

**Walks through History
Fredonia Cemetery
Fredonia Road, Stevens Creek/Holly Grove vicinity, White County
Start at the pavilion
May 10, 2014
By: Rachel Silva**



Intro

Good morning, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, a state agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of Fredonia Cemetery. I’d like to thank the White County Historical Society for co-sponsoring today’s tour, and I’d like to thank Cheryl and Robert Shaver, who have taken care of Fredonia Cemetery for the past 10 years, for all of their help.

This tour is worth 2 hours of continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects.

The Fredonia Cemetery Historic Section was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007 for its association with the early farming community of Stevens Creek, later called Holly Grove, in White County, and for its collection of

19th and early 20th century grave markers, which varies from fieldstones to elaborate, commercially produced monuments.

The earliest marked burial is Martha E. P. Jowers, who died in 1870 at the age of 2. However, there are unmarked graves and graves marked with fieldstones, and many of these graves likely predate 1870. The most recent burial is Larry Mason, who died on January 2, 2014, and was cremated and laid to rest by his parents. But most new burials do not go in the historic section. That's only allowed if you already have a plot or a marker there.

Stevens Creek/Holly Grove History

In 1822 Reuben Stevens, a wealthy landowner from Batesville, purchased land in this area and settled a few miles northwest of here at Steprock to raise his family. Stevens Creek, which runs just north of the cemetery, was probably named after Reuben Stevens. However, a traveling minister named John Stevens stayed in the area for a while in the 1880s and baptized many converts in Stevens Creek, so the creek might have been named after him. Regardless, the surrounding community became known as Stevens Creek as well. White County was created by Arkansas's Territorial Legislature in 1835 from parts of Pulaski, Jackson, and Independence counties. Coldwell Township (sometimes written "Caldwell") was established in 1852, and the Grand Glaise-Searcy Road, which was built in 1847 and connected the Jackson County town of Grand Glaise to the White County seat of Searcy, passed right by the cemetery. The Stevens Creek Post Office was established in 1872 and served residents of this area until 1909, when mail was routed through Bald Knob.

An abstract from January 11, 1839, indicates that this portion of Reuben Stevens' land was already in use as a cemetery at that time. Gideon Freeman Bullock, originally from North Carolina, came to Arkansas in 1855 and bought land in Coldwell Township in 1861, where he served as justice of the peace. In 1868 Bullock gave one acre of land just north of the cemetery to the Fredonia Masonic Lodge #229, of which he was a charter member. A two-story, wood-frame

building was erected to house a church and school on the first floor and the Masonic Lodge meeting hall on the second floor. Gideon Bullock paid the teacher's salary so that his six daughters could learn to read and write. Because of its association with the nearby church/school/Masonic Lodge, the cemetery became known as Fredonia Cemetery. Over time, it was also called the Stevens Creek Cemetery and Holly Grove Cemetery.

About 1900, Phillip Horatio Louks ("Lowkes") donated land for the Holly Grove Missionary Baptist Church, which was constructed at the corner of Honeysuckle and Fredonia roads. The church was so named because the land was covered by holly trees, and the community soon took the name of Holly Grove, instead of Stevens Creek.

When the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad (later Missouri Pacific) was built through the nearby community of Shady Grove in 1872, the residents of small rural communities relocated to be close to the railroad, forming the town of Bald Knob. The Fredonia Masonic Lodge #229 moved to Bald Knob sometime before 1920, when the one acre that Bullock gave for the school and lodge reverted to the cemetery (may have moved the lodge as early as 1898?). In the late 1920s or early 1930s, the Fredonia church/school/lodge building was destroyed by fire. A wood-frame Holly Grove School/Church was built on Stanley Road to replace the Fredonia building. In 1939 the National Youth Administration, one of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs, constructed the stone Holly Grove School on Stanley Road (now a ruin).

