

Written In Stone

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Westside Cemetery

For most of us under the age of 50, it's difficult to imagine life before I-65, with roads named Farm-to-Market or Westside Highway. However, in order to locate various home places or family cemeteries, it's extremely important to know the original name of the communities in which your ancestors lived. When researching a cemetery or home place or community, we can go to various publications; such as cemetery books, or major street plans, or comprehensive community planning guides, or general community histories. Sometimes we have to pull the census records to find out who is living in that particular section to see why certain streets have the names they do. Before the completion of I-65, roads led to various locations in the city limits or police jurisdictions differently than they do today; so it's confusing sometimes to figure out the location of residences from 'back then' to now. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps help, as does old proposed sub-division or road maps, and then, just talking to some of those who remember.

There were many communities named for various reasons or people; and when browsing through the old newspapers in the social news of the week, one finds places like Centreville, Johnstonville, Franklinton, Old Town, Iris, Tanyard, Westside, Callihan, and others. Many of these served as voting precincts; had schools or churches known as the same name; and many are only known today by the old-timers who remember them.

One street in particular is of special interest to me because it's where I live; and always wondered the reasoning behind the name Liberty Hill. While changes of E9-1-1 are afoot today, with street and numbering changes, it's refreshing to see one stay the same; and then, especially find that it might be connected to an old family estate from the early 1900's.

In the 1900 Conecuh Census, in the Evergreen District, exclusive of Evergreen Town, there was an area known as Westside, because it lies west of Evergreen, with names common to the area including Chapman, Clough, Guice, Henderson, Hill, Lundy and others. According to the Conecuh County Headstone Volume 3, the Westside Cemetery, an African American Cemetery is located about 2 miles west on AL83 in T6N, R11E, S20. It is just up the hill from Colony Square Mall, overlooking a stand of bamboo trees in the distance. The earliest known death date is listed as 1889, which tells me that the cemetery was located there prior to the land being obtained for said cemetery. The plot was acquired in 1903 from the Estate of the late Priscilla Hill. In the 1900 Census, I found Priscilla Hill, a black female widow, with 2 children: Curtis and Herbert. I discovered over 90+ graves up on that cold, lonely hill, with many familiar names of early citizens with ties to our community of Evergreen still today. Many of the graves are in need of repair, with debris from various storms still lying atop the slabs; and the road in and out of the cemetery severely rutted. The cemetery is still in use today; and deserves recognition for standing through the tests of time and deterioration. If you have information about this cemetery, please contact me at (251) 578-2670. Remember, 'a cemetery is a history of people, a perpetual record of yesterday and a sanctuary of peace and quiet today'.