

Massey-Steele Cemetery Preservation Project

One of the projects undertaken by the Grayson County Millennium Committee and its Historic Cemetery sub-committee was to track and document all the cemeteries in Grayson County. Dr. Ann Van Wynne Thomas, co-chair, of the committee rediscovered the Massey-Steele Cemetery, which is located on Preston Bend, north of Pottsboro. The cemetery was so covered with underbrush, vines, and trees, that from the road, one could not see it. This pioneer cemetery contains the graves of several Steele and Massey family members as well as a number of unnamed markers. Two of the graves are of particular historic note. John T. Massey, a veteran of the War of 1812, traveled to Texas from Kentucky in about 1853 when John was around 77 years old. He came with his wife, Margaret; son, George and his family; and daughter Emily Massey. There is also a grave marker for John T. Massey's grandson, Henry Massey, 1st corporal of Reeves 11th Texas Cavalry, Confederate States of America. Henry was 15 in 1861 when he was mustered in the cavalry unit on the Grayson County Courthouse grounds. He took with him a horse, a \$50.00 pistol and a \$40.00 gun. Henry died from injuries sustained in the Battle of Atlanta in 1864.

When Dr. Thomas heard of the cemetery she told committee member Lee Safford. Lee in turn went on an "exploration hike." After Lee found the cemetery, Dr. Thomas contacted Mrs. Dickie Gerig, a fellow member of the Millennium Committee and member of the Dixie Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Mrs. Gerig in turned contacted Darryl Odom, member of Reeves 11th Texas Cavalry Camp, Sons of Confederate Veterans. Mr. Odom, who also serves as an Asst. Scoutmaster for BSA Troop 66, sought help from the troop. Kirk Meyers, decided in April 1999 to organize and execute the clean up the cemetery for his Eagle project.

Kirk organized Scouts and other interested volunteers for four workdays from May to November of 1999 to clear the cemetery and clean some of the tombstones. In March of 2000, 180 feet of metal fence sections were donated for the project. With the help of two fence builders, the scouts, troop leaders, and other volunteers erected a fence across the front of the cemetery. On this workday, a descendent of John Massey, Mrs. Kirsten Solomon, and her husband came to help. In all, Kirk and his 40 volunteers donated over 300 man-hours in this project.

On May 6, 2000 ceremony was held at the cemetery to rededicate the markers of John and Henry Steele and to honor Kirk Meyers for his work in the preservation of this pioneer cemetery. The ceremony was led by Reeves' 11th Texas Calvary, Sons of Confederate Veterans with Mark Farrington, as master of ceremony. Mrs. Dickie Gerig, President of the Texas Division of the U.D.C. laid a wreath in honor of the service of Henry Massey and presented Kirk Meyers with a certificate of appreciation. The Daughters also presented a certificate of appreciation to Darryl Odom for his many efforts in encouraging and assisting Kirk. The Sons of Confederate Veterans saluted their fallen hero with a 21 gun and cannon salute. Also present were representatives from The Texas Society of The Daughters of the Veterans of the War of 1812 who honored the memory of John T. Massey with a wreath and presented a certificate of appreciation and gift to Kirk. Members of both the Massey and Steele families spoke in remembrance of their family members and the cemetery, expressing their appreciation to Kirk and the other scouts who took part in the clean-up. Judge R. C. Vaughan was on-hand also to applaud the work and tell the background of the project.

Initial Exterior Pictures:

As you can see from the two views below the cemetery was quite camouflaged.

Initial View from the Road -



Initial View from the Back



The Following Views Were Taken Before Starting the Project



The Following Views Were Taken Before Starting the Project (*Continued*)



The Following Views Were Taken During the Different Stages of Work



The Following Views Were Taken During the Different Stages of Work (*Continued*)



The Following Views Were Taken During the Finishing Stages of Work



Henry Massey's Tombstone



The Views Below Were Taken During the Dedication Ceremony



The Views Below Were Taken During the Dedication Ceremony (*Continued*)



The Views Below Were Taken During the Dedication Ceremony (*Continued*)



The Views Below Were Taken During the Dedication Ceremony (*Continued*)



Newspaper Coverage: **(Discovery of cemetery sparks local interest)**

TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 1999 HERALD DEMOCRAT A5

BY JORDAN MENDEZ
HERALD DEMOCRAT

"John Pete Steel 185-" read the tombstone, its date partially chipped off. Clearly it was the earliest grave in the cemetery, that of a man who had been dead for more than a century. Other graves were dated from 1862 to 1952. Finding the wooded lot on Preston Peninsula required meandering for nearly half an hour. It took even longer to make it around dense brush and to avoid abundant beds of fire ants. The brush around the lot was at least five feet tall, hiding the ant beds from view. Ant bites were inevitable.

Curt Meyers, a Boy Scout, and his companion, Max Moore, cleaned up the site for a second Saturday. Meyers said the cemetery was hard to find. He spoke about the "Glenn Ellen Rd." sign, with a film of red clay masking the white letters, being hard to read.

The cemetery is next to an immaculate white house overlooking the lake. The house overshadowed anything noteworthy about the cemetery --- except for a discovery which has led to the lot's being salvaged.

Originally, the Millennium Committee, chaired by Judge R. C. Vaughan and Dr. Ann Thomas, had put locating old cemeteries in Texoma on its agenda. Leigh Stafford of Preston worked on the committee, and devised an intricate plan to find old cemeteries in Preston.

She said, "I just went around asking neighbors if they knew of any sites".

Dr. Leonard J. Flohr informed her of a site in Preston. He also told her that George McElraft was related to some of the people buried in the site.

Stafford called Thomas to see if a cemetery were plotted on the peninsula. Sure enough, it was on the map. It had been surveyed by Leland Rogers and Charlotte Holder in 1983.

It was recorded as the Massey Steel Cemetery. In this cemetery were buried three men from two different wars. This sparked the interest of Dickie Gerig, a member of the Millennium Committee and United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Gerig said, "This is an exciting find for the Daughters and Sons of the Confederacy and will play an important part in the Re-enactment." The cemetery contains Pvt. John Massey, who fought in the war of 1812 under the 4th Regiment East Tennessee Militia. He died in 1862. The other two graves contain soldiers from the Civil War, Cpl. Henry W. Massey of Company C of the 11th Texas Calvary died at the Battle of Atlanta.

His body was buried in Millner, Ga. In 1952, his body was returned to the Texas cemetery. No one knows the identity of the other soldier.

Unmarked graves also exist inside the perimeter of the lot. Gerig said he suspects these are buried slaves.

McElraft is one of the last members of the Steel family living in the area. "I have been doing some genealogical research, but I can't find the relationship between the Massey and Steel family," he said.

McElraft is related to the Steel side of the family through his grandmother, Madge Steel Terry. He also said, "That big white house was built over the family's abandoned log cabins." Once the boys located the cemetery, they spent the morning cutting away at the brush and picking up litter in the area.

Meyers, 16, was volunteering to clean up the site in order to receive his Eagle Scout. "There were about five of the Sons (of the Confederacy) and 20 Scouts last weekend," Meyers said.

Meyers described the project. He said Gerig contacted his troop leader, Daryl Odum, looking for young men interested in doing something unique for their Eagle Scout project. Meyers accepted the challenge in spite of Gerig's saying, "There will be plenty of Saturdays this summer."

When Stafford heard about Meyer's project, she said, "it is a lovely thing those boys are doing."

In the process, Meyers said he is learning the value of service, and will carry a piece of history with him.

Newspaper Coverage: **(Pioneer cemeteries need our attention)**

Other voices

By R. C. Vaughan

In a handsome 440-page volume entitled *Fannin County Folks and Facts (1977)* published by the Bonham Public Library, the historical markers of Fannin County are listed. On page 14 a description of this official historical marker appears:

19. Carson Cemetery (FM 898, 3 mi. N. of Ector). Tradition says this cemetery was named for John Carson, who owned adjacent land. Some say it had no grave before 1842. Others say the first grave was dug after 1842 Indian raid at nearby home of Dr. W. M. Hunter that left three victims: Minerva (Mrs. W. M. Hunter), her young daughter Elizabeth and a maid servant.

