



The Beginning. Oak Hill Cemetery is the first public cemetery established in Johnson City, the others being family cemeteries or having church affiliation. The first burial was the 18 year-old daughter of Col. Robert and Sarah M. Love, Leonora Love who died on 31 July 1867. At that time, the cemetery on their farm was known as the Love Cemetery.

On March 2, 1870, Col. Love (member of First Christian Church) and Samuel Hunt Miller (Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church member) made bond to seven trustees: T. A. Faw, James M. Gentry, William H. Taylor, J. M. Johnson, J. W. Seehorn, L. H. P. Lusk, J. P. C. Nelson, giving title to ½ ac (Love) and ¼ ac (Miller). Love reserved a family plot in the NE corner, 25 ft x 35 ft; Miller reserved his family plot 25 ft x 35 ft in the SW corner. The condition was that the cemetery be called "Oak Hill Cemetery" and that a good plank fence be erected around it.^{1,2}

Early Years. Most of the cemetery's early history is reconstructed from newspaper articles, particularly those in the local newspaper, *The Comet*; from annual reports of the Oak Hill Cemetery Association, and records kept by Mrs. Mary Hardin McCown.

A committee of ladies from each of the churches of the city met in November 1896 to organize the Oak Hill Cemetery Association (OHCA) and elected Mrs. C. K. Lide, president. They sponsored events to raise money for replacing the fence that had fallen down in 1890³ and to care for the cemetery. By 1898 the Association raised enough money and built a fence around the cemetery.⁴ The Cemetery Association was reorganized on 28 Oct 1904, with Mrs. W.J. Exum as president.⁵ Other early members were Misses Sally Faw, Mollie Kitzmiller Lena Hentron and Lucy Hatcher; Mesdames W.B. Harrison, George W. Hardin, T.V. McCown, James A. Martin, Charles J. Broyles, Henry Wilbourne and many other.⁶

In August 1906, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Chapter 754, purchased four lots⁷ where veterans in "Gray" were to be buried. By 1945, 55 Confederate veterans were buried in the cemetery as well as 29 Union veterans⁸ and one War of 1812 veteran.

¹ Kitzmiller, Mary. Undated typewritten report. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Acc no. 744, Series 1, Box 1.

² "Good Women of the City," *The Comet*, No. 1274, 4 Jun 1908, p. 1, 4. photocopy, Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

³ McCown, Mary Hardin. Oak Hill Association Annual Report, 1945, Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Acc no. 744, Series 1, Box 1.

⁴ *The Comet*, No. 1274, 4 Jun 1908, p. 1, 4. Oak Hill Collection.

⁵ Kitzmiller, Mary. Undated typewritten report. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection.

⁶ McCown, Mary Hardin. Oak Hill Cemetery Association 1896–1970 typewritten letter, 1 Jan 1972. Held by Elaine S. Cantrell.

⁷ www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~tnjccudc/history.html. Accessed 9 Oct 2010.

⁸ McCown, Mary Hardin. Annual Report, 1946. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection. Box 1.



The graves of Henry Johnson, the founder and first mayor of Johnson City, and his wife were transferred from the Hoss Family Cemetery in the 1400 block of Fairview Ave. to Oak Hill in 1910.⁹ The Oak Hill Cemetery Association received a charter of incorporation, dated 23 Feb 1912, which was registered 26 Feb 1912, Note Book No. 3, p. 79.¹⁰ The charter was recorded in Washington County Deed Book 109, p. 53. Elected to the Association Board of Directors on 8 May 1912 were: Mrs. Jas. A. Martin, Mrs. C.J. Broyles, Miss Sallie Faw, Mrs. George Hardin, and Mrs. W.J. Exum.

During the 1930s and 40s, Mr. and Mrs. John T. Hall looked after the cemetery and collected yearly dues of \$2.50 for each family plot. They died in 1944 and 1945 respectively.¹¹ Julia Anderson Sanders, widow of G.C. Sanders, assumed operation of the cemetery in 1945, but she soon left for California and Mrs. Mary Hardin McCown took over as Treasurer and Manager.

