

The Ferris and Wilcox Cemetery Schematics

A Link to the Past

By David W. Martin

The Great Depression of 1929 left the United States in economic disarray. The American currency waned virtually worthless, resulting in company failures and unemployed workers. In 1933, to help ignite the stagnant and depleted U.S. economy, President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced a series of new programs, collectively called *The Real Deal*. One of these new initiatives was called the Works Progress Administration (WPA).¹

While the WPA was initially designed to fund the rebuilding of the American infrastructure, it also supported the arts, history, and culture of America. In 1935, the WPA began their mission by using local agencies to screen and hire qualified workers.

New and economically stimulating programs in which the WPA started and funded included the Federal Arts Project, Federal Writers Project, and Federal Theatre Project, and the National Health Survey and Historical Records Survey (HRS).

The HRS documented resources for research into American History. It was responsible for creating the *soundex* indexes of the federal census, which genealogists today rely so heavily on. The HRS also compiled indexes of vital statistics, cemetery interments, school records, military records, maps, and newspapers.

WPA Cemetery Survey Project

One of the survey projects conducted by the HRS was called the WPA Cemetery Survey Project. This project was overseen on a county-by-county basis, with each county producing a separate and distinct report. For example, some county reports were typed manuscripts with only basic data, such as cemetery name, location and marker reading. Other counties went further and researched newspapers to find the information to confirm someone's veteran status. Still, other counties submitted county maps showing the locations of the cemeteries that were included in the survey. A few went so far as to clean the stones before they were read.

The Ferris and Wilcox Cemeteries

The Franklin County Ohio Chapter of the WPA Cemetery Survey Project researched and documented many previously forgotten cemeteries. For example, two cemeteries had been long been abandoned and lost to the outside world. These cemeteries, named after the Wilcox and Ferris² pioneer families, were located in Perry Township, and possibly began as family burial grounds, which was common in the early 1800s.

¹ Johnson, Steve Paul, *WPA Historical Records Survey*, July 28, 1999. The entire article can be read at http://www.interment.net/column/records/wpa/wpa_history.htm.

² The first public cemeteries in the vicinity of the Ferris Cemetery were the Indian Run and Dublin (IOOF) cemeteries, both located on the west side of the Scioto River in Washington Township. They were established in 1816 and 1858 respectively. The following Ferris family members are interred in the Indian Run Cemetery: *James Ferris*, 9 Nov 1839 70y; *Lucy wife of James*, 14 Mar 1848 74y; *Inf dau of Harry & Mary* 3 Nov 1844. No Ferris family members are buried in Dublin Cemetery. However, the Mitchell Cemetery, also located west side of the Scioto River, but within seeing distance of the Ferris homestead, interns Mary Ann, daughter of Leroy and Mary Jane (Mitchell) Ferris, who died 26 Mar 1848, aged 4m 16d.

In 2002, the heritage committee of the Linworth United Methodist Church began researching the origins of their beginnings, which occurred in the late 1800's in Elmwood, later renamed Linworth. It was discovered that the Wilcox and Ferris families were prominent in their church history. Wilcox family members are found in the earliest church meeting minutes.³ The Ferris family conveyed their family cemetery land to the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1848.⁴ As part of the research, the committee decided to research the exact location of the cemeteries, and identify those who had been buried there.

Markings on an 1856 Franklin Co., Ohio map revealed a graveyard on the Wilcox land, and local lore has marked an approximate location for the Ferris Cemetery. A more intense search of the burial grounds revealed one complete grave marker (*Sarah O. Dau. Of J. W. & E. J. Michael, Died Sep 21, 1854, Aged 1 Yr, 3 Mo, 24 d.*, found in the Wilcox Cemetery) and broken pieces of markers in the Ferris Cemetery. Progress was being made to identify who was buried there, but the original intended size of the cemeteries and how many people were buried in them was still unknown.

The Discovery is Made

A thorough search at the Franklin County Genealogical Society provided vital clues needed to solve a portion of the puzzle. Old schematic drawings of the two cemeteries were accidentally found while researching other family history. Copies were made, but no Society volunteer there knew the origin of these drawings.

As a final effort, the drawings were taken to the 18th Floor of the Franklin County Municipal Building,⁵ to the *Map Room*. The manager said the copies looked familiar, but couldn't remember where she had seen them. Suddenly, she remembered she had recently been given two rolls of old cemetery maps, which she had labeled *Misc. 1* and *Misc. 2*. She unrolled them on the countertop, and a quick comparison was made. The print on the pages matched perfectly with the format and content of the schematic drawings. They were, in fact, copies of the final reports of the WPA Cemetery Survey Project, conducted in Franklin County.

Work Left to Do

Over 60 years ago, a group of men and women researched as many cemeteries as they could before the WPA funding ran out, in 1943. No doubt, they felt their contribution was small and perhaps worthless. But to the heritage committee of the Linworth United Methodist Church, these schematics are priceless, certainly not for their historical value, but for the content of the reports. Many research doors have been opened and will be explored so that someday the exact location of these two graveyards can be determined, and the names of those early pioneer and church members who are interred in these sacred spots of earth can be identified and properly honored.

³ See *Minutes of the First Mite Society Meeting*, recorded April 22, 1886, in Elmwood, Ohio, copied by Jim Thompson in *Remembering Our Roots, Elmwood (1877 - 1909) to Linworth (1910 -)*.

⁴ WPA Cemetery Survey Project, Franklin County, Ohio, pg. 297.

⁵ Located at 373 South High Street, Columbus, Ohio.

Row 5

WILCOX
CEMETERY
FRANKLIN CO. PERRY TWP.
OFFICIAL PROJECT NOS.
465-42-3-467 & 665-42-3-232

HISTORY

ESTABLISHED 1824. A
PART OF THE U.S. MIL.
LAND PATENTED TO
PHILEMAN THOMAS BY
U. S. PRESIDENT JOHN
ADAMS. MARCH-14-1800.

.09 ACRE

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