

A Brief History of
Big Hurricane Cemetery
Brookwood, Tuscaloosa County, Alabama

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Big Hurricane Cemetery consists of approximately six-and-a-half-acres of land owned by Big Hurricane Missionary Baptist Church, Brookwood, Alabama. It was placed on the Alabama Historical Commission's **Register of Alabama Historic Cemeteries** in **2015**.

According to the *History of the Tuscaloosa County Baptist Association, 1834-1934*, by Henry B. Foster, **Big Hurricane Baptist Church** was constituted near its present location sometime during the year **1838**. There may have been burials in the cemetery before the church was established, but many of the oldest graves with legible tombstones have burial dates in the **1850s**. The oldest readable tombstone today is that of **John Doroh (1769-1851)** (also known as *John Dorough and John Dorroh*).

John Doroh (Dorough) was also one of the charter members of Big Hurricane Baptist Church. In 1973 the Alabama Society of Daughters of the American Revolution published *Some Early Alabama Churches (Established before 1870)*. It has the following entry on page 225:

Big Hurricane Baptist Church (located east of Tuscaloosa):

Charter members of Big Hurricane Baptist Church were: *John Dorough, Rebecca Mitchell, James McDual, Sally Wallace, Lucy Kennedy, Thomas Clerkland, Susie Sulinger, Levin Pumphrey, Eady Weaver, Zillen Wallace, Nathan Burrage, Sallie Sulinger, Rebecca Wallace, Corine Cleveland, Edward Kennedy, James Burrage, Rebecca Dorough, Margaret Pumphrey, Nancy Hosmer, Polly Mitchell, and Joseph Hosmer*. It was constituted in 1838.

In addition to **John Doroh (Dorough)**, at least two other charter members of the church are buried in Big Hurricane Cemetery: **Rebecca Dorroh (Dorrough) (1770-1852)** and **James M. Burrage (1795-1857)**. The BillionGraves.com website shows that *Big Hurricane Cemetery* has over 1,000 graves with the oldest burials in the nineteenth century. Many existing tombstones are illegible today, and a number of gravesites have no markers of any kind. However, it is clear that much of the current cemetery was used as a burial ground by the church and local community many years before it was officially recognized as a church cemetery in 1911.

Most of the land in the cemetery, today, was acquired by **Mr. James A. Wallace** when he was awarded an **1892 federal land grant of 159.55 acres**. The **Homestead Certificate No. 11316, Application 19632**, was signed by President Benjamin Harrison on **December 15, 1892**, and reads, in part: “. . . the claim of James A. Wallace has been established and duly consummated in conformity to law, for the South East quarter of the South West quarter, the West half of the South East quarter, and the South East quarter of the South East quarter of Section twelve in Township twenty-one South of Range eight West of Huntsville Meridian in Alabama containing one hundred and fifty-nine acres and fifty-five hundredths of an acre . . .”

James Wallace died in 1909 and in **1911**, his widow, **Ellen D. Wallace**, sold a **one-acre lot** of land jointly to *Big Hurricane Church* and *Woodman of the World* insurance company for a cemetery. She also sold an adjoining **one-and-a-half-acre lot** exclusively to *Big Hurricane Church*. These lots were located in the northeast corner of the *1892 Wallace land grant*. Both **Ellen D. Wallace (1842-1927)** and **James A. Wallace (1832-1909)** are buried in the cemetery.

Tuscaloosa County **Deed Book 85, Pages 492-495**, and a **March 13, 1911**, warranty deed state that **Ellen D. Wallace**, widow of James A. Wallace, and her heirs sold two lots of land (approximately 2.55 acres) for fifty-one dollars (\$51) to “*Big Herrican Church*” and “*Woodmen of the World*.” One lot of **1.07 acres** was to be jointly owned by the church and *Woodmen of the World* and used as a **cemetery**; the adjoining lot of **1.48 acres** was to be solely owned by the church and used as desired.

As time passed, burials were made throughout both lots of land and outside the original two lots conveyed by Mrs. Wallace. The church building was moved south of the cemetery, likely because of the cemetery growth. Multiple Deed Books in the Tuscaloosa County Probate office and other documents show how the cemetery has grown through donations and additional sales to its current size (as of *January 5, 2025*) of approximately *six-and-a-half-acres*.

On **July 23, 1970**, according to **Deed Book 585, Pages 565-567**, and **Deed Book 137, Pages 431-439**, **W. O. Kilgore and his wife, Gertrude C. Kilgore** sold two parcels of land for one dollar (\$1.00) to Big Hurricane Baptist Church: a rectangular tract of approximately three-fourths-acre (0.78 acres) for the cemetery located west of the land sold by Ellen D. Wallace, and one tract of land for the church located south of the Big Hurricane cemetery.

On **September 14, 1979**, according to **Deed Book 793, Page 219**, the mining company **Mitchell and Neeley, Inc.** sold for one dollar (\$1.00) to Big Hurricane Baptist Church a parcel of land containing approximately one-and-two-tenths-acres (1.22 acres) north of land owned by Big Hurricane Baptist Church. Incidentally, this is the only land owned by the church that is outside (north) of the *1892 Wallace land grant*.

On **April 6, 2016**, according to **Deed Book 1016, Pages 7462-7465**, trustees of Big Hurricane Baptist Church and Big Hurricane Cemetery, both unincorporated associations, sold **Big Hurricane Missionary Baptist Church, Inc.**, an Alabama nonprofit corporation, all property owned by the two associations (nine parcels of land). According to an April 12, 2016, letter from **Sydney Cook & Associations, LLC**, nine parcels of land belonging to ***Big Hurricane Baptist Church*** and ***Big Hurricane Cemetery*** were conveyed to the ***Big Hurricane Missionary Baptist Church, Incorporated***. That letter also listed the following references in the Tuscaloosa County Probate Office as sources of Title to the land: **Deed Book 588 at Page 312**, **Deed Book 137 at Page 431**, **Deed Book 85 at Page 493**, **Deed Book 585 at Page 565**, **Deed Book 585 at Page 313**, **Deed Book 1110 at Page 0327**, and **Deed Book 1110 at Page 360**.

On **May 24, 2016**, according to **Deed Book 137, Page 431** and **Deed Book 85, Page 493**, **Woodmen of the World** relinquished through a *Quit Claim Deed* any right, title, or interest to the parcel of land being one and seven hundredths (1.07) acres jointly owned with Big Hurricane Church.

Until 2016, the cemetery was maintained entirely by volunteers in a community cemetery committee, members of Big Hurricane Church, and families and friends of those buried in the cemetery. Gravesites were assigned by the community cemetery committee to requesting families at no cost, and cemetery maintenance was funded by donations to the community cemetery committee and the church. When the community cemetery committee disbanded, Big Hurricane Baptist Church assumed total responsibility for the maintenance and management of the cemetery. However, many volunteers still assist the church in maintaining graves allocated to their family and friends.

In 2023, the nonprofit corporation, *Big Hurricane Missionary Baptist Church, Inc.*, established a church Cemetery Committee to manage the cemetery, establish burial guidelines, and recommend appropriate fees to be charged for the maintenance of new grave plots.

On August 14, 2024, according to Deed Book 2024, Pages 17904 to 17907, Terri E. Zimmerman sold a parcel of land containing approximately two acres of land (2.17 acres) west of the Big Hurricane Cemetery to Big Hurricane Missionary Baptist Church for four thousand dollars (\$4,000.00).

The cemetery is in many ways a memorial for nearly one hundred veterans who are buried there. Records and photos on the BillionGraves.com website and other sources show **at least ninety-one veterans are known to be interred** in Big Hurricane Cemetery. **Sixty-four of those veterans** (63 men and 1 woman) served during **eight wars**. Three veterans served in two wars: Murry W. Smalley (1898-1950) served during WWI and WWII, and Maurice Terry Walker (1926-2000) and Eugene Weaver (1920-1979) served in WWII and the Korean War.

There are legible tombstones or records for the graves of veterans who served during the War of 1812 (two), Civil War (seven), Spanish-American War (one), World War I (six), World War II (thirty-one), Korean War (eleven), Vietnam War (eight), and First Gulf War (one: Laura Haun, 1978-2011, the only female veteran). The oldest legible veteran grave marker is that for Samuel J. Hosmer (1783-1871), a veteran of the War of 1812.

In addition, at least **twenty-seven veterans** are buried in the cemetery whose tombstones or records do not show if they served in a specific war. There are likely more veterans buried in the cemetery who have not been identified.

In August 2024, Big Hurricane Missionary Baptist Church submitted an application to the Alabama Department of Archives and History for a **historical marker** to be placed in the Big Hurricane Cemetery. The marker was approved in November 2024, for installation in **2025**.