

ROSS, ELIZABETH. HOME BURIAL GROUNDS. #12932 94

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February 3, 1938

HOME BURIAL GROUNDS

The custom of making interments in the near vicinity of homes was long prevalent in the Cherokee Nation. In these times (1938) one may travel through old neighborhoods and find here and there long neglected and forgotten graves. In some instances there are broken or time-darkened headstones or recumbent slabs, the latter usually without inscriptions. In other instances the burial plots have been used for agricultural purposes and plows have obliterated all traces of spots which in past years were once given careful attention. Persons of more than ordinary prominence have been buried in ~~the~~ home burial grounds, and their final resting places have long since been lost.

In speaking of relatives, friends and acquaintances of the older days, a number of persons of long past years related that interment was made in the "family burying grounds." Those who then owned and occupied homes among the hills and woodlands and on the prairie seemingly gave no thought to the changes which would transpire in years of the future, and instead of the people of a neighborhood laying out and enclosing

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a tract of land as a general burying ground, they preferred to bury members of their families near the home.

As the years passed by surviving members of families removed to other and distant sections of the country. And in instances entire families have become extinct. Old homes and farms have fallen into possession of strangers, many of them newcomers from outside states. Few of the newcomers have sought to protect the old family burial plots from damage. As a consequence those remaining are overgrown with weeds and saplings, and the tombstones if any, have fallen to the ground, in numerous instances.

In a portion of the present Cookson township, about ten miles south of Tahlequah, there stands on a low eminence a heavy brown stone slab which rests upon stone walls. There is no inscription upon the slab, but it is believed to mark the grave of an adult member of the family of former Assistant Principal Chief George Lowery of the Cherokee Nation. But no one can definitely tell. The home of the old and notable assistant chief once stood in vicinity of the memorial slab, but long ago disappeared. Had it not been for the action of the national council which provided for the interment of Chief

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Lowery (as he has often been referred to) at Tahlequah, his grave would now probably be unknown. As it was he was buried in a regular burying ground and his grave is now identifiable.

Among the fullblood Cherokees interments were often made in near vicinity to the home, but in accordance with a custom of long standing, the remaining members of a family abandoned the home and removed to a new location. Or some of the natives it has been related that they had occupied at least a half-dozen different homes during the course of a decade. This was because members of the family had died in the new home. When, after a few years some other member, a child or adult person died, removal was again made to a new location and home.

Among those following the custom of possessing family or home burying grounds were some of the advanced and leading persons of the nation. Throughout the old districts of the Cherokee Nation, (nine in number), the family burying places may be found. Some of them were utilized within comparatively recent years.

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