

God Love His Sweet Soul

"The Monteagle Cemetery in Marion County"

Jackie Layne Partin

Around **1874** Robert and Jane (Moffat) Weir moved their small family from Canada to be with Jane's parents, John and Lydia (Landon) Moffat, in a little place that had just four years before become known as Moffat Station, Grundy County, TN. In 1880 the Weirs lost their nine-month-old son, Harold Ormiston Weir, and buried him in what was to become known as the Moffat Sundial. Little Harold was born February 15, 1880 and died December 06, **1880**. As far as I can read on any legible stone in the cemetery now (2011), this was the first burial on the piece of land that we know today as the Monteagle Cemetery. "God love his sweet soul;" his burial pioneered the burials of the hundreds (probably between 1600 and 2000) of others to follow him. One year later in **1881** Jane (Moffat) Judd born 1829, possibly a sister to John Moffat, joined little Harold in the burial plot.

Once the burials started with little Harold, they grew in number. On Sept. 02, **1882**, John Lowrie's second wife, Sarah (Smartt; Gilliam) Lowrie was buried nearby. Then in **1886** John Moffat's noble tabernacle found its resting place near his grandson. The landscape was set and upon the canvas was painted several gravestones, all probably, in the beginning, fieldstones with etchings. The Mont Eagle Cemetery in Marion County had become part of the little village.

Why does a young settlement choose such and such place as the village cemetery? In all our western movies the cemeteries were just outside of town on a slightly higher lay of land and usually visible to the stagecoach as it passed by. What did Mr. Weir look for when he chose his son's burial spot; maybe he placed the tiny body on the family compound. Depth of soil was important and easy access came into play. Early maps suggest that the old Stage Road going off the plateau into Ladd's Cove at the headwaters of Battle Creek probably passed near the now newly formed burial grounds. Other evidence of the beginning time frame of this cemetery might be found in the fact that John and Minerva (Collins) Lane, who in 1880 were living near the little village of Mont Eagle, a name change from Moffat Station, buried two babies a few months after the death of little Harold O. Weir in the established Tracy City Cemetery. If the Mont Eagle Cemetery had been thought of as a public cemetery, then why in **1881** did this young couple go out of their way to bury their babies six miles away? The only evidence of immediate family being interred in Tracy City was a grandmother Elizabeth Collins, but that was six years later in **1887**.

On the other hand, little Harold may have joined others who had passed on before him but whose graves had no markers or dates but were known to be buried there. The village began to be formed around **1871** when it got its first post office, so there were obviously deaths between 1871 and 1880. Well, what we do know is that after John Moffat

died on Christmas Day **1886**, his wife, Lydia Moffat, became the head of the house and took control of the Moffat holdings. In **1888** John Francis, a prominent business man, died and was buried there, so there was an obvious need for a designated public cemetery. Evidence points to the fact that Lydia and her daughter Jane Weir decided in **1889** to sell off some of the Moffat land. It is not clear at this writing whether the small burial ground was donated to be used by the whole village or sold to certain landowners. Logic tends to lean toward the fact that possibly one acre holding the Moffat family burials and others would not have been sold, so I suspect that the front two sections were donated as a cemetery for the village.

Has the fact that the Moffats were buried in a circle, or appear to have been, bother anyone besides me? Hasn't it always been the Christian custom to bury loved ones facing east? I asked one gentleman, "Who placed the Moffat Sundial marker in the center of the Moffat burials and when?" He stated that it has always been there and must have risen out of the ground. Now we know that that statement is not historically correct, but it will suffice at the moment for the appearance of such a memorial.

When I was a child, Winston Avenue was the road that led one to the cemetery, but Interstate 24 cut off that route. Now Laurel Lake Drive is the road one must take. The front of the cemetery once was bordered with a wrought iron fence which has long since disappeared. In **1904** Messrs. Tucker and Emil Graenicher were the trustees of the newly formed Monteagle Cemetery Association. This usually is the period when real planning and structure begins. Rows could be set, plots sold and monies collected and used for upkeep.

Early on, some families used fieldstones to show the borders of their plots. People were not ignorant before associations were formed. They were aware that their loved ones needed to be in rows or bordered plots, and it appears that the early Mont Eagleans did a fine job in placing their interments. It is an unspoken rule, but a very important one, that any fieldstone, concrete block, metal marker or small wooden cross in a cemetery that obviously marks a grave should never be moved unless being replaced with a new more modern marker. Throughout the years many of the fieldstone markers have been buried beneath natural debris or broken so as to be questionable, but still one should leave them alone.