Growth and Expansion of the Cemetery. In 1896 citizens considered adding more ground to the Love Cemetery, which was also called Oak Grove Cemetery by *The Comet* at least until 1902. According to *The Comet* in 1898, the cemetery was enlarged and laid off in suitable squares with lots ready for sale, priced at \$15-\$30.¹²

On December 1, 1901, N. C. Love deeded 38 lots in Oak Hill Cemetery and 49,500 sq. ft. outside on Winter, Summer, Fulton, Whitney and Lamont Streets to C.N. Brown & Sanders for \$8,151.00.¹³ More land was added to the cemetery in 1914 when N. C. Love sold to W.F. Kipping and G.C. Sanders one parcel of land for \$1000 each in cash on Hamilton and Whitney Streets, registered on Feb. 23, 1918, Washington County Deed Book 131, p. 577.

Mrs. McCown reported that "some real estate men in town got interested and we have two distinct additions. Led by the efforts of John Sanders, some land was added in 1918. The second was in 1938 when Lamont St. was formed to connect with the street to the Soldiers Home [VA] and Mr. W.O. Dyer was City Engineer. Two corners were cut off (our land originally ran to the corner of the present Youngs Supply then it was a Tobacco warehouse)."¹⁴ Mr. Kipping, an undertaker connected with Sterchi Furniture Co., worked with A.B. Bowman, Horace Miller and E.S. Miller in the purchase of this acreage known as the Sanders-Kipping Addition. G.C. Sanders and Kipping sold the lots. The plat was laid off by Will O. Dyer,

⁹ Stahl, Ray. *Greater Johnson City. A Pictorial History*. Norfolk VA: Donning, 1983. p. 35.

¹⁰ Charter of Incorporation, Oak Hill Cemetery Collection. Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Acc no. 744, Series 1, Box 1.

¹¹ McCown, Mary Hardin. Oak Hill Cemetery Association 1896–1970 typewritten letter, 1 Jan 1972. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 5.

¹² *The Comet*, No. 1274, 4 Jun 1908, p. 1, 4. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection. Box 1.

¹³ Washington County, Tennessee Deed Book 80, p. 455.

¹⁴ McCown, Mary Hardin. Draft letter to the editor of the *Johnson City Press-Chronicle*. (undated). Oak Hill Cemetery Collection.



surveyor.¹⁵ The 1946 newsletter to members reported that Oak Hill now occupied more than four acres.¹⁶ The original deed for the Oak Hill Cemetery was not recorded until 1946 by Mrs. McCown.¹⁷

In 1938 Oak Hill gave a large slice to the City of Johnson City.¹⁸ The City wanted to cut off the corner at Boone and Lamont Streets in 1977, but graves located there prevented the transaction. Evidently quite a row ensued with an article in the *Johnson City Press-Chronicle* accusing the Cemetery of not cooperating, to which Mrs. McCown wrote a letter to the editor that gave much history of the cemetery and Johnson City and was intended to “set the record straight.” A draft of the letter is in the Archives collection.¹⁹

A major addition occurred in 1985 when the Wilson Ave. Trailer Park and parking lot were acquired for \$60,000.²⁰ The Trustee's Addition as it was called created about 1,100 new grave spaces after the water, sewer and underground electrical lines were removed.²¹ The City closed an alley and titled that property to the cemetery. The new section was then fenced and topped with three strands of barbed wire. Oak Hill Cemetery had grown to about eight acres by 2009.²²

Maintenance of the Cemetery. Various groups sold lots at different times. The Cemetery Association asked families of the ones buried there to contribute for maintenance. Later the owner of each square was asked to give \$1.20/yr to be used for upkeep. The amount was raised to \$2.50 where it stood until 1945 when the dues were increased to \$5.00/year.

A cyclone metal fence was set around the 4 ½ acres cemetery in 1942 with double entrance gates on Boone and Whitney Streets and a single gate on Lamont St.²³ The fence was repainted in 1955.²⁴ Sections of the fence stand today. As the cemetery grew, so did the fencing around its borders. A sidewalk was laid along Lamont St. from Whitney St. to the Lamont St. gate.²⁵

In 1948 two men were employed, one full-time and one half-time.²⁶ The number of persons employed varied over the years, with extras hired during mowing season. A caretaker lived on the premises in 1989. Reserve funds were kept to replace the mowers, trimmers and other equipment need in the care of the

¹⁵ McCown, Mary Hardin. Oak Hill Cemetery Association 1896–1970 typewritten letter, 1 Jan 1972. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 5.

¹⁶ McCown, Mary Hardin. Annual report, Jan 1946. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

¹⁷ Hamill, Dorothy. *Johnson City Press-Chronicle*, May 25, 1969; reprinted by the *Johnson City Press*, 12 Apr 2010.

