

Coffee County Historical Society's

Ghosts of History Tour

Written by Jackie Layne Partin

Last night, October 29, 2010, my best friend, Edwene Johnson, and I traveled to Manchester, Tennessee to take the "Ghosts of History Tour" through the Manchester City Cemetery. Staying true to my every step in life, I *misunderstood* the time, so we arrived an hour early. But never mind that, the two of us have always found a way to entertain ourselves. For us extra time together is wonderful since we rarely see each other these days.

When we found where we were going, we tried to turn right onto a road that I thought was two turns short of the location of the cemetery. There in my way was a car and a police car with two city officers, a male and a female, standing in the road. The car backed up and went another way. As I pulled up to the police officers, the man simply said, "Living or working?" Now folks, I had had a rather long day with an unusual hangover from a huge headache the night before. I had volunteered at our Grundy Heritage Center during the day, had written more on a story, had greeted and said "good-bye" to my husband, (who had been away for the week), as he and I passed at the door, picked up my friend, and now was just about to reply to the officer's query. But I didn't know what to say, for I didn't know what he had asked.

It is completely amazing the amount of information or misinformation that runs through the mind of a person who has no idea what to say, but certainly wants to be careful and not come off looking like a "fool" when she answers. My thoughts ranged from, "No, they are dead, but will appear as living," to "No, we are not on our way to work!" Standing there before me was a nice-looking officer with a huge smile and obviously a great personality, waiting for my reply. As many times in my past, I looked at my good friend who always has the answer to every problem I have, but shockingly, she just stared at me. What kind of friend is that? My brain screamed, "Say something, Edwene!"

Now, there I was all alone, like a little fawn whose mother just stepped in front of a hunter's arrow, at a loss for words, a strange, uncomfortable and scary position for me. I had to swallow my pride and ask him to repeat the question which still left me speechless until he kindly broke it down into pre-school language. "Oh," I replied. "We came to the cemetery tour. We are not working, nor do we live here. We live in Grundy County." I should have left the latter part off, because I had just linked my stupidity to the whole of Grundy County, a wonderful place to call home.

The officers told us where to park. We walked up the hill through a beautiful neighborhood to the cemetery. When we realized that the Historical Society was not even set up for business, and the weather was chilly, we strolled back down toward the officers, who were still smiling, almost as though they were holding in a great big laugh. Under pressure, I

asked the officers where the closest public restroom was. The lady pointed in the direction of the square and began advising us that we could go to “The Brew,” buy something to drink, and then casually wander into their restroom. Now folks, I really don’t know what all my problems were that night, but I thought, “‘The Brew’ sounds like a place to get liquor.” I didn’t want to be seen in a pub! Then I remembered that no nice police officer would send two old women, who obviously were “*from up a lane*” to a beer joint. So we loaded up, drove to the square, which to our surprise was full of “trick or treat”ers. I drove out of that place quickly for fear of hitting a child – never mind that we missed “The Brew” and my opportunity to find a restroom.

Even though we were aware that we needed to be in the first group of tourist to go through the cemetery because it was so cold we figured we wouldn’t last too long waiting in line, I drove us all the way back through Manchester to the local Wal-Mart Store. If the Father in Heaven ever helped design a building, He certainly was in on the architectural design of Wal-Mart – thank Him and old man Sam Walton for toilets.

We drove back to the other end of town, and there they stood – the police officers. As we drove up, my friend declares that the officers said laughingly, “There are those two old ladies again!” The officers denied it with a smile. Up the hill we went, got our gold card and waited a few minutes until the “gold group” was called to begin the tour. Edwene was cold from the start of the tour. Her toes, then mine, were numb, but we listened carefully to all those who had “risen from the grave” to speak of their lives.

First, Dr. James E. Rodes (1825-1902) and his second wife Betty told of their lives. I must say that Dr. Rodes’ suit had not decayed one bit in the one hundred eight years he had been in the grave. Betty spoke of little Frances Lasater (1843-1844), the oldest marked grave in the cemetery. I asked Betty if she had made her dress or bought it; she quickly answered, “Borrowed it!”

Next, Thomas N. Scott (1836-1905) displayed some of the actual bricks he had made. Some of the Manchester buildings he had bricked are still standing. I wandered why his family’s graves were not covered with some of his bricks. Maybe after years of laying bricks, he made it clear that “not one brick shalt thou lay on my grave!”

Thirdly, James David Herring came forth from his grave elsewhere to speak of the numerous Confederate soldiers buried between 1861 and 1865 in the Manchester Cemetery. Some had died from injuries at Stones River, but Mr. Herring had survived the battle and wanted the tourists to know about his fellow soldiers and how they came to Manchester for medical aid but died there from their wounds. Mr. Herring’s trip from the dead and reliving the memories of the suffering of his friends, made him a little woozy, and he had to sit. We wish him a safe journey back to his resting place.

