

The Peak Cemetery

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on June 18, 2012)

This column is intended to bring attention to a truly historic site in Oak Ridge. It is also intended to assist with a CALL FOR HELP on **Saturday, June 30, 2012, at 8:00 AM**, at the Peak Cemetery at the corner of Wilberforce Avenue and Fisk Avenue.

I can't help but notice how unusual it is to have a junction of two Avenues! Yet, that is often the case in the Scarboro Community in Gamble Valley. It is also found at the corner of Utah and New York Avenues.

The Peak Cemetery is being cleaned up by community volunteers led by Councilman Dave Mosby and Scarboro resident, member of *Scarboro Neighborhood Watch Group*, past member of the *Oak Ridge Bombers* baseball team and good friend of mine, Larry Gipson, along with members of the *Team Investment* group. Won't you come out and help clean up this cemetery?

I hope this column provides information that will cause you to want to help preserve this historic cemetery and even to assist in an effort to get a Historical Marker there. Read on to learn why.

There are over 70 community and family cemeteries located within the Oak Ridge Reservation and the city of Oak Ridge. Most are maintained and marked. Many contain unmarked graves. Some of them were moved because of construction of the Manhattan Project sites and city of Oak Ridge.

A listing of those individuals buried in these cemeteries can be found at the following Oak Ridge Public Library Oak Ridge Room link: <http://www.oakridgetenn.org/departments/Library/Oak-Ridge-Room/Oak-Ridge-Cemeteries>. Although many unmarked graves are recognized, this resource is great for finding relatives' burial locations on the Oak Ridge Reservation and city of Oak Ridge.

CD's with photographs of the cemeteries on the Y-12 National Security Complex portion of the Oak Ridge Reservation can be found at the Y-12 History Center in the New Hope Center, which is named for the original community. You may visit there any time Monday – Thursday from 8:00 AM through 5:00 PM or at any other time by appointment.

The Oak Ridge Public Library's web site gives credit as follows: "Some of the information was taken from *Inscriptions from Old Cemeteries on the Oak Ridge* (Manhattan Project) Area by Marjorie Parsly and Margaret Terrell, with the permission of the Parsly family and Ms. Terrell. The GPS coordinates and photos were furnished as part of an Eagle Scout project in 2008 by Hunter Ripley."

I was pleased to assist Hunter as he located cemeteries on Oak Ridge Reservation surrounding the Y-12 site. I am also privileged to have a copy of the Marjorie Parsly and Margaret Terrell work completed in 1986.

One of those cemeteries is the Peak Cemetery located at the corner of Wilberforce Avenue and Fisk Avenue in the Scarboro Community located in Gamble Valley. This cemetery is overgrown, has trees fallen within it and generally is in sad repair. It has not been maintained for sometime. This is the cemetery that has been identified for a community cleanup project on Saturday, June 30, 2012. You are welcome to come and help!

Fred Eiler, a friend, mentioned in the recent articles on the Melungeons and DruAnna Williams Overbay, researched the Peak family property which led him to locate this cemetery. He has contacted members of the Peak family, visited the Oak Ridge Room of the Oak Ridge Public Library in his research and has shown me the cemetery. Fred is intensely interested in seeing this cemetery properly maintained.

The Peak Cemetery is an example of a segment of history that is in danger of being lost forever. You see, there is substantial indication that two Revolutionary War Soldiers may well be buried there in unmarked graves, William C. Griffith, Jr. and probably a second, his father-in-law, Thomas Jones.

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Also there is the possibility that two Civil War Soldiers are buried in the Peak Cemetery in unmarked graves. Jacob Peak's youngest son William who was the purchasing agent for the Confederacy and who died while on a mission in northern Georgia in 1864, and his son, William Henry Harrison Peak, a Confederate soldier who survived the war, married, died and must have been buried here in the family plot in 1878.

