St. Luke's United Methodist Church
Graveyard and Cemetery Burial Site Catalog and Database Project

By Dave Disney
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In 2018 St. Luke's members and Trustees partnered and created a catalog and database of graveyard and cemetery burials and grave sites including historical markers.

In December, 2018 this endeavor passed a significant milestone. The first version was published on paper (located in a notebook in the Fellowship Hall) and made available to the public through the St. Luke's UMC website (www.stlukesumc-okatie.org).

Background

To begin this task a Cemetery Project team was formed: Linda Batten, Judy Corley, the late Jerry Corley, Terri Reutter, Joy Preveaux, Jane Seymore, Sally Suberati, and myself. Over two days (March-April 2018) these servers inventoried and manually recorded (using pencil, paper, warm clothing, and comfortable shoes!) the first draft of markers and burial sites.

Their excitement, dedication, and commitment made it possible to begin the preservation, memory, and history of those interred here, our most important vision. There were several other goals:

- Accurate documentation and database for current use and hand off to future generations
- Accurate records and publicly available database to assist those researching family histories
- Inventory and document burial sites of unknowns

Creating a Database

A master database, hosted in Microsoft Excel ™, was designed and created to store 22 data/information facts for each entry. It can be used by the administrator to select, search, sort, print, merge, and/or export records in a variety of formats, groupings, and sort order. Entries within the database/catalog are listed alphabetically by last name, first name, and then middle initial to aid in a first or high-level search but can be regrouped and/or sorted for other purposes.

For example, each Memorial Day a report is printed to assist the Trustees placing a flag on each veteran's grave as thanks for their service including those who sacrificed their lives for our country. No matter the conflict they served in, all are honored, none are forgotten.

Input Initial Data

Hand entering data and information gathered during the teams the March-April field study was the first task. Next, data was sorted and checked for duplication and transposition errors. All data associated with St Luke's on Find-a-Grave web resource was exported, imported, blended, and merged with the initial data. The first tedious task began to merge these two data sources to improve accuracy and eliminate duplications. The initial unedited and unverified result was over 850 grave and burial records.

Refining Data

Returning to the cemetery was a must. Using a printout, an attempt was made to local each database entry, A through Z, to enhance accuracy. Likewise, the cemetery was walked and while standing at every grave/burial site an attempt was made to locate a matching entry in database printout.

But here began the real challenge, sometimes a record of burial in the database could not be located on the ground, and visa versa. Another challenge were the unknown burial sites. Each one had the same last name, "unknown."

Unraveling a Puzzle

This is where Paul Lamonaco stepped in to assist. His time, work, and energy during the hottest part of the year was deeply appreciated. It allowed the project to move forward. Paul and I visited the cemetery to unravel puzzles and Paul suggested several creative solutions.

Paul suggested to divide and mark the largest portion of the cemetery with the most burials, between the exit road and the sanctuary, into smaller sections creating more manageable geographic section more manageable numbers. He also described a system that is implemented within the database today. His system describes each unknown and unmarked burial site by its position in relationship to known objects, positions, or direction, for example "south of the sanctuary, west of and immediately adjacent to the grave of John Smith (DOB 1-1-1918)".

Paul also suggested when necessary--because of likeness to other unknown burial sites--that each unknown burial site be photographed once by itself and another photograph taken with a known grave in the image, just for sake of illustration, John Smith. This approach made it possible to ensure each unknown burial site is not duplicated nor is it skipped but is unique within the database.

Data Validation

Paul and I completed one more walkthrough to count of burial sites and graves then take and match each to a photograph. This provided final audit and verification. Photographs and images were tediously linked to each grave site within the database!

This too was challenging. As I took pictures then encountered confusion Paul returned to walk the cemetery. He and I literally crisscrossed the cemetery many times seeking a match for a photograph or seeking those accidentally skipped.

Demographics

Recall the overall vision, focus, and guiding principle of this endeavor is to preserve the memory of those buried here.

Also, to create a catalog and database for families, researchers, and visitors to locate loved one's final resting place on earth, a record that can be paid forward to future generations so that no one is forgotten or lost.

Outcomes resulted that surfaced and identified demographics. No doubt the cemetery is also our heritage, a line through time, our culture, families and sometimes snapshots of events, challenges, trends and matches to history.

Some example demographic and interesting facts are listed here. There are surely many more.

NOTE: Some demographics do not include Mary Bull and her infant whose graves were moved here in 1988)

- 813 (down from the initial 850) burial sites or graves including the columbarium
    - By Section
        - A: 437 (Front of church, south side)
        - B: 148 (Front, north side)
        - C: 49 (columbarium)
        - D: 179 (rear of church, not including C)
- More than 800 photographs of headstones, footstones and other markers are linked to database records
- Headstone prose: Inscriptions, words, spelling, engravings, feelings, deep beliefs etc. Some are hand carved, while some are truly the work of a skilled craftsman, artist, and author that are only appreciated by walking through and taking time to read. You might say, "folks don't talk or spell like that anymore." Start by reading Mary Bull's headstone inscription.
- Grave with the earliest year of birth, 1793 (estimated from year of death and age at death on headstone); next is 1801 (wife of man born approximately 1793)
- Grave with the earliest year of death and assumed to be one of the first burials here: 1849 (as a point of reference St Luke's sanctuary built 1824)
- There are 13 graves with a year of birth before the siege of the Alamo (February 1836)
- There are 292 graves with a year of birth before the discovery of Penicillin (1928)
- 73 are veterans from the Civil War, 1902 Philippines conflict, WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, that include some memorialized who never returned giving the ultimate sacrifice to freedom and country
    - By Section
        - A: 37
        - B: 15
        - C: 2
        - D: 19
- The grave of a house servant who only has a first name
- Sadly, 27 graves of unknowns
- Sadly, 76 graves of infants or children (12 and under), and 10 teenage (13-19)
- Names you might not have heard before. My favorite female first name is *Verlancher*, buried in the late 1800's at two years old, the daughter of H.W. & Eliza Mears; buried with her twin brother, one of several double interments in the cemetery
- My personal favorite male first and middle name is *King Solomon*
- Two wooden headstones
    - Col Brotle Thomas Alexander Sr 1819 10 1904 A
    - Blank wood plank immediately North and adjacent to metal marker for Mary Jane Cowart, 1891-1980; immediately West of Myrna Gail Harrison 1939-1940; "Col. T. A. Brotle died in my husband's great grandfathers house in Pritchardville at the turn of the century. He is buried at Bull Hill Methodist Church Cemetery (today St Luke's UMC, Hwy 170). It is at the foot of Oscar Foote's grave. There is no headstone but Mrs. Johnson is one of the oldest people around." (Note last name might be Bootle)

Moving Forward

A database/catalog is never finished, its accuracy and completeness are ongoing endeavors. Your time and assistance are welcomed! Please let me know if you have

- Need or interest in a special data content or export format including printed
- Need or interest in a photograph of one or more grave markers
- Knowledge to correct or enhance database information and/or format

What's Next

The immediate next step is to upload all grave/burial site photographs and link them to the online database as part of the St Luke's public website. This will strengthen and enhance the database for members, families, researchers, and visitors.

Paying it Forward: Final Example

Recently a couple visited the 10 a.m. service. The young man was a descendent of the Beach Family, in fact his grandmother is buried at St Luke's. After the service the couple walked the cemetery and viewed his grandmothers' grave site. I met the couple shortly thereafter.

After explaining the database, they were interested in viewing the printed version. The young man asked if he could obtain a xerox copy of pages containing entries for the Beach family. I explained he could have an electronic (pdf file that is static) copy mailed to him that day.

But the conversation did not end there. He asked for the spreadsheet and I suggested preparation of a special spreadsheet containing only Beach family including those with Beach as the middle or maiden name, plus with all headstone photographs linked to this special database that he and his family could keep and view when ever they wanted. They were ecstatic and by that Sunday afternoon these files were emailed to them.

Thus, demonstrating the value of a record that can be utilized and be of value to future generations. Many thanks to the St Luke's members who worked to make this vision and project a reality.

Respectively submitted,
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