

Historical Sketch of Sinking Spring Cemetery

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The history of Sinking Spring Cemetery goes back to an original deed recorded in Deed Book A, page 62 in which Dr. Thomas Walker of Albemarle County conveyed to the minister and congregation of the Sinking Spring Presbyterian Church and their successors 55 acres by estimation "in Fincastle County on the waters of the Wolfe Hill Creek branch of the Holstone River". This deed is dated April 14, 1774 and became known as the "meeting house" tract and also as the "glebe lands". The original Sinking Spring Presbyterian Church was built on this land and the land immediately surrounding the church became the cemetery. Francis Walker, the executor of Dr. Walker's estate thought there was a legal problem with this deed so he wrote a second deed dated January 11, 1801 and recorded it in the Washington County deed book 2 on page 272, to Charles Cummings, Robert Craig Sr., John Campbell, Matthew Willoughby, John Davis, Frederick Hamilton, James Vance, James Campbell, James Armstrong, William King and John Preston as trustees to the Sinking Spring Congregation and their Successors forever, for the exact same 55 acres.

It was on this tract that the first Sinking Spring Presbyterian Church, a log structure, was built. It was shortly thereafter replaced by an improved and somewhat larger log structure at the same location. This served as the church building until the early 1830's when a new church was built in downtown Abingdon that today serves as the Barter Theater. Sinking Spring Cemetery grew around the original log church building like ripples from a stone thrown into a pond. The first burial in this cemetery occurred on July 4, 1776, Independence Day! That person was Henry Cresswell and his tombstone can still be read today and says, "Henry Cresswell entered this place July 4, 1776". Since that beginning, many famous and humble Virginians have been interred here and it serves as a virtual history of America.

In 1872, 30 acres of this original 55 was sold to James Fields, builder of the Fields Penn House and he turned this land into a housing development which today defines a portion of the northern boundary of the town of Abingdon. In 1877, 14 more acres was sold to Henry Hopkins "Hop Scott" Scott, well known early entrepreneur of Abingdon who used 12 of these acres to start what was known as the Hamilton - Scott Addition to the Town of Abingdon. Later the remaining 2 acres would become a part of the present cemetery.

The first addition to Sinking Spring Cemetery occurred on February 24, 1893 when Henly Fugate et ux and John F. Risen et ux and several members of the Penn Family conveyed to George E. Penn as trustee, 15.37 acres of land which George Penn began to sell. About 2 acres of this 15.37 acres adjoining the Sinking Spring Cemetery on the south side was sold by George E. Penn as cemetery squares for family burial plots and became known as the Penn Addition to Sinking Spring Cemetery. The balance of the 15.37 acres was sold to others for other purposes. These sales of family squares were recorded in the Washington County Clerks Office but were not described by a metes and bounds description.

The second addition was added to Sinking Spring Cemetery in 1923 when H. H. Scott and J. Paul Campbell formed a trust of the two acres mentioned above and named Floyd Bradley McConnell trustee. Mr. McConnell proceeded to sell family burial squares in what became known as the Scott - Campbell addition to Sinking Spring Cemetery. The sales of these squares were not recorded in the Washington County Clerks office. This addition adjoins Sinking Spring Cemetery on the northwest side. About half of this 2 acres was sold as burial squares and the other half was not sold because the ground was too wet and water would accumulate in graves. The remaining 1-acre remains unused.

No provision was ever made for perpetual care for graves in Sinking Spring Cemetery or the two additions, nor were any records of burials maintained. In the early 1920's a cemetery committee was formed to attempt to maintain the cemetery which had fallen into a state of disrepair. This effort was funded by individual contributions and sufficient funds to properly maintain the cemetery were never available. On May 30, 1982, the congregation of Sinking Spring Presbyterian Church authorized the trustees of the church to convey to the town of Abingdon the Church's ownership in Sinking Spring Cemetery with certain conditions. Since that date the town has taken over maintenance not only of the Sinking Spring Presbyterian Church Cemetery, but also of the two additions.

The transfer of the Church's interest in the Cemetery was finalized by deed dated February 3, 2006, which conveyed the Church's interest in the Cemetery to the Town of Abingdon. As previously mentioned, no records of burials in any of the cemeteries were ever maintained. The only record existing today is contained in the publication "High on a Windy Hill" by Catherine Sanders McConnell and subsequent additions thereto. These publications are available at The Historical Society of Washington County.