

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE LEWIS FAMILY AND OLD CATHOLIC CEMETERIES,
SWEET SPRINGS, WEST VIRGINIA, SPRING 1986

On the knoll above the old Lewis mansion of Lynnside, across the road from St. John's Catholic Chapel, two very unique cemeteries lie side by side. Slaves, Irish immigrants, and the very influential Lewis family rest in peace in the same burying ground.

I. The Lewis Family Cemetery

The front one-third (about .3 acres) of the burying ground is the Lewis Family Cemetery.

A. Graves of the Lewis Family (and Gov. John Floyd)

The most logical place to start a visit is at the large triangular stone cairn over the graves of William Lewis (1724-1811) and his wife Ann Montgomery (1737-1808). This monument was erected by the last Lewis to live at Lynnside, Miss Coralee Lewis (1881-1966). She died before she was able to have the names placed on the cairn; you will notice a rectangular space where the inscription was supposed to be.* William Lewis was the brother of Andrew Lewis of Point Pleasant fame. (More details on the lives of the people here described are available in the history found in the rededication booklet of St. John's Catholic Chapel, April 17, 1983).

Coming towards the front of the cemetery one finds a large stone slab 36 inches wide, 2 inches thick and 68 inches long, covering the grave of William's famous son John. The slab reads:

Here lie the remains of
JOHN LEWIS
Son of Wm Lewis & Ann Montgomery
who was born in August 1754,
and died at the Sw. Springs June 8, 1823.
He was a man of noble nature, stern integrity,
high courage & pure patriotism, and the friend &
fellow soldier of Washington under whom
as a Va. officer he fought bravely the battles
of Brandywine, Monmouth, and with whom
he passed the winter of 1777 at Valley Forge.
He was the grandson of John Lewis, the pioneer
of Augusta Co. and in his day & generation did noble
service in establishing upon a solid bases the Liber
ties of the country he had contributed so largely in
rescuing from a savage foe.
His wife Mary Preston who was born in 1776 & died
Feb. 4 1821 is here buried by his side.
This monument was erected in 1858 by their descen
dants to commemorate their virtues: & as a grateful
recognition of the mercy of God to the seed of the
righteous.

To the left of John Lewis' marker is Governor John Floyd's grave. Its slab is of dressed concrete, six feet long, three feet wide, and four inches thick. It reads: JOHN FLOYD/TWICE GOVERNOR OF/VIRGINIA/

AN APOSTLE OF SECESSION/AND THE FATHER OF/THE OREGON COUNTRY/
DIED AUG. 21 1837.

His wife is buried by his side. Plans call for a similar slab to be placed on her grave (currently unmarked), to read: LETITIA PRESTON FLOYD/ WIFE OF GOVERNOR JOHN FLOYD/MOTHER OF GOVERNOR JOHN BUCHANAN FLOYD/ AUTHOR AND EDUCATOR/ DIED DEC. 12, 1852.

Their oldest daughter, Letitia Floyd, became the third wife of John Lewis' son William Lynn. Letitia (1814-1886) and William Lynn (1799-1869) are buried in front of the graves of the governor and his wife. Letitia and William Lynn brought the estate to its greatest splendor, in the years just before the Civil War.

Letitia's sister Eliza Lavalette Floyd (†9/12/1887) married George Frederick Holmes (1820-1897), who later became a prominent professor at the University of Virginia. Markers for their graves are just behind Governor Floyd's.

One Lewis stone (Mary Fox, daughter of Pat Fox and Sarah Lewis, †7/29/1869) and one stone almost illegible have the very old style of printing. The Lewis-Fox stone is isolated, in the front left hand side; the other stone is on the right hand side, near the Rowan obelisk (see below). The other stone currently lies flat.

B. The Graves of Black Families.

A large stone marker a few feet to the right of John Lewis' marker is inscribed "FAITHFUL SLAVES TOM & DINAH DIED A.D. 1800." These were probably the house slaves of William Lewis.

It is certain that after the Civil War, other black families buried here. The Woodville's, for example (see below), employed a black servant girl, one of whose infant grandchildren is buried here.

