

"Our Cemetery" by Nannie H. Smathers on September 14, 1989

In the year 1916, Mr. & Mrs. J.B. Rogers gave to the community a piece of land to be used as a burial ground. This is the land that we now know as Piney Grove Cemetery. On December 12, 1916, a deed for $\frac{3}{4}$ acre, more or less, was conveyed to the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The trustees at that time were Mr. W.H. Rhodarmer, A.A. Reed, D.D. Reid, J.B. Rogers and H. J. Rogers.

By some unknown method, this land was divided into lots with each family getting one lot. Some chose a lot that ran straight through the length of the cemetery. Others chose two lots running half the length. In my opinion each family in the community got a lot at that time. They were as follows: James B. Rogers family; Sherman Rogers family; Medford family; Rhodarmer family; Rhinehart family; Vance family; Shook family; Reid family; Pless family; Pressley family; Putnam family; and Stamey family.

Then as today, each family had complete control over their portion and knew exactly where it lay, and they were to decide who would be buried within their space. Some graciously shared with outsiders. I remember the J.B. Rogers family gave space to the Ellis family. They were from Pennsylvania. Mr. Ellis ran a little store at the foot of the hill. The building was crude and very rough, once having been used by Uncle John Grahl as a corn mill. The thing I remember most about it, he sold snuff, tobacco, and moon pies. The Medford family allowed the Charlie Turpin family space in their lot. This family lived on the Chambers Farm, now known as Mary Freeman farm. The Medfords graciously allowed them within their lots. Sherman Rogers family gave space to a Mr. Pilkington and son in their lot; which shows each family could decide how their space was used.

Early on there was no organized committee to direct or provide the upkeep. As I first remember it, there were few graves. They were mounded up into little hills, no grass. Many weeds, saw-briers, and broom sedge. But my fondest memory is about the birch patch. On the back side near the woods patches of ground birch grew. Birch is a little plant several inches high with shiny leaves that carpet the ground. The children would gather the leaves and chew them as chewing gum. Being little gum at that time, it was a great treat. I could hardly wait to get to Sunday School. I hate to admit this, but as I look back the birch patch was probably the reason I came to Sunday school so religiously; and I did. Aunt Ida once gave me a little testament for perfect attendance. I still have it. About three years ago, I stepped through the back fence and would you believe the birch patch was still there! I plucked off a hand full of leaves and chewed them. At once I rolled back 65 years and was 8 years old again, chewing birch in the cemetery.

There were no lawn mowers at that time and everything grew at random. Maybe once or twice a year the families would meet, bringing hoes, mattocks, and mowing scythes and beat down the wild growth; maybe put fresh flowers from the garden or the roadside on each grave. Not until many years later was a committee organized to supervise things. Unlike today, back 60-70 years ago, there were few aggressive people- few pushers and movers. Maybe it was because there were few people. They were few and far between, with no mode of transportation or communication. Much different from today where we are all pushers and movers or bosses! Those who can't push, always boss.

I want to tell you my memories of some of the pushers and movers of that day who had a very direct influence on Piney Grove Cemetery. These were those aside from the kind people who donated the land. They, of course, were number 1. The first was Aunt Ida Pless Reed. I always thought she was the boss. She was my first Sunday School teacher and as I now think of it, I thought she was the boss of everything. At that time, we had no assigned preacher. Once or twice a month, maybe more, maybe less, a traveling preacher would come through and preach for us. The roads were so bad down the river, and through the creek by Ruth Pressleys a car could hardly get through and much of the time the preachers would park their Model Ts or whatever at Uncle Joe Hargroves and walk across the Rhinehart-Rhodarmer hill (the high hill) to church, which was quite a distance. They were most devout, so please forgive me when I criticize them. Most of the time Aunt Ida would attend to our spiritual needs and believe me she could outshine those preachers! I thought she was an angel. Of course she was very reserved, very sincere. She presented everything in a calm, lady-like manner, quite different from the circuit riders who yelled and screamed and preached nothing but Hell Fire and brimstone. They scared me to death and I was under the seat most of the time. Is it any wonder I thought Aunt Ida an angel-I still do!

I remember when she decided a woven fence should be erected to keep the cows and other animals from wandering over the graves. For months and months she begged and pleaded with one and all to get money for that. She got little from each, as there was precious little to live on, let alone give to the cemetery. I remember how proud she was when Mr. Turpin, the same one from Chambers Farm allowed to be buried in the Medford lot, gave her a dollar. Mr. Joe Vance gave a dollar. I'm sure that was a large amount as she was impressed enough to tell it. None the less, after many months, she got enough to build that woven fence. Anything she tackled was a complete success; no one quite like her.

