a drainage ditch, which was constructed during 1941 by men employed through the United States Government's Works Progress Administration (WPA) New Deal program. Arkansas Highway Department trucks brought in native stone that was placed on the north wall of the ditch. A bridge spanning the drainage ditch on the southwest corner of the Baggett Addition was built as an entrance to the cemetery. Another entrance was later added west of that access point.

The location of the first grave in the Prairie Grove Cemetery is not known. Chunks of rock or stone that served as grave markers are scattered throughout the older Additions. Some are broken, and others have disappeared. The oldest recorded grave in the cemetery is of a five year-old girl, Rachel C. Marrs, who died in 1818. The second oldest documented burial was of another child, Mary Ann Crawford (1822-1824). Until recently, Tennessee resident Mary Percilla Inman was thought to have been the first person buried in Prairie Grove. Miss Inman was visiting relatives in nearby Cane Hill when she became ill and died in 1831. Before her death, she asked to be buried in the beautiful valley she had traveled through on her way to Cane Hill. The Prairie Grove Cemetery Association in 1941 placed a commemorative marble headstone at her grave with the inscription, "First Grave in Prairie Grove." When the Marrs and Crawford markers were discovered a short time ago, the Inman grave became the third oldest recorded internment in the cemetery.

Some notable Prairie Grove residents buried in the cemetery include:

Colonel James Preston Neal (1820-1896), who is buried in the Original Addition near his mother Sinai Buchanan and stepfather, Rev. Andrew Buchanan, was the founder of Prairie Grove. Neal, a lawyer, was a veteran of the Mexican-American War in the late 1840s and mayor of Fayetteville, Arkansas, from 1851-1854. At the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, Neal joined the Confederate forces and was made "an elector" and voted for Jefferson Davis as president of the Confederacy. He also helped provide Confederate forces with much-needed supplies, eventually earning the rank of colonel. In 1875, four years after moving to his stepfather's Prairie Grove farm, Neal decided to establish a town. A plat for the downtown area was drawn up, and Neal opened the first "merchandising" business. He also served as postmaster from 1873-1877.

Nancy Morton Staples (1831-1921) was born in Prairie Grove and experienced many hardships during the Civil War. Mrs. Staples taught school as well as a Sunday school class, but after war was declared bushwhackers and other lawless men began roaming the hills. So, Mrs. Staples moved her students to a barn loft. Immediately after the Battle of Prairie Grove she attended to the needs of wounded soldiers on the battlefield until they were taken to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church or other makeshift hospitals in the area. To protect the dead soldiers from wild hogs that wandered the countryside, she and other local women constructed wood fences around the stacks of corpses. Later, bushwhackers invaded her ailing father's house and began burning his feet with a hot poker in an attempt to force him to tell where he had hidden his money. Mrs. Staples, who was at the house, grabbed the poker, seriously burning her hands. She

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was later given an honorary membership to the United Daughters of the Confederacy's Prairie Grove Chapter.

Dr. E.G. McCormick (1855-1938), a physician, came to Prairie Grove in 1884 and set up a medical practice. A year later he helped start the town's first newspaper, the *Prairie Grove News* that was edited by Joseph Garrison. In 1888, Dr. McCormick and another doctor, W. W. Mahan were tired of rowdy behavior and drunkenness occurring in the area and wrote a letter of incorporation and petition on a piece of notebook paper and sent it to the county judge. Prairie Grove was incorporated on July 25, 1888. Dr. McCormick's practice was next to his brother William McCormick and M. M. Collier's drug store. To facilitate faster prescription orders, Dr. McCormick strung a telephone wire from his office to the pharmacy. Eighteen years later, he and M. M. Collier incorporated the Prairie Grove Telephone Company, which is still in operation and owned by descendants of the doctor. He also helped establish a telephone line between Prairie Grove and Fayetteville that was the longest line at that time in the state of Arkansas. Dr. McCormick also founded and was president of the first canning factory, Prairie Grove Canning and Evaporating Co. He played an instrumental part in establishing a railroad line in Prairie Grove and other towns in west Washington County, when, in 1901 the Ozark-Cherokee Central opened. Dr. McCormick and other families helped organize the Southern Presbyterian Church in Prairie Grove in 1905. And in early 2014, he was added to the Hall of Honor at the Arkansas Country Doctor Museum in Lincoln, Arkansas, in recognition of his commitment to healthcare and contributions to his community.

Prairie Grove businessman Ernest H. Dorman (1859-1938) owned Dorman Monument Works just east of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Dorman was born in England and immigrated with his family to Fayetteville, Arkansas, as a young boy. He began training as a monument maker at age 19 and later opened his own business in Fayetteville, where he stayed until 1886 when he moved to Prairie Grove. His gravestones were hand-carved with a hammer and chisel until 1932 when he began using a sand blaster. Dorman has many hand-carved headstones in the Prairie Grove Cemetery, as well as other cemeteries in the region. Besides English, Dorman also inscribed tombstones in Latin, German, and Cherokee. The sandstone he used was mined from a quarry he owned in the community of Mountain Gap, located east of Prairie Grove.

James Frank Holmes (1876-1947) was a Georgia lawyer who moved to Prairie Grove in 1931. A year later, he was elected mayor and served in that position until 1941. During the time he was mayor, Mr. Holmes helped organize the construction of the city's water and sewer systems. He was also instrumental in starting a public library for Prairie Grove residents. In 1941 he left the mayor's office to serve in the Arkansas House of Representatives for several years.

A native of Tennessee, Joy Nelson Webb (1891-1976) was married to Prairie Grove dentist Dr. James W. Webb (1878-1947). From 1926-1932, she was owner and publisher of the weekly *Prairie Grove Herald*. Throughout her life in Prairie Grove, Mrs. Webb collected information concerning the history of Prairie Grove and its residents. At her death, she left her home and its contents to the Prairie Grove Woman's Club with the request that the house be used as a library

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for the public and a meeting facility for the Woman's Club. In 2003, the Cemetery Association constructed the Mrs. Joy Webb Memorial Pavilion that is used for outdoor funeral or memorial services. The Pavilion is located on the southeast corner of the Blakemore Addition.

Dr. Fred McCuistion (1891-1969) and his wife, Madge McCuistion (1904-2004) were a driving force in helping establish the Prairie Grove Battlefield Park, which later became an Arkansas state park commemorating the Battle of Prairie Grove. Dr. McCuistion's plan during the 1950s was to bring in historic buildings from the surrounding area to form a "Pioneer Village" showing how the early settlers and their families lived. Mrs. McCuistion's wish was to highlight the area's handmade arts and crafts. On Labor Day in 1951, the Ozark Guild of Artist and Craftsmen (that later merged with the Arts Center of the Ozarks in Springdale, Arkansas), of which Mrs. McCuistion was a member, strung a clothesline in the park for artists to exhibit their works. This art display evolved into the yearly Clothesline Fair that continues to be held every Labor Day weekend at the Prairie Grove Battlefield State Park and attracts thousands of visitors.

Generations of families are buried in the Prairie Grove Cemetery. Rachel C. Marrs and Mary Ann Crawford, the two young girls with the oldest headstones in the cemetery, were both related to the Buchanan family. Descendants of the Buchanans still live in the area. Other pioneer families buried in the cemetery include Blakemore, Borden, Campbell, Carl, Carnahan, Carney, Cummings, Cunningham, Dearing, Edmiston, English, Hannah, Morton, Parks, Pittman, Pyeatt, Rogers, Shofner, Tilley, West, and Wilson.

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