

Glendale Legacies

In 1787, Caleb Stebbins, Jr.'s burial was the earliest recorded in Glendale Cemetery. Originally a Baptist burial ground for the parishioners of the First Baptist Church at Colton Hollow, Glendale also has several unmarked pieces of red sandstone in the southeast corner-the oldest part of the cemetery; possibly indicating the graves of hunters and trappers from an earlier time.

Local legend holds that churches were most often built on the highest land elevations to be nearer to heaven in towns where there was a land choice. In the Glendale section of town, religious services were held at the No.7 schoolhouse and in private homes after the Baptist church moved to south Wilbraham in 1854. Lorenzo Kibbe who lived on the east side of Main Street (at the site of the Noah Alvord place) was appointed group leader of the first 29 people to gather as a Glendale parish. Chauncey Peck recalls in his 1913 text: *The History of Wilbraham Massachusetts*, "Mr. Kibbe was a very large, portly man, full of enthusiasm and religious zeal, very fond of singing and with a voice like a trumpet." He goes on to describe how Mr. Kibbe walked from his home in the evenings to attend meetings in Glendale and upon his descent down the western side of the mountain, "he would break forth into song, and the sound of his voice rolled far down the mountain side and could be heard for quite a distance along our Main Street."

Burial grounds grew up on church owned land as church members passed away and grave markers recorded family legend in perpetuity as each stone told a story. In 1805 the Glendale church parish maintained the cemetery. In 1857 the Burying Ground Society of School District No. 7 in Wilbraham was formed to take care of the burying ground.

Pastor Haskell ministered to the people of the area in 1867 and named that section of town- *Glendale*, known, according to Chauncey Peck for 'its grassy glen and dale.'" In 1868 a meetinghouse was erected for \$2,000 and in 1869 the Glendale M.E. (Methodist Episcopal) Church was born. A Sunday school was prepared and Roderick Burt, a Wilbraham resident and bookseller helped to organize a library with books that had been previously kept in a cupboard at the School District No.7 Schoolhouse.

During that period, when churches failed, the cemeteries were funded by acts of the state legislature. Just prior to the Great Depression, the legislature ruled that when a church and its burial ground became separated or the church could no longer afford graveyard maintenance, and the cemeteries were offered to the cities and towns, they were obliged to accept and maintain them. Chapter 114 of the Massachusetts General Laws is still in effect today.

Since "the church in the center of the Wilbraham was considered forgetful of affairs over the mountain," according to Merrick's *History Of Wilbraham*, the town took control of the cemetery in 1876 and still manages the Glendale, East Wilbraham and Adams Cemetery today through the dedicated labor of the town's three-member Board of Cemetery Commissioners.

On June 20, 1913 – the 150th anniversary of the town's incorporation, Glendale's Civil War veterans, who served during Wilbraham's centennial, dedicated a massive graveyard boulder at Glendale Cemetery. The stone frames the bronze engraved names of their

fallen comrades and early war heroes of the French and Indian and Revolutionary wars. The children of district No.7 sang and there was a reenactment according to Peck of “old slaves, who, just as they were about to be seized by their masters, were rescued by Glendale people and borne away in safety...Glendale was said to be a famous Underground Railroad station.”

Merle and Arthur Messer on Glendale Road were married in the church in 1957, as were their two daughters and their granddaughter whose son was the last to be married in the church 6 years ago. “Our church and Monson had the same minister,” said Merle. We were a small group and couldn’t pay as much as Monson. The Methodists closed the church and Glendale parish families now go to Wilbraham United Church and Grace Union ”

Merle’s cousin, Jean (Bennett) Franklin, who lives “down in the village” near the center of town, remembers church suppers at the Glendale Church when she was a young child. “ They used to take out the pews to set up tables, and families would make the food and bring it over. Then we built the church annex and moved our suppers there.” Jean’s parents, Ralph and Winifred (Rogers) Bennett lived on the hill when she was young and when they later moved down to the village, they donated some of their land to the cemetery. Jean’s father, Ralph, used to tell her: “If you want to have a strong town, you have to support it.” He purchased all his dry goods and food in town at “Tom’s” (now, the Village Store), as did Jean.

This family, like many others, has a richly rooted history in the Glendale part of town. Merle remembers the fire at Glendale Church in December 1980 that cracked the steeple bell. The bell had come to the church in 1940 at the request of Benjamin F. Greene, a church councilman, who obtained it from the hurricane-wrecked belfry of the West Warren Methodist Church. “A church in Three Rivers donated a bell to us after the fire,” recalls Merle, “and our cracked bell sat on the church grounds for quite some time. The neighborhood children used to ring it after services.”

Twenty-eight years later there are plans underway to mount the Glendale church bell on a granite stone and return it to the Glendale families who have been part of great service to their town. The bell will be rededicated in the spring at its final resting place in Glendale Cemetery as a gesture of respect and appreciation for all those who came before us –and are now at rest. [Word Count: 994]

Story by Joan Paris