

# CALLOWAY COUNTY'S ASBURY CEMETERY

Ernie R. Bailey, Ph.D.

Asbury Cemetery, located northwest of Stella and northeast of Coldwater in Calloway County, is one of the oldest burial grounds in Kentucky's Jackson Purchase. Many of the pioneer settlers who purchased land at Wadesboro settled in this region of Calloway County. Among the family names to be found at Asbury are Bazzell, Clark, Dulaney, Floyd, Hughes, Hurt, Hudspeth, Radford, Stone, Turner, Vaughn, Wrather and many others.

The origin of the cemetery is somewhat obscure. According to the most reliable research available, the cemetery actually began as small burial plots for two prominent pioneer families whose land joined where the cemetery now stands. Both the Bazzell and Slaughter families established family cemeteries only a few yards apart as well as a burial ground for slaves who worked in the nearby mill. Many of the slave graves were marked with crude sandstones, some of which still survive.

The area quickly became a center for worship activities. It is thought by some local historians that the first meetinghouse on the site was a union church, a community church or a Christian Church as both the Bazzell and Slaughter families were associated with the Barton Stone-Alexander Campbell movement.

At some point in the mid nineteenth century, the congregation became known as the Asbury Methodist Church, having been named for the famous Methodist Bishop, Francis Asbury (1745-1816). Through the years, at least four different buildings have stood on the site and an active Methodist congregation existed there for many years. By the late 1920s or early 1930s the congregation disbanded as members moved to the Kirksey, Coldwater and Goshen Methodist churches. The Memphis Conference of the United Methodist Church continued to administer the cemetery for many years before transferring the site to an independent cemetery association.

At least two Revolutionary War patriots are known to have been buried at Asbury as well as a veteran of the War of 1812 and numerous veterans of the Civil War. The earliest extant grave stones date from the decade of the 1840s, although it is known that burials took place there several years prior to that period.

In recent years, much to the dismay of local residents and law enforcement officials, extensive vandalism has occurred at the site. The remote location of

the cemetery invites the sort of wanton destruction that has occurred. The situation is made worse by the fact that the oldest stones, which are the most valuable in terms of historic interest and in genealogical information, have been the object of the worst destruction.

The annual cemetery meeting is scheduled for Saturday, August 12th of this year. In case of inclement weather, the event will be moved to one of the nearby churches. Important security, preservation and restoration plans will be discussed at this year's meeting. All members of the Jackson Purchase Historical Society are issued a special invitation to attend this year's meeting in order to support the efforts to preserve this historic and picturesque site. Cemetery vandalism is certainly not confined to Asbury, but all those who have an interest in preserving the heritage of Kentucky's Jackson Purchase will surely wish to see this particular cemetery rescued from the clutches of the criminal element which is so bent on its destruction.

Tax deductible contributions toward the preservation, upkeep and security of Asbury may be mailed to Mr. Iris E. Crawford, 503 South 16th Street, Murray, Kentucky 42071. Checks should be made to the Asbury Cemetery Committee.