



SECOND SITE CEMETERY

Historic Cemetery in the Backyard of Mint Hill, NC

THIS RESEARCH PAPER CORRESPONDS TO A WEBSITE I CREATED SPECIFICALLY FOR THIS PROJECT. PLEASE VISIT MY WEBSITE [YONDERCARLINA](https://yondercarolina.com) TO VIEW THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE CEMETERY, MAPS, GRAPHICS AND A MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION

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Located off of Matthews-Mint Hill Road in Mint Hill the Second Site Cemetery, or the Rice Cemetery as it is sometimes referred to, is a post-Revolutionary War cemetery linked to the still existing Philadelphia Presbyterian Church of Mint Hill, NC.¹ Philadelphia Presbyterian is the oldest church in Mint Hill as well as one of the oldest in Mecklenburg County. The Second Site Cemetery dates to 1780 and contains the grave sites of at least one Revolutionary War soldier, various church members, the enslaved and drifters who passed away while traveling through Mint Hill. This paper culminates a semester-long research project focused on the Second Site Cemetery. The entirety of this project encompasses a public website, photography, social media, multi-media as well as this brief research paper to create a comprehensive picture of this important historic site in Mint Hill.² The ultimate goal is to present the project to the public, and especially to Mint Hill as an educational and appealing cultural history resource. The research on the Second Site Cemetery delves into the lifestyle contributing to the community's overall health and well-being (or lack thereof), as well as burial practices, attitudes surrounding death, visible funerary art and historic preservation.

Historic Background

In the 1730s Settlers from New England began making their way south in search of more space and freedom from the crushing control of Great Britain. Many of them were of Scot-Irish descent and settled in the area of Clear Creek (now known as Mint Hill, NC). The Clear Creek Presbyterian Church formed early in the eighteenth century, although an exact date eludes the records. Clear Creek Presbyterian Church established their first meeting site and their first cemetery just off what is now Brief Road. The cemetery at this first site goes by the name Rocky

¹ Second Site is also known as Rice or Hart Cemetery and is one of five cemeteries connected to Philadelphia Presbyterian Church.

² "Second Site Cemetery." Yonder Carolina, 2022.

<https://sites.google.com/uncc.edu/yondercarolina/collections/second-site>

Springs Cemetery. Today, private property surrounds the historic Rocky Springs Cemetery. This first church site burnt down in 1780. Likely spurred to action by tragic destruction of their church meeting house, the Clear Creek congregation relocated to a new location, their 'second site,' off of what is now Matthews-Mint Hill Road. The congregation erected another meeting house here as well as the Second Site Cemetery, the main focus of this paper. Around this same time, the church changed its name from Clear Creek to Philadelphia Presbyterian, or the church of 'brotherly love'.³ The congregation remained at Second Site until from 1780-1826, eventually moving to their third and final location off of Bain School Road, where they are still to this day.

It is worth noting that Philadelphia Presbyterian Church is home to several historic movers and shakers influential in shaping Mecklenburg County into what it is today. Tunis Hood, one of the first buried at Second Site, was a major landowner in the Clear Creek area to the extent that we still have a road named after him, Hood Road.⁴ Another landowner, John Bain owned the land where Bain Academy in Mint Hill now sits. Bain was instrumental in the establishment of Bain Academy, which originally functioned as a boarding school.⁵ In addition to the Hood and Bain families, Reverend Russel Kerr's collection of church records indicate several signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence listed as church members including; Adam Alexander, John Foard, Matthew Stewart and John Query. Burial records specify the Rocky Springs Cemetery as the burial place of Adam Alexander and most likely for John Query.⁶

The historical time period of the Second Site Cemetery marks the beginning of a new country, the United States of America. Rev. Kerr notes an increased attitude of independence and revolutionary spirit in the lives of the church members. In contrast, we also begin to see

³ Russell M. Kerr. *A History of Philadelphia Presbyterian Church Bicentennial Year 1770-1970*. Philadelphia Presbyterian Church, 1970.

⁴ For more information on the Hood family please reference the monograph by Dellmann O. Hood. *The Tunis Hood Family: Its Lineage and Traditions*. Portland: Metropolitan Press, 1960.

⁵ Carol Timblin. "Who Was John Bain?" *Mint Hill Times*, October 31, 2018.

⁶ Russell Martin Kerr. *The Presbyterian Gathering on Clear Creek*. Charlotte, Philadelphia Presbyterian Church (2001)

social tensions caused by the confusing dichotomy existing between freedom and an economic system dependent on slavery. Many of the Philadelphia Presbyterian members were slave owners, some families likely brought their slaves, or indentured servants, with them from New England to settle in the South. Second Site Cemetery hosts a large African American cemetery with at least 200 graves, now delineated from the white side by a stone wall and a metal fence, mostly for preservation purposes.⁷ Unfortunately, very few of the grave markers on the enslaved side exist, but we can propose a possible identity of some of the enslaved based on church records. The membership roster lists slaves as members of the church, but also identifies them by first name (sometimes with their owner's names as surnames) and then "servant of

_____”⁸.

Lifestyle, Heritage and Death

The early residents of Mint Hill endured through difficult and trying times. A cursory glance at the readable grave markers at Second Site tell us that most did not live much past the age of fifty. Unsanitary living conditions and poor hygiene likely contributed to their shortened lifespan. While there were some wealthy plantation owners, poverty and disease ravaged many of the residents of the area. Most walked around without shoes, causing a significant amount of parasitic infections therefore affecting the overall health of the population. Whether you were slave or free, if you lived in the early 19th century, you likely suffered from severe anemia caused by hookworms.

Mint Hill residents handled human waste in a hands-on way, no doubt exposing themselves to various diseases transmitted through fecal matter. This coupled with the fact that

⁷ The stone wall was an addition orchestrated by the ladies of the church in 1922. The black aluminum fence came much later in the early 2000s due to the preservation efforts of George Timblin, Harry Hood, Charlie Burdick, Scot Treadwell and Bill Hawkins.

⁸ Kerr. *The Presbyterian Gathering at Clear Creek*. 188-191.

many families lived in small one, or two room cabins, sometimes with as many as ten children or more per family, created closely cramped living conditions contributing to the spread of disease. Most residents did not bathe regularly as it was a laborious and time consuming process of hauling and heating water. Most women gave birth at home and consequently most people also died at home. Those who fell ill relied on the care of their immediate family members.⁹ Sadly, many succumbed to diseases such as typhoid, diphtheria, cholera, scurvy, tuberculosis and polio, all of which are diseases we can treat today with antibiotics and vaccines.¹⁰

Historical Attitudes Pertaining to Death

While some may consider research into cultural and historical attitudes surrounding death to be highly morbid and depressing, it reveals a plethora of information useful in painting a picture as to how the people buried at Second Site processed the reality of death. Historical attitudes portray death as more of a passageway for the immortal soul than an extinction of the self as we read in James Crissman's monograph *Death and Dying in Appalachia, Changing Attitudes and Practices*. The 18th to 19th centuries defined death as tranquil sleep. During the 1840s the custom of routinely visiting gravesites became a cultural norm. Around this same time period, the idea of heaven becomes more of a physical state and less conceptual, this coincides with the increasing spread of Protestantism and the idea of "accepting Jesus into one's heart". Education in Biblical theology became more prominent and the New Testament's teachings on the eventual resurrection of the dead during the Second Coming also became a widespread belief.

According to historical examples from Lewis Saum, Colonial Americans, such as those at Second Site, seemed rather obsessed with death. It is important to remember that their world

⁹ James K. Crissman. *Death and Dying in Appalachia, Changing Attitudes and Practices*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1943.

¹⁰ Jane Gore. Mint Hill Historical Society Docent Tour, Mint Hill, NC. April, 8 2022.

was rampant with disease and war and death was a constant and close visitor in their homes. People died young and infant mortality was extremely high. Women died in childbirth and many children did not survive into adulthood. Death of children is an easily verifiable observation one can make while visiting the Second Site Cemetery. One barely readable grave marker stands in honor of Newton Stinson who passed away at 12 years of age, and many other graves seem to contain the bodies of children as well. While these attitudes do not disguise the anguish and pain of losing a loved one, they do not seem overtly negative. In fact, much of the poetry and writings of the time period, from poets such as Poe and Tennyson wrote extensively on the topic of death. Biblical teachings encouraged those left behind to look forward to their future home in heaven since that is where their deceased loved ones wait patiently for them.¹¹

It is difficult to tell from the surface what kind of physical burial practices the community employed, but there are a few determinations we can make through researching body preparation methods from the time period. Early practices for preparing a body used an apparatus known as a cooling board to drain bodily fluids.¹² Formal embalming by an undertaker was not a common practice until the twentieth century making it unlikely that anyone in Second Site was embalmed unless they were from a very wealthy and prominent family.¹³ Coffins were not in use until the late 17th century. If a coffin was not available the body would be covered in a shroud and carried to the gravesite in a communal coffin used over and over again for funerals. Burials eventually were near churches, but in an early settlement, they were near the edges of the settlement. Nails may be found in the soil as evidence of a pre-existing coffin. Considering the time period, it is likely most of the deceased at Second Site were interred in a pine box. Any pine coffins have long since rotted away, but surface level excavation of the cemetery by

¹¹ Lewis O. Saum. "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America." *American quarterly* 26, no. 5 (1974): 477–495.

¹² Kate Sweeney. *American Afterlife : Encounters in the Customs of Mourning*. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2014.

¹³ Jessica Mitford. *The American Way of Death*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.

biological archaeologist, Christina Brooks, revealed evidence of coffins in the form of nails.¹⁴

Carved and decorative gravestones were not as common in the 17th century, but became popular in the 18th century, which corresponds to genesis of professional stone cutters, like the Bigham Family Workshop, opening for business in Mecklenburg County.¹⁵

Funerary Art

If we are thinking purely in terms of logistics, inscriptions, capitalizations, lettering and spelling may show us more about the education level of the stonecutter. In this cemetery, it does not seem like there was a standard, however, from the various carving styles and dates of death we can attribute the grave markers to certain stonecutters. Professional stonecutters existed, but in the backcountry, most working men had multiple jobs, and some may have carved stone on the side. Early grave markers showing little to no imagery on the gravestones may indicate a lack of a skilled artisan in the area.¹⁶ If there is anything other than the name and date of death/birth, such as a verse, or a further inscription, we can confidently suggest that such stones are the work of a professional stone cutter artisan. The grave marker of William Maxwell's (the most decorative at Second Site) appears to have a maker's mark in the bottom right corner that reads "John White" and directly beneath we see lettered symbols. This is purely an observation and not a confirmed maker's mark and this inquiry requires further research.

Second Site Cemetery does not present a great deal of complex funerary art. Most of the designs are relatively simplistic. Stone cutters did not often sign their work, but through careful observation of the carved designs on grave markers and their various nuances, it is possible to

¹⁴ "Carol Timblin. "Clear Creek Settlers Arrived with Slave." *Mint Hill Times*, September 7, 2016.

¹⁵ Robyn S. Lacy. *Burial and Death in Colonial North America : Exploring Interment Practices and Landscapes in 17th-Century British Settlements*. Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2020.

¹⁶ Ruth Little. *Sticks and Stones, Three Centuries of North Carolina Grave Markers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

mount a reasonable argument to attribute the grave markers to certain stonecutters active in the area at the time. Factors to include in such an attribution may include the cut shape of the stone, lettering, grammar, design, type of stone used and the length of the epitaph. For example, a certain stone cutter may be well known for creating a particular shape or specific designs. Workshops such as the Bigham Family Workshop or Caveny-Crawford also mass produced generic designs that we may see repeatedly, but may also carve custom work for a wealthy patron. The Bigham Family was known for the coats of arms, which is not something we see at Second Site, but we can find at other cemeteries in Mecklenburg County such as the Steel Creek Cemetery. Bigham was also only active until 1820, therefore any death dates postdating the early 1820s, we can more likely attribute to the Caveny-Crawford Workshop, who became active around the same time Bigham closed down shop.

