

AN EARLY PIONEER CEMETERY

As people moved west, not only did they establish governments, schools, and churches in their communities, but they also, of necessity, established burial grounds. The earliest in our area were probably plots along the canal or the overland routes or small family plots on the newly cleared land. Most of these early areas have been lost, their wooden or stone markers rotted or crumbled and the land built over. The burial plots were referred to as “God’s Acre” or the “Church Yard” or the “Burial Ground”



long before they were termed cemeteries (which means “sleeping place”). According to former Perinton historian Helen Butler, there were three early burial grounds in Perinton of which there is no longer any trace. One was located on the southwest corner of Ayrault and Turk Hill Roads on land that was originally owned by the Slocum family. Tradition has it that they buried five of their children there. After the Ellsworth family acquired the property, another source referred to it as the “slave cemetery,” because apparently some slaves had been buried there. As late as the 1920’s there were around 16 stones still left at the site. Another site was reportedly located on Roselawn Avenue in the Village of Fairport. It was called “Peter’s Burying Ground.” A third lost site was located at Furman and County Line Roads.

One of the earliest of Perinton’s extant pioneer cemeteries, Perinton Center Cemetery, is located on Ayrault Road (formerly Wapping Road) high on a knoll across from Martha Brown School. The land, approximately one acre, “3 chains and 17 links by 3 chains and 17 links,” was deeded to the cemetery trustees, among them Jesse Perrin, Samuel Bennett, and Abner Wight, by Lyman Barker in 1813. Although there is no proof, local legend says that Jesse Perrin helped clear the land. The cemetery is still active, so it is possible to see gravestones that reflect over 200 years of burial customs as well as Perinton history. The stones are of various materials, some very eroded and unreadable, some very clear with long inscriptions. There are graves of those who fought in the Revolution, Civil War, and the two World Wars. Many of the stones are inscribed with symbols that were popular during the Victorian Era such as the willow tree, a dove, or a hand pointing to heaven.

The earliest gravestone in the cemetery is that of Hollister Perrin, son of Jesse and Abigail, who died as an infant in 1797. It is probable that the body was moved from the family farm on Moseley Road to the cemetery sometime after 1813. Both of Hollister’s parents, Jesse and Abigail, are buried with their son. Charles Arnold, one of Perinton’s pioneer Quaker settlers, is buried there. One of his family members, Isaac, owned and ran Arnold’s Tavern that still stands on the northwest corner of Ayrault and Turk Hill Roads.

Members of the Eaton family who moved to Perinton in 1810 and bought the Glover Perrin farm are buried there. Stephen was postmaster, overseer of highways, a juror, and a Revolutionary War veteran. Lucy, his wife, was one of the founders of the Congregational Church. They are joined by Ransom, their son, who died at the age of 21.

The view south from the cemetery looks out over land that was owned by the Ellsworth and Hannan families, a number of whom are buried in this place. The most impressive stone in the Ellsworth plot is that of Lincoln Byron Ellsworth (1862-1941) which is engraved with information not only about him, but also about his family. Lincoln was a farmer and an inventor who built one of the town's first steam engines and who was well known for his work on the development of the bicycle. Lincoln's grandfather, William Pratt, clan patriarch, industrialist and banker, grandmother Irena Cady, teacher and designer of early water power mills, and his father, James, and mother Mary Theresa Yale are also in the family plot. Among the many other Ellsworths is Deva (1895-1925), a musician who toured with several bands and also served in World War I as a member of America's Ladies Military Band.

The Ellsworth and Hannan families are related through marriage. Lincoln's wife was Jessie Julia MacMillan, daughter of James and Susan Ann Hannan MacMillan. Susan's parents were James and Lucretia Packard Hannan. Lucretia was known as an excellent horsewoman and taught school before her marriage and move from Egypt to a farm at the intersection of Route 31 and 250. Lucretia's father, Cyrus, was an innkeeper in Egypt before becoming Perinton's first supervisor. Their son, Jesse, was a Perinton supervisor, chairman of the Monroe County Board of Supervisors, and ran the family farm. All their graves may be found in Center Cemetery.

Visitors to this still-active cemetery should be sure to read the gravestone inscriptions and note the ages, enjoy the view south, and try to imagine what it was like nearly 200 years ago when this "God's Acre" was cleared.