

Cemeteries of the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area

The earliest historic burial that has been located at Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area is located in the No Business Cemetery which is on a small ridge on the North side of No Business Creek, about halfway upstream from its confluence with the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River. A small stone engraved with R.S. 1848 may represent the grave marker for Robert Slaven. The most recent burials to occur within the boundary of the National Park take place at the many active, private cemeteries located throughout the National Area. All of the cemeteries in the boundary of the National Area have remarkable stories associated with them. Below are a few.

OWENS CEMETERY, TN

The Owens family moved into the area of the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River at its confluence with Station Camp Creek in the late 19th Century. Their large farm was located in the bottoms just west of the junction of Station Camp and Laurel Fork Creeks. The family also owned and operated a large grist mill here. Eight graves dating from 1888 to 1903 are situated on a small bench overlooking the family home site. The headstones for the children were made by their father as each of five of his children died. What is interesting about these graves is that the names, dates, and epitaphs are characterized by grammatical and spelling errors, the reversal of letters and an inversion of surname letters in the short space of a few years.

CHARIT CREEK/HATFIELD CEMETERY, TN

The earliest grave in this cemetery of nine graves, including six head & foot stones, is that of Jonathon Burke. Only two of these stones have an epitaph but the original Burke headstone was stolen when Joe Simpson operated the Charit Creek site as a "Hunting Lodge" (Figure 1). Joe felt so depressed over this that he replaced the original stone with one that he had carved as close to the original as he could make it.

Jonathon Burke b8/14/1797 d8/28/1875

Another of the original settlers of this area is located in this cemetery; the grave is that of William Riley Hatfield who was interred in 1892. According to Joe Simpson who talked with Mr. Hatfield's niece, she related that:

"Mr. Hatfield was a strong Christian man. He came from West Virginia, - Where they had all the trouble years ago-. He didn't believe in all the killin and moved his family here. He had a bad temper, and did not believe in violence. He got into an argument down by the river one day with somebody he was mad at. He swung his horse around to knock the man down and trample him. The man stumbled, and shot Hatfield with his 45-70 rifle into his stomach, and the bullet destroyed part of his face, killing him soon afterwards".

W. R. Hatfield b7/25/1824-d1/22/1892

The roses on the grave were supposedly planted by Hatfield's wife Elizabeth. She was Jonathon Burke's daughter (b1831-d1910 m1849).

Later, according to Mr. Simpson, the Stearns Company sent a lawyer to buy her (Mrs. Hatfield's) land. She refused, but the day after he had left she sent word to the lawyer, who was in Huntsville, TN, that she would sell. After selling she and her four sons moved to Crowder, OK (near McCallister, OK) where she died and was buried nearby.

CHIMNEY ROCKS CEMETERY, TN

This cemetery contains 66 graves only 25 of which have inscriptions. The earliest grave in the cemetery is that of "PA" Slaven who was buried there in 1776 (**Figure 2**). The last burial occurred in 1936. The earlier headstones in this cemetery were locally manufactured using available fine-grained sandstone slabs that were, according to local sources, quarried just down the road several hundred yards from this cemetery. Over time, though, literacy was not emphasized and people who could read and write begin to disappear. Many of the field stones without inscriptions serve as "grave markers" and probably date from the late 1890s and early two decades of the 20th Century. As large industries move into the area literacy once again becomes a valued skill and many people learn to read and write. This brings more prosperity and the locally quarried stone is replaced with commercial stones like marble or granite (**Figure 3**). These commercial stones are brought in and then locally inscribed. But even this eventually gives way to commercial stones with pre- inscribed epitaphs, local carvers just inscribe names and dates.

RANSE BOYATT CEMETERY, TN

This cemetery contains 6 graves, 4 of which have inscriptions. The earliest grave dates to 1904 and the last burial was of Ransom Boyatt in 1935. This grave only had a small aluminum (modern) cemetery marker with his name until a new commercial headstone was added in 2000.

The body of Ransom "Ranse" Boyatt was discovered locked in his house at the head of No Business Creek, a main tributary of the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River (**Figure 4**). His remains were found lying on a bed, very obviously dead and beginning to deteriorate. His tongue was protruding, and rope scars around his neck indicated that he had been hung. A rope attached to a rafter in the barn suggested that this is where he had been lynched. Ranse had been allowed to return to the family farm to tend his stock while his family remained "detained" at the Pickett County jail following a double homicide committed by Ranses's son Jerome.

TACKETT CEMETERY, TN

As the story goes, the two Tackett brothers, one fifteen and the other sixteen years of age, lived with their mother and grandmother near the confluence of Charit and Station Camp Creeks. One day in late May of 1863, Mrs. Tackett hid her two sons underneath a feather mattress on top of which was placed a down quilt. The grandmother then laid on the top of this. They did this to prevent the boys being pressed into service by a roving band of guerrilla soldiers. Tragically, the story states that both boys suffocated underneath the heavy feather mattress. The brothers are buried approximately 90 feet away from the home site, and one inscribed stone reads, MA 3 1863 (Figure 5).

LEATHERWOOD FORD OVERLOOK GRAVE, TN

The story of this lone grave is that of a black fellow that was hired and worked with a lumber crew in an area overlooking the Leatherwood Ford, along the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River. One day the lumber boss just *“up and took a club and killed him”*. The assumption being that the “boss” didn’t want to pay out to him his wages. The murdered man *“...was buried where he fell but nothing was ever done to the killer”*. The grave where this occurred has a stone but no inscription” (Figure 6).

ROBERTS/JONES/HUNLEY, KY

Another burial at the Roberts/Jones/Hunley cemetery is of special interest. The grave of note here near Alum Ford in Kentucky is what is referred to as a “Coffin-Type” of construction made of large slabs of limestone pieced together to form the shape of a coffin (Figure 7). This type of construction dates from the Middle -19th Century and the grave may record a date of 1856. It is hard to be sure since the pieced together slabs were all vandalized and scattered when first recorded in 1985.

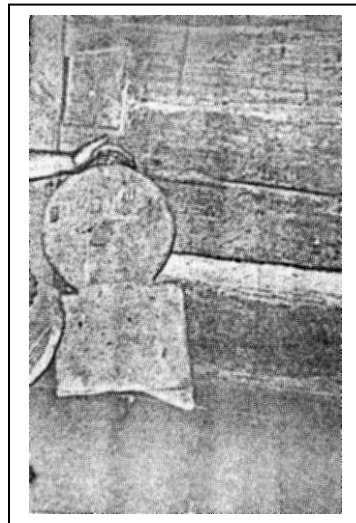
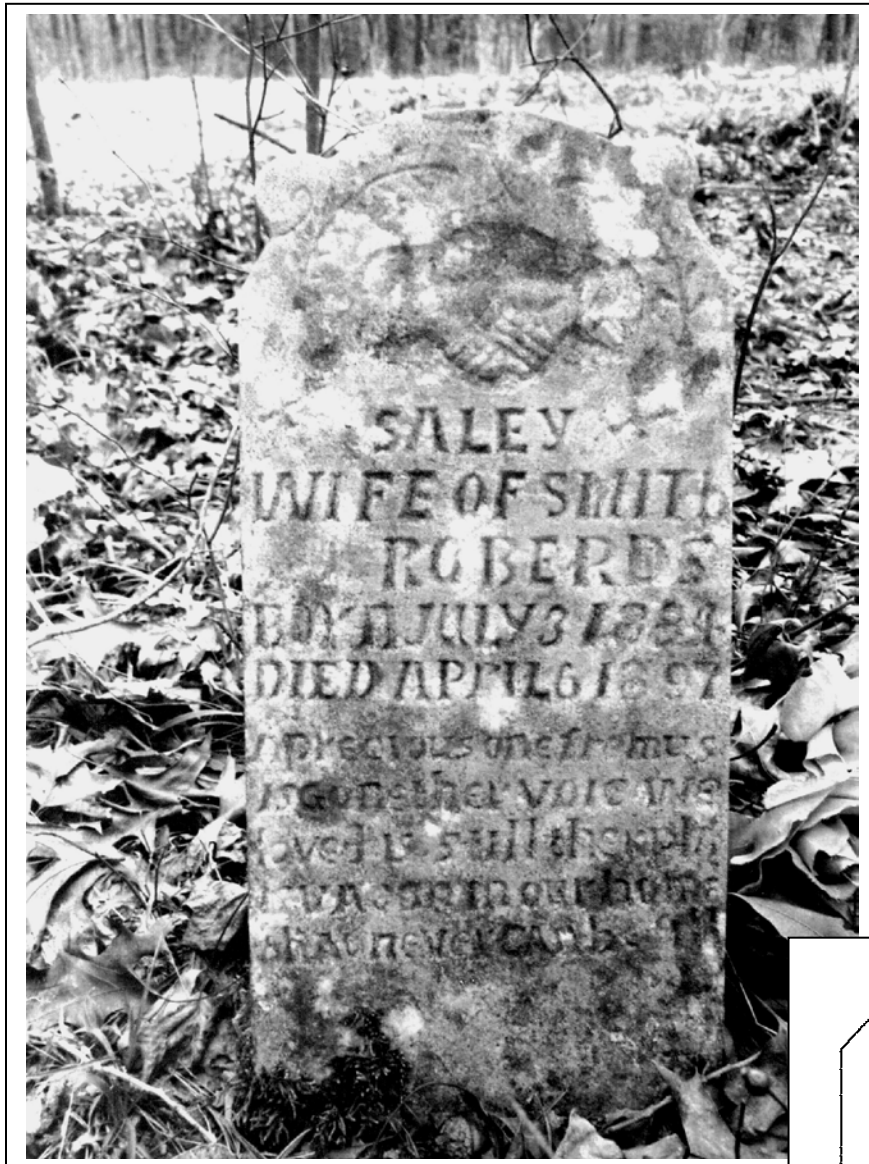


Figure 1. Close up of newspaper photograph of the original Jonathon Blevins headstone, since stolen from the Charit Creek Cemetery, Big South Fork.



Figure 2. Handmade headstone for Absalem Slaven using local stone



SALEY
WIFE OF SMITH
ROBERDS
BORN JULY 3 1884
DIED APRIL 6 1897
A Precious one from us
is Gone the voice we
loved is still the plac
is Vacant in our home
that never can be fill

Figure 3. Headstone for Saley Robards, note the nature of the locally inscribed epitaph. Also note dates of birth & death.



Figure 4. Stabilizing the remains of the Ranse Boyatt house ruins.



Figure 5. Tackett Headstone with 1863 inscription in center.



Figure 6. Leatherwood Ford Overlook Grave..



Figure 7. Coffin-Type crypt at Alum Ford, possibly of S. E. Roberts d.1856.,