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Hometown History

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Heaston Cemetery & Gas Light District

The Heaston Cemetery was established by David and Cathrine Heaston in 1844. It is located on 630 South Western Ave, Winchester, Indiana, North of the Winchester Amory.¹ However, the land the Heaston Cemetery is located at is prone to flooding and has horrible drainage. Because of this problem, it causes the bodies resting there to rise up to the surface; this also causes major erosion to the grave stones causing them to break apart and even sink back into the ground. Many stones are like this and so the decision was made to restore the old stones and burial ground. Some of the bodies that were discovered were moved to Fountain Park Cemetery for their new resting place due to this issue.

The Heaston Cemetery is a major part of Winchester history. It was the first cemetery established in Winchester. Henry and Sarah Kizer were the first two buried in Heaston in 1823. Henry died on August 12th, and his wife died exactly a day after his death.² The last person buried in Heaston was Ford C. Phillips on January 8th, 1979.³ Many bodies were moved during the time of the first and last people there due to the soil in the area. The soil didn't drain well which caused bodies to rise to the surface and headstones to erode. Majority of the headstones have been recovered, but some are still unknown. Those that are unknown have memorial

¹ Old Winchester Cemetery, Book 78, Hometown History

² Smith, Sharon E. Voices From The Graveyard: North Charleston, SC. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

³ Old Winchester Cemetery, Book 78, Hometown History

markers at both Heaston and Fountain Park Cemetery. The makers and records of some of the people buried there have either been lost or the papers are unable to be read due to them being so aged and dated. This allows those who are buried and unable to be identified to still be memorialized and not forgotten.

The Heaston Cemetery has many volunteers over the years that have devoted their time and effort to restoring the graveyard to help preserve the history that rests there. The restoration allows those to still be memorialized and be a major part of Winchester history. The cemetery contains many Civil War soldiers that have headstones that are nearly two hundred years old.⁴ Most people that walk through the Heaston Cemetery would have few clues that this is the final resting place for most of Winchester's early pioneers. Valentine and Elizabeth Wysong were two of the first white people to settle in Winchester and were buried in the Heaston Cemetery.⁵ Without the efforts to restore and preserve these peoples' history, they might have been forgotten.

One story in particular that has not been forgotten is the story of "Our Jonnie." This grave represents the many of the children that died from different sicknesses at a young age. At first, people thought the grave was for a young Civil War soldier that died in combat, but historians figured that it represented the children that died since there were no Civil War soldiers under the age of 15.⁶ His grave has been placed at both the Heaston and Fountain Park Cemetery to memorialize his death. Another major part of Winchester and the history that is here is the Gas Light District.

The Gas Light District was a neighborhood connected to the Heaston Cemetery. The district got their name from having gas powered street lights.⁷ This was a technological

⁴ Old Winchester Cemetery. (Book 78).

⁵ Pauper Burials at Fountain Park Cemetery, unknown

⁶ From the Pages of History. rchsmuseum.blogspot.com, November 29, 2019.

⁷ Homes of Winchester: Gas Light District, 50.

advancement because it was the first neighborhood to have this luxury for their streets. The Gas Light District still exists today even though there are no gas fueled lamps in the area. The gas lamps have been replaced by the modern day electricity street lights. In the present day, the district is located behind Willard School.