

## **Parks/Bell/Wampler Cemetery**

On a crisp, early spring day, March 22, 2015, eight members of the cemetery committee, plus an interested guide, Debby Reed, went in search of the Parks/Bell/Wampler Cemetery. Debby and her family operate the Reed Quarry north of Bloomington near the cemetery. Her mother owned the property where the cemetery is located and still owns property nearby. Debby grew up in the area and has childhood memories of the cemetery. She has a wealth of information about the cemetery and the area around it, much derived from an abstract of the property that her mother passed on to her.

Access to the cemetery is difficult to say the least. The journey began on a mowed path leading south from Acuff Road but soon degenerated into a scramble through shrubs and briars followed by a climb over a barbed wire fence. After a walk of about a half mile we came upon a scattering of tombstones in a thicket of trees. We found only six inscribed stones, although we suspect that other may be hidden in the leaf litter or even under a shallow layer of soil. According to the 1998 register of County Cemeteries of Monroe County, death dates on the stones range from 1823 to 1846. The readable names are Mary Jane Bell, Deborah Griffith, Elizabeth Griffith, William Riddle, Esther Wampler, and Joseph Wampler. We found no stones labeled Parks. There are other stones with no inscriptions (the register indicates 25-30).

Debby Reed's abstract indicates that the property including the location of the cemetery was purchased by Joseph and Esther Wampler in 1831. They were relatives of the original owner, John Griffith. John moved to Monroe County in 1819. He established one of the earliest grist/saw mills in the county on Griffith Creek, probably the present Griffey Creek. Lumber for the first frame buildings in Bloomington may have been sawed at his mill. John's wife, Esther, is the oldest burial in the cemetery, which was first called the Wampler Burying Grounds. Albert Parks purchased the property in 1853 from a son of Joseph and Esther. In his will, dated April 15, 1873, Parks divided his property among his children, but preserved the  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres that included the Wampler Burying Ground as a cemetery.

An article in the Bloomington Herald Times, dated May 8, 1987, reports desecration of a grave in the cemetery. Someone had dug a shallow trench beside one of the stones. The motive was not determined nor was it clear that the trench was deep enough to reach the burial. The author

speculates that the culprits may have been looking for a cult ritual or a prank. Or the search may have been for presumed valuables included in the burial.

The article indicated that the age of the cemetery was 140 years (in 1987). The source of that date is not given. If the 1823 death date for Elizabeth Griffith is the date of her burial, the cemetery must be one of the oldest in the county, 192 years old at the present time (2015).