C. Other Families.

The markers to Dennis Stack (behind the Lewis') and the Rowan Family (a short obelisk in front of Tom and Dinah's marker) are also historically interesting. The unmarked grave of Letitia Preston Floyd Frederick Osborne (†7/2/1933) is visible as a shallow depression in front and to the right of Governor Floyd's marker.* Her daughter, Letitia Preston Osborne Randall Laiser, was a renowned traveller and author.

Note: When Philip Keiley was buried, the funeral director used a probe to locate one of the few sections of the Lewis Family Cemetery where there are not unmarked graves.* It is absolutely certain that there are many more graves in the Lewis Family Cemetery, and probably in the Old Catholic Cemetery, than we have records for.

It is also probable that over the years, stones and markers have disappeared.

II. The Old Catholic Cemetery.

Behind the graves of the Holmes family stands a large oak tree. Run a line directly through the tree, across the width of the cemetery and you have the boundary line of the Old Catholic Cemetery. Approximately .89 acres were obtained by Bishop Kain in 1882 for this cemetery. Until St. Andrew's Church in Union was established in 1977, this cemetery was the only property in the county owned by the Catholic Church. (St. John's Chapel was purchased from the Lewis heirs only in 1977).

A. Irish and German Families.

Attracted by jobs building the turnpikes and railroads, many Irish Catholics came to the Sweet Springs area in the early 1800's. A scattering of German Catholic families also came. On the left side of this cemetery, note the foot high concrete wall for the Curran family. An interesting example of early 20th century concrete work, the wall encloses three generations of Curran graves.

Thanks to the research of James L. Smith of Oceanside, Ca., into his ancestors John Dillon (born 1820-21) and Mary Ryan (born 1830-31), we have an extensive geneological chart of one Irish family buried in the Old Catholic Cemetery. Among their descendants are Father Paul Hickey, of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, and Sister Mary Clare SSJ, of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Wheeling.

B. The Woodville-Ferguson Families.

One family of wealth and power, who are buried in both cemeteries, are the Woodvilles. Dr. James Lewis Woodville (1820-1904) was a great-grandson of William Lewis; his large estate near Sweet Springs, Glen Cary, probably rivalled the Lewis' Lynnside. He and his wife Mary Breckinridge (1831-83) are buried with several other Woodvilles at the back of the Old Catholic Cemetery. Cary Breckinridge Woodville and his wife Sarah Lewis are buried in the Lewis Family Cemetery.

Thanks to a descendant, Jane Flaherty Wells, of Huntington, W.Va., we have a thorough history of the Woodville's, their connections with the Lewis' and Prestons, and their relationship to the Episcopal and Catholic Churches.

Acknowledgements: *material furnished by Madeleine Keiley, 1985. A special thanks also to the Monroe County Historical Society, without whose encouragement this would not have been written. Haskell Shumate and Izzy McCoy were most helpful with Letitia Preston Osborne.

Note: this is not a complete listing of all families and individuals buried in the two cemeteries. As Jane Flaherty Wells observed in her notes on the Woodvilles: "Family records indicate many more burials than these, but these seem to be the only marked graves."

There is a very old cemetery just to the left of the Andrew Rowan Home. It contains some families who have also buried in our cemeteries, eg the Worshams. One may enter the main entrance of the Rowan Home property and follow the access roads to the cemetery, known locally as the Sweet Springs Cemetery.

We are working on a complete list of families and individuals.

The Monroe County Historical Society is working on a listing of all the cemeteries of the county.

For Further Reading

Cowell, Mark W. Jr.; Fisher, Lewis F.; Frazier, Irvin, The Family of John Lewis, Pioneer (San Antonio, Tx.: Fisher Publications, Inc., 1985), rev. ed.

Crowson, E.T., "George Frederick Holmes," Virginia Cavalcade, Spring 1968, pp. 18-29. Copy available also at Monroe Co. Library, Union.

Wells, Jane Flaherty, "Woodvilles," a file of clippings and notes, 1985, copy available also at Monroe Co. Library, Union.

Winter, Harry E., "A Short History of St. John's Chapel," Rededication Mass Booklet, 1983.

Please address questions to the Reverend Pastor, St. Andrew's Catholic Church, Box 347, Union, W.Va. 24983, or to Mrs. Jack (Lynn) Spellman, Sweet Springs, W.Va. 24980.

32 20 **In late September, 1988, Ken Robinson, an archaeologist from North Carolina, spent a week excavating in the cemeteries. Over unmarked graves were located in the Old Catholic Cemetery; the grave of Governor Floyd's Catholic wife was definitely located also. Two sixteen page reports on each cemetery's work, by Ken, are available.

+Ken returned to the Lewis Family Cemetery from June 11-16, 1990, to continue the restoration, especially in preparation for the dedication of the marker to Letitia Preston Floyd, tentatively scheduled for late afternoon, August 15, 1990.

Note that only the top 6 inches of soil were examined (except for the use of a probe, and soil sampler). No graves were excavated.

Madeleine Keiley, wife of Lewis descendant Philip Keiley, furnished much information and encouragement, especially in 1985. She died in 1997 and is buried in the Lewis Family Cemetery. A special thanks also to the Monroe County Historical Society, without whose encouragement this could not have been written. The late Haskell Shumate and Izzy McCoy were most helpful with Letitia Preston Osborne.

Kenneth Robinson began probing and restoring the burial ground from Sept. 27-Oct. 1, 1988, locating 20 unmarked graves in the Old Catholic Cemetery, and marking them. His Map and Key (see below) gives a total of 165 graves in both cemeteries, with 108 named and 57 unnamed, as of 1990.

Sometime after World War I, another cemetery was begun, just behind the chapel. It has been named "The New Catholic Cemetery." There is a very old and historic cemetery just to the left of the Andrew Rowan Home (the old Sweet Springs Resort). It contains some families who have also buried in our cemeteries, eg the Worshams. One may enter the main entrance of the Rowan Home property and follow the access roads to the left, to reach the cemetery, known locally as the Sweet Springs Cemetery. The Monroe County Historical Society is working on a listing of all the cemeteries of the county.

For Further Reading

Cowell, Mark W. Jr. and others, The Family of John Lewis, Pioneer (San Antonio, TX: Fisher Publications, Inc.), 1985.

Crowson, E.T., "George Frederick Holmes," Virginia Cavalcade, Spring 1968, pp. 18-29.

Robinson, Kenneth W., Archaeological Investigation at the Old Catholic Cemetery, Sweet Springs, WV, 1988a. 16 pp.; copy on file at St. Andrew's, Union, WV.

Robinson, Kenneth W., Archaeological Investigation of the Governor Floyd and Letitia Preston Floyd Graves, Sweet Springs, WV, 1988b. (32 pages of text, 11 of photos and diagrams, showing the fascinating story of careful restoration in both cemeteries, dated Feb. 15, 1991). Copies on file at St. Andrew's, Union, WV.

Robinson, Kenneth W., Old Catholic and Lewis Family Cemetery, Map and Key, Summer, 1990 (showing all graves, marked and unmarked, 4 pp). Copies on file, St. Andrew's, Union, WV.

Winter, Harry E., "Letitia Preston Floyd--Pioneer Catholic Feminist," 9 pp., 1990, copies on file, St. Andrew's, Union, WV.

Winter, Harry E., St. John's Catholic Chapel, Sweet Springs, WV, (ed. Michael Williams), 1999, distributed by the Alleghany Highlands Council 8689, Knights of Columbus, 8 pp.

Further Information

For comments regarding the Old Catholic Cemetery, see the Pastor, St. Charles Borromeo Church, White Sulphur Springs, WV. For comments regarding the Lewis Family Cemetery, see Mrs. Jack (Lynn) Spellman, Sweet Springs, WV. First edition of this description, spring, 1986; second edition, fall, 1999. Kindly distributed by the Alleghany Highlands Council 8689, Knights of Columbus and authored by Father Harry E. Winter O.M.I.