

Written In Stone

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Cunningham Cemetery ~ Part I

It seems my 'love affair' with cemetery preservation must have begun about the mid 1990's down a winding dirt road near Old Scotland, Tunnel Springs, Monroe County, AL. A family friend wanted me to help find the graves of her ancestors and accompanied by her daughter, as driver; Mrs. Young, as navigator; my own mother, myself and their precocious poodle, we set off one afternoon for the hills and winding back roads of NE Monroe County. Mrs. Young was Elizabeth Cunningham and we were searching for the Cunningham Family Cemetery and upon finding it, I still remember the awe and reverence as she fingered the relief of stone indicating the names, dates and origin of her ancestors.

According to the Historical Atlas of Alabama; Cemeteries by Location, this cemetery is located in Township 8 North, Range 8 East, Section 15 and is identified as # 140-NE on the cemetery map. After Mrs. Young's visit, the entire cemetery was restored to its former beauty, and a dedication service was held honoring those buried there, attended by family descendants, community leaders, and preservationists. The earliest known grave is that of Mary Cunningham, wife of Dr. William M. Cunningham. Mary was born in Mecklenburg County, VA 1814 and died in Monroe County, AL 22 March 1843. The last known interment in the cemetery appears to be that of Willie Helen Cunningham, daughter of Sarah Fox (the 2nd wife) and Dr. William Cunningham, who was born in Burnt Corn, 19 Feb. 1868 and died in Evergreen, AL 23 March 1949 at age 81. "Miss Willie" as she was known here in Conecuh County, was educated at Judson College, and began her teaching career in 1894 when the State Secondary Agricultural School came into being. She taught two full generations of children during her long teaching career, and started with the third generation when she taught elementary grades at Evergreen City School. She retired from teaching in 1943, and had precious little time to enjoy her retirement before her death in 1949.

Dr. Wm. Cunningham, born in VA, 21 April 1809, was the son of William and Sallie Marshall Cunningham. He moved to the Bermuda-Burnt Corn area of Conecuh/Monroe Counties in the early 1850's where he was listed in the census as a planter and physician, having graduated from the Univ. of PA in medicine. He practiced medicine during the WBTS; married his wife, also of VA and raised three sons: Robert, James, and William H. Cunningham. Their youngest son graduated from Tulane and served as a surgeon from AL during the war and died soon after the conflict. Dr. Cunningham's second wife, Sarah Fox presented 7 children to him. Dr. Cunningham died in 1867 and Sarah Fox passed away in 1914.

We'll cover more of this family next week, and discover some of those other descendants with ties to both Monroe and Conecuh Counties, still living today, preserving cemeteries.