

HOPEWELL CEMETERY

By Dale Jennings

Hopewell is one of Shreveport's oldest African American cemeteries. It is located along "Coates Bluff," a segment of old Pierre Bayou on the back side of Wright Island, and is probably the site of the early settlement of Coates Bluff. This is in the Stoner Hill area of Shreveport. It covers about two acres of a twenty-three acre strip of land along the bluff. The tract was never sold by the U. S. government in its sale of area public lands beginning in 1840. The tract's first recorded owner was William J. Sayers, who acquired "color of ownership" prior to 1892, probably by uncontested usage and payment of parish taxes.

Caddo Parish conveyance records show that on August 8, 1891, William Sayers sold one acre in the northwest corner of the tract to the Hopewell Church. The church's stated purpose was for a church site and graveyard. Simon Ford, a trustee of the church, signed a one year note for \$20.00. The following August the church sold the property back to Mr. Sayers for the purchase price. On October 18, 1893, Sayers sold Simon Ford the entire twenty-three acres for \$150.00. Simon donated the land to his wife Rachel the following day.

Rachel McGee Ford died in September 1901, and the property was inherited by her daughter, Pauline. She was Simon's step-daughter and by then married to Charlie Calhoun. At the request of her step-father, Pauline donated a half interest back to Simon so that he could leave it to two of his sons. When Simon Ford died that December, the property was partitioned, with Pauline receiving the northern 11.7 acres and her step-brothers, Miles and Mitchell Ford, receiving the south half.

In March 1903, Pauline Calhoun, a church member, sold the Hopewell Baptist Church a small piece of land from the acreage. This 100 x 50 foot parcel, off the end of East Olive Street, was taken from the very northwest corner of the property. She sold a like parcel to Elmira Leshay. The church sold the little lot to the Victoria Lumber Company in 1911. The conveyances did not address the property's usage during the intervening years but it presumably would have been for the church site. The church's present site is very near there on the west side of C. E. Galloway Boulevard (formerly Hopewell Avenue) just south of its corner with East Olive. The cemetery is on the other side of C. E. Galloway (named for long-time pastor, Charles E. Galloway), but hidden back in the woods.

The Hopewell Cemetery first appears in the Shreveport city directory in 1925 with Charles Calhoun its sexton. The cemetery is now long abandoned, its graves widely scattered over its hilly, gullied, overgrown grounds. The grave markers are in disarray, many broken, and some covered by dirt and leaves. There is evidence that there were many more burials than the more than fifty readable stones that have been found. They record dates of death as early as 1898 and 1901 and as late as 1959.

It is not clear just what connection the Hopewell Cemetery may have had to the Hopewell Baptist Church. The church's written history makes no mention of the cemetery. It tells that the Hopewell Church was begun in 1882, primarily by freed slaves. After modest beginnings in a brush arbor and log cabin, a frame building was built under the pastorship of Reverend Aaron Wells (1889-1901). It further states that two lots were purchased from Pauline Calhoun in 1903 under the early tenure of Reverend Essex Stills, and that the church building was destroyed by a storm – in 1912 according to the church history. A new church was constructed and the mortgage paid off in 1914. The 1913 Shreveport city directory shows the Hopewell Baptist Church at its present location. The Hopewell Cemetery appears to have been a "free cemetery," open to all desiring to bury their loved ones there.

Pauline Calhoun died April 30, 1945, and her property went to her heirs. In the late 1940's the Caddo Parish School Board became interested in obtaining the twenty-three acres along Coates Bluff. Both the Calhoun land on the north and the Ford land to the south had become partitioned by sale and litigation. The property had long been fenced and used for cultivation and pasturage by the Calhouns, Fords and others. To satisfy the school board's desire for uncontested ownership, representatives of both tracts reached agreement among themselves and applied to the United States Bureau of Land Management for a land patent. The patent was issued and the Caddo Parish School Board purchased the entire tract in 1949. Valencia Junior High School was soon built against the south edge of the Hopewell Cemetery (where the E. B. Williams Stoner Hill Elementary Laboratory School parking lot is presently).

Hopewell Cemetery was inventoried by Dale Jennings in February 2006, and again by Dale, Reed Mathews and Carol Hill de Santos in March 2007, at which time several more tombstones were found. The cemetery is basically in three sections: the north section, south section, and the central section, which is cut off from the first two by two deep gullies.

