

Old Unity Cemetary

There is an old cemetery tucked inside an ancient rock wall in a residential area of Fort Mill. Old Unity, or Revolutionary Cemetery, as it was originally known, dates back to 1788 when Unity Presbyterian Church was founded in the settlement.

An old surveyor's plat shows the land was originally leased to Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt and then to Martha Elliott White, widow of Capt. Joseph White. On the larger plat, a smaller plat is drawn showing 4.75 acres with the name "Meeting House" on it. Facing the meeting house is a one-acre plot with "G.Y." (for graveyard) marked on it.

The first Unity Church has been described by the late Miss Zoe White as "a small log structure in the shape of an 'L' situated 1 1-5 miles from Fort Mill. This building was burned and a second, a log house, in the shape of a 'T,' was built in 1804 about one-fourth of a mile south of the graveyard gate." In 1838, a third church was built at the site of the present Unity Presbyterian Church on Tom Hall Street.

The Revolutionary War graveyard was left behind its four-foot-high stone wall. Among others, buried in the cemetery were Revolutionary War heroes and their families. The Revolutionary War veterans buried there are Capt. Richard Springs, Alex Faires, Capt. Joe White, Capt. John White, Theodore Webb and Robert Harris. In 1909, Bessie Springs Childs of Columbia came to investigate the old cemetery of her ancestors. She was both disturbed and intrigued by what she found and wrote an account which was printed in *The State*, June 13, 1909. Mrs. Childs, an ardent DAR member, wrote of arriving in Fort Mill by train one morning. After she had breakfast at an inn, she engaged a carriage to take her and a friend to Old Unity cemetery.

She wrote: "We drove for a mile through a beautifully shaded road, bordered by virgin forests, great tall timbers sheltering us on the way, grand and magnificent trees....Suddenly our driver stoppedThe woods were so dense we could not have even passed a second vehicle....we saw through the trees gravestones scattered among them, grown dark with age. We wended our way in, now on foot, to find ourselves in the most peculiar surroundings. This stone wall inclosed [sic] a space of an acre square. The trees had grown up so dense that it would seem that the rays of the sun had not penetrated through for years and years. Vines were matted underfoot, and we were frequently warned by our guides to beware of snakes, as they were numerous.... We had to grope through in a creeping posture, while fighting briars overhead and vines underneath until we began to find the names of the silent dwellers of this place and then we forgot our bodily discomforts...."

Mrs. Childs next copied the inscriptions and then laid plans to inform as many of the descendants as she could. She wanted their help in the restoration and preservation of Old Unity. With the assistance of Mrs. R.M. Bratton of York, state regent, the Kanawha Chapter of the Daughters of Revolution in Fort Mill was organized as a result of her visit.

Eventually, a bronze plaque was placed by the DAR near the old iron gate.

There were at least three Confederate veterans buried at Old Unity. Green Burns and U. Parks were from Fort Mill district but no one knew the name of the uniformed stranger who was passing through from Virginia when he fell ill and died and was buried in the cemetery. In 1933, the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the American Legion Auxiliary decided to join forces to mark the graves of the three Confederate soldiers.

Louise Pettus is a renowned local historian. "Fort Mill History" is sponsored each month by the Fort Mill Downtown Association. Check them out on the Web at www.fortmilldowntown.com.