

The Masonic Plot at Elmwood Cemetery

by W.Bro. James A. Neal (1/26/2009)

The practice of Masons establishing cemeteries as part of their obligation to care for the welfare of their fraternity brothers, their widows and children dates to 1784 when Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4, A.F. & A.M. located in Virginia established the first Masonic Cemetery. The practice was so prevalent that by 1868, Daniel Sickels in his book, *General Ahiman Rezon*, provided instructions for a "Service for the Consecration of Masonic Cemeteries."

The Masonic Plot at Elmwood Cemetery in Columbia, SC is one of two known burial sites in South Carolina intended to serve Masons and their families. The other site is in Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston, SC. Visitors seeking the location in Columbia should turn right immediately after entering Elmwood Cemetery. Look for the large Wray-Cozart mausoleum on your right. The Masonic Plot is directly across from it. A tall obelisk for Lt. Joseph K. Wilson, 8th US Infantry who died September 19, 1869 marks the beginning of the Plot and the Oliver enclosure the end. The Plot has seven rows with 13 burial sites in each row for total of 91. As recent as 1962, the plot was surrounded by a wrought iron fence placed on a foundation of brick. The brick foundation still remains.

Currently 49 of the sites are vacant. Of the 42 interments, 13 are unknown. Of the known burials, 7 are infants and 5 are females. Ages range from infants of one year or less through age 86. Based on Records of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina or the existence of a Masonic symbol on the person's headstone, the following Masons are buried in the plot. The year of death is listed to show the gaps in time between burials. Those with an * after the name have been identified as members of York Rite.

LTC. Richard Anderson *	1861	Marshall A. Brooks	1910
James Fraser*	1865	Albert E. Fugle	1912
Lt. Joseph K. Wilson	1869	Robert S. Hipp*	1917
Alexander Oliver*	1884	Harry Elden Smyth	1918
M.A. Meadows	1892	John S. Gladney*	1920
Ira Hope Neeley	1895	John Franklin Smith*	1938
John Oliver*	1897	Robert Gresham	1938
Saul Hudson	1901	Marion W. Perry*	1938
James A. Brown	1902		

The unknown burials present the greatest mystery. Elmwood does not have any records and obviously there are no headstones or markers. Perhaps these are indigent Masons whose family could not afford a marker.

What appears to be the first interment is that of Lieutenant Colonel Richard F. Anderson who enlisted on September 10, 1861 in the South Carolina 15th Infantry Regiment. The 15th was completing its organization at Lightwood Knot Springs later known as Camp Johnson located near present day Dentsville on Parklane Road. He died of an unknown cause on October 22, 1861. He was Master of Richland Lodge # 39 in 1858 and was a member of Union Council # 5, Royal and Select Masters. Clare McCall in his excellent work *A History of Richland Lodge No. 39 Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina at Columbia, South Carolina* states that "Brother Anderson is buried at Elmwood in the plot reserved for the Freemasons of Columbia." If LTC Anderson is the first burial in the Plot in 1861, it means the Plot was purchased before this date although the date of purchase is not known.

In addition, Brother McCall cites census data from 1860 that lists Anderson as a cotton merchant with a taxable wealth of \$23,000. Since he was not indigent, this seems to support the idea that the Plot at that time was not solely for indigent Masons.

A notice in the *Daily Carolinian* from the Masonic Bodies on November 16, 1864 announced plans for consecrating the Plot had been formulated by three members of Richland Lodge # 39.

