

The Cemetery of Wakefield Plantation

Four family cemeteries existed in what is now Wakefield. The county consolidated the cemeteries into one location. And with the help of the **Olivia Raney Local Historical Library** and the services of **A. Brothers Associates**, historical markers were erected. These markers tell the early history of this area. The cemetery is located next to the high power lines, where they cross Wakefield Plantation Drive.

The Prehistoric Inhabitants

Before the 1740s when tobacco farmers moved into the area north of present day Raleigh, Native Americans hunted in the area. John Lawson, the first to record impressions of the Falls of the Neuse in 1701, observed two Tuscarora hunters. Tuscarora ("hemp gatherers") are a Native American people of the Iroquoian-language family. The Tuscarora probably lived in the area for a thousand years. Before them, as far back as 10,000 years, other Native American groups visited and lived by the Neuse River. Although the projectile points or arrow heads of all time periods appear at Wakefield Plantation, the era of greatest activity was around 2,000 years ago. At that time, people were learning to live on fish runs coming up the bays and rivers of the Atlantic coast. They came to the Falls Area to fish and to enjoy a respite from the winter cold.

The Colonial Settlers

By the early 1740s, colonial settlers had begun to move into northern Wake County. Most of these people traveled south from growing Virginia settlements or west along the Neuse River from the expanding populations of eastern NC. Some of the early residents of the area moved westward with the expanding frontier as existing farmland became depleted. It is likely that some early landowners only stayed for a short time in the Falls area before heading westward, leaving no record of this stay.

Only fourteen names were found on official land records for the Falls area from the early 1740s. It was very difficult to acquire land and even more difficult to determine boundaries and ownership. To do so, settlers had to request a grant from the title holder. This was usually the English King or the Earl of Granville, who owned the

entire northern half of NC from 1746 through the Revolutionary War. The settlers had to cultivate a portion of the land as well as make yearly payments. Most early land grants were for one hundred to six hundred acres compared to the much larger plantations in the east and other colonies. Many of the grants were incorrect as well as unrecorded and many were sold to more than one person. Thus, ownership was never clear.

The land chosen by the settlers was located near waterways, like the Neuse River and Richland Creek. These water sources supplied fish and attracted wild game such as deer, elk, wild fowl and bears. The colonial settlers became skilled hunters and farmers, growing both cash crops, such as tobacco, and sustenance crops to feed their families. Life was difficult for the pioneers due, in part, to constant threats from the land. Panthers and wolves were abundant and frequently attacked and killed livestock. Also, because trade with other communities was limited, they faced isolation and other hardships.

Despite these difficulties, settlers continued moving into the Falls area throughout the late 1700s and early 1800s. They built mills long the Neuse River and developed communities around the trade centers they generated. With the onset of activity and trade, many families began to enjoy a more prominent lifestyle and acquired more land and slaves.

Cemetery Residents

Since colonial times, this land was farmed by many different families, several of which now rest in this cemetery. Martin/Moor, Hunter, Gill, and Allen are the four families believed to be represented. These four families owned large tracts of land now known as Wakefield Plantation. William Martin was one of the earliest landowners of the late 1700's and descendants of the Martin, Gill, and Allen families owned the majority of land throughout the 1800's and 1900's. David Gill's property stretched from this site south across the Neuse River, and George Allen's property stretched from this site, north to Old Highway 98. These two families were neighbors and most likely friends for several generations. Other neighbors were descendants of the Martin family and the Crenshaw family, who are represented in nearby family cemeteries.

Most of the land passed from generation to generation, but as children moved away and generations passed away, the land was sold to neighbors and newcomers. As that happened, the family cemeteries were lost and forgotten. Of the 45 graves in this cemetery, only 25 are marked with headstones, and some of these have little or no identifying information. This is particularly true for the Hunter and High graves, none of which have complete dates or names. All four family cemeteries contained unmarked graves, and it is unlikely they will ever be identified. However, most of the immediate family members have been determined by researching wills, land and census records, and estate settlements.