

THE SMELLAGE CEMETERY

Putnam Co., Boma, TN

Speech prepared by Reba Smellage for the 1998 Decoration Day

The earliest Smellage in this area was Jephthah (Jeptha) W. Smellage who was born in the Norfolk, VA area in 1803. One realizes how short our American History is when you remember that Thomas Jefferson made the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. In our family this period covers 6 generations. People sometimes ask about Jephthah's unusual name. There is a judge by that name who is written about in the book of Judges, Chapter 11. We can only believe that devout parents gave their son his Old Testament name.

Jephthah was orphaned when he was only 8 years of age when both his parents died of typhoid. As the custom in those days, the courts met and "bound" him to a family who was to feed, clothe, and educate him in exchange for his labor. He grew to feel that this family was abusing him, so when he was 13 years of age he ran away and followed a wagon train into Tennessee. He almost starved to death on this trip as he followed way behind the wagons and tried to keep out of sight. He was finally spotted and brought into the train, headed by a Mr. Garner. He later married Eleanor (Elender), one of the Garner daughters.

By 1830 or 40, Jephthah had a cotton gin across the road from the George Kinnaird farm. He used oxen to haul cotton bales long after oxen had disappeared from the area. People used to come from miles around to see the oxen work. Jephthah's log cabin stood in George Kinnaird's back yard till in the 1960's when it was sold and moved to the banks of the Cumberland River near Lebanon to be used as a fishing cabin.

Jephthah's farm covered the area where the cemetery is today. Part of the farm was this clay area where nothing would grow. He recognized the need for a place for public burial. Up to that time, small isolated family cemeteries were the custom of the area. In 1865 he donated 1.3 acres to the public for a community cemetery. A Hendley baby was the first person buried in the cemetery. Today this grave is marked thanks to the generosity of Milton Theodore "Ted" Huddleston. Jephthah was buried here in March 1865. Jephthah and Eleanor were grandparents of John Smellage, the father of the 5 Smellage girls.

Local men used to go up to the Sand Springs area to cut out gravestones for the earliest graves. There are no names or dates recorded on the oldest tombstones which were made by men who were untrained and used farm tools to shape the rocks for markers.

By 1911 it was necessary for the cemetery to have additional land so the trustees bought $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre of land from Mr. George Kinnaird for \$25 and divided this into plots which were sold for \$1.00 each. In 1911 the trustees bought an acre of land from William Byrd Wells for \$20 to be used as a public hitching ground for horses.

Decoration was started in 1900 so we will soon be observing the 100th memorial. The fourth Sunday in May was selected as the date of the annual Decoration Day. At first

people brought whatever flowers were in bloom in their yards. Then they began to make paper flowers out of paper torn from their children's notebooks. Petals were cut out and rolled around the long hat pins that women used to wear stuck through their hats. After the petals curled, they were stuck on pieces of broom straw. After colored paper became available, this was used and the finished flowers were dipped in paraffin. Still later colored crepe paper was used to make flowers. Today, plastic flowers, professional florists' wreaths, and home grown flowers are all used.

At the 1980 Decoration, Mrs. Oma Shanks Wallace stated that she came to the first Decoration in 1900 when she was 5 years old and had missed being present only once. She gave me the information about flower making in early days.

Hundreds of people used to come for Decoration from far and near – on foot, by horseback, or with whole families in wagons. The Tennessee Central Railway used to put on an extra coach to deliver the large crowds of people.

Housewives used to cook for days. After a morning song service and sermon, the service would break for “dinner on the ground.”

The present tabernacle is the third one built at the cemetery. Funerals were held under the tabernacle in all kinds of weather before there were funeral homes in this area.

The archway, reading Smellage Cemetery, has been in place since about 1970. The cemetery has been expanded several times through purchase of surrounding land till today it is estimated that between 1200 and 1500 graves are located in the cemetery.

Following our several wars, the VFW for some years put an American flag on the grave of each soldier, sailor, marine, or air man who had died in service to his country.

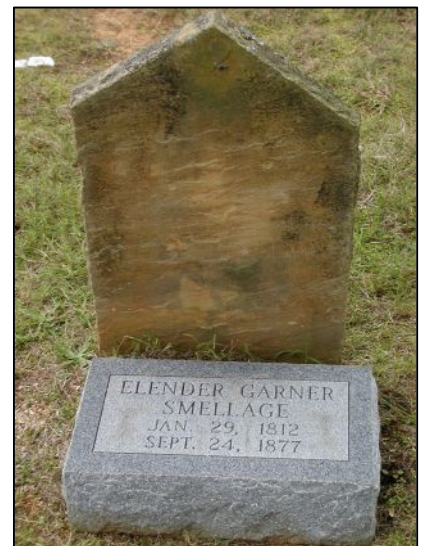
As more and more people moved out of the area, it became necessary to think ahead as to what would happen to the cemetery. Mrs. Erma Shanks Denny formulated the idea of the Perpetual Care Fund. Mrs. Vinnie Gentry gives an annual report on this fund which is now at more than \$20,000.

Today the cemetery is in the very capable hands of Milton Theodore “Ted” Huddleston and it is to his credit that the cemetery always looks so well kept.



Jephtha W. Smellage
b. 11 August 1803
d. 26 March 1865

Elender Garner
b. 29 January 1812
d. 24 September 1877



“We never lose the ones we love
For, even though they’re gone
Within the hearts of those who care
Their memory lingers on.”

Source: A. L. Smellage, et al. To Deed To Public Graveyard:

Know all men by these presants, That We A. L. Smellage and G. O. Kinnaird, do by these presants, give, Grant, transfer and convey to the Public, and to be used by the People for the purpose of Buring the Dead, the following described lott or pearcil of land, lying and being situated in the State of Tennessee, County of Putnam, and Civil Dist., No. 17. Containing by estimation one acre and three eights, and bounded as follows, to wit: Beginning on a cedar tree, runing thence west 10 rod and 5 yds to a stone, thence south 18 rod and 9 yrds to a stone on the bank of the Buffalo Valley and Indian Creek road, thence east with said road 10 rod and 5 yds to a stone, thence noth 18 rod and 9 yds to the beginning corner, Said land is known as the Smellage old Grave Yard, and the said A. L. Smellage includes and excludes and reserves 15 yds long, by 7 yds wide, where his Father and Mother and other connection is buried. To have and to hold the above described lot of land, as herein set out. We are lawfully seized and possessed of said land and have a good right to convey it.

Witness our hands, this Aug. 11, 1909.

A. L. Smellage
G. O.(his mark) Kinnaird

STATE OF TENNESSEE, PUTNAM COUNTY:

Personally appeared before me, J. W. Barks, a Notary Public in and for Putnam County, and aforesaid State, A. L. Smellage and G. O. Kinnaird, persons with whom I am personally acquainted, and acknowledged that they executed the within deed for the purpose therein contained. Witness my hand and seal of Office, this Aug. 11, 1909.

My Commission expires July, 6, 1912

J. W. Barks, N.P.

STATE OF TENN, PUTNAM COUNTY: The above and foregoing deed was filed in my Office for registration on the 27th, day of August, 1909. At 1:50.O’clock.P.m.And noted in filation Book “B” on page 297.

By:
S. F. Carr, Register.
Algood Moore, D. R.