¹⁸ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1977. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

¹⁹ McCown, Mary Hardin. Draft letter. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

²⁰ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1986. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

²¹ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1987. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

²² McKinney, Tim. Interview by M.W. Houglan, Oct 2010.

²³ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1957. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

²⁴ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1956. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

²⁵ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1950. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

²⁶ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1949. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.



cemetery. The caretaker in 1959, Edward Jackson, died; he was replaced by Willard Lawson.²⁷ After 20 years as caretaker at Oak Hill, Lawson retired in 1974 and turned over the records to the new man (unnamed).²⁸

The annual reports are full of information about the trees, shrubs and flowers in the cemetery. The information is particularly helpful in locating graves listed on the cards referencing these plants. The landscape changed considerably with old trees dying or being struck by lightning and new trees being planted. Sunken graves were a problem in the early years of the cemetery. The use of concrete or metal vaults were adopted in the 1960s to reduce the problem.

Vandalism. The first reported vandalism was in 1975. Between Christmas and New Years, over 20 tombstones were knocked from their base. On April 1 the theft of three mowers occurred in the tool shed, and on Halloween a fire was set to the tool cart and some 100 year old boxwoods.²⁹ Vandalism was reported in January and early February, 1981; therefore dawn to dusk lights were installed.³⁰ A speeding vehicle took down 95 feet of new fence along Wilson Ave., made a big circle in the cemetery and took down 7 pine trees. This occurred at night and witnesses were unable to make identification.³¹ The most damage to the cemetery occurred on 11 April 2000 when over 100 markers were overturned or damaged in some way. The estimated loss was \$5,000–\$10,000. The vandals were apprehended and tried in court, resulting in an eight year prison term for Richard F. Vanover, Jr.³² Vandalism in the cemetery was reported again in the Spring of 2007.

Mapping of the Cemetery. Maps of the cemetery wore out easily and several have been made. The largest and best map existing today is labeled, "Oak Hill Cemetery, Sanders and Kipping Addition, 1939" prepared by Beeson & Beeson Architects; however the creation date of the map is uncertain.³³ This map was traced by Bob G. Jacobs and another oversized, unlabeled map was created by Bob G. Jacobs Associates, Johnson City in 1975.³⁴ A large plat map of the grounds was made by Leland Cardwell, architect in 1959,³⁵ but the whereabouts of this map is unknown.

²⁷ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1960. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

²⁸ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1979. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

²⁹ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1976. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

³⁰ Naher, Peter, Oak Hill Association Annual report, Jan 1982. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

³¹ Naher, Annual report, Jan 1995. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

³² Payne-Brooks, Leisa, "Gravestones vandalized at city cemetery," *Johnson City Press*, 11 April 2000.

³³ Held by Tim McKinney, owner. 2010.

³⁴ Jacobs, Bob G. Map "Oak-Hill Cemetery" Original Plot. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection. Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Acc no. 744, Series 1, Box 4.

³⁵ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1960. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.



After acquisition of the Trustee's Addition, the formerly City alley property was surveyed in 1986 by Bud Davis Surveyors of Bluff City³⁶ and netted 111 plots with all but four being 10 grave space plots.³⁷ The cemetery was completely mapped according to the 1981 annual report. The center and old portion on the south side of the driveway had never been mapped.³⁸ However, this map is also missing from the collection. The Beeson map was updated to include location of the lots, lot numbers, and owners of the lots by Elaine S. Cantrell in 2010.

Decoration Day. An article in *The Comet* gives the first account of a Decoration Day ceremony held on Saturday, May 30, 1899.³⁹ Only a few veterans of the 1860s attended. Decoration Day was not mentioned again in the records until Memorial Day, 1962. By 1968 the American Legion, Daughters of the War of 1812, UDC and other patriotic groups held ceremonies on May 30 and June 3.⁴⁰ In 1975 Decoration Day ceremonies were held May 30, while June 5 was for the Confederate commemoration.⁴¹ The 3rd Annual Decoration Day was held on May 8, 2010.

