

The Historical Pierson Cemetery

by Nancy Winfrey

A Link To The Past

The historical Pierson/Pearson cemetery is the oldest cemetery remaining in Pamlico County with headstones bearing the dates. Even though there is little doubt there are many burial spots throughout the County that are possibly as old as the Pierson/Pearson cemetery, they hold no date.

One cemetery was recorded in past years but has since vanished. It was located on a pulpwood road between Goose Creek and Broad Creek. This information was found in a booklet from the Pamlico County Historical Association, compiled in 1935. Recorded as being buried there were Zebedee Rawls - no date of birth legible, died in 1816; Sam F. Sparrow, no birth date recorded, died in 1721; SENR Wasborn, born 1721, died 1791; Ben Spark - born 1767, died 1799. The booklet also mentions that there were approximately 12 graves marked with ballast stones. Unfortunately, this cemetery has since been destroyed.

There are many interested citizens in Pamlico County who are interested in recording and saving as much of the remaining history of this area as possible...two of whom are Vernon Daniels, Jr. and Ruth Lee.

In 1967, in an earnest effort to record the county's past heritage, Vernon "Bud" Daniels, Jr. contacted Ruth Lee of the Arapahoe area, knowing that she was keenly interested in the history of the county.

The two visited the old Pierson/Pearson Cemetery, making recordings and rubbings of the unusual and handsome headstones. At that time, said Lee, all but one of the markers were standing; that was approximately seventeen years ago. One of the two black slate headstones had fallen and lay on the ground. Today, that marker is almost in a state of non-repair.

This historically significant cemetery, which is located about 100-feet from the Neuse River at Dawson's Creek, holds unique and rare slate and sandstone headstones. They were intricately carved. One of the black slate markers has a large cherub's head with wings and the other slate marker holds a death's head with wings fanning to either side of the large marker. The craftsmanship was of the highest quality.

This is now the only surviving historical burial spot in the county and merits preservation both for the early dates and for the funerary motifs which are found on the headstones.

It's interesting to think back to the 1700s and realize the cost and the time it must have taken to have markers of this quality brought into the area. One of the stones Lee recorded had the stonemason's mark on the back. The family must have been quite wealthy to be able to afford a marker of this quality.

This past week, Ruth Lee of Arapahoe, George Baxter of Paradise Shores, and I revisited the Pierson/Pearson Cemetery to probe for more headstones that might have fallen and been hidden through the years by the grassy overburden. We found, however, no other burials there.

Lee's foresight many years ago when she did her first rubbings has proven invaluable. At this most recent visit, the black slate marker bearing the cherub's head was found to be broken into so many pieces that it's doubtful if the superior craftsmanship of the stonemason's design could ever be recaptured.

For those who are members of the Pamlico County Historical Association, along with many others throughout the county who have a strong interest in seeing the area's history recorded and preserved, the name "Ruth Lee" certainly has a familiar ring. Lee was one of several who helped form the association in 1968. You will find pages in a book entitled Pamlico County Imagery containing the early history of the county, which were painstakingly researched and written by Lee. She has been and still is involved in genealogical research. You will find all of her writings and recordings to be meticulously researched and footnoted.

Because of Lee's sincere interest in keeping as much valuable information on record as possible, she researched the old Pierson/Pearson Cemetery. Following is the research she did which has also been sent to Archives and History in Raleigh for their permanent records.

PIERSON/PEARSON HISTORICAL CEMETERY by Ruth Lee

This graveyard is located on a private road at the end of Pamlico



Ruth Lee is pictured at the Pierson Cemetery taking a rubbing of a sandstone marker. She very carefully makes her rubbings capturing every remaining detail cut into this 1700's headstone.

County Road number 1304, a dirt road, about 200-yards west of Pierson Point and about 100-yards in from the bank of the Neuse River.

Those buried in this family cemetery are as follows: Here Lyes Y Body of Eunice Pearson - The wife of Capt--? Pearson, Aged 44 years. Dyed May 2, 1745 (marker of black slate); Here Lyes Buried The Body of Thomas Pierson ESQ - Who Departed This Life Dec. 8, 1748, 32 Year of His Age (black slate marker); Here Lyes the Body of Wheelwright Pearson Esquire Who Departed This Life October 31, 1751 in the 33 Year of His age (back of this reddish sandstone marker engraved by hand "Made by John Suricher in New York"); Here Lyes the Body of Joseph Crispin Senr. Who Departed this Life February 21, 1774 Aged 61 Years (reddish sandstone); Here Lyes the Body of Thomas W. Pearson Who Departed this Life January 29, 1791 Aged 40 Years (reddish sandstone); Here Lyes the Body of Thomas Kelly Who Departed this Life October 12, 1791 Aged 37 Years (reddish sandstone); In Memory of John Oliver Who Departed this Life Oct. 1, 1837 Aged 63 Years and Elizabeth Pearson Oliver-His Wife-Who Departed this Life Oct. 15, 1823 Aged 37 Years 11 months (White stone slab, one stone for both graves). (NOTE: It's interesting to note that there seemed to be a gap of twenty-some years between the first three of the oldest burials-1745, 1748, 1751, all dying about three years apart-and the next four burials-1774, 1781, 1791, 1791.)

The following data was abstracted by Elizabeth Moore, a New Bern genealogist, from loose papers, now in the Raleigh Archives, found in the Clerk's Office in Craven County. Lee abstracted the data from Elizabeth's Genealogy and History released to the Pamlico County News and found in the issues of January 6, 1972, and January 13, 1972.

FELLOWS VS. KELLY

The petition of Jonathan Fellows, says: That Thomas Pearson, who in his life time was of Craven County, died some time in the year 1748, having made his will, which was proved and Wheelwright Pearson, Thomas Pearson, Jr. and Mary Pearson therein named as Executors and Executrix, the said Thomas Pearson, Sr. having by his will made several bequests devised all the rest and residue of his estate, both real and personal, to be equally divided between Thomas Pearson, Jr., Mary Pearson, Elizabeth Pearson, Ann Pearson, Esther Pearson, their heirs and assigns forever. Petitioner says that part of the said Thomas Pearson's estate comes within the said residuary clause, was part of land lying in said county of Craven on the north side of Neuse River called Nottingham Point, containing 250 acres, of which Thomas Pearson died seized of. The said Ann

Pearson survived the testator and married Joseph Oliver and had by him a son called James Pearson Oliver, who survived his mother, and to whom her share of right of the land descended, she dying intestate.

The said James Pearson Oliver afterwards died intestate and without issue, some time in the year 1789, and the said Ann's share descended from him to Eunice Conway, his only surviving sister, of the whole blood, who afterwards intermarried with your petitioner, and being well and legally entitled by the said descent aforesaid, and under the will aforesaid, to 1/5 of said land undivided, your petitioner and the said Eunice, his wife, sold and conveyed said 1/5 undivided part to Thomas Hyman from whom your petitioner afterwards purchased the same. And your petitioner says that the other 4/5 of said land came at length to be united partly by descent and partly by purchase - in - Thomas Wheelwright Pearson, who devised the same to Thomas Kelly, an infant under the age of 21 years, the guardianship of whom was obtained by James Bryan, and who in right of said infant has entered into possession of said land and now holds the same and as the same has never been divided, your petitioner prays that Commissioners may be appointed according to the Act of the Assembly in such cases made and provided, to divide the same between your petitioner and the said Thomas Kelly who are tenants in common. The citation may issue to James Bryan, guardian as aforesaid, to show cause, if any he has, why the prayer of the petitioner should not be granted and that 1/5 of said land may be set apart for said Jonathan Fellows.

James Bryan, guardian, acknowledged service of complaint at June Term 1800, and filed the following answer: Thomas Kelly, an infant under the age of 21, by James Bryan, his guardian, says:

He admits that Thomas Pearson died at the time stated in said petition, having made a will, and devised the residue of his estate to be divided between Thomas Pearson, Jr., Mary Pearson, Elizabeth Pearson, Ann Pearson, and Esther Pearson, etc. land called Nottingham Point; that said Ann Pearson, and Esther Pearson, etc. land called Nottingham Point; that said Ann Pearson survived the testator and married Joseph Oliver, and had by him a son called James Pearson Oliver, but respondent does not know that said James Pearson Oliver is dead. It is admitted that petitioner married Eunice Conway, sister of James Pearson Oliver, but knows nothing of the conveyance from petitioner and his wife to Thomas Hyman, or of the conveyance from Thomas to petitioner.

That he believes that Thomas Pearson, Jr. departed this life soon after the death of his testator, about 1750, and that immediately after his death Thomas Wheelwright Pearson, his nephew

and heir at law took into his possession the whole undivided tract of land called Nottingham Point, claiming the same as heir to his uncle and did continually until the day of his death, which happened some time in the year 1791, hold as his sole and exclusive property, without any division of suit therefore, etc. Signed James Bryan, June Term 1800 before Samuel Chapman.

The deposition of Thomas Oliver, a witness in the suit in New Bern Superior Court in which Jonathan Fellows is petitioner and Thomas Kelly by his guardian is defendant.

He says he has been well acquainted with the land called Nottingham Point on the north side of Neuse River below Wilkinson's Point for 35 years. He knew Ann Pearson, the daughter of Thomas Pearson, she married Joseph Oliver, who was reputed to be lost at sea. Deponent held no personal acquaintance with him but the widow for several years lived upon Nottingham Point and afterwards married Peter Hyman. Ann Pearson had by her husband Joseph Oliver a son James Pearson Oliver who deponent understood went to sea about twenty years ago, and has not been heard of and presumed by his family to be lost at sea. James Pearson Oliver was about 16 years old when he went to sea. Joseph Crispin before the memory of deponent married the widow of Wheelwright Pearson, who was the son of Thomas Pearson and had occupied the point land but not within the recollection of deponent. Captain Thomas Kelly settled upon the land about 16 years ago and died there. About 18 years ago Thomas Wheelwright Pearson purchased the shares of two of the daughters of his grandfather, Thomas Pearson, in the Nottingham Point land. One of these was Esther, wife of James Little, after this, the deponent frequently heard Thomas Wheelwright Pearson declare that he had purchased all the shares in the Point land, except the share of James Pearson Oliver, the son of Ann Oliver, and he intended to purchase the share of the said James as soon as he attained the age of 20 years. Sworn to before John Stanly. -day of -1804.

The deposition of John Gooding, a witness in the suit wherein Jonathan Fellows is petitioner and Thomas Kelly, by his guardian, defendant, says about 40 years ago deponent rented a piece of land on the North side of Neuse River below Wilkinson's Point, from Joseph Crispin, who intermarried with the widow of Wheelwright Pearson. This is the same plantation which was afterwards improved by Captain Thomas Kelly. Crispin informed deponent he rented the land for the benefit of Mrs. Ann Oliver, the widow of - Oliver, who was reported to be lost at sea, and her children, James and Eunice. He further states that between the years 1780 and 1790 