North Section

Pearl E. Gountz
 Born Jan 7, 1885
 Died Jan 20, 1922
 Betty Thompson Chamber
 2042 Shreveport, La.
 (With organizational symbol)

Helen Bowie
 Born July 8, 1892
 Died Apr 15, 1916
 Thompson Chamber
 2042 Shreveport, La.
 (With organizational symbol)

Georgia Shufford
 Died Jan 12, 1916
 Royal Mansion Chamber
 809 Shreveport
 (With organizational symbol)

Jackson Prisilla
 Feb 6, 1945 Age 65 years
 Robert Father
 Gus Brother

Thadeus Coleman
 Aug 24, 1885
 Dec 3, 1944 Age 59

Mother
Henryetta Dyson
Died Jan 27, 1916
Erected by her daughters
Mahalia Cuetta and Helena

Crawford Dillard
Died Nov 25, 1901
(In destroyed iron fence)

Hamp Range
Born Jun 15, 1875
Died Nov 6, 1910
(In destroyed iron fence)

Minnie Hendricks
Born May 25, 1892
Died March 4, 1913

Villet Baudim (?)
Born Aug 1, (?)
Died May 10, 1948
Age 74 yrs
(In wire fence)

Charlie Benjamin
Born May 10, 1872
Died January 2, 1913

Chestina Wimberly
Died 1910
Aged 42 years

Bill Freeman
Died Mar 1, 1923

Jim (missing)
April 1898
Age 54 years
(Broken)

Robert Ellis
Died Aug 3, 1926
Aged 59 years
("FLT" in interconnected circles)

Jennie V. Hodges
Died May 1910
Age 5 weeks

Pearl C. Willis
Mar 11, 1895
Sep 3(?) 1951
Wife of J. T. Willis

Manerva Elbert
Died Mar 20, 1910
Age 72 yrs

Leander Galloway
Died Apr 20, 1939

Jackson Johnson
Pvt 816 Pioneers
February 26, 1935
(With military cross)

Central Section

William Leshay
June 9, 1893
Oct 17, 1918
Age 25

Clyde Leshay
Jan 13, 1904
Oct 16, 1922

Elmira Leshay
Born (?)
(Broken)

Ollie Shivers
Died Aug 12, 1922
Age 31

Caroline Buncombe
Died May 1919
Age 101

Lou Hardy
Died May 1, 1924
Age 85

Robert Fuller
Died May 5, 1924
Age 21

Fred Stringer
Died May 5, 1922
Age 7 mo

South Section

Henry Milton
Louisiana
PVT 1CL
508 Engr Serv Bn
January 13, 1940
(With military cross)

Charity Smith
July 17, 1884
Jan 18, 1944

Gabriel W. Smith
May 8, 1887
Nov 20, 1946

Robert Lattier
Oct 5, 1890
Dec 19, 1945
(Above-ground brick crypt)

Eva Mae Davis
Apr 24, 1900
Nov 24, 1944
Age 44

Father
Rev Essex Stanley
Born 1872
Died May 10, 1935

Mother
Alice Davis
Born 187(3 or 8)
Died Jan 15, 1934
STILLS
(Essex and Alice Stills are both interred
in above-ground brick crypt)

Above-ground brick crypt
(No inscription)

Bertha Green
Born May 20, 1888
Died Sep 25, 1930
Mary Knuckles Chamber
5404 Shreveport, La.

George McGee
(Dates cannot be read)

Eliza (- - -)ater (?)
(?) 9, 1871
Dec 4, 19(?)
Mother
(Broken)

Mary Knuckles
May 23, 1946
Age 64 yrs
(Broken)

Ida B. Small
June 28, 1894
Dec 20, 1955

Daughter
Lila B. Small
Kirkpatric
Sep 17, 1925
April 10, 1955

Ben Clark
July 4, 1883
Mar 31, 1956

Mother
Louise Bryant
1900 -1958

Austin Marshall
1885 – 1959

Gussie Gray
Died Oct 1955
Age 15

Pauline Calhoun
Nov 10, 1868
Aug 30, 1945
Age 66

Oscar Calhoun
May 15, 1891
June 22, 1952
Age 61 yrs

Nelson
June 22, 1878
Mar 25, 1950
(Broken)

In memory of
Virginia Johnson
Died Oct 4, 1948
Age 10

Mandy Harris
Died Feb 9, 1924

Below-ground concrete crypt
Bates (Crude lettering)

Charlie Stewart
Sep 9, 1888
Jan 22, 1952
Age 61 yrs

James Cooper
Nov 5, 1930
Apr 7, 1959

