

THE HISTORY OF MT. JACKSON CEMETERY

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Today and all through the month of May in Wayne Township, Marion County, there comes the thundering roar of racing automobiles wheeling around the "500" Indy Motor Speedway in preparation for the Memorial Day race there. But with all the hundreds of thousands of persons involved in the pursuit of sporting thrills and other recreation the time-honored traditional Memorial element of humanity is not lost sight of in honoring those gallant souls who, by their acts of bravery and sacrifices in times past made today's pleasantries possible.

So, among the myriad of places where such memorial services are held around Memorial-day time in May is a spot known as Mt. Jackson Cemetery in Wayne Township, Marion County.

Now it's 1967, and on the 28th day of this month of May another Memorial Service is added to the annals of Mt. Jackson Cemetery's History. This Cemetery truly is a historic landmark in the life-story of Wayne Township.

Here was a tract of land, originally a part of some 160 acres, situated 'way out west' of downtown Indianapolis and reached from there by way of old trail West Washington Street's rough and rutty dirt road which early came to be known as the old "National Road."

The time was July 20, 1821 that the United States of America conveyed to one Isreal Harding the piece of almost wilderness land lying just a little over three miles from the center of Indianapolis and a quarter of a mile north of West Washington Street along a lane which is now Tibbs Avenue. According to the last will of the person Isreal Harding, which will was signed by him on July 19th, 1842, there must have been a church at one time located on the land. This church was known as the Little Eagle Baptist Church. But the location of the church is not identified in the will other than "a certain piece of ground on which stands the Baptist Church called Little Eagle which said ground is cleared off so as to identify the same not less than one nor more than two acres."

Isreal Harding died in 1842 and as time went on the estate passed to survivors, Nancy Ann Harding, his wife, then in turn to other Harding heirs. Then in 1856, by marriage into the Conroe family, following then into the Pugh family by marriage in 1866.

In 1870 the Speer family entered the ownership status of the estate.

Considerable litigation was interwoven through the years as to heirs, deeds, wills, mortgages, debts, etcetera, according to the records through 1870, 1878, 1879, 1894, 1896, 1899, 1902, 1908 and 1914.

Really, it's a lengthy and interesting story revealing a bit of the pathos, the courage, love, hardships, travail and struggle through those early days of history in the making of Western Marion County, Indiana.

At any rate on June 14, 1880, one Sarah J. Speer was assigned a Deed for ownership of 63 acres of the original 160 acres conveyed to Isreal Harding back there in 1821. This Sarah J. Speer - in some instances in the records her name is quoted as Speers - was the daughter of Isreal Harding and married one Wm. H. Speer.

On December 28, 1896 Mount Jackson Cemetery officially and legally came into being. On this date a plot of ground containing 8 and 38/100 acres was laid out, and on the Real Estate Plat it was described as to be used for cemetery purposes and is to be known as the "Mt. Jackson Cemetery". However there were numerous burials made in these grounds before the area was legally established as Mt. Jackson Cemetery. It would be interesting to know exactly from what source the "Mt. Jackson" name originated. It could very well have sprung from the name of a little settlement nearby.

This little settlement came into existence through the impulse of a couple of pioneers named OBEDIA HARRIS and a MR. MUIR, who laid out a plat of ground on the "Old National Road" (West Washington Street) where Tibbs Avenue now intersects West Washington Street. These two old timers named the new settlement the "Village of Mt. Jackson" and the plot was recorded on October 27, 1838.

The man Harris was born February 5, 1789 in North Carolina and at the age of 18, started a Westward trek, heading across Ohio and into Indiana. When he put feet on soil in Wayne County, Indiana in 1807, and when he reached Marion County land in 1822 he must have found what he was looking for, because here he settled for good on a farm on the Old National Road. He died there on April 2, 1875 at the age of 86.

Harris was noted for his hunting prowess, and too for his activities in politics of the day. He was, it is intimated in the records, a weighty figure in the State Legislature.

This leads me to believe that it is quite likely that inasmuch as Andrew Jackson was President of the United States from 1829 to 1847, when Van Buren took the office, and Harris and Muir named the new village Mt. Jackson could they not have had Andrew Jackson in mind for the name of their venture?

A store was soon opened in the new village by a person name Daniel Hoover, and soon another by partners Moore and Kempton.

Harris' wife Sarah died November 24, 1842 and is buried in Mt. Jackson Cemetery.

At this writing, we do not have any accounting of the man Muir.

In 1902 Sarah Speer also deeded a strip of land to the Board of Commissioners of Marion County, Indiana which was recorded on September 15, 1902, which says in part,

"The said Real Estate is hereby conveyed to said Board of Commissioners of Marion County, Indiana, to be held by it forever for the use of the Public for a Public Highway and said Real Estate is hereby dedicated to the public forever for highway uses and purposes."

Then on December 8, 1904 another tract of land of 4.14 acres was recorded as an additional part of Mt. Jackson Cemetery, this also being Deeded by Sarah Speer.

Also on December 8, 1904, Sarah J. Speer recorded in her last will the following declaration:

"Whatever remains of said Mt. Jackson Cemetery lots undisposed of by my husband William H. Speer at his death, I will and devise to the Trustee of Wayne Township, Marion County, Indiana, and to his successors in office in trust, for the purposes of a public cemetery and with full power and authority to sell, dispose of, lease and convey in fee simple any and all of said lots in said cemetery that shall come into his possession as such Trustee from the sale of lots to be accumulated and loaned out on real estate securities, out of the income of which said Trustee shall keep up the needed repairs and betterment of said cemetery..... said Trustee shall upon the death of my said husband assume control and management of the entire cemetery aforesaid and keep the said in as good condition and repair as possible with the funds which shall come into his hands from the aforesaid source."

The husband of Sarah Speer died on or about February 14, 1910.
Sarah Speer died November 11, 1906.

According to the records there are no unsold burial lots remaining in Mt. Jackson Cemetery.

There is a lot of things I haven't found out yet in this research effort about Mt. Jackson. So, you might say I've just scratched the surface. For instance we have located one headstone with the year 1801 as the date of death. Others appear to have dates of 1790's. Of a certainty my research study of this historic old landmark shall not cease in my lifetime.

At the beginning of this commemoration this morning a faded and tattered Stars and Strips was lowered after many seasons of service overhead in this cemetery haven and a brand new one unfurled by the Color Guard.

And there's a little story behind the replacing of the old Old Glory with the new.

Being somewhat of a sentimental guy, especially in matters of occasions like today, I was desirous of having a flag donated by some patriotic group. But with time running out and the flag not yet offered, a Wayne Township businessman, seeing my concern, said the other night, "Don't fret another minute, I'll provide the flag--what size do you want?" And the next day the flag was delivered to my office. That man will crown me for telling you this because he's a very modest fellow, but tell you I must--the man is Paul T. Whedon on Rockville Rd.

Yes, it's a band-new flag atop the mast, flying proudly in the sky and casting its everlasting message of freedom over the land, which among those who helped to make it so, lie more than 350 soldiers here in Mt. Jackson Cemetery. The oldest headstone, so far, that we have located on a soldiers grave bears the date of 1891.

And in honor to them, and in memory of them this Memorial Service has been held.

/s/ *Ollie Baus*

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