Next, Annie Guy Wisely (1894-1986), a beloved 3rd grade teacher at Manchester City School, reminded us of her love for her students and her profession. Even though she had risen

from the cold, cold earth, she appeared a little surprised at the cold temperatures above the ground. She thoughtfully brought a warm wrap with her from the realm of the dead.

I was a little apprehensive when we walked to the grave of Joanna Brixey (1816-1903). I knew she had carried a tremendous burden in her life on earth when her husband died early and her son, Calvin S. Brixey went about wreaking havoc on innocent people around several counties in the area during the Civil War era. Joanna had worked so hard to rear her children in a manner to make her proud, but Calvin brought her so much shame. As the tourist walked away from her, I asked her if she knew that her son's gang of marauders had killed my husband's gg-grandfather, Anderson S. Goodman. She hung her head and said that she knew about it. As I walked away, I told her that her granddaughter Fannie (Brixey) Bryan was buried in my hometown of Montegale. I felt as though she wanted to go back beneath the earth where she could live in peace.

Moving along, we visited with Dr. Vaughn and his daughter Christine. He spoke of his busy life in politics and banking; of course, he also was ever so busy caring for the sick. I was really impressed with his daughter. She spoke quite articulately to the tourist of her many ventures and travels. I may be wrong, but she gave me the impression that she would be happy to come back to Manchester and continue her active life.

Next, attorney, Leighton Ewell (1895-1973), appeared near the path. Making use of his handkerchief from time to time, he explained that his cold might get worse in the nippy, night air, so he pulled out his Shiners' cap and placed it on his bare head. One would think that he was conditioned to the cold, but then again, maybe he came to us from a warm and cozy place where he was cared for by Someone who loved him and saw that he had to suffer no more. Thank you, Mr. Ewell, for putting your health in danger so that we could know your good work as an attorney and State Senator.

Well, there was no doubt who the prominent ones were in old Manchester—Alfred Moore May (1875-1944) and his wife Adelaide. One needed only to look around the area for the largest, most impressive burial site to find a rich family. They spoke of how they got their money and how they spent it. Their daughter, Clarine married Dave King (1897-1990) who was once a poor little Russian boy who came to America to make his fortune. He did just that, and he wisely married young, homely and wealthy Clarine. I'm just not certain that Clarine spent their money wisely while on earth, and I know she didn't while in the grave. She left \$100,000 for the sole purpose of feeding her dogs precise meals planned by her before she died. I was so disappointed in Clarine, but that's just my opinion. I really didn't mind walking off and leaving her to crawl back beneath her fanciful slab.

Francis Morton (1906-1969) popped out from behind her headstone to speak with those on the tour. By the time Edwene and I got to her, all we noticed was her warm outfit. I really don't know what that odd color was, but it certainly looked warm. She was just lucky that we did not take that nice warm, cozy top from her and wrap it around our toes. The Morton name

was an interest to me because I believe that Francis stated that some of her husband's family moved over into Warren County. My husband and I have done nursery business with some Mortons over there for years.

Lastly, Dr. J. Horace Farrar (1883-1961) paid us a visit as he had many thousands of patients in his lifetime. He told us that he built the first hospital in Manchester and had delivered thousands of babies there. Edwene and I were a little worried about his mental condition because he kept speaking to his wife who wouldn't come out of the grave to visit us. My feet were cold, and my mind wandered back into the years when I thought I had been in Dr. Farrar's home which was heated with pipes of hot water running through the floor. My feet began to warm.

At the end of the tour, we made a bee-line to the car. I turned on the heat, made an illegal u-turn in front of the Methodist Church and prayed that the two officers would not want to bother themselves with two crazy little ladies from Grundy County. We stopped once again at Wal-Mart; this time we were asked to buy some "doe urine," or was it "buck urine?" The truth is that I don't know what we were buying because we were tightly hugging the little section (*hoping no one would see us*) with all those "hunter things" hanging there while her son told her on the phone what to choose and I pulled it off the hanger. We did not go unnoticed. As all these camouflaged dressed men passed and eyed us, I knew they were thinking that we "*came from up a lane.*" I knew they were laughing at us.

On our way home we discussed some day in the future when we would write a cemetery tour for the Grundy County Historical Society. We got a lot of great ideas from our friends in Manchester, and we were thankful to them for their presentation. They all did a wonderful job. We dined on Chinese food in Monteagle, delivered the urine package, stopped to check our headlights and tail lights (*the law was everywhere*), then finally headed toward home. As I parked my car, I heard my phone ring twice. It was just about time for my husband to call the law to search for me; well anyway, he wouldn't have had to look very far for a policeman.

I arose this morning being thankful that the dirt was below my feet and not over my head!