The Bigham workshop was the first major stonecutter in Mecklenburg County and operated until 1820. As descendants of a Scot-Irish heritage, they are well known for their carved coats of arms, but also developed simplistic grave marker designs. The general shape was a central tympanum with two smaller plates on either side. There are a few shaped like this in Second Site that correspond in the date of death to the operational time period of the Bigham workshop. There are also several that post-date 1820, however, it is possible that, while the Bigham workshop ceased production in 1820, they still had a surplus of generic grave markers for sale. Since we see consistency in design and style it is probable that some of these grave markers came from Bigham, or from a stonecutter associated with the Bighams despite a slightly later date of death. As a sideways observation, we also see how as a society, Americans began to move into the business of death as a way of earning a living.¹⁷

Another and more likely possibility as to the stone cutters responsible for the Second Site grave markers is the Caveny-Crawford Workshop. James Crawford and John Caveny

¹⁷ Edward W. Clark. "The Bigham Carvers of the Carolina Piedmont: Stone Images of an Emerging Sense of American Identity." *Cemeteries Gravemarkers*, 31. Utah State University Press, 1992.

opened for business shortly after the Bigham Workshop ceased operations. Some of their motifs are very similar to the Bigham designs, however, Caveny used more simplistic designs in his grave markers, including the physical outline of the stone, which we see at Second Site. Caveny was also known for carving the word “Sacred” into the central rounded tympanum of the grave marker, which is another hallmark of several of the stones at Second site, making an attribution to the Crawford-Caveny Workshop a strong contender for attribution.¹⁸

Due to age, environmental damage and abandonment, only a small percentage of the gravestones contain legible epitaphs. On the enslaved side only a few fragments of visible grave markers exist, however a modern addition of poured cement fieldstones with a cross marks the approximate location of many of the graves of the enslaved.¹⁹ Rev. Kerr’s records indicate that the enslaved mostly had wooden grave markers, or perhaps simply uncut stones found nearby. Any wooden markers, on either side of the cemetery, did not survive into the 21st century, however there is still a partial wooden marker on display in the History Room at the Philadelphia Presbyterian Church.²⁰ The grave marker fragments we see while walking around the enslaved side of the cemetery are, for the most part, smaller than on the white side. Over the years the damage and weathering left no visible marks (if any existed), but some show signs of vandalism, most likely teenagers scratching their names into the headstones and footstones. In some cases, the grave markers look like a rock likely found close by and some look like stones taken from the rock wall. Without more detailed records, photographs or drawings it is difficult to determine what exactly marked the graves in the 1800s and what is a contemporary addition.

Ruth Little’s monograph *Sticks and Stones, Three Centuries of North Carolina Grave Markers* becomes a highly informative and useful book for researching cemeteries in North

¹⁸ Christine Dorothy Willkie. *Early Gravestone Cutters and Acculturation in the Carolina Backcountry: The Bigham and Caveny-Crawford Stonecutter Workshops*. Charlotte: UNC Charlotte, 2014

¹⁹“Our Heritage.” Philadelphia Presbyterian Church, 2022

<https://www.philadelphiachurch.org/about/our-heritage/>

²⁰Timblin, “Clear Creek Settlers Arrived with Slave,” 1.

Carolina. Little focuses her research on information specific to cemeteries in North Carolina and the Piedmont. According to Little, artisans crafted most of the grave markers in this area from schist, slate, shale or sandstone (although sandstone was not the best choice for fine details). Little argues that the differing shapes of grave markers, such as those at Second Site, highlight a transition in style from the 18th to the 19th century where we begin to see the baroque style start fall out of favor for the neoclassical style. Types of memento mori common on grave markers may include; winged skulls, wings in general, cherubs, flowers, bones, hourglasses, fruit, hearts, faces, figures of the time, weeping willows, lambs and many more. The community associated these images with death, time, wealth, but considered them to be celebratory symbols of a life lived and a morbid reminder of their death. Also, symbols to ward off evil; hexfoil and pinwheel, fylfot or swastika, are common designs found on grave markers, but we do not see most of these at Second Site.²¹

While we have no way of knowing what the now deteriorated grave markers looked like at Second Site, we can observe from the existing markers that funerary artwork, in this cemetery at least, was very minimal. In Philadelphia Presbyterian's slightly newer West Cemetery, we see significantly more artwork on the grave markers ranging from the repeated motifs such as lambs or an hourglass to coats of arms and hearts. Customization of grave markers did not become common until the 20th century.²²

Historical Preservation of Second Site

In 1922, an early preservation effort by a group of women from the church, orchestrated the addition of the stacked stone wall to delineate the space of the dead from the space of the

²¹ Robyn S. Lacy. *Burial and Death in Colonial North America: Exploring Interment Practices and Landscapes in 17th Century British Settlements*. 68-75.