The poor and the rich, the murderer and the murdered, the warriors and the peacemakers, those born in the USA and those born in other countries, all staked out their chosen final resting places. Sarah C. Young, a staunch member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, kept her faith and took its power with her to the grave in **1885**. Charles S. Judd never took another photograph after **1892**. Dr. Oliver Dennis Mabee, co-establisher of the village, was sorely missed at his passing in **1896**; his postmaster position was filled by another. Frances (Brixey) Bryan, first wife of Dr. David Hampton Bryan, passed away in 1907; her father was the infamous Civil War marauder, Calvin S. Brixey. Maggie (Kilgore) Garner was killed on the streets of Monteagle in **1923**; she didn't deserve to die so young and so violently. And why in the world did George Leonidas Wrenn need to take up so much

room for himself, his wife and a stillborn child; the child's stone is probably only a memorial. John Lowrie born in Scotland, Magdalena (Abplanalp) Kennedy born in Switzerland, Oliver Dennis Mabee born in Canada and John Francis born in England, probably had no idea that their final resting places would be on the Cumberland Plateau.

Now let's deal with those "Lappins." In 1931, five Lappin family burials were removed from the Monteagle Cemetery and taken to a family site now known as the Lappin Cemetery in Monteagle. Their huge, heavy stones and what remained of their coffins or bodies were given a new resting place keeping things all in the family. I bet you didn't know that. Another interesting point is that Mr. William Wellington Lappin, one of those five, died April 25, 1882 according to his stone. However, on the June 01, 1880 Census record, his wife Frances Caroline (Seely) Lappin stated that she was a widow. Wellington had already gone to meet his Maker. According to researchers, Wellington Lappin died Mar. 25, 1880, so his burial pre-dated that of baby Harold O. Weir. Another one of the removals was Wellington and Caroline's son, Robert Durant Lappin, who supposedly died in 1876. If this information is accurate, then Robert D. Lappin's burial also pre-dated little Harold's interment. To be moved from the Monteagle Cemetery to what would be called the Lappin Cemetery, one had to have been buried there. Could the Lappin family have been the originators of the burial ground? Could their gravesites have been the reason Mr. Weir chose this site for his son's burial? Could John Moffat have sold several acres to Wellington Lappin just in time for the burial of his son Robert Durant?

Several young children passed away in those early years: two-year-old James Waston Thomas in 1888; in 1892, one-day-old Marshall Adams couldn't win his fight for life, and young Ibbie Richmond was only ten in 1899 when she passed away. George Washington Parker buried four of his young children between 1906-1909—two being twins. What heartbreak! My own mother placed her eighteen-month-old son Larry Alexander Layne in his grave in 1948. God love their sweet souls!

Seeing that the original "old sections" were close to being sold out, the Cemetery Association saw the need to acquire more land. In 1935 two acres were bought from the Holcomb family and were known by the older ones as "the new section." After this acquisition, the land was laid off in rows and a marker stone placed in the ground at about ten foot intervals in order to keep the rows straight and to facilitate the sale of graves.

As the years passed, in 1945, a pavilion was erected under the direction of the Monteagle Woman's Cemetery Association with Charlie A. Smith chosen as the builder. The masonry work is as beautiful today as it was the year Mr. Smith mortared one stone atop the other. Harold Lappin Lowrie did the intricate framing for the roof and then nailed down the roofing. One needs to look up and appreciate the design that young Lowrie used for his roof. The pavilion was presented "In Loving Memory" of Egbert W. & Mary J. Holcombe with a lovely poem posted by Blanche Sanders, a granddaughter.

The Monteagle Cemetery is a beautiful place, and it is well kept in memory of our loved ones. It is because those memories should be kept for generations to come that the Grundy County Historical Society is asking for your help. The Society is working on a cemetery book for the whole county and some cemeteries in adjacent counties. If you have loved ones buried in the **Monteagle Cemetery**, we need to know who the parents of each are. If you know who is buried at an unmarked fieldstone, please let us know that information too. All legible stones are already surveyed and documented. We will have a comment section where we will endeavor to help family researchers by presenting some heritage. If a volunteer asks you to help answer questions about your loved ones who are buried there, please take time to help them. You may also write me with the information—(Jackie Layne Partin, 204 Partins Place, Tracy City, TN, 37387). An example follows: “**Kennedy, Magdalena (Abplanalp) b. 1850; d. 1936; dau of Andrew & Elizabeth Abplanalp; wife of John R. Kennedy.**” If you have access to a computer, send the information to me at jackiepartin@blomand.net. Thank you for the concern you have for the memories of your loved ones.