

GREENE, HAZEL B.

WHEELLOCK CHURCH AND CEMETERY.

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Hazel B. Greene
Interviewer
September 28, 1937

In McCurtain county, two miles east, one mile north and thence a half mile east of Millerton, is old Wheelock Church, and just across the road is the cemetery.

The church is built of immense square stones. The walls are about two feet thick. It is said by persons residing in the vicinity that a few years ago a large tree had grown up from beneath the floor and out through the roof, but the building has since been repaired.

There are two glass windows in each end, three on the north side and four on the south side of the building. The one door is in the west end. High up under the edge of the roof, and in the center of the east wall, is a huge stone; on that stone is inscribed: Jehovah Jireh, and below that, A. D. 1846.

Immediately across the winding road is the cemetery to the south of the church. There are hundreds of graves there and it would be a stupendous task to attempt to count them. There are perhaps four and a half or five acres under the cemetery fence and there are perhaps five hun-

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dred graves in the cemetery and probably one third of them have tombstones. Some have marble slabs with not a word inscribed on them. A few have little sheds over them, as it was the custom of the Indians in bygone days to shelter the graves of their loved ones. Other graves are simply marked with Bois d'arc posts at each corner of the grave. Some graves have no markers at all and are pitifully sunken and neglected and grown over with briars and grass.

The grave of A. W. Felker is marked with a handsome marble monument which measures about six feet across the base; the stone proper is about five feet across, by about four feet, six inches high. It has on it only "A. W. F." The stone at the foot has his name, A. W. Felker, 1875--1922.

He was sheriff of McCurtain County, and on the morning of August 14, 1922, was killed by Clayton Thompson, a desperado, whom he had gone over to Wright City to arrest. Thompson was charged with killing two men the evening before and Felker had gone over there to arrest him. Thompson was seen going down the sidewalk that was crowded with people, Mr. Felker and his deputy, Christian, slowed

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down and told Thompson that they would see him down town. As they drove off Thompson fired, shooting Christian in the back, then fired again and killed Felker instantly.

Thompson was arrested a few minutes later in a restaurant where he had calmly walked after killing Felker, and had ordered his breakfast. He sat with his rifle across his lap guarding the front door, but Deputy Jones came in at the back door and covered him before he had time to shoot him. He attempted to shoot but a deputy gave him a load of buckshot that knocked him to the floor.

The next grave I came to was under a shed, with a paling fence around it and a slab of some kind of hard wood at the head and any inscription that might have been on it was worn off by time and the elements.

Next was a grave that is sunken and covered with dirt, grass and briars. There is a marble slab at this grave without inscription. S. A. Buchanan, of Wright City, said that long years ago, there was an iron door over the metallic coffin in this grave and that one could raise the door and read the inscription and date on the coffin.

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It has been forty years since he saw that iron door, but he thought that the body of a missionary was buried here in 1847.

Next was an enclosure of iron fencing, or picketing, with a gate for entrance; this enclosure is about 50 X 30 feet. Inside of it is the grave of the Reverend Mr. Alfred Wright, and that of another missionary, James F. McBride, who was stationed at Oak Hill School, (a school for negroes, one mile west of the present town of Valliant, and now called Elliot Academy). McBride was buried in 1892. Another grave was that of a son of a Mr. Robe and his wife who were missionaries at Wheelock in 1889, according to that tombstone. Mrs. Narcissa Ashford-Frazier-Knutson at Spencerville, told me that a missionary and his wife, named Robe, were once at Spencer Academy. This little grave is that of John Faris Robe who was fifteen months old at the time of his death, January 20, 1891.

Since, according to the inscription on the tomb of the Reverend Mr. Wright, Wheelock church was organized

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there in 1832; it is evident that many of the unmarked graves that are in that cemetery were made in that year or years soon following.

There are scores of unmarked graves in that four or five acre plot which is very crowded. The grave that shows the oldest date is that of the Reverend Mr. Alfred Wright, but Mr. S. A. Buchanan, peace officer at Wright City, said that he saw stones in the Wheelock Cemetery, forty years ago that had dates as far back as 1847. Mr. Buchanan lived within a hundred yards of the cemetery.

Down the hill about fifty yards is a spring. It is now filled up with dirt and trash and only a small stream of water flows away from it now but forty years ago, people hauled water from that spring two and three miles in barrels.

The Buchanans moved three and a half miles southwest of this spring but continued to haul water for a year or more.

They broke the sod on a one hundred sixty acre tract of land that begins right close to the south side of

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Millerton and extends south for a mile down the road and they lived on that one hundred sixty acres for nineteen years. They raised cotton that sold for forty cents per pound on that place in 1918. There are fine cotton stalks on that ground today.

The tablet at the grave of the Reverend Alfred Wright bears this inscription:

SACRED

to the memory of the

Rev. ALFRED WRIGHT

who entered into his Heavenly rest
March 31, 1853, aged 65 years

Born in Columbia, Connecticut, March 1, 1788
Appointed Missionary to the Choctaws 1820
Removed to this land October, 1832
Organized Wheelock Church December, 1832.
Received to its fellowship 570 members.

AS A MAN

He was intelligent, firm in principle,
prudent in counsel, gentle in spirit,
kindness and gravity,
and conscientious in the discharge of every
relative and social duty.

AS A CHRISTIAN

He was uniform, consistent, strong in faith
and in doctrine, constant and fervent in prayer,
holy in life, filled with the spirit of Christ
and peaceful in death.

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AS A PHYSICIAN

He was skillful, attentive, ever ready to relieve and comfort the afflicted.

AS A TRANSLATOR

He was patient, investigating and diligent, giving to the Choctaws in their own tongue the New and part of the Old Testament and various other books.

AS A MINISTER

His preaching was Scriptural, earnest, practical, and rich in the full exhibition of Gospel truth.

He was laborious, faithful and successful.

Communion with God, faith in the Lord Jesus, and reliance upon the Holy Spirit, made all his labors sweet to his own soul and a blessing to others.

In testimony of his worth, and their affection, his mourning friends erected this Tablet to his Memory.

"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God".