

# Written In Stone

*By Sherry Johnston*

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## Riley Cemetery

It was a wet, dreary day much like the days of this week when Ted Urquhart, President of the Alabama Cemetery Preservation Alliance and I visited the old Riley Cemetery located on the Loree Road, not far from the Arkadelphia Baptist Church. An ornate iron fence surrounds the old marble headstones of one of the First Families of Conecuh. William A. "Gus" Riley and his beloved wife, Frances Elizabeth Lee Riley is interred here along with their two daughters: Nannie Augusta "Cousin Gussie" as she was affectionately called; and Nellie Riley Craig and her husband, Samuel Oliver Craig. Within the family cemetery lie Sam's sister, Bertha and her husband, Dewey Hopson Scruggs as well.

Reading about this devoted family, I discovered that Frances E. Riley, being the daughter of George Lassiter Lee and Nancy C. Henderson Lee, died first in 1915 and was buried on the old family place about 6 miles west of Evergreen. Following her in 1917 was "Gus" Riley, an old Confederate veteran and consistent member of Arkadelphia Baptist Church. Miss Augusta Riley, aka "Cousin Gussie", eldest of the three children of Wm. A. & Frances E. Riley, was educated at the old Evergreen Academy & Livingston College, and at the time of her death was residing at the family home on Rural St. She passed away in 1949, buried at the old family cemetery west of town. In the obituary for Nellie R. Craig, there was a discrepancy in the name of the burial place. In the 1966 Courant, they listed her burial place as the "Benefield Cemetery" and for her husband, one month later; the paper listed his as the "Riley Cemetery". This family lived and worshipped in the Arkadelphia Community, being devout Christians, large landowners with roots in AL and SC, all the way back to 1600 Ireland, according to family history.

The day we visited this hallowed ground, I discovered a key point in why we sometimes 'lose' our old cemeteries. Names change as old families 'die out' and lands change hands, leaving us with cemeteries known by another name. This proved to be true with the Riley Cemetery, aka 'Benefield' or 'Beddingfield' Cemetery in Arkadelphia. Further back into the woods, behind the Riley Family Plot lie the earliest known graves of a son and his father. The John S. Beddingfield Family lived in the Belleville District in the 1850, 1860 and 1870 Conecuh censuses. A son, Charles A. T. Beddingfield died about 1874, leaving a widow and young son, Charles, Jr. His father, John S. Beddingfield, died circa 1879. This family, as well as the Riley family and allied families all were prominent land owners, dedicated Christians, not only in their Sunday best, but in their daily lives as well.

For more information about these families, visit our archives in the Lucy C. Warren Heritage Section of Evergreen Public Library.