In the 1880s, a few people had large farms in the area, including the McNeal, Moore, Rudesill, and Garrettson families. However, most residents of the Stevens Creek/Holly Grove community were subsistence farmers, meaning that they farmed enough to feed their families and hopefully have a little something left over. People grew cotton, corn, strawberries, watermelons, and livestock.

According to oral history, by 1965 the Fredonia Cemetery was so overgrown that you couldn't walk through it to find a gravesite. So Buford Reed, Nina Wilson,

Clarence and Kathryn Overstreet, and Minnie Mae Overstreet led a cemetery clean-up effort. Without realizing that they were picking up fieldstone grave markers, people moved large rocks out of the cemetery and added them to a stone retaining wall that had been present since the late 1930s. So some of the rocks in the retaining wall are actually fieldstone grave markers. The cement blocks throughout the cemetery were later placed to mark the locations of graves, but no personal information exists on each burial.

Selected Biographical Sketches/Iconography

Some of the oldest graves were marked with fieldstones. Some have words, letters, and numbers etched into the surface, but they are difficult to read. One in the row reads, "C. T. Scott. Died Aug. 1872."

Gideon Freeman Bullock (1814-1869)—

Gideon Freeman Bullock was from North Carolina and came to Arkansas in 1855. He bought land in Coldwell Township in 1861, where he served as justice of the peace. In 1868 Bullock donated land at the northern edge of the cemetery to the Fredonia Masonic Lodge #229, of which he was a charter member. According to oral history, when Bullock died in 1869, he was buried in the Bullock family cemetery to the east of here down Fredonia Road. By 1890, Bullock's daughters had his body moved to the community cemetery, so he could rest among his fellow Masonic Lodge members. When his body was exhumed, the girls complained, saying, "All that was left of him was his buttons and his belt buckle." Because he was moved at a later date, Bullock's burial is not considered the earliest marked burial at Fredonia Cemetery, even though his 1869 death predates that of Martha Jowers (1870).

The Bullock marker features the Masonic square and compass with the letter "G" in the center, meaning God. Masonry is based on Christian principles and the construction of Solomon's Temple in the Old Testament of the Bible.

Jowers Family (in a row)—

Martha E. P. Jowers (Jan. 1868-May 1870)—

Martha Jowers was the daughter of George A. Jowers and Mary Overstreet Jowers. She died in 1870 at the age of 2 and is the earliest marked burial in Fredonia Cemetery. Although Martha's grandparents lived in Coldwell Township, her parents settled near Newport. Her father, George, served in the Confederate Army. Martha is buried near her grandparents, her aunt, and her brother, but her parents were laid to rest at Walnut Grove Cemetery in Newport.

The Martha Jowers marker features a lamb, symbolizing the innocence and gentle nature of a child. The lamb is also symbolic of Jesus, who was called the Lamb of God because he was sacrificed to take away the sin of the world.

Epitaph reads, "Our little angel rests here."

J. J. Jowers (Nov. 1804-June 1882)—

John J. Jowers was born in 1804 in North Carolina. He and his first wife, Catharine Jowers (1809-1872), raised 5 children. Martha was their grandchild. John Jowers was a justice of the peace in Coldwell Township. Catharine Jowers died in 1872 at the age of 63, and John remarried a much younger woman named Elizabeth. John Jowers died in 1882 at the age of 77 and was buried next to his first wife, Catharine.

The J. J. Jowers marker features an open Bible, symbolic of the word of God and the faith of the deceased, and the Catharine Jowers marker features an upward pointing finger, meaning that she was devout enough to go to heaven.

Amanda E. Jowers (Aug. 26, 1851-Aug. 8, 1876)—

Amanda E. Jowers was the daughter of John and Catharine Jowers and the aunt of Martha Jowers. She died just days before her 25th birthday.

The Amanda Jowers marker features a rose, which symbolizes love and beauty. A rose bud may also represent youth and the frailty of life.