Henry Johnson Obelisk. The unveiling of the nine foot monument honoring Henry Johnson, the first mayor of Johnson City, was celebrated in May 1995. The City of Johnson City purchased the monument which sits on top of a three ft. cube of granite with the city seal on the obelisk and a memorial inscription on the cube. The Johnson graves were relocated to the Trustee's Addition by the cemetery grave digger. The Cemetery donated the 20 ft. square plot valued at \$3,000.⁴²

Notables Buried in Oak Hill. Several persons of historical note are buried in Oak Hill Cemetery besides Henry Johnson, the first mayor of Johnson City, and his wife. These include Congressman Sam R. Sells; ETWNC Railway Vice President George W. Hardin; attorney LeRoy Reeves, designer of the Tennessee State Flag; Maj. Cy H. Lyle, editor of *The Comet* newspaper; Samuel Hunt Miller, co-founder of Oak Hill Cemetery; May Ross McDowell, first woman mayor of Johnson City; Mary Hardin McCown, Johnson City historian and manager of the cemetery for many years; Clifford Maxwell, a well-known photographer; John Allen Maxwell, a nationally known painter and illustrator; William Dickinson, owner of the Piedmont Hotel; William Ernest Miller, a federal judge, and many others.

³⁶ Davies, Richard A. Map of Oak Hill Cemetery dated 1986. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection. Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Acc no. 744, Series 1, Box 2.

³⁷ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1987. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

³⁸ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1981. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

³⁹ "Good Women of City," *The Comet*, No. 1247, 4 Jun 1908. A copy in Oak Hill Cemetery Collection. Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Acc no. 744, Series 1, Box 1.

⁴⁰ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1969. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁴¹ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1976. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁴² Naher, Letter to Plot Owners and Descendants. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.



Trustees. The names of the first seven trustees were mentioned at the beginning. At the time of incorporation of the Oak Hill Cemetery Association, the following signed the document: Isaac Harr, Jas. A. Martin, S.A. Bowman, Walter B. Hodges and Haskiel H. Dyer. The name of others elected later is sketchy. In 1973 the following were elected: Dr. Wm. P. Bailey, Ralph B. Carr, Wm. B. Miller, Sam B. Miller, Dr. Carroll A. Long and Mildred McNeas Thomas. Already serving were James H. Miller, Wm. E. Miller, L.W. McCown and Harry G. Range.⁴³ The 1987 annual report gave a brief history of the cemetery naming the churches from which the Board of Trustees was selected: First Christian, First Methodist, First Presbyterian, Munsey Memorial Methodist and Central Baptist Church. The report also listed the trustees for 1985: Dr. William P. Bailey, Peggy Thomas Evans, Gordon Grubbs, Samuel B. Miller, Jr. and Mildred McNeas Thomas; the Trustees for 1986: Ralph B. Carr, Dr. Carroll H. Long, Samuel B. Miller, Rose Miller Montgomery and Peter Naher, Jr.; and those for 1987: Dick T. Edwards, Nancy Miller Jenkins, Elizabeth "Betts" Miller Leach, Carolyn Minnis and Kathryn Setzer Willis. The document authorizing the quit claim deed when the cemetery was transferred to Jack Ragsdale was signed by Peter J. Naher Jr., Jessie Day, Fred Lockett, Samuel B. Miller and William P. Bailey III.⁴⁴

The McCown Years. The Oak Hill Cemetery Association was a non-profit organization that was revived in 1945 with regular meetings held on the second Wednesday of each month. Members of the organization included Mrs. W.B. Harrison, Mrs. M.H. McCown, Mrs. G.C. Sanders and Mrs. Florence S. Dickson.⁴⁵ Initially Cornelia (Mrs. W.B.) Harrison, granddaughter of Samuel H. Miller, was president of the OHC Association from 1945 until her death in 1955.

The year 1945 marked the beginning of recordkeeping for the cemetery. Mrs. Mary Hardin McCown was a principal guiding factor for almost 40 years. Mrs. McCown managed the cemetery from 1945–1975. Mrs. Tempie Brown, sister of Mrs. John T. Hall, turned over the books, including the 1870 deed of Gift from Col. Love and Samuel Miller to Mrs. McCown. One of her first acts was to record the deed in Washington County.⁴⁶ Mrs. Hall's 8 ½ x 14" ledger book contained treasurer's records from 1932. This ledger was used until 1948. There were no minutes of previous meetings or records except the 1942 contributors for the cyclone metal fence and no census of burials.⁴⁷ Mrs. McCown abstracted much of the early history of Oak Hill Cemetery from *The Comet*, a Johnson City newspaper published from March 1884–May 1918.

Annual reports to members of the Association provide most of the history of the cemetery. Mrs. McCown was responsible for reconstructing the records of burials made before 1945 and for keeping meticulous records during her almost forty year tenure as manager of the cemetery and later as president of the Oak

⁴³ McCown Annual report, Jan 1973. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁴⁴ Naher, Annual report, Jan 2003. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁴⁵ Undated paper, Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁴⁶ McCown, Oak Hill Cemetery Association 1896–1970 report. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 5.