"The ceremony of consecrating the Masonic burial grounds will take place at 7 P.M. on Wednesday evening, 16th instant, at the Masonic Hall. On which occasion, an address will be given by RW Brother A. Mackey, M.D., Grand Secretary of this Jurisdiction. The craft and the public in general, especially the ladies are invited to attend. Signed L.P. Ashley, B.D. Senn, J.J. Bevit, Committee." (McCall, 1991)

This suggests that the Plot was a project of Richland Lodge #39. However, Brother McCall does not provide any further detail on the origin of the Plot and if it was solely with Richland Lodge # 39, he would not have omitted this from his very thorough work. Brother McCall found that Richland County reissued the deed for the Plot in 1955 to replace the 1887 deed. It is issued to Richland Lodge # 39 AFM, Acacia Lodge # 94, AFM and Columbia Lodge # 5, AFM (Note the error - this should read Columbia Chapter No. 5, RAM.) This

reissued deed does not provide any light about who purchased the property, when and for what purpose. It reads:

All that certain lot of land in Elmwood Cemetery, Southern Division, situated in the City of Columbia, in the County of Richland, State of South Carolina, upon part of a tract of land known as Tickelberry Farm, said lots being designated as Number's 6, 7, 13 and 14 in Square 1, and numbers 48 and 49 in Square 20, and walk-ways between, altogether containing Thirty-eight Hundred and Six superficial feet, more or less, and having such shape and boundaries as shown on the plot on file in the office of the Association, and more fully described upon the Grave Register of the Elmwood Cemetery Association; the purpose of this deed is to provide the above named grantees with evidence of the ownership records of Elmwood Cemetery Association as to the above described lots, the original deed Number 235, made and delivered by Elmwood Cemetery Company, having been lost or destroyed. These lots were originally shown on a map of Elmwood Cemetery properties dated in the year 1887.

Brother McCall sites minutes from 1939 of an attempt on the part of Richland Lodge # 39 to determine the cost of upkeep of the Plot and ownership. The report states that:

It appears that two Brothers gave the plot to the three Masonic bodies owning it with request that their remains be buried therein, and before their death they fenced in both their own section and the entire plot for this privilege. It is believed that this original intent was that the plot be used for the burial of indigent Masons, but it appears that several Brethren who were not indigent, but who especially requested burial in the Masonic plot, have also been buried there.

In 1955 a committee composed of Herbert Hook, Richland Lodge # 39 AFM, Mendel C. Jeanes, Acacia Lodge # 94 AFM and Lunice H. Ulm, Columbia Chapter # 5, RAM was created to research the Plot and develop an agreement for the three Masonic bodies to maintain the property. A copy of this report is in the records of Acacia Lodge # 94 AFM. It states that the Plot was bequeathed and deeded to the three Masonic bodies by John Oliver and Alexander Oliver to be used for: "Any indigent Mason, indigent Widow or indigent orphan of indigent Masons..." In addition, this agreement states:

- Permission for burial in the Masonic Cemetery Plot shall be granted by contacting either the Worshipful Master of Richland Lodge 39, AFM, the Worshipful Master of Acacia Lodge No. 94, AFM, or the High Priest of Columbia chapter No. 5, RAM, or their respective Secretary or Recorder.
- The Masonic body or bodies concerned shall be requested to bear the burial expenses of indigent Masons, Widows or orphans
- The expenses or the proper maintenance and upkeep of the Masonic Cemetery Plot shall be equally borne by Richland Lodge No. 39, AFM, Acacia Lodge No. 94, AFM, and Columbia Chapter No. 5, RAM.
- The Worshipful Master of Richland Lodge No. 39, AFM, the Worshipful Master of Acacia Lodge No. 94, AFM and the High Priest of Columbia Chapter No. 5, RAM, shall be the representatives of each body concerned in the execution of this agreement.
-an annual report, as to the cost of upkeep and burial shall be made to each concerned at the Regular Communication in January of each year.

It appears that over time the stewards of the Plot have neglected adhering to this agreement.

In 1978, Brother McCall was asked by the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina to assist Mrs., Lucille Anderson Bell in locating the burial site and marker of her father Herbert G. Anderson. Brother Anderson was buried in the Masonic Plot on November 5, 1913. His burial expenses were paid by Richland Lodge # 39. A headstone or marker were never erected and Elmwood Cemetery cannot identify the burial site. Brother McCall sites this unfortunate situation as evidence of the need for the three Masonic bodies entrusted with the Plot to take their stewardship more seriously.