"By 1878 the cemetery had trustees who acquired title to the land and later added acreage. Land grantors Mr. and Mrs. W.R. Luton, Mr. and Mrs. W.E. Alderson, and I.M. Newell are all interred here.

"Mrs. Hunter's grave was marked in 1942, a century after her death."

Maryethyl Praetz of Sherman, Longtime member of the Carson Cemetery Board of Trustees, recently wrote: "I enclose a history written in 1973 by H. G. Dulaney which resulted in an historical designation. Vandals destroyed the marker and we placed a new one inside the grounds."

Maryethyl recalled that her mother, Ethyl Hodges Hudspeth, "had a well dug, installed a fence ... and erected a monument to the Hodges family. G. W. and Elizabeth Binion erected a chapel with removable sides."

She added that new Highway 82 just north of the cemetery has made necessary the construction of another fence. This was done and additional acreage purchased.

Maryethyl related that the Carson Cemetery Board of Trustees has established a scholarship in honor of their longtime treasurer Anna Belle Feagan, who had taught school at Savoy "for a long, long time" and had bequeathed her entire estate to the cemetery

The history of Carson Cemetery written by H. G. Dulaney contained a description of the gruesome murders by marauding Indians in 1842, of Mrs. W. M. (Minerva) Hunter, one of her daughters, and a maid servant, and their burial on Caney Creek in a tract of land that would be called Carson Cemetery. Another daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Hunter, Amanda, was captured by the Indians and later ransomed by Indian traders.

Also mentioned in the history was Mrs. Josephine Duncan, the great-great-granddaughter of Mrs. hunter. Mrs. Duncan, who previously lived at Van Vleck in Matagorda County, now lives at the Greenbriar in Denison.

It is Mrs. Duncan's understanding that Amanda married Henry Jeffries in 1859. She says that she has the original marriage license of the daughter (Amanda) which she obtained from the courthouse in Bonham.

Josephine Duncan also said that she accepted the official historical marker for Carson Cemetery at the dedication ceremony, as a direct descendant of Dr. and Mrs. Hunter. She remembers that H. G. Dulaney (longtime curator of the Sam Rayburn Library in Bonham) and County Judge Choice Moore took part in the ceremony.

Newspaper Coverage: ***(Dixie Chapter 35, UDC, participating in dedication)***

Dixie Chapter No. 35, United Daughters of The Confederacy, (UDC), met Saturday, in the Sherman home of Elaine Olson. Members were joined by guest Vickie Parker, a friend of the hostess. Parker's great-great- grandfather fought for the Confederacy.

Suzanne Cain, vice president, presided in the absence of the president, Lila Davis. Following the opening ritual, salute to the flags and the Lord's Prayer, committee reports were given and the roll call of members was observed.

There will be a marker dedication and salute at the Massey Steele Cemetery on Preston Peninsula at 3 p.m. May 6. This occasion will be sponsored by Dixie Chapter No. 35, UDC; Col. Reeves 11th Texas Calvary Camp No. 349, Sons of Confederate Veterans; and the Texas Society, United Daughters of 1812. Graves of Cpl. Henry Y. Massey, CSA, and of Pvt. John M. Massey, War of 1812, will receive markers. Descendants of both families will attend. The salute will recognize Kirk Meyers of the Boy Scouts who organized the restoration of the cemetery as his Eagle Scout Project.

The April program was provided by Suzanne Cain who shared a tape entitled "Grandpa Wore Gray" by Marie Melchiori. Ms. Melchiori is a nationally known genealogist and military research specialist/ Various sources for searching for one's ancestor records were shared and suggestions made of helpful indices and files to search.

The hostess was assisted at the refreshment table by Suzanne Cain. Finger sandwiches, a fruit assortment, nuts, cake, tea and coffee were served.

The next meeting will be held on May 20 in the Denison home of member Ruth Runnels. The program will be given by Sherry Cavanaugh.