
THE TOWN OF MONTEVALLO BEGAN IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR CEMETERY

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Benjamin Wilson came to Shelby County about 1815 following his brother Jesse Wilson, who is considered the Father of the Town and founder of Montevallo. Montevallo was called Wilson's Hill in its earliest days. The name was changed about 1825 to Montevallo (the translation always includes something about a mountain and a valley). Benjamin and Jesse were the only two boys in the family, but two of their sisters Hannah Wilson Frost (a widow), and Nancy Wilson Baker (a widow) also came with them.



WILLIAM A. WILSON,
son of Jesse Wilson.

Their sisters Elizabeth Wilson (Mrs. Jehu Lawler), Lucretia Wilson (Mrs. Joel Hancock) and Mary Wilson, unmarried, remained in Madison County, Alabama with parents James and Lucretia (Griffith) Wilson.

Jesse Wilson's plantation was located on part of what is now the Montevallo city cemetery, and is the reason the cemetery is located there. In those times, families would bury their dead either in an established church yard or on their farm. Jesse's log cabin was located to the right as you enter the cemetery, past the fence where the cemetery ends today. When his daughter Jane Wilson McQuirter died (Mrs. Francis McQuirter) in 1820, she was buried a suitable distance from the house. Her grave is the oldest in the cemetery. Later, Jesse's wife Elizabeth and another daughter of his were buried there.

The "Big Spring" is located on what was once the Thiemonge place. The "Nelson Spring" is the one in present Orr Park.

Benjamin and Hannah (Harless) Wilson are not in the Montevallo cemetery. They were buried in Harless Cemetery, about five miles north of Montevallo. This was the plantation cemetery of Mrs. Wilson's brother Henry Harless.

In 1820, Jesse Wilson was in the process of moving to the new town of Selma, when he died there suddenly. He was buried on his new farm just north of the town of Selma.

Jesse's son William Wilson inherited his father's Montevallo plantation, and remained here until about 1832, when he moved to Coosa County. After Jesse died, his wife had returned to Montevallo to live with her son William. She died in 1830 and was buried near her daughter.

An early history of the town states that the hill above the Wilson graves once was the location of Montevallo's Masonic Lodge and other public buildings. This location is what we call the "first" location of the town of Montevallo, in the middle of the present day city cemetery.

When the railroad tracks were laid in 1853, Montevallo had a large public barbeque and the town began to drift more toward the railroad tracks and the creek. This is what we call the "second" location of the town.

Later, Edmund King (who lived in King House on the U. M. campus, and Edmund Powell, whose house was near the present Presbyterian Church and whose plantation was Orr Park, formed a new Main Street (still there) between their lands and the city drifted a third time to where it is now. The Powell cemetery is located on the high hill above the Montevallo High School baseball field.

With the city moving closer to its present Main Street, the land on the hill above the Wilson graves began to be used solely for burials.

One family that surrounds the block house in the cemetery is the West/Prentice family. Rev. Dr. Joshua West, who died in 1860, is buried there next to his wife Hannah Prentice West. Dr. West was a medical doctor as well as a Methodist Minister. He was converted as a teen to the Methodist Church. He and Mrs. Prentice were married in 1793 and were sent by the church to Sevier County, Tennessee. He rode a circuit preaching the gospel.

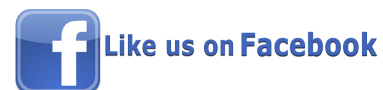
His brother-in-law John Prentice and wife Rhoda Lovelady Prentice are buried on the other side of the building. Dr. West and family were in Montevallo by 1818.

The African-American Prentice family descend from those John Prentice held in bondage and brought with him in the move to Montevallo. John Prentice had sons Daniel and George. All the Prentice (white) men moved from Montevallo after 1865.

One can follow the growth of the Montevallo cemetery simply by looking at the death dates on the tombstones. The top of the hill was in use by the post-civil war era. The section behind the flags as you enter the cemetery opened next. The very top of the hill was in use by the 1930's, and the section that forms the top of the hill and the back to the right has been the most recently opened.

Just as in life, the cemetery reflects Southern segregation. There is a section on the right where African-American citizens were once buried, and today the second to the far left in the cemetery is used for African-American burials.

The cemetery board of the Council and the staff who maintain the cleanliness of the cemetery have always earned the praise of the people of Montevallo.



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