⁴⁷ McCown, Draft letter to the editor of the *Johnson City Press-Chronicle*. (undated). Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.



Hill Cemetery Association. The cemetery had fallen into neglect before she assumed leadership. She and three other ladies of the Association began meeting regularly and established a Perpetual Care Fund. Mrs. McCown reported that cemetery was overgrown with Bermuda grass up to their waists. After mowing the grass, they burned the grass in the middle of the cemetery to dispose of it.⁴⁸

A file card was made with the name of every known person interred in the lot and the date of interment. Individual grave card file on every known burial (cross-referenced), perpetual care cards, veteran burial cards and dues paying cards were made.⁴⁹ Mrs. McCown kept impeccable records including the number of veterans and other burials each year since 1945. She extracted information from copies of *The Comet* and other local newspapers for obituaries of people buried prior to 1945. During her tenure she kept obituaries for all burials, attaching them to the file cards. Images of these cards are in the Archives of Appalachia Oak Hill Collection.

It was estimated that roughly 5000 burials were made from 1867 to 1952.⁵⁰ [The estimate may be a little high.] The number of interments from 1945 to 1978 had reached 770. In all, 227 veterans were buried in the cemetery at that time.⁵¹

An account book was used from 1953–1973 to record the name of the person, death date, account information, and funeral home. This book now located in the Oak Hill Collection in the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University. In her account of the history of Oak Hill Cemetery,⁵² Mrs. McCown named many of the dedicated helpers. Mrs. Florence Sitton Dickson served as secretary until 1970; Miss Marjorie Hunt served as recording secretary; Mrs. Belle Lyle Tilden was elected Vice-President and Mrs. McCown became president after the death of Mrs. W. B. Harrison. Other helpers over the years included Mrs. J.T. Hall until her death in 1945, Mrs. Frank M. McNees, Mrs. Edna Vance Hidlebrand, Mrs. S.R.H. Baldwin, Mrs. Carrie McAnally, Mrs. G.C. Sanders, Mrs. Dora Cargille Sproles, and Mrs. L.E. Faulk.

Perpetual Care Fund. A drive was made to raise a Perpetual Care Fund in 1938. They were unsuccessful at raising \$15,000 so the money was returned to the donors. Finally a Perpetual Care Fund was established under the direction of Mrs. Mary Hardin McCown in 1945. The fund started small, but grew over time. The Association passed their goal of \$50,000 in 1964 and reached almost \$175,000 by 1989. Initially investments were made in US Treasury bonds, then switched to savings and loan accounts other certificates of deposit as the interest rates rose. However, by 2003 those funds had been depleted. When each burial lot was sold, a portion of the sale went into the Perpetual Care Fund. Owners of the lots were also assessed an annual fee for the care and maintenance of the cemetery. Letters to the owners were

⁴⁸ McCown, "Oak Hill Cemetery Association, 1896-1970" typewritten report. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 5.

⁴⁹ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1981. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁵⁰ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1952. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁵¹ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1978. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁵² McCown, "Oak Hill Cemetery Association, 1896-1970" typewritten report. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 5.



sent with the annual reports, but many were returned for the lack of a valid address. Collecting the assessment was a perennial problem in most of the Association reports.

The Centennial. The centennial year was celebrated in 1967, 100 years after the first burial. The annual report of the OHC Association recounted the genesis of Johnson City on the “waters of Brush Creek” from three land grants: North Carolina to Robert and Joseph Young in 1782; North Carolina to Joseph Tipton (brother of Co. John Tipton) in 1792.⁵³ David Jobe of Virginia purchased land from Joseph Tipton in midtown on the “waters of Brush Creek” which was handed down to son Abraham Jobe. As early as 1811, the now Johnson City was called “Brush Creek Settlement.” In turn a son, Samuel Tipton Jobe, received Abraham’s land. Tipton Jobe gave land for the ET&WNC railroad and for Science Hill School. During the Civil War the Brushy Creek Camp ground was used as the first school. In 1860 Col. Robert Love, CSA, purchased land from Tipton Jobe, a grandson of David Jobe and built his home near the Jobe Spring. Samuel H. Miller obtained land adjacent to Col. Love in 1869.⁵⁴ On Mar. 2, 1870, Col. Love and Mr. Miller deeded portions of their farms to seven trustees for a cemetery.