²² Lucinda Bunnen., and Virginia Warren. Smith. *Scoring in Heaven : Gravestones and Cemetery Art of the American Sunbelt States*. 1st Ed. New York: Aperture, 1991.

living. These stone walls remain in place today, however geological surveys of the property show burials inside and outside the stone walls, including the cemetery for the enslaved separated from the main cemetery by a black metal fence. The black fence was a 21st century addition. We can estimate hundreds of people reside at Second Site as their final resting place, although sadly, the vast majority remain unidentified.

In the early 2000s, preservation of Second Site became a labor of love for a group of five retired volunteers who took it upon themselves to clean up the cemetery and preserve the site. George Timblin, Harry Hood, Bill Hawkins, Charles Burdick and genealogist Scot Treadwell, lead the effort to restore and preserve Second Site as well as the Rocky Springs cemetery in the early 2000s. Their first mission was to locate Second Site, which at the time was in the middle of the woods. Queens Grant School did not exist and neither did the medical offices now located next to the cemetery and across the parking lot. At the time, the land developer Lat Purser owned the land where the cemetery sits. The band of historic preservationists convinced Purser that the cemetery was a site of cultural heritage and historical significance. As a result of their arguments, Purser donated the land to Philadelphia Presbyterian Church. This transfer of ownership aided greatly in the continued preservation of the site.

Timblin, Hood, Hawkins, Burdick and Treadwell worked diligently to restore the cemetery, gathering weekly on Thursdays for many years to restore the cemetery. They also partially excavated the site and pieced together grave marker fragments, some of which they located between 3-12 inches beneath the surface. The overgrown trees and vines obscured many of the grave markers including a good portion of the wall. In a personal interview with Scot Treadwell, he stated, "We could not see all the way through to the back of the cemetery due to the overgrown trees and vines." This was by no means a quick and easy project. The grave markers they located often were in pieces, which they restored as much as possible and replaced them in their upright positions.²³ The group of men were instrumental in restacking the

²³ Scot Treadwell. Personal Interview, Charlotte, NC May 7, 2022

stone wall and raised funds for the installation of an aluminum fence around the enslaved side of the cemetery.

In addition to the physical restoration and preservation of the cemetery, the men worked with biological archaeologist, Christina Brooks from Winthrop University, and geologist, Andy Bobyarchick from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Ms. Brooks located artifacts of historic significance and many are now on display in Philadelphia Presbyterian's history room. Dr. Bobyarchick provided the use of ground penetrating radar (GPR) to detect soil disturbances, a sign of an unmarked grave.²⁴ Through this combined effort of skill, talent, research and a pure drive to preserve the site, the group determined there were at least 200 graves in the slave cemetery, making it one of the largest and oldest known cemeteries for the enslaved in Mecklenburg County.²⁵

Closing Remarks

The culmination of cemetery research from historians, the deep dive into Mint Hill's local history, creation of photography and speaking to people in person brought me to the conclusion that a cemetery, while a space for the dead, is more about life than it is about death. Any inquiry into death leads to inquiries into life, whether that is the life of those buried at Second Site, or the lives of the people who devoted themselves to its preservation in the 21st century. Second Site Cemetery is a tribute to those who came before us, as well as to the group of dedicated men who worked to preserve it for future generations. Sadly, George Timblin passed away in 2006 and Bill Hawkins followed him in 2020. While we can mourn the passing of these two men

²⁴ Lacey Hampton. "Discovering Rice Cemetery with Discover Mint Hill." *Mint Hill Times*, April 8, 2010.

²⁵ Mikell Frey. "Restoration Thursdays, Volunteers piece together historic Mint Hill cemeteries." *Mint Hill Times*, March 6, 2006

there is no denying the mark they left on the Mint Hill community. Their considerable effort included the back-breaking work of using chainsaws and backhoes to remove trees and debris from multiple historic Mint Hill Cemeteries. Their passion for cultural heritage and local history ignited interest in the town's historic legacy and continued preservation of the cemeteries. The important action to take now is to continue to preserve the cemetery and their history for younger generations to appreciate and learn from. Before his passing, George Timblin stated in an interview with *Mint Hill Times*, Mikel Frey, "We're just trying to do our part. And when we aren't around to do it anymore, we hope someone will take over."²⁶

²⁶ Frey. "Restoration Thursdays, Volunteers piece together historic Mint Hill cemeteries.

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