

Hallowed Ground, Old Shiloh Cemetery

by Martha Tootle Cain with
J. Derwood Tootle and
Nancy Hodges Crosby

Old Shiloh Cemetery, probably the oldest public cemetery in Tattall County, lies east of GA Highway 121 (the Woodpecker Trail) at milepost 15, about four and a half miles south of Reidsville. Here under huge oaks, about five hundred early Tattall residents sleep eternally at the site of the second Methodist Church in the county. Included are both Whites and Blacks, free and slave. Six generations of some early pioneer families are interred here.

Tattall County was created largely from Montgomery County by the Georgia Legislature on December 5, 1801, and named for Georgia Governor Josiah Tattall. Some land grants to those who had served in the Revolutionary War had previously been made, but this wiregrass area was largely unsettled. The opening of a new county brought a flurry of settlers to the good lands along the rivers and up the creeks emptying into those rivers.

One early settler was Michael McKenzie Mattox, from Maryland for-bearers but a South Carolina resident, who had served as a Linesman in the Revolution. With him came three grown sons: Elijah, John, and Isaac, and a daughter, Sarah, married to the Rev. William Eason, a local Methodist preacher. Michael McKenzie Mattox received land along Battle Creek near its confluence with the Ohoopie River. One of the few places noted on the 1859 map of Tattall cartographed by James R. Butts was Mattox Mills, the home site and business. Elijah and John settled along lower reaches of Thomas Creek; William Eason on the upper reaches of Thomas Creek.

The extended family were devout Methodists. The Rev. William Eason attended the spiritual needs of the family and its neighbors. In 1806, he attended the Methodist Conference in Sparta, presided over by Bishop Francis Asbury, and pleaded for the assignment of a circuit rider pastor for the area. The Rev. Angus MacDonald was assigned. In 1808, Mt. Carmel Methodist Church was organized near the Easons' home; about 1810 Shiloh Methodist Church on vacant land among the Mattox families.

From its beginning, Shiloh was unique in that the community buried all its dead beside the church. No family plots were in the community until that of Henry Solomon Strickland, almost half a century later. When the congregation replaced the peeled pine pole building with a white frame church in the 1850s near a more reliable spring a short distance north, they continued to use the cemetery beside the first Shiloh Church.

Therein arose a problem. Never had the congregation done the paperwork to gain title to the land of that first Shiloh Church and its cemetery. Not until 1864 did Mary Jane Southwell McCall deed two acres on the waters of Thomas Creek to that second Shiloh Church. But families continued to bury their loved ones at Old Shiloh beside those who had 'outrun them to the Father's House'. In 1890, the first grave was placed beside the frame Shiloh Church; but, well into the twentieth century, families preferred that first cemetery.

In 1856, John E. Hammock had gained title to 15 acres of vacant land adjoining his sizeable farm. This included the first Shiloh Cemetery. In 1886, John E. and Nancy McCall Hammock deeded three acres of land, including the first cemetery "to be used forever exclusively as a burying

ground" to the Trustees of Shiloh Cemetery, Columbus Tootle, Levi H. McCall, and A. J. Hammock. In 1913, J. M. Smith and Belle Mattox sold a strip of land 10 feet wide and 750 feet long for use as a roadway to Old Shiloh Cemetery to the heirs of Columbus Tootle and Jeremiah Tootle. This land extended from the public road to the cemetery, then along the north and east sides of the cemetery. There is no record of other Trustees after those named in the 1886 deed. The community remembers persons who volunteered to lead in caring for the cemetery, such as William Napoleon Tootle; Robert H. Tootle, Sr.; W. Theo Tootle; M. Felder Jordan; T. Harry Wilkes, Sr.; and Beatrice Tootle Durrence. Always, the Shiloh Methodist Church has been interested.

By the 1920s, more Shiloh com-

munity residents were using the cemetery by the frame church. The last burials in Old Shiloh Cemetery were those of Julia Hammock Easterling and her daughter, Emma Easterling, in the spring of 1942. Theo Tootle championed the cause of erecting a new fence about the cemetery in the late 1940s. It was then that the pines were cut to help cover the cost. Later, Beatrice Durrence became the overseer of upkeep for Old Shiloh. For many years, Beatrice and Pigeon Sharp could be seen cleaning at Old Shiloh until the task became too, too great for two aging ladies.

