

Gregg Cemetery

By Jackie Layne Partin (2016)

Isn't alone time, time to think, time to let one's feelings go back into "what used to be," wonderful time, well spent? My life has narrowed with age, but thankfully I feel excitement, inquisitiveness, almost to the extent of wanting to stay a little longer on this earth, especially in Grundy County, TN. Inside my shrunken world, thoughts are encapsulated, bundled as shocks of corn, counted and relished. The first sight of daffodils peeking through the soil alongside my family's outdoor toilet in the 1940s, (just about this time of year) put a child-like hop in my walk in the rain today, Feb. 1, 2016. "There they are; I saw them; I crept up on them in my own front yard; I saw little cone-shaped heads peering up asking for permission to 'come on up!'" Those little bulbs' stems and buds bound my youth with my old age as if there were no years between.

Desiring to stay with my story and keep it tied up like a shock of corn, I begin. My interest today is the Gregg Place, aka the Gregg Tract, sometimes called the Gregg Cemetery, that is, if one crops off many acres around those interred. Why is it called the Gregg Place? Does anyone else wonder why? Why? Scratching my head, I thought, "Well, it is obvious; a Mr. Gregg used to own that piece of land." You reckon?



A truly short story tied up like a "shock of corn"

However, not remembering crossing paths with any Greggs in Grundy's early history, I felt a need to learn of him and his purchase of land near Lankford Town Rd.

and just beyond Reid Hill. Census research brought me to the **1910** record where I finally found a “Gregg” right where I wanted him at the time I wanted him to be there. Howard Leroy Gregg was born April 26, 1882, in Burnside, Pennsylvania; his parents were James Washington and Anna Louise (Berger) Gregg. He was a 1907 graduate of Pennsylvania State University with a BS degree in mining and metallurgy engineering. In the previous sentence, most of us locals understand immediately why he came to Tracy City, a former mining town.

Howard married Muriel Hannah Kirk on December 27, 1909 in Luthersburg, Clearfield, PA. Soon the newlyweds moved to Tracy City, TN. Mr. Gregg enjoyed an oyster supper with the Millet Club on Dec. 22, 1910. Muriel, who had also been born in Pennsylvania, stepped right into a teaching position in the public school system. Howard put his education to good use working for the Tennessee Consolidated Coal Company. As of April 15, 1910, both young people were working at full time jobs, and as yet, they had no children.

It often happened that Northern-born-and-reared families, or vice versa, went back to the surroundings they had grown accustomed to in their youth. When the January 2, **1920** Census was taken, Howard and Muriel with four little children were back in Pennsylvania. It appears that the Census taker first wrote Pennsylvania as the birthplace of the first child, Anna Katherine (1911), but wrote over it and put Tennessee. Two sons were added to the family, Howard Leroy, Jr. (1913), James Kirk (1915), and another daughter, Rachel Amanda (1917) who was nearly three-years of age in 1920. Some believe Howard, Jr. was also born in TN. If so, then the family left Tracy City between **1913** and **1915**. After the move back to PA, Howard remained an engineer with the Pennsylvania Coal and Coke Company for thirty-six years. Muriel seemed to have settled into caring for her small children.

He registered for the WWI Draft on Sept. 12, **1918** in the city of Patton, Cambria Co., PA. In Cresson, PA, in **1940**, at the age of fifty-seven, Howard was still working as a division engineer in the coal industry. Coincidentally, at the age of sixty Howard Leroy Gregg, Sr. registered for the WWII Draft on April 27, **1942**, in Cambria Co., PA. At both periods he was working for the Pennsylvania Coal and Coke Corporation in Cresson, PA. Even though he registered for the drafts of two wars, Howard, Sr. never did any military service.

Why did Howard and Muriel leave Tracy City so soon? Maybe the transcribed article from *The Mountain Herald*, Tracy City, Tenn., May 8, 1913, will give us some clue.

The Mountain Herald, Tracy City, Tenn., May 8, 1913

“New Coal Co.—Tracy City Capitalists to Operate Kentucky Coal Mines. — The Fern Hill Mining Company is the name of a new concern organized in Tracy City to operate coal mines in Owensboro, Ky. The officers are as follows: Prof. W. G. Dillon, President; H. L. Gregg, Vice President and General Manager; E. W. Patterson, Secretary and Treasurer; Capt. J. D. Wiley, Superintendent, Mr. Gregg and Capt. Wiley will leave here in a day or two to take charge of the new work. The mines these gentlemen will operate are about three miles out from Owensboro. The officers of this new company are among Tracy City’s best men and the entire community will hope for their success in their new undertaking. Mr. Dillon, the president, is the principal of Shook School and has been a resident of this place for a number of years. For a number of years he was cashier of the First National Bank here. Mr. Gregg, the general manager, came here several years ago from the north and has been employed as civil engineer for the T. C. C. Co. Mr. Patterson, the secretary and treasurer, is the storekeeper for the company here and has been here a number of years. Capt. Wiley, the superintendent has been connected with the T. C. C. Co., T. C. I. & R. Co, and the Sewanee Fuel & Iron Co., as general foreman and superintendent for twenty years or more. He has also been chairman of the County Board of Education for a number of years and superintendent of the Southern Methodist Sunday School and has taken an active part in the growth and welfare of the community.”

We read in the *Coal Trade Bulletin* of December 2, 1912, “Tennessee Consolidated Coal Co., of Tracey City, Tenn. has purchased the property of the Fern Hills Coal Co. at Owensboro, Ky, for \$75,000. The property includes 586 and ½ acres of coal; 87 acres of surface and all the machinery of the plant.” So the four capitalists decided to do a job, and they did it. What happened after that might be gleaned by internet searches for the Fern Hills Coal mines in Owensboro, KY. It seemed rather tumultuous to me.

Howard and Muriel owned a 600 acre tract of land off the Lankfordtown Rd. in the suburbs of Tracy City, TN. Try as hard as anyone could, I found no deed where they bought the land and from whom, but there were several records of the “Gregg 600 acre tract” in other deeds. Within that land a cemetery named for or in memory of the Greggs stands on 1.15 acres of land, more or less. As far as this writer knows, there were no Greggs buried in the Gregg Cemetery. It appears that Howard bought his

land before he and Muriel married since he owned it earlier than 1909, (*the name Gregg mentioned in other deeds*). Dave and Margaret Layne later gave the land for the Gregg Memorial Society.

Suffice to say here that the Gregg family headed back to their homes in Pennsylvania and stayed. There is no indication that they ever lived on their 600 acres. They made their home in Grundy County, for the few short years here, in downtown Tracy City. Some of their neighbors were Tom and Lillie Crick, Ernest and Rosa Werner, Len Jackson and Della Cox, Dr. George Douglas and Stella Hayes, William S. White, John and Belle Oakley, and Kelley and Pauline McCurdy. These were prominent members of the then booming town. Howard and Muriel were renting, probably from the Crick family.

A long lasting marriage for

Howard Leroy Gregg, Sr.

and his wife

Muriel Hannah (Kirk) Gregg



This writer wonders if any of the Gregg descendants know that a small cemetery in Tracy City, Grundy County, TN, was named for their beloved ancestors. Margaret Layne mentioned that the decision was once made to change the name "Gregg Cemetery" to "Whispering Pines" because of the winds that blew through the old pines around the cemetery, maybe whispering of the past. She admitted that the name never really caught on, but the name "Gregg" also was really unknown, and no background was really available for the locals to feel comforted as they walked back home from the burial of a loved one. I encouraged her to wait until I could finish this little story so

that the families involved would have a sense of belonging or attachment to the Gregg family.

In 1897 Nancy A. (Thompson) Kilgore had been buried there, and five years later in 1902, her husband Steven Kilgore was interred. Margaret Layne mentioned that when the grave for her husband's brother was being dug, an old grave was disturbed. It is believed by all that many more people are buried there than there are stones on display. Since Howard and Muriel were on the plateau and owned the land in 1910, then the cemetery was already in use showing that they probably were aware of the burial ground. They themselves may have been the ones who started calling it the "Gregg Cemetery." Just last month (Jan 2016), I discovered that two men by the name of William (1868-1937) and Hugh Pyburn (1840-1924) are buried there in unmarked graves. Coppinger, Kilgore, Layne, Anderson, Sitz, Harris, Haynes, Byers, Johnson, Price, Meeks, and O'Neal are a few of the surnames of those interred.



Howard and Muriel's burial stone lies in the IOOF (Independent Order of Odd Fellows) Cemetery in Burnside, PA. (Courtesy of Find-A-Grave)



Gregg Cemetery off Lankforttown Rd. near Tracy City, TN

Find me at jackiepartin@blomand.net for corrections and additions.