See the potential historical significance of the Peak Cemetery in Gamble Valley? It should not be allowed to go unmaintained! We are better than that. This cemetery may well be one of the most historic cemeteries in our city! We need a historic marker there!

Fred says, "Family lore has it that William Peak's body was returned here for burial." There is a marked grave for his mother, Sarah (Sallie) Tunnell Peak, who died in 1893. Seeing "Tunnell" makes me wonder if Lawrence Tunnell might be kin to this Sallie and might even have some details of the Peak family in his records.

Fred says of his research into these graves, "Snyder Roberts' (a renowned historian of Oliver Springs and surrounding area, whom I was privileged to know!) 'Story of Oliver Springs' on page 28 of Vol. IV states, 'William Griffith and his wife and Jacob Peak and his wife are buried in the Peak Cemetery in Gamble Valley in the Oak Ridge Project area.'"

"Later on the same page he adds, 'Thus, William Griffith is the only Revolutionary War soldier buried in the Oak Ridge Project area whose burial site can be pinpointed to an exact cemetery.'" Wow, what a keen insight!

Fred continued, "As to the father-in-law of Jacob Peak and William C. Griffith Jr., Thomas Jones, the only clue I could find was in Snyder Roberts' *Three Prominent Jones Families of Anderson and Roane Counties, Tennessee*, where he states on page 2, 'Thomas Jones was possibly buried in the Peak Cemetery in Gamble Valley (no stone).'"

Although there are at least 24 burials which are easily identifiable by the sunken graves, only two graves are actually identified with tombstones. Those two are, J. Clarence Peak, born November 30, 1884 and died August 25, 1906, and Sarah Peak, mother of William Peak, died 1893.

So, you see there is much information that should be applied to this historic cemetery, the Peak Cemetery. There is reasonable proof that exists to commemorate two Revolutionary Soldiers buried here in the Peak Cemetery.

From the late 1700's to 1942, the Peaks owned the center part of what is now Oak Ridge. In 1942, their property joined that of John Rice Irwin's family and ran from the top of Pine Ridge to the top of East Fork Ridge, encompassing what is now Scarboro in Gamble Valley where the historic cemetery is located. Another parcel northwest of this Peak property was owned in 1942 by the Peck family. This can be confusing, Peak and Peck.

At one time Jacob Peak, who, according to Fred Eiler's research was recorded on the 1802 county tax roll as being one of the few men in the county who had as many as two slaves, by mid-century census records indicate he owned more than 20 slaves and over 1200 acres of land before his death in 1853.

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This Jacob Peak plantation would have compared in size with the Gallaher Plantation which was to the west in Roane County. As there is a slave cemetery associated with the Gallaher Plantation, there is evidence that there may well have been a slave cemetery located near (maybe northeast) of the Peak Cemetery. No physical evidence has been found, however, and today Wilberforce Avenue cuts through the property just northeast of the Peak Cemetery.

There is much more to be learned about this historic cemetery in our midst, if we will join Fred in his efforts to research the history and Larry's efforts to clean up the property and finally if we can get a historic marker and assure the Peak Cemetery, No 27, is maintained in the future. We will have more to say as we learn more of the interesting history of the Peak family, like the large home known as the Jarnigan Brick or Jarnigan-Peak house that stood across the street from the Anderson County Court House in Clinton.

From Fred's research: "William Peak was the father of John Abner Peak, who married Margaret Rachel Garner, aunt of Vice-President John Nance Garner, and their son was Clyde William Peak (1882- 1962), the last Peak to live on the Peak property and who married Volina Lee. They were the parents of Sarah and Margaret, and the family moved into the Jarnigan Brick in Clinton in 1924." Now there is another story to be researched and told...The Jarnigan-Peak House.

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The largest tombstone in the Peak Cemetery is that of Clarence Peak

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The second and only other tombstone in the cemetery, Sarah Peak, wife of William Peak

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Cemetery # 27 of the more than 70 cemeteries located within the Oak Ridge Reservation and city of Oak Ridge