

December 2015 – Cemetery of the Month: Covenanter

The Covenanter Cemetery, located on 1 ½ acres at the corner of Moores Pike (Hillside) and High Street (Perry township, section 3) was established in the 1830s on land purchased by emigrating Presbyterians from South Carolina, as the site both for their church and the graveyard. Known as Covenanters they were strong abolitionists who had been determined to leave the slave holding south. Reverend James Faris, a well-known name in Bloomington, was Minister of the new church and his monument, as well as markers for several family members and descendants are prominently present in the cemetery. After a fire destroyed the church in 1877 it moved to South Walnut Street but the cemetery remained at its original location. Later this group split into two factions, one of which became the Reformed Presbyterian Church and moved to the southeast corner of Lincoln and Washington streets. It is this church that is the owner and caretaker of Covenanter Cemetery.

The oldest part of the cemetery is on the east side under very well established old trees. The oldest stone found by this writer was that of George Daugherty, 1773-Oct. 1838, decorated with a weeping willow and in the very first row of gravestones. However it should be noted that the stones in this area are very mold covered and difficult if even impossible to read. Apparently, according to cemetery records, there are at least two Fullertons marked here who died in Aug. 1938 (Robert) and 1839 (John). Eleven Civil War veterans are buried here, including Henry Clay, 1826-1913, veteran of Co. I, 46th Indiana infantry and John H. Curry, 1845-1919, Pvt., Co. K, 133rd regiment. At least two very interesting stones in this older part have an open book on top of the stone – perhaps/probably the Bible?

Among the prominent families and individuals buried in Covenanter are the Faris family and descendants with more than 45 stones. Other prominent families include the Curry, McConnell, and Stephenson families. Also notable is the grave marker of Elizabeth Breckenridge, 1843-1910. Born in Bedford, Indiana, she was the daughter of an ex-slave and served as a domestic in the Theophilus and Rebecca Wylie family house on Second and Lincoln streets from the age of 13. Her mother, step-father and two infant half-siblings are buried next to her. Although there is some space remaining in the small, 3 ½ acre lot, burial there is restricted to members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in particular to descendants of those already buried there.

For the most part the cemetery is in very good shape though several of the older stones could use a good cleaning and one or two need repair or resetting. The Church's Cemetery Committee however takes very good care of it including mowing, leaf raking and other clean-up as needed. As a footnote to this report it might be noted that an automobile went through the southern (Moores Pike) stone wall, just east of the entry gate, in mid-November and, although doing a great deal of damage to the wall, knocked over but one large monument – that of John Cathcate. The monument itself seems to have very recently been replaced upright on its pedestal but the stone wall is still in need of repair.