

Kingdom Notes

In the past three years, the staff of the Kingdom of Callaway Historical Society has been actively seeking to locate and catalog family cemeteries which are essentially unknown to the public and to the Society.

In this period of time we have seen the number of cataloged cemeteries rise from 232 at the inception of the program to the current number of 281, with most of the cemeteries of increase being of the small family burial sites that are located on land purchased by our early pioneers. Many of these small cemeteries have been destroyed, but this time we would like to discuss some that have been saved.

Additionally, there is a current list of approximately 50-plus cemeteries that are not part of the current catalog of cemeteries but are just waiting to be located using GPS and be digitally photographed. It is unclear how many cemeteries will be potentially located in Callaway County.

This has been an exceptional year for the cemeteries of Callaway County. For many of us, it goes without notice that several of the more aged and historic cemeteries have seen vast improvements as a result of several local cleanup programs.

Most prominent among these cemetery cleanup efforts are those at Old Salem Missionary Baptist Cemetery on Route O near Readsville, Criswell Cemetery (New Providence Old

Cumberland Presbyterian Cemetery) on Route J north of Guthrie, and High Hill Baptist Cemetery on County Road 4003, approximately halfway between Route AA and Route BB.

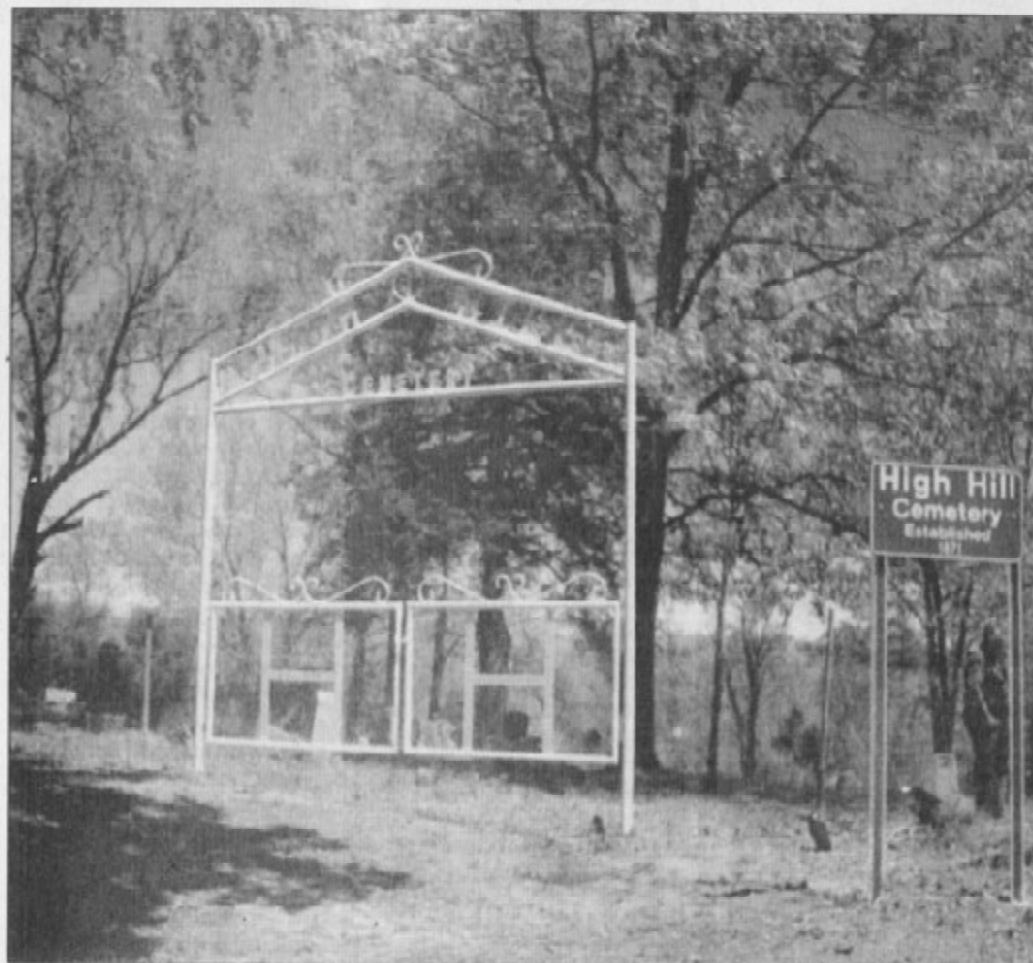
All three of these cemeteries have profited greatly as a result of these efforts. To those of you involved in these projects, we tip our hats.

In mid-summer about four years ago, Wayne Johnson finally located and attempted to photograph High Hill Baptist Cemetery. It was a fairly large cemetery, but he was only able to find and photograph five tombstones because of small trees and undergrowth that totally obscured the cemetery.

A year later, one individual started on a solitary crusade of cleaning up this cemetery by himself. A year later, the Richard and Frances Vaughn family and extended family took up the crusade to clean up, protect and preserve this old cemetery that was established in 1871.

The first half-day of their cleanup efforts involved approximately 10 people moving out and burning what one man had done the previous year. I am proud to say that this family has come back a second year with renewed vigor and a lot of good planning, and has made serious headway in cleaning up this obviously large cemetery.

The cemetery is now devoid of small saplings and under-



Contributed photo

This specially made gate now graces the entrance to High Hill Cemetery located in the southern part of Callaway.

growth that once choked this cemetery, sports a brand-new steel gate and arched entryway, and is awaiting a new fence around the confines of the cemetery.

Burial listings from the mid-1930s indicate approximately 70 burials at this cemetery, but current estimates are between 150 and 200 burials, with the cemetery being essentially full.

The fence will probably be completed this fall and plans are currently underway to start recovering, cleaning and re-erecting many of these fallen stones next year.

High Hill Baptist Cemetery stands as a testimony as to what one determined family can accomplish when they put their mind to the task at hand.

Quoting Frances Vaughn, "Had we known that the cemetery was that large or contained that many burials, I'm not sure that we would have undertaken this cleanup. But we have come too far now to back out and let Mother Nature take it back over as she had."

The extended Vaughn family took note of the size and simply backed up, redoubled their efforts and their planning and pushed ahead. With the success of recovery projects like this one, an observer begins to feel that the days of apathy and greed are now behind us with more and more people realizing the contribution our "pioneer" forefathers, buried in these cemeteries, made and are more willing than ever to commit to protecting and preserving these hallowed reminders of our pioneer past.

Memorial Day was originally celebrated as a remembrance of our military dead and of our families that have gone before us. It is most appropriate that we extend this to remember those who were instrumental in making Callaway County what it is today.

(Editor's note: Kingdom Notes is a weekly column of the Kingdom of Callaway Historical Society.)