Huge oaks have bumper crops of acorns, and from acorns new oaks grow. Old Shiloh became such a forest that walking within the cemetery was next to impossible. The wooden grave markers disintegrated with time. The stone markers were so shielded by the lush growth that identity as a cemetery was largely lost.

In fall 1994, Nancy Hodges Crosby, working on the family history of her husband (a descendant of Columbus Tootle), called Martha Cain to ask whether she had any objections to detainees from the Men's Detention Center in Claxton clearing the undergrowth at Old Shiloh. "An answer to years of prayer will be gratefully received" was the response. But T. Harry Wilkes, Chair of the Trustees at Shiloh United Methodist Church before its merger with the Reidsville United Methodist Church, and Beatrice Tootle Durrence, long the proponent for Old Shiloh up-keep, should be informed. Shortly, Nancy had arranged through Elaine Wood Wallace for the detainees to perform their Friday community duties removing the undergrowth at Old Shiloh and for Tattall County Commissioners to provide a chipper. Carl Burkhalter and Sam Kennedy supervised more than 2000 man-hours of clearing by the detainees.

For months, Derwood Tootle, newly an Appling Gray Son of Confederate Veterans, searched for the burial place of Simeon Tootle, the 17-year-old son of William and Sarah Mattox Tootle. Simeon was the youngest of six brothers, five of whom had volunteered as members of the Tattall Invincibles in March 1862. After training on the William Smith lands beside the Shiloh Cemetery, they had marched off to engage the Union Forces at James Island, South Carolina. There on June 10, in the first skirmish, Simeon was wounded and died four days later, one of the first two casualties of that company. Derwood called Martha Cain to inquire of Simeon's burial place and was told "in an unmarked grave in Old Shiloh." Derwood went to the cemetery and found only a few graves visible near the broken fence at the southeast corner of the overgrown forest. These were Tootle graves, including both Columbus and Jeremiah Tootle, older brothers of Simeon, who had served as officers of the Tattall Invincibles. Derwood did not find the grave of Cicero Tootle, his own great-great-grandfather, the eldest son of William and Sarah Mattox Tootle and the only one of their six sons who did not serve in the Tattall Invincibles.

Derwood slashed his way through the thick undergrowth to Cicero's fallen headstone. There at Cicero's feet lay the broken headstone of Mary Tootle Kennedy, one of Cicero's three sisters. Her stone marker (death date March 5, 1860) is the oldest stone marker in the cemetery. Derwood and Mr. Clyde had taken a bush hog, but the massive growth and underbrush overwhelmed the small tractor. Together they vowed to mark a grave for Simeon after Old Shiloh was cleaned and reclaimed.

In January 1995, Derwood Tootle, Martha Cain, and Johnnie and Nancy Crosby met to plan the restoration of Old Shiloh and a grave marking ceremony for the three Tootle brothers: Simeon, Capel (Colorbearer for the Tattall Invincibles who died of illness at home in October 1862), and Enoch (completed his Confederate service and died at home in 1864). June 24, 1995 was set as the date for the grave-marking ceremony to be conducted by the Appling Grays SCV. Utilizing the work of the detainees, Derwood, Mr. Clyde, and the Crosbys were to enlist others, clean the cemetery, and obtain military headstones for the three Confederate soldiers. Mr. Clyde brought in the heavy equipment and spent many hours

Derwood sought the help of his grandfather, J. Clyde Tootle. They visited Beatrice Tootle Durrence, who showed them on her self-drawn map of Old Shiloh where Cicero was buried and suggested they could get to it better from the west side. With a machete,

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often by himself - as brush and trees too large for the detainees were removed and earth moving was required. Canoochee Electric Membership Cooperative cleared the entangled trees from its line along the north side of the property. Lee Durrence, a tree surgeon, evaluated the oaks to choose those to be left on the property. Later, Ricky Hodges seeded the area with one part Bermuda and four parts centipede. Mr. Clyde, Derwood, Herbert Jordan, Cecil and Marie Rogers, and Louie Tietgen Smith undertook routine maintenance of the cemetery. Martha agreed to investigate the needed legal work - new Trustees, an official plat of Old Shiloh, a supporting organization both for finances, and for publicity.