Before the time of even a push mower, Mary Hardin was on the Rhodarmer lot with a reap hook. Week after week, month after month she fought the grass and weeds. Finally she bought a push mower. I can see her yet behind that little mower coming up the road to the cemetery. Week after week and month after month, she mowed that Rhodarmer lot. I used to think she stayed there all the time. She did this for many years and only gave it up after Herman, Delmar,

Mattie and others got things organized and had the means to have the entire cemetery mowed. No one was more faithful than Mary Hardin.

Then there was Delmar Reid, also Herman Rogers. Without these two, Piney Grove Cemetery and Church would not be what it is today. They were great leaders and gave much of their time, talent, and money to make the cemetery and church a memorial to their ancestors. At one point they decided a lawn mower was needed, so the members of the church could take turns with the mowing. Of course it was a push mower, there were no others. They started collecting funds and after a time it was purchased. Mary Martin tells me it was a great day when the mower arrived. Many members took part in using it, but for years the most faithful ones were Delmar Reid and Claude Rhinehart.

Next we have Mattie Pless Rogers, Herman's wife-Aunt Ida's sister. She was as vivacious and as aggressive as Aunt Ida. A natural born solicitor and salesman, she more or less took over after Delmar resigned. She collected funds far and wide for many causes plus the cemetery. She took care of the funds, wrote the checks, and along with Herman hired the workmen. She was from a large family and I'm sure she harassed them constantly for money to maintain the work. She and Herman were the first ones to put order to the whole operation. They contributed and led throughout their lifetime. There are many more worthy of mention, but it is impossible to do so. After Mattie, Johnny Woody took over the entire task of the operation and has held it since. One year he contacted Mountain Projects who had a crew that was funded by the Federal Government and for several months we got free mowing, only having to pay for gas and furnish the mower. Since then it has been contracted yearly to a Lawn Maintenance service. That has worked out well until this season when the weather and grass have refused to cooperate. It's rained too much and the grass has grown too fast for anyone to keep up with it. It's been a most unusual season. Maybe next year will prove better.

In 1982, Bill Rhodarmer became very interested in the operation of the cemetery. On July 27, 1982, he called a community meeting for the purpose of forming a committee to help with the direction of upkeep. Not only for immediate, but for future lifetime care. Twenty two members attended. At that meeting it was decided that as from the beginning, no trustee or director of said committee would have jurisdiction over any family lot, that would remain as from the beginning; entirely up to the individual families. The minutes of that meeting show three trustees elected. Elwood Shook, Martin Rogers, and Jack Rogers, with Elwood Shook chosen as chairman. Their main purpose was to have Cemetery Day each year and collect funds to be deposited in checking and used for immediate upkeep, hoping for enough to last through the year. Also Wells Funeral Home was instructed to call someone on this committee if anyone outside the original families should want to be buried there. The committee in turn would get in touch with the family concerned and they were to decide on the matter. As far as I know, this has worked out well with no friction whatsoever. Since that meeting in 1982, there has been a Cemetery Day always held on the third Sunday in September, and we have always collected enough to tide us over until the next year. Aside from this fund which is on checking and used for immediate care, many wanted to establish a perpetual memorial fund to be invested on interest and to use only the interest for maintaining said cemetery, thus insuring future care. This fund was established in 1981. The first Certificate of Deposit was purchased for \$1000 with memorial funds from friends and family of Nancy Smathers Haire. Mrs. Delmar Reid had left \$500 from the Reid Estate to be used in like manner. Memorial gifts for Mattie Pless Rogers amounted to several hundred dollars and it along with the Reid money purchased the second CD, the Reid-Rogers bond. In 1988, Connie Shook Patrick donated \$1000 and another CD was purchased, the Shook-Patrick bond. These certificates are on interest at Canton Savings. So far, none of the interest has been used thus adding to original funds for later use.

The trustees of this fund are Martin Rogers, Gale Neal, Johnny Woody, Connie Patrick and Nannie Smathers. As others contribute, the by-laws can be amended and others added. We hope many others will contribute and build the total to such an amount that we will always have enough for upkeep.

This about brings us up to date on cemetery matters, but like Jim and Tammy Faye, we have another cause of great importance. The road to and from the cemetery. As many of you know Walter and Neil Roberts and our late beloved Pop Rogers have dedicated many hours in collecting funds for this. The lower part is finished, taking \$5000 for this. With many hundred of that coming as memorials for Pop. But as you will note, the upper portion is in bad need of repair. You can hardly navigate it. Therefore, we must start working to finish this project. Nell tells me they have over \$1000 in interest. She has bought a small bucket (10 quarts) It is in the back of the church and she is hoping you will drop in a mite. In fact, she wants you to fill the bucket. All kidding aside, we must organize and finish that project. If we all give a little each month it won't be a burden on anyone and before we know it will be complete. It is my wish and prayer, we as friends and neighbors, will always work together on these two common goals and keep this sacred, hallowed ground as a memorial for all those buried there.