

FAMILY THANKFUL FOR GENEALOGY MEMORIAL

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Mary Betty Sullins Burgess stands with the memorial at Smellage Cemetery that lists the more than 300 descendants of her grandfather, James Jasper Sullins. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea



One afternoon when 82-year-old Mary Betty Sullins Burgess of Buffalo Valley was visiting Smellage Cemetery where her relatives are buried, she noticed one of the graves had a big slab of rock across it. The slab was blank.

This gave Burgess an idea. One of her relatives, James Jasper Sullins, had a grave that was badly in need of repair. The gravestone had been eroded by time and the elements until the name on the stone was barely readable. Burgess wanted to give him a

new stone. But she also wanted to do something more, explains her niece, Wanda C. Corbin.

"Aunt Betty said, 'What if I can come up with the names of all of his descendants?'"

Those words started a year-long quest to gather more than 300 names of every single one of James Sullins' decedents, both living and deceased. Each of these names were cut into two large slabs, along with a headstone dedicated to James Sullins and his wife Elizabeth (Betty) Shanks, complete with photos.

James Sullins, born in 1861, served as Justice of the Peace from the 11th District of Putnam County in 1908 and served until his death in 1935. From the bits and pieces Corbin has collected about the man, he appears to have been a very level-headed gentleman.

In a clipping from a 1923 edition of the Herald-Citizen, James Sullin writes, "I have heard some inquires as to my stand on the so-called Stock Law. As far as I know, the tax payers are content with that law as it is, and I see no reason why any member of the Legislature should consume time with laws tax payers are content with, while there are so many laws they are not content with that needs abolishing and repealing that would take the entire time of 75 days or longer."

James was the son of Jesse W. Sullins. Jesse was one of five brothers, all of which fought in the Civil War on the Confederate side.

James was born the year his father left for the war and did not see him again until nearly four and a half years later. Jesse was at Appomattox when Lee surrendered to Grant, and was even given a train ticket from Washington, D.C., to Tullahoma. The fact that the government paid for his ticket home indicates he must have been some type of war hero, Corbin said.

Within a year of returning from the war, Jesse died at the age of 23, possibly from wounds sustained in battle.

Later in life, James had seven children, Charlie Cleveland, Dolph, Martha Catherine, Robert S., Samuel Denton, John and Buchanan Sullins.

Burgess has been able to trace the family tree back from James to Martin Franklin Sullins, Zachariah Sullins, Nathan Sullins and finally Richard Sullins, the earliest known ancestor in the United States.

This past May, Burgess gathered with her living relatives at the Smellage Cemetery to admire their new genealogy memorial. In addition to Burgess, who is the granddaughter of James, other distinguished family members attended such as Reba Sullins Roberts, Burgess' sister; Charlene Sullins, Burgess' cousin; and Betty Crowell Sullins, daughter-in-law to Burgess' Uncle Dolph.

The whole family is thankful for Burgess' selfless act of compiling the list of their ancestors, Corbin says. Because of this one woman's dedication to her family's heritage, their family will be blessed to have all of their genealogy in one location.

"She has the most giving heart of any human being I've ever met," said Corbin of her aunt. "Everybody knows her as a giver. She's not one to sit by and idly talk about it. She does it."

*Read more about the people buried in Smellage Cemetery, Boma, Putnam Co., TN at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>