Restoration of Old Shiloh was a much needed project, for which 'its time had come.' When folks observed people at work, they came to help - offering many diverse talents and uncounted hours of involvement. Several hundred people were present in a cleared cemetery on June 24 for the impressive grave marking ceremony conducted by the Appling Grays. The three grave sites marked were in line with that of Mary Tootle Kennedy as discovered by Barry Chandler using divining rods. Beside Mary to the north was first the grave of a small child and then graves of adults; to the south were a vacant space and then three adult graves near the outer reaches of the fenced Whites area. William had died in 1859; a young son in the 1830s; thus, the three adult graves together seemed more likely to be the three Confederates.

The Rev. Stephen Grantham, pastor of the Reidsville United Methodist Church, with which Shiloh had merged in 1984, was a constant source of knowledge and inspiration. He suggested Old Shiloh be kept as a community cemetery and that we ask Hal Roach, Attorney and Chair of the Statesboro District Trustees, for legal advice. Thus, all was readied so that five Trustees were appointed by Judge Albert Rahn III, in Tattall Superior Court on November 22, 1995. The five persons appointed were chosen to represent the major families buried at Old Shiloh, namely J. Derwood Tootle, Jr.; Johnnie H. Crosby, Jr.; Homer H. Durrence; Louie Tietgen Smith; and Martha Tootle Cain. To these Trustees was given the power to replace any Trustee who could no longer serve. Derwood was elected Chairman of the Trustees; Nancy Crosby was asked to be secretary.

Ken W. Smith, an attorney from Hazlehurst and a descendant of William Smith, was the presiding officer in the Appling Grays for the grave-marking ceremony. He offered his legal expertise. Ken suggested that the Reidsville United Methodist Church be asked to accept Old Shiloh Cemetery as a local

mission project so that funds received might be tax exempt until the time-consuming task of setting up a support group with tax exempt status could be accomplished. This responsibility, the Administrative Board accepted on June 18, 1995. Ken drafted By-Laws for Friends of Old Shiloh Cemetery, and led the group through the acceptance procedures and the incorporation. The organization was accomplished with 72 members on June 10, 1997. The first order of business at the First Annual Meeting on October 12, 1997, was to make Beatrice Tootle Durrence a LIFE member in the organization in gratitude for her many years of work, often by herself, to maintain Old Shiloh. Tax Exempt status by IRS was granted as a 501-C-13 entity on March 6, 1998.

David W. Tootle and Henry Durrence volunteered to survey the fenced cemetery (2.82 acres) with the public access (0.17 acres) and prepare an official plat, which was registered August 14, 1995. Segal Durrence, owner of the property around Old Shiloh, verbally agreed that use of the ten-foot right-of-way might be extended completely around the newly fenced cemetery.

Two errors had been made during the early clearing of the cemetery. First, no survey of visible grave sinks was undertaken before the clearing and the heavy equipment work, which obliterated all but the most obvious sinks. Parts of only two wooden grave markers were found. Second, the marble headstones were so blackened by years of weathering that much scrubbing with increasing concentrations of Clorox was used to clean them and now much of the more subtle sculpture has weathered away.

Four cemetery rosters recorded by Beatrice Tootle Durrence, Mary Frances Oliver, Evelyn Dorine Gay Edwards, and Armand LaFie were discovered. From these, an official register of graves was collated. Each interee with birth and death dates was further identified through research by names of parents and spouse. This roster has been expanded to include names of others known to be buried in the unmarked graves.

