

# FORT MILL TIMES

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## Unity Church Cemetery dates to 1788

### Fort Mill History

By Louise Pettus Fort Mill Times

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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 that the land was originally leased to Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt and then to Martha Elliott White, the 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 Graveyard was left behind its four-foot stone wall. Among others buried in the cemetery were Revolutionary heroes and their families. The Revolutionary War veterans buried there were 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 that 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.

"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 stopped... The 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.

"The trees were growing right up out of the middle of the graves, the tombstones were being jostled out of place by the crowding of roots and branches, the vines were climbing up over all, connecting them together in festoons."

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 Mrs. Childs' visit.

Eventually, a bronze plaque was placed near the old iron gate:

"This marks the site of Unity Presbyterian Church and graveyard 1788. Erected by Kanawha Chapter, DAR, 1932."

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.fortmilledowntown.com](http://www.fortmilledowntown.com).*