

Historical Background of the Bryson City Cemetery Property

At least as early as 1866, the area we now know as the Bryson City Cemetery was used as a burying ground. The earliest documented grave is that of Alfred Cline, a Civil War veteran. According to an article in the October 9, 1866 issue of the Charlotte Democrat, "A man by the name of Cline, residing in the lower part of Jackson County, was shot down in cold blood, a short time since, by a band of marauders from Tennessee, known as the Robert Burchfield robbers."

There are dozens of fieldstone-marked graves in the cemetery. While some of these almost certainly came later, it is reasonable to assume that some may predate the burial of Alfred Cline.

The central portion of the cemetery was sold by Cline's widow, Lucy Ann Raby Cline, her brother John B. Raby, and children of Alfred and Lucy Ann to trustees of the three main-line denominations in Bryson City – Baptist (D.K. Collins), Methodist (W.T. Conley), and Presbyterian (E.M. Scruggs) – in 1884 for \$62.50.

A marker placed near the grave of Lucy Ann at the time of the county centennial states that Lucy Ann donated the cemetery property as well as the area around the square in Bryson City. In reality, Lucy Ann Raby Cline donated neither the cemetery nor the town property – she sold both. Though she sold the town area at what might be considered a benevolent price, she reserved some of the prime territory for herself and subsequently sold the reserved property for considerably more than it would've warranted if sold for farmland, had the area not been designated the county seat.

Lucy Ann certainly deserves to be honored, not as a purely altruistic soul but as a bright businesswoman who contributed to the public good while simultaneously providing for the welfare of her family.

After the purchase of the cemetery property, church trustees sold family plots in fee simple. Many family plots were sold but never recorded with the Register of Deeds. The first recorded sale of a plot was from the three trustees – W.T. Conley (Methodist), D.K. Collins (Baptist) and Kelly E. Bennett (Presbyterian) – to M. A. McCauley in November 1909. Multiple other plots had been previously sold, and are referenced in later plot boundaries, but were simply not recorded.

The Franklin family owned property which adjoined the church-purchased cemetery on the east. They logically elected to use their property for a family burying ground, but also sold tracts to others, including the Coburn and Orr families in the late 1920s and early 1930s. These family plots are located at the southeastern section of the cemetery, near the cemetery sign.

In May of 1952, Berlin and Lillian Franklin Thomasson and Coburn and Margaret DeHart deeded to the three church trustees a right of way and road easement over their lands on the east (Thomassons) and west (DeHarts) sides of the original cemetery. Both couples subsequently had their lands lying inside of the road surveyed and subdivided into plots, most of which were subsequently sold.

The Bryson City Cemetery of today is thus a combination of the original Cline property which had been deeded to the church trustees and subsequently sold by the trustees, the Franklin/Thomasson addition, and the DeHart addition.