

Written In Stone

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Protection of Cemeteries in Alabama

Over the last several weeks, I've had various queries as to how the cemeteries in our state are protected from economic development, timber management or even, oil production. So many people mistakenly think that just because there are no visible signs of a cemetery, then, it's okay to dig or develop a piece of property. That isn't the case, especially rural Alabama and Conecuh County.

One of the main reasons for writing a column every week is to help make others aware of the many cemeteries which once dotted the landscape of our county, and also to help identify, locate, protect and preserve the ones we do know about. Written in Stone was developed to help us all be more aware of the plight of our forgotten history—the history that can be found in every little rural or town cemetery—museums of stone which can tell us so much about the foundation of our county and our state.

First off, the Burial Act of Alabama State Code, S13A-7-23.1 gives us all implicit instructions as to what can and cannot be done in a cemetery, whether willfully or maliciously and who helps to protect our cemeteries? Each one of us—the Alabama Historical Commission, the Alabama Cemetery Preservation Alliance, the Canebrake Genealogical and Historical Society and community leaders, and citizens.

If you have land that you want to build upon or enlarge an existing cemetery, one of your first steps would be to contact the Alabama Historical Commission, and your local historical society to see if they have records on the cemetery or property in question. You might find out that **you need a permit**, or an archaeological study done, or ground penetrating radar done to the land **BEFORE you dig!** Just because you own the land doesn't give you the right to ignore what's already there! Just because you can't see it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist!

For more information on how to protect or preserve local cemeteries, please call Sherry S. Johnston at 251.578-2670 or email at canebrakesociety@yahoo.com or the AHC's Cemetery Project Coordinator, Lee Anne Wofford at 334.242.3184. Copies of the legislation and Cemetery Register Applications are always available at The Evergreen-Conecuh County Public Library.