William D. Jowers (1865-1888)—

William D. Jowers was the son of George and Mary Jowers and the older brother of Martha Jowers. He died at the young age of 23.

His marker features an upward pointing finger, pointing toward heaven.

Epitaph reads, “A precious one from us has gone, a voice we loved is stilled, a place is vacant in our home, which never can be filled.”

Southwest corner of the cemetery:

Point out some of the old fence. The design was called “wedding wire.”

Waller Family (in a group)—

J. N. Waller (1841-1912)—

Marker is a peaked coping post with an engraving of the great city in the sky, surrounded by clouds and watched over by the sun (symbolic of the all-seeing eye of God). J. N. Waller died at the age of 71. His epitaph reads, “God’s finger touched him, and he slept.”

Mary E. Waller (1854-1931)—

Mary E. Waller was the wife of J. N. Waller. She died in 1931 at the age of 76. Her marker reads “Dearest Mother” and features multiple roses, representing love, beauty, and respect.

The Wallers buried at least 3 of their young children at Fredonia Cemetery—their sons, Virgil and Romby Waller (share a marker), and daughter Lesly A. Waller, whose marker features a lamb.

Mary Belle Hayes (infant with lamb on top)—

Mary Belle Hayes died the same day she was born, August 2, 1934. The infant mortality rate was extremely high, and many mothers died in childbirth as well. Mary Belle’s epitaph reads, “Budded on Earth to Bloom in Heaven.”

N. D. James (next to Mary Belle Hayes)—

N. D. James (1855-1921). This marker features an engraving of the pearly gates that lead into heaven, as well as an open Bible.

Reed Family (far southwest corner)—

Simple marker of John Franklin Reed and wife, Millie Belle Burgess Reed, as well as the graves of their daughters, Cumi and Effie Reed. John and Millie Belle Reed lost two children within a year. Their daughter, Cumi Reed, died as a result of a blood clot on her brain, just one month before her 14th birthday and 4 days after the birth of her little sister, Effie. Effie Reed died 10 months later.

During this time, a 3-year-old girl died after falling into a kettle of boiling water. It would have been about 1926. Her family buried her at the head of the Reed girls' graves and didn't stay in the area long after that. Her grave may have been marked by a fieldstone originally, but it is unmarked today, and her name is lost to history. Millie Belle Reed tended the girl's grave each time she visited her own daughters.

Point out the fieldstone growing into the tree. It says "SHM."

S. P. Rudesill (western edge)—

Simon Peter Rudesill was born in 1869 in Illinois and later moved to White County, Arkansas, where he served as constable. S. P. Rudesill and Lee Woodall had farms about 2 miles apart, and although their families were connected by marriage, they did not get along. Rudesill and Woodall played pranks on each other, sometimes cutting the tails off of each other's horses. In September 1920, Lee Woodall's son was smoking a cigarette outside of church, and S. P. Rudesill, who was the constable, scolded him and slapped the cigarette out of his mouth. When Lee Woodall heard about the incident, he was furious. Woodall shot and killed S. P. Rudesill, starting a family feud.

S. P. Rudesill died at the age of 50, and his marker features the open gates of heaven and a Bible.

Lillie J. Rudesill (1857-1948)—

Lillie Jane Mangis Rudesill was born in 1857 in Illinois and was the wife of S. P. Rudesill. She was 63 years old when her husband was shot by Lee Woodall, and

she still had daughters Grace, Goldie, and Ada living at home. Her daughter, Dora Rudesill Graham, was already married and living nearby. Lillie Jane Rudesill died at the age of 91.

Dora Rudesill Graham was born in 1894 to parents S. P. and Lillie Rudesill. She married Homer Z. Graham. While holding a cedar post for her husband as he drove it into the ground, Dora was injured when the post maul (iron piece at the end of the wooden handle, or the end of the hammer) came off the handle and hit her in the forehead. Homer took her to the house, and when she came around, Dora sewed up the wound herself with a needle and thread. She wore that scar for the rest of her life. In January 1975 Dora watched as her sister, Ada Rudesill Fritts, crossed the highway at Velvet Ridge to get the mail. After getting it, she turned and stepped into the path of a car that killed her instantly. Dora never recovered from witnessing her sister's death. Dora Graham died at the age of 89.