1974 – 2002. Mrs. McCown asked to be relieved of the managerial duties in January 1974 but continued as President of the Association until about 1980. Raymond E. Huff replaced her as manager. The cemetery was operated by a Board of Trustees until 2003. Peter Naher Jr. assumed duties as manager in 1979 and was made Trustee in 1980. Chairman of the Board, Ralph B. Carr, reported in 1981 that about 75% of the burials were individually catalogued and the remaining 25% was in the old part.⁵⁵ The use of index cards was discontinued in the 1980s and replaced by a burial form containing the following data: name of the deceased, date of death, funeral home, time, date and place of funeral, next-of-kin with address; lot name and number, plus attached newspaper obituaries and funeral notices.⁵⁶ No Association annual reports for the years 1990–2002 are in the Archives collection. It is not known if any were produced or if they were lost. [Several documents dated 1992–1995 were discovered recently (Dec. 2010) which will be added to the Archives collection.] In these documents the number of burials and contributions to the Perpetual Care Fund decreased significantly when compared to the records kept by Mrs. McCown.

New Ownership. In the 2003 annual report, Peter Naher, Jr., Chairman of the Board of Trustees, said that he was unable to manage and operate the cemetery and that continued operation of the cemetery as it had been in the past was not reasonably possible; the savings accounts had been depleted by operating costs.⁵⁷ Attempts to get the City of Johnson City to take over were unsuccessful. Jack Ragsdale, from Granite Sales of Greeneville, said he would be willing to operate the cemetery provided he had ownership

⁵³ McCown, Annual report, Jan 1967. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁵⁴ McCown, Draft letter to the editor of the *Johnson City Press-Chronicle*. (undated). Oak Hill Cemetery Collection.

⁵⁵ Carr, Ralph B. Letter to Members, 1981. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.

⁵⁶ Obituaries and Memorials 1980s folder, Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 3.

⁵⁷ Naher, Peter. Annual report, Jan 2003. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1.



and control of the cemetery. The Board of Trustees then made a quit claim deed to Ragsdale.⁵⁸ The cemetery burial cards, records, maps and plats, grave space records-occupied and unoccupied, patron list and family names were transferred to the new owner.

The cemetery bordered by Wilson, Boone, Whitney and Lamont streets was purchased from Jack Ragsdale by Samuel T. McKinney in 2005.⁵⁹ Mr. McKinney began restoring the neglected site. Unfortunately he died in September 2008.⁶⁰ After his father's death, Tim McKinney assumed ownership. Many of the cemetery records were rescued from destruction by Chester Willis, a volunteer preservationist. He donated the collection to the Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University on 11 July 2006. These records are the major source of information for this history and the cards which have been scanned and indexed for preservation. The Historic Oak Hill Cemetery Walking Tour began 3–4 August 2007. Over 15 sites of significant persons who shaped Johnson City are featured on the tour.⁶¹ An attractive granite bench was placed in the Cemetery in 2009, honoring Sam McKinney, former owner of Oak Hill, and Chester Willis, volunteer preservationist.

Cemetery Survey of 2009. The Northeast Tennessee Cemetery Survey Team comprised of Donna Briggs, Elaine Cantrell, Bernie Gray, Geraldine Greenwell, Lucy Gump, Barbara Hilton, Betty Jane Hylton, Wanda Manning, Thomas Manning and Robert Shell began taking an inventory of the cemetery and photographing each tombstone. The team worked from September–December 2009 recording and photographing the cemetery. The scanning of the cards from Mrs. McCown's collection by Elaine Cantrell and Margaret Hougland consumed another three months in 2010, and the project is still a work in progress as unmarked graves are identified. Elaine Cantrell, the current unofficial Oak Hill Cemetery historian, has amassed several notebooks of information about the cemetery, its history and the people buried there. Over 3700 grave sites of known persons and 783 unknown and unmarked graves are found in the cemetery. Oak Hill is still a working cemetery with burial lots currently available.

December 2010

⁵⁸ Paine-Brooks, Lesia. "Historic cemetery in new hands," *Johnson City Press* [undated article-a month after the transfer]

⁵⁹ *Johnson City Press* article, Jun. 3, 2009. Held by Elaine Cantrell

⁶⁰ McKinney, Tim. Interview by M. W. Hougland, Oct 2010.

⁶¹ Oak Hill Cemetery Friends and Volunteers Brochure. "Historic Oak Hill Cemetery Walking Tour. Johnson's Depot Homecoming," Aug. 3, 2007. Oak Hill Cemetery Collection, Box 1