

The old Methodist Church and Cemetery

This is what its called; the one in use now in the northern part of town is Oakdale.

My great, great uncle, Elisha Banner, gave the land on which the church stood, and adjacent burial ground, where his remains rest beside his brother's, my great, grandfather, John Banner.

I don't remember when the old church was used as it was before my time, but I went there frequently prior to its demolition years later. Built of wide clapboard siding, painted white, a high belfry and a recessed porch with an enclosed stairway leading up to the gallery, where the slaves sat. It stood a good distance back from the road (street now) with an avenue of (cedar) trees lining the wide driveway leading to the church. Beyond them were spacious esplanades for the horses. A few of them were there when I can first remember going there as a very young child.

About 1895 the congregation moved up town to the new Central Methodist church on Franklin Street, and the years following, the burial ground was sadly neglected. Briers and honeysuckle ran riot over it; vandals had turned over gravestones, breaking ^{many} beyond repair, and the scene was one of utter desecration. Discouraging as the outlook appeared, two brave souls decided to do something about it. They were Gertrude Smith and Mary Fulton Bennett, friends and contemporaries of mine. Their first step was to go before the Town Board and ask that a high metal fence be put up enclosing the entire ground, as the project wouldn't be permanent without it. They acceded to their request and have been most helpful.

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The town paid for the fence, had it put up, the stone gate posts, given by the North Carolina Granite Corp. set in place and ^{the} wrought iron gate hung. Without being asked, they volunteered to take it over as to mowing the grass etc. which insures its maintenance. Money had to be raised for clearing the ground and other expenses involved; they asked my help and we contacted relatives of those buried there, and wrote letters to ones living elsewhere, most of whom responded generously. The Garden Clubs were told of what we hoped to do, and were asked their help. The proposal was accepted as a worthwhile project. Many gave flowering shrubs from their gardens. A few large English boxwood had survived over the years. Hettie Hollingsworth and Irene Smith donated several, and were very proud of them, the aristocrat of evergreens, especially at home in this setting. The gardeners directed the planting and all interested, and they are legion, give most hearty thanks.

The grass is up now, and looks like a green velvet carpet. As one enters the gate, one sees an ancient very tall pine tree standing in the back, close by the fence, which I fancy is saying, "I am keeping watch over this hallowed ground, wherein lies the dust of the long ago citizens of the village of Mount Airy."

(FROM MRS. E.C. BIVENS) genealogy