Goldie Rudesill Fritts was born in 1904 to S. P. and Lillie Rudesill. Goldie Rudesill was 16 years old when her father was gunned down by Lee Woodall. She took a pistol and fired at the offender, who fired back at her and hit the door facing where she stood. She later married Elmer Fritts, and her sister, Ada Rudesill, married Elmer's brother, Earnie. Goldie died of cancer at the age of 32. Her husband, Elmer Fritts, was overcome with grief and shot himself a few months after her death, leaving their 10-year-old son, Floyd, to be raised by his Uncle Earnie and Aunt Ada. Elmer Fritts died at 35.

Darlin C. Jones (1833-1912)—

Darlin C. Jones was born in 1833 and served in the Union Army during the Civil War. He later belonged to the Grand Army of the Republic, which was a fraternal organization for Union Army veterans that lobbied for veterans' pensions and supported Republican political candidates. Not much is known about Darlin Jones, except that his family was full of talented musicians.

The marker is a peaked coping post with an engraving of oak leaves, which symbolize strength, endurance, faith, and virtue.

Quickly point out—

Harold Graham—died at almost 2 years of age. Lamb on top of marker.

Preston H. Jones—died at about 1 year of age. This was a popular stock marker at the turn of the 20th century—you see markers like this throughout the cemetery with the same type-setting and wilted flower, symbolizing the brevity of life.

Louks (“Lowkes”) family (under trees)—

Philip Horatio Louks (military marker)—

Philip Horatio Louks fought with Company G, 9th Illinois Cavalry during the Civil War. He bought land in the Stevens Creek community in 1878, and by 1900 he donated the land for the Holly Grove Missionary Baptist Church. He was married to Catherine Holton Louks, and they raised 3 sons. Catherine Louks was a school teacher in Holly Grove. She died in 1895 at the age of 50. After Catherine’s death, Philip Louks married a young widow and had three more sons. He died at the age of 88.

The Catherine Louks marker features an open book, which could either symbolize the Bible or education (since she was a teacher), as well as an image of the setting sun framed by a curtain that appears as if it’s about to close.

Rose Evalena Louks (1884-1887)—

Rose Evalena Louks was the daughter of Philip and Catherine Louks and died at the age of 3. Her marker features a weeping willow, which is a symbol of sadness and mourning.

7-foot woman buried next to Gordon plot at northwest corner of cemetery—

During strawberry picking season, migrant workers came to the Holly Grove area to find work. A 7-foot-tall woman came to work for William and Clara Gordon. She was staying in the cabins provided for the workers, and one morning, they found her dead in her cabin. William’s father, the Rev. William Lafayette Gordon, made her a coffin and buried her just to the north of the Gordon family plot.

Point out the location of the Fredonia Methodist Church/School/Masonic Lodge #229 at the northern edge of the cemetery at the edge of the woods. The old Grand Glaise-Searcy Road may have actually gone down the fence row and been right next to the church/school/lodge building.

Woodmen of the World marker—

John Henry Scarbrough (1861-1915)—

John Henry Scarbrough's father, Dr. John Bell Scarbrough, was an early settler in Bald Knob, where he practiced medicine and preached at the Methodist Episcopal Church. John and his brother, Thomas, moved with their families to the Texas Panhandle in 1901 and planted cotton. John Scarbrough's cotton was destroyed by boll weevils, and his wife, Arethusia Randals Woodard Scarbrough, and baby daughter, Rena, died in Texas. In 1903 he returned to Arkansas with his remaining 5 daughters, who his second wife, Minnie, help to raise. When John's daughter, Nettie Scarbrough Bolding, was 18 years old and expecting her first child in a matter of weeks, she was bitten by a snake while picking strawberries. The excitement put her into early labor, and the snake's poison killed her and her unborn child. They are buried near John Henry Scarbrough.

Scarbrough's Woodmen of the World marker—Woodmen of the World was a fraternal organization that provided insurance to its members, and before 1920, WOW provided distinctive, tree stump grave markers for its members. WOW was founded in 1890 in Omaha, Nebraska, by Joseph Cullen Root, who related a sermon he heard about "pioneer woodsmen clearing away the forest to provide for their families" to a society that would "clear away problems of financial security for its members" and make insurance available to everyone.

The Scarbrough grave marker is shaped like a tree stump and features the WOW tools, the maul and axe, as well as the Latin motto, "Dum Tacet Clamat," meaning "Though silent, he speaks."

Overstreet family—

William DeBerry Overstreet (1850-1902) & Tenesee A. Benson Overstreet (1866-1940)—

William DeBerry Overstreet was born in 1850 and attended the subscription schools of White County. In 1870, when he was 20 years old, William married Gabriella Kay Lumpkin, who was just 13. Overstreet was a prosperous farmer. Gabriella gave birth every two years for the rest of her life and died at the age of 33, likely during childbirth with an unnamed infant. There is no marker for Gabriella Overstreet in Fredonia Cemetery. William Overstreet then married Tenesee A. Benson, and they had more children. William died of what was probably a heart attack at the age of 52. When he died, Tenesee Overstreet was just 36 years old and had a large family to raise on her own. She paid off William's debts and bought additional acreage in her own name.

Dixon "Buddy" Overstreet (b. 1894)—Dixon "Buddy" Overstreet was born in 1894 and was the son of William and Tenesee Overstreet. He accidentally shot himself while climbing through a fence with a gun. He was 15 years old.

James G. Robbins—

White County Judge in 1841.

W. L. Gordon (1871-1935) & Kittie Gordon (1871-1958)—

William Lafayette Gordon was born in 1871 and married Loucenda "Kittie" Patterson. In 1919, when William was 48 years old, he was called to the ministry and was ordained at the Holly Grove Missionary Baptist Church. He died at the age of 64. Kittie Gordon died at age 87.

The Gordon markers are identical in style, with crossed palm branches, symbolizing victory, peace, and eternal life. The epitaphs read, "Not dead but asleep."

Mable Gordon Talbott (1897-1919)—small new marker outside the Gordon fence
Mable Gordon Talbott was born in 1897 and was the daughter of Rev. William and Kittie Gordon. She was the first wife of James Arthur Talbott and died at the age

of 22 during childbirth. She and her twin babies are buried at the foot of her parents (but she died before them).

Row of small, concrete, square markers with moveable letters—

These markers are unique in their shape and were probably quite inexpensive. You could slide in the letters to spell the name of the deceased. Several of these people were in the Fairless family and died in 1918, possibly due to the flu epidemic of 1918, which killed at least 7,000 Arkansans (state population was 1.7 million at that time).

Thomas H. Blaylock (1889-1920)—

Thomas Blaylock was killed at the young age of 31 while working for the railroad as a flagman.

His epitaph reads, “Death has been here and borne away a brother from our side. Just in the morning of his day, in youth and love he died.”

Green Wright (1833-1913) and Mary Glossen Wright (1833-1903)—

Green and Mary Wright came to Arkansas from North Carolina. They took a train to Memphis and then traveled by boat to Prospect Bluff (now known as Judsonia) on the Little Red River, where he traded a nice team of mules for 80 acres of land. When he was 28 years old and the father of 5 children, Green Wright became a private in the Civil War. He was part of Company A, 8th Arkansas Cavalry and transferred to Company C, 5th Arkansas Cavalry. He fought with McCauley’s Raiders and was a POW in 1863 in St. Louis. He returned home after the war and had 4 more children. When Mary died at the age of 70, Green married a much younger woman. He died at the age of 80.