Although the original deed is lost, there is sufficient evidence that the story of the Plot begins in Kelso, Scotland with two brothers: John Oliver, 1810-1897 and Alexander Oliver, 1816-1884. Not much is known about their life in Scotland or why they decided to leave. However, by 1850, both brothers had migrated to Columbia where they are shown on census records as shoe makers and merchants.

Both became members of Acacia Lodge # 94. Alexander Oliver first appears on the roles of Acacia Lodge in 1861 and was the Master of Acacia Lodge # 94 in 1870-71, 1877-78 and again in 1882. John Oliver was raised as a Master Mason in 1865 in Acacia Lodge # 94 and is shown as Treasurer, an office he served in for several years, beginning in 1866. Alexander was the Senior Deacon that same year. Both were active members of Columbia Chapter #5, R.A.M. and both appear frequently as visitors in the minutes of Richland

Lodge # 39. Unfortunately, Elmwood does not have records showing when the brothers purchased the Plot. However records exist at Elmwood to show that in 1887 the Plot was deeded to Acacia Lodge #94, A.F.M., Columbia Chapter #5, R.A.M., and Richland Lodge #39, A.F.M.

My conclusions, based on the available research are that:

- The Masonic Plot at Elmwood is historically significant because it is the only one in the midlands of South Carolina and because of its age.
- The Oliver brothers purchased the Plot in the late 1850's probably on some form of a payment plan with the idea of using it for Masons and their family members.
- The first burial that of LTC Anderson was because of the suddenness of his death, his service in the Confederacy and his Masonic connections.
- Many of the internments were by choice, such as that of the Oliver brothers, and not because of indigence.
- John Oliver had Elmwood Cemetery deed the property to the three Masonic bodies in or before 1887, Alexander having died in 1884 and buried in the Plot, in order to provide for its maintenance in the future. To ensure the property would be maintained, he deeded it to the organizations in which he had the greatest trust. The two Masonic Lodges in the city of Columbia at that time and the Columbia Chapter of the York Rite. Richland Lodge # 39 was chartered in 1841 and Acacia Lodge # 94 in 1859. Grand Lodge records show Acacia Lodge # 94 meeting in the same building as Richland Lodge # 39 in 1860. Over the years, these two Lodges have shared the same building in several locations and on occasion conducted the installation of their officers together. This fraternal spirit between the two Lodges was probably a major factor in both being named in the deed along with Columbia Chapter # 5, R.A.M.

Have we been the stewards that John Oliver envisioned for the Masonic Plot? The last burial was in 1938. Since then several generations of Masons have come and gone without it serving the needs of any indigent Mason, his widow or orphans. Do the members of the organizations deeded this property know of its existence? What are these heirs doing to plan for the maintenance of the Plot for future generations? Acacia Lodge # 94, Columbia Chapter # 5, R.A.M. and Boyleston Lodge # 123 (merged with Richland Lodge # 39 thus entitled to all assets belonging to Richland Lodge # 39) have an opportunity to renew the trust placed in their hands by the Oliver brothers. Some ideas for these bodies to consider are:

- A permanent Masonic Plot Committee composed of two members from each of the three bodies to be appointed annually and charged with developing and updating plans for the awareness, maintenance and use of the Plot.
- The design, purchase and placement of a marker on the Plot that will interpret its Masonic connection and purpose. Elmwood Cemetery requires markers in the section the Plot is located to be of granite or marble. Cost for a granite marker with a brief explanation would be around \$1800.
- Plan and conduct a service of consecration.

Sources:

Acacia Lodge # 94, AFM – Minutes and historical files.
Elmwood Cemetery

McCall, Clare. *A History of Richland Lodge No. 39 Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina at Columbia, South Carolina*, Richland Lodge No 39, Columbia, SC 1991.

South Carolina Grand York Rite

The Grand Lodge of Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina