

Old Sulphur Cemetery

Darren Shell

Some may wonder why I often write about the cemeteries on Dale Hollow. After all, it is a morbid subject. But when asked, my answer is always the same. "There is a lot of history in the ground there."

It's not death and suffering that draws me to these spots. It's all the wonderful history buried there that intrigues me. Countless stories are buried there, too.

When I first found the McClusky Cemetery on Kemper Flats, I was overwhelmed with others that wanted to see that special spot. People I didn't know came to me asking for directions, and returning with a true appreciation of what lies beneath the red clay of that point. Thousands walked that shoreline viewing the odd casket shapes in the soil.

But unfortunately, the drought of last summer and the first few harsh rains of the winter have virtually washed away the shapes we once saw in the clay. Now, only crude sunken holes remain where those fresh clay castings once lined that point in rows. If you've never seen it, I suggest you go soon. It won't be there much longer. Time and Mother Nature will have washed it away, just as they washed it into view.

This little article is for those of you that have been to that old cemetery and have an appreciation for it. There's another on Dale Hollow you can go see. There are shapes in the clay there, too. They are a little harder to see, but they are certainly there. I'm talking about Old Sulphur Cemetery. It's a neat one.

Finding this spot is easy. Just south of Sulphur Creek Marina is Casey Creek Hollow. Casey Creek is on the western shore of Sulphur Creek and is clearly marked by one of the old white Corps signs. Just below that sign is where some of the old cemetery shapes can be seen in the clay. The graves are probably about ten feet deep at full pool. So, if the water is down at all, even a few feet, the graves can be seen beneath the lake surface. In the fall, those shapes are well out of the water.

That point is covered in dark black shale rock. Nestled within this dark cluster of shale are pockets of red clay. These pockets are the holes of graves. Some are square in shape, while others still hold their "Dracula-shaped" coffin configurations. Some of the black shale still holds its shape, too. Those were placed on top of the caskets during burial. The shale helped keep critters from digging into the shallow graves. There is very little soil depth in our hollows of Tennessee and Kentucky, and often graves are covered in rock for that purpose. In some cases, folks couldn't dig deep enough without hitting rock to fully bury a casket. They'd pile on slabs of rock to cover what couldn't be covered in soil.

When the lake was built, 116 graves were moved from this spot and reentered at Webb Cemetery just north of the lake. There were Johnsons and Coops, Spears and

Hoots, all buried here in this little hollow on Sulphur Creek's western shore. Although only a few holes are evident on the Casey Creek point, many more lay beneath the lake surface of Casey Creek.

As I mentioned earlier, history is buried here. For instance, old George Coops ran a general store in the Sulphur Creek hollow. Beneath Sulphur Creek's row of houseboat slips is where the store was located. Below dozens of lavish houseboats, a cluster of homes and buildings stood as part of the city once known as Peytonsburg.

The homes and barns of Peytonsburg filled the Sulphur Creek hollow west of the marina. Foundation stones can still be seen in piles throughout that hollow when the water is down in late summer. Miles of pasture land filled this whole cove from Diver's Island, to beyond the marina. Farmhouses dotted the long and winding ribbon of Sulphur Creek waters as far as the eye could see. The old road still winds down into the Casey Creek hollow as it did decades ago, when a different group of people called these hollows home...before Peytonsburg became just another wonderful cove in Dale Hollow.

So check it out. Go see that remarkable little point. Yeah, it's a graveyard, but it's more than that. As I mentioned before, there's a lot of history there. You'll feel it, I promise. That's why they call me The Gravedigger.~