James S. Wright (1868-1962) and Lillie Paralee Gordon Wright (1867-1940)—

Born in 1868, James S. Wright was the son of Green and Mary Wright. He married Lillie Paralee Gordon, daughter of John Robert Gordon and Eliza Francis Overstreet Gordon. The couple built a log house by 1889 and eventually accumulated 520 acres. They grew strawberries and were quite successful. Their farm was often the center of social activity in the community, hosting Saturday

night dances, brush arbor meetings, and silent film showings. They had a Delco electric plant with a kerosene generator long before electricity came to the area, so neighbors would come over and listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights. The Wrights raised 9 children, and Jim Wright was blind in his left eye. Lillie Wright was a wonderful storyteller. Lillie died in 1940 at the age of 72, and Jim died in 1962 at the age of 93.

James and Lillie Wright had three daughters who did not survive childhood and are buried next to them: Lillie May (1898-1900), Esther (March-July 1906), and Ida (1894-1908).

Mrs. M. A. Bone (1852-1936)—

Fannie Bone was born in 1852 and married Mumphard E. Bone. The couple raised 6 children. Mumphard suffered a heart attack at the age of 58 after working in the field and died. After his death, Fannie went by M. A. instead of her real name. She died in 1936 at the age of 84.

Her grave marker features the open gates of heaven and clasped hands, which symbolize God's welcome into heaven. The epitaph reads, "Farewell. Until we meet again. None knew her but to love her."

Interesting story about Mrs. Bone's grandson, Arthur Bone—Arthur Bone's leg was crushed by a tree during a bad storm. His cousin was a preacher, and told Arthur that if he loved God and believed in Him, he would walk on his leg. Well, Arthur walked on the leg, which made it worse, and it was amputated. Someone told Arthur that if worms ate his leg when it was buried, he would somehow feel the pain. So he had the leg embalmed and put it into a container. Then he poured concrete around it and buried it next to his grandmother at Fredonia Cemetery. Arthur was buried somewhere else.

John Conley Woodall (in iron fence)—

John Conley Woodall was born in 1885 to parents William Radford Woodall and Laura Syphronia Rhoden Woodall. He was the younger brother of Lee Woodall (who shot the constable, Rudesill). John died at the young age of 24, likely in a

railroad-related accident. His grave marker is an obelisk and features clasped hands, which symbolize him being greeted by God and entering heaven. The marker also indicates (B of L F & E) that he was a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, which was a fraternal organization that provided benefits and insurance for locomotive firemen and enginemen, who had very dangerous jobs (firemen constantly built and stoked the fire for the steam engine). The cast-iron fence around his gravesite was manufactured by the Stewart Ironworks Company of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sylvia Sheffer (heart-shaped marker)—

Sylvia Sheffer, born in 1893, was the youngest daughter of Robert Green Sheffer and Sarah Jane Kilman Sheffer. She was lifting a large tub of water and injured herself. Then she got down on her health and died of pneumonia at the age of 19. Walter Wright had planned to marry her and was deeply saddened by her early death. He cared for her grave for many years.

James T. Roaseau (1854-1905) and Julia E. Roaseau (1861-1934)—

About 1875 James and Julia Roaseau (“Roe-je”) found a trail of coins in a stream in Georgia that led to thousands of dollars in an old stump. They used part of the money to charter a railroad car to bring them to Arkansas, and they purchased land near other family members at Holly Grove.

Bohle obelisk (in iron fence)—W. N. Bohle and toddler sons, Henry D. and Jesse O. Bohle. The fence was manufactured by the Champion Iron Fence Company of Kenton, Ohio. There is another Bohle marker outside of the fence. It is broken in half. The death date on that one is 1879 (Frederick Bohle, 1831-1879).