

First Known Cemetery In Edwards Village

by LaVerne H. Freeman, Town Historian

The beginning history of Edwards records the accidental death of a Mr. Partridge in 1813 by a falling beam "at a raising" (cooperative building of a barn, usually) and the first murder, on 12 Dec 1817, of Jonathan Brown. The first natural deaths have not been researched. However, it is not known where the remains of any of the village deaths of this time period were buried.

The first known cemetery of the village was located next to the property of what is believed to have been Lawson (or Alvin) Gardner's, next called Harrison ("Had") Gardner's, then known as Dr. Daniel McCormick Taylor's in the 1890s to Apr 1946 when Carl Randall, Sr. bought it. It is now the rental property of Clarence (J.C.) Brassard. It was a logical place for a cemetery since it was directly across from the only church in the village.

Nellie Thurston Barnes (1861-1939), who worked for Dr. Taylor as his housekeeper, told Hazel Bancroft Freeman (1890-1981), that she remembered seeing cemetery stones in the abandoned cemetery next (west) to Dr. Taylor's when she went to the back yard to hang up clothes. She also said when the clothes were blowing on the line they hung over the cemetery. These remaining stones, apparently, were never moved to the Riverside Cemetery when it was opened between 1858 and 1865. It appears that there was no one left in those families to attend to the transfer of the remains to the new cemetery.

The small cemetery, to be easily seen by Nellie Barnes while hanging up clothes, had to start near the back of the lot. It is known that it was in the location of Dr. Taylor's garden. Whether or not it went to the sidewalk and road isn't known. In any case, in the mid-1800s, the town needed a larger area and land of Thomas Noble on Church St. was purchased, or received as a gift, to begin Riverside Cemetery.

In 1905 the IOOF organization built a large building extending from the sidewalk nearly to the rear of the lot destroying any signs of graves that might have been there. There are no records, or stories, that any stones were discovered when the Odd Fellows building was erected, and when it was razed in April 1969 to make a parking lot, no fragments of cemetery stones were reported.

While this cemetery has no records or diagrams for people to look at in 2003, the beginnings of the 21st century, a number of residents have stories they have been told of the existence of this graveyard. One is that during Dr. Taylor's lifetime, he was digging in the ground where the cemetery had been at one time and came upon the skulls of two people. They had their natural teeth so probably they were fairly young people. He carefully cleaned them up, and put them on display in his office on top of a glass front cabinet in which he kept his instruments, and that is where Earl Noble remembers seeing them. It is believed he wrote to authorities in Albany and asked what to do with them. They then appear to have been taken from his office, never to be seen again, and it is presumed they were buried without further ado; probably somewhere in the Riverside cemetery.

Another tale is about the Kerr family, who had their reunions in the Odd Fellows Hall built over the cemetery. At the family gatherings the adults would discuss the same stories of the stones and bodies that had been left in the old cemetery. While they were talking at an adult level, sometimes the children would hear and these children, now adults, still remember about the cemetery that "used to be there".

Sources: I have known the part about Nellie Barnes and the cemetery because she related those facts to Hazel Freeman who, in turn, told them to me.

Earl Noble has been told the story of the two skulls and that the cemetery was located in the spot where Dr. Taylor had his garden.

Edith Duffy remembers hearing the stories of the cemetery being there, while listening to adults.

This cemetery is mentioned in *The History of St. Lawrence County, New York*, published by Everts in 1878, page 445, under "Burial-Places".

LaVerne H. Freeman - 4 Dec 1999

The Current Edwards Cemeteries

The following records of the current Edwards Cemeteries were originally done by Miss Leah Noble in 1952 as part of her duties as Edwards Historian. Recently they have been put on a database using Miss Noble's records, burial permits available and information found in genealogical records. Present historian will update these records as time allows and more accurate information is found.

Riverside Cemetery, Village, Church St. - This burial ground was established between 1858 and 1865 on land purchased from, or donated by, Thomas Noble. It was later expanded by purchase of more land from Mr. Noble along the same street. Stones dated earlier indicate that original burials were in the first village cemetery and moved to Riverside Cemetery.

Fairview Cemetery, Village, Hall Rd. - Chartered January 16, 1915. Land was purchased from, or donated by, the Woodcock brothers, Milo and William. As part of the transaction they requested that their father and his two wives be moved from Riverside Cemetery to the new Fairview Cemetery, thereby making those three the first burials in the Fairview Cemetery. This cemetery has been expanded in recent years as the need became evident.

Gates Cemetery, River Rd. - Land was given the Gates family with the stipulation that the cemetery plots were to be used only by those who resided in that neighborhood and there was to be no charge for these grave sites. The earliest marked grave in this cemetery is Mary Jane Whitford who died May 28 1853.

Payne Cemetery, Harmon Rd., St. Rte. 58 - This cemetery has also been known as "Creek Burying Ground", then "Harmon Cemetery", now known as Payne Cemetery. It is believed to be named for the early settlers, the Payne family, who owned that land. This cemetery is the site of the earliest marked grave in the town of Edwards, Lois Rice Payne, who died Feb 13, 1828, age 20 years.

Pinney Cemetery, Co. Rte. 23 - Small cemetery located near the Pitcairn town line on farm property. Must reach it by passing through this farm driveway. Named for the Pinney family who once owned the farm. Earliest marked grave here is 1832, an infant son of Isaac and Malinda Bannister.

South Edwards Cemetery, Co. Rte 23 - Located at edge of Shawville settlement in South Edwards. The cemetery is comprised of very sandy soil on a flat area of land before one travels down the hill into the community. The earliest marked grave here is that of Angeline Austin who died Feb 13, 1844, age 16 years.

Family burial grounds include:

Brayton - Rte. 58 - graves of infant Brayton triplets who died 1859 and 1860. also buried here are infants of the Cole and Freeman families. None of these have traditional stones. They are marked only with field stones and occasionally decorated by descendants. This small cemetery is carefully and respectfully tended by the landowner, Gerald Barker.

Winslow-Shawville, South Edwards, Co. Rte. 23 - Located on a steep hill overlooking the settlement of Shawville on property owned by Alfred and Barbara Fenton. It is very difficult to reach. A low stone wall surrounds the graves of the three Winslow family members. This cemetery is tended by the Alfred Fenton family. The earliest grave is Ruth Dunbar Winslow who died January 3, 1835, age 53.

Antwine, Edward - a private grave located on Antwine family property.

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