April 2017 Cemetery of the Month: Smithville Christian Church Cemetery
Written by Vanita Bell

Smithville Christian Church Cemetery is located on the east side of South Fairfax Road at the intersection of E. Ramp Creek Rd (E. Smithville Rd on west of S. Fairfax), and it has a long dry-stone wall along E. Ramp Creek Road. The latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates of the cemetery are approximately 39°04’15.2"N 86°30’09.9”W. The Smithville Christian Church is situated on the opposite side of South Fairfax Road, adjacent to the cemetery.

The Smithville Christian Church was established on May 24, 1858 on land donated by Mansfield Bennett, who was from North Carolina and an early pioneer of Monroe County. William Leonard helped lead the church building efforts and remained involved with the church during his lifetime.

William Leonard’s parents, also natives of North Carolina, arrived to the area in 1825. William was born in 1817 and was a farmer and stock dealer. William married Lucinda Grimes, and together, they had 11 children, including Dr. John Henry (JH) Leonard. William and Lucinda share a headstone in the cemetery, which stands prominently near the entry steps, which face South Fairfax Road.

Interestingly, two families who are buried in the cemetery arrived to the area in the 1830s from Wythe County, Virginia. The families are that of Jacob Deckard and James Harrell. It is unknown whether the families were acquaintances, but both appear in the 1830 Wythe County VA Census and again in the 1840 Census for Monroe County, Indiana. James Harrell and his wife, Mary Catherine Thrasher, had 13 children all of whom were living together in 1850, according to the Monroe County Census. One son, Joseph Harrell, who is buried in the Smithville cemetery, died October 29, 1899 at the age of 73. Joseph’s death certificate lists the physician as Dr. JH Leonard, son of William Leonard.

Smithville Cemetery remains active with approximately half of the land remaining available. There are approximately 520 interments, and the oldest headstones are located in the northwest corner of the cemetery nearest the intersection. The earliest burial (that I could find) is that of Mary E. Leonard, a 4-year old, who was buried on Dec. 21, 1858. With an amazing mix of the families of railroad workers, farmers, and quarrymen, the short drive to Smithville Cemetery promises to please the history buffs in our community.