During the clearing, almost one hundred stone grave markers had been set in place again. Some headstones were broken. It was known who lay buried in some grave sinks. There were said to be many graves no longer visible. After much consultation, the marble markers were dowel-pinned and glued successfully; the concrete ones required a special adhesive. If the headstones were not repairable, the pieces were embedded in a concrete slab over the grave site and a new four-inch thick, marble headstone was purchased. Marble headstones were secured for the known interees in grave-sinks.

The mammoth task of discovering the obliterated grave sites was taken to Ken Thomas, Historic Preservation Section of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. He first suggested Sue Moore, PhD, archeologist from Georgia Southern. Dr. Moore felt the project done by electrolysis in a one-foot, two-dimensional grid would be too labor intensive. She suggested ground-penetrating radar by Steve Persons at RED-R Services in Atlanta. In two extended periods of work, Steve mapped 370 unmarked grave sites. One of Steve's first days at work, Barry Chandler with his divining rods came to walk beside Steve, and they compared the two data sets. Derwood

assembled the ground-penetrating radar data on a plot of Old Shiloh showing all known graves and assigning identifying numbers to each grave site. A numbered marble pillow, 4 inches by 6 inches extending to a depth of 15 inches was ordered for each grave whose interee was unknown. Volunteers set these pillows in place. Kyle Durrence, Administrator of the Segal Durrence estate, gave permission to extend the fence in the Blacks area said to have been given by William Smith so that the graves found outside would be within the cemetery. Names of interees with birth dates and death dates whose grave sites are unknown are placed on memorial ledgers at vacant sites throughout the cemetery.

Headstones moved away while Old Shiloh was so neglected were returned. Those included ones for the Rev. William J. Jordan and his wife, Margaret Holland Jordan, from Reidsville City Cemetery, and for Maxey S. Strickland from Shiloh Cemetery.

Tattall Countians. Visitors were often seen eagerly searching among the graves for a possible ancestor.

Then on May 17, 1998, vandals struck, overturning 56 of the one-103 headstones. Luckily, many hit the grass-covered soil and were unbroken, but Vidalia Monument Company assessed the damage as \$20,000. After several weeks, the Sheriff's Department had a claimant for the \$1000 reward. Three early teenage girls, ages 11, 12, and 13, were sentenced to two years probation, including 300 hours of community work, as many as possible at Old Shiloh. But the Department of Juvenile Justice had no supervisors for the Old Shiloh work. So, volunteers, always at least one man and one woman from the Trustees and Friends of Old Shiloh Cemetery, spent two years of two Saturday mornings monthly working with the girls. Three acres of pesky small oak leaves were raked and re-raked; dandelions pried from the developing lawn, bare spots weeded and reseeded, graves discovered by ground-penetrating radar data positioned among the marked graves. An early task was to disassemble the badly crushed vault of Josephine Hammock, whose death in October 1885 occurred when the ground was too wet for grave digging and decades later during a tornado a huge oak had fallen upon the vault. The sand-colored bricks crumbled while being cleaned. Cecil and Marie Rogers were among the supervisors that Saturday. They had volunteered at the Etowah Indian Mounds. When skeletal remains were found, the Rogers, with their expertise, took over the task of reclaiming the human remains. A wooden casket was obtained for the remains. New sand-colored bricks were purchased. A vault, with distinctive brick work as the first vault, was constructed. The Rev. Marshall Singletary, pastor of Reidsville United Methodist Church, officiated at the dedication of the reconstructed resting place during Annual Meeting in 1999.

At the Second Annual Meeting in October 1998, Friends of Old Shiloh Cemetery agreed to put the dedication of the restoration of Old Shiloh Cemetery and its marking as a Georgia Historical Site on the calendar as a special event October 14, 2001, during the Bicentennial of Tattall County.

On that October day after Homecoming at Shiloh, with the Rev. Stephen Grantham preaching and dinner-on-the-grounds, the crowd assembled to dedicate the restoration of Old Shiloh Cemetery. Trustees Chairman Derwood Tootle presided. Graves of Michael McKenzie Mattox, the Rev. Edward Moore, and the Rev. William J. Jordan were marked by Confederate re-enactors and wreaths laid by descendants. Plaques for special recognition for their work in the restoration were given to Beatrice Tootle Durrence, J. Clyde Tootle,

and Martha Tootle Cain. Mark Baxter and Sonny Dixon presented the history of the area. Dr. W. Todd Groce, Executive Director of the Georgia Historical Society, and W. Louie Smith, Sr., President of Friends of Old Shiloh Cemetery, unveiled the roadside marker, which reads as follows:

OLD SHILOH CEMETERY
Shiloh Methodist Church, the second Methodist Church in Tattall County, was organized about 1810 by Rev. William Eason and remained at this site until the 1850's when it was moved a short distance north. Unlike at other churches in the area at the time, a cemetery was maintained beside the Meeting House. Six generations of area residents are buried here in likely the first public cemetery in Tattall County. Burials include area pioneer Michael McKenzie Mattox, Methodist ministers, Confederate veterans, local and state elected officials, and numerous other whites and blacks - both slave and free. The last burial occurred in 1942.

Erected by the Georgia Historical

Society, Trustees of Old Shiloh Cemetery, and Friends of Old Shiloh Cemetery, Inc.
2001.18 132-2



Oldest marker found at Old Shiloh, badly broken, now embedded in concrete slab with headstone replacement - Mary Tootle Kennedy, 1835-1860.

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The Rev. Charles Adams, Statesboro United Methodist District Superintendent, offered the prayer of dedication and continuing commitment. Confederate re-enactors rendered a cannon and rife salute. "Taps" resounded from the trumpet of Bill Bowers. A significant milestone had been accomplished, but the total task was not yet completed.

In December 2002, Friends of Old Shiloh Cemetery accepted the goal of raising a \$50,000 Trust Fund for the perpetual upkeep of the cemetery by the end of 2012. For these first years, funds have been personal gifts - often memorial gifts. At Annual Meeting 2008, the Trust Fund consisted of \$30,000. At Annual Meeting 2006, a fund-raising project was approved. The Hudgins 1909 Tattall County map, showing the landowners, school districts, waterways, Rural Free Delivery Routes, and Militia Districts, was to be reprinted for sale. The information is now in the public domain. Family historians who question a piece of information were encouraged to ask about it. Before a change was accepted, it had to be corroborated with local cemetery records, Tattall County legal records, such as voter registration lists, tax and marriage records, and U.S. Census records. Jerry B. Tootle, broadcast specialist for Florida State University, did the computer work on the map. The map

was first sold at the 2008 Reidsville Christmas Festival, then at celebrations in Cobbtown and Claxton. Maps could be purchased at First Citizens Bank in Glennville. A major promotion of the map in Glennville will be at the Sweet Onion Festival, May 9, 2009. The map project was completely underwritten so that the \$20 price for a map goes into the Trust Fund. There is Georgia sales tax of an additional \$1.40 per map.

The task begun in 1995, which continues to demand attention, is discovering names of persons interred beneath the numbered marble pillows and recording that information on memorial ledgers throughout the cemetery. Thirty-four names currently are on memorial ledgers. Ten memorial headstones, including two Blacks, have been placed. Six known grave sinks now have marble headstones. Eighteen other names are in various stages of research to establish their validity as possible interees. Names of persons for consideration as Old Shiloh interees may be sent to Martha Tootle Cain, 109 Christie Lane, Statesboro, GA 30458.

Yes, the condition of Old Shiloh Cemetery, despite the valiant efforts of a few dedicated individuals, was disgraceful. But time became right for Old Shiloh to be restored. Many, many persons have contributed their time, their knowledge and skills, their encouragement, and their funds - and just when that special contribution was needed. A continuing series of miracles has made Old Shiloh Cemetery that wondrously peaceful place, hallowed as the eternal resting place of five hundred early Tattall Countians.

Derwood Tootle returning markers for Rev. W. J. Jordan (1826-1906) and his wife, Margaret Holland Jordan (1825-1878) to Old Shiloh Cemetery, November 1996.



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Jeremiah Tootle placing wreath at grave of his great-great grandfather, Lt. Jeremiah H. Tootle, CSA, 1830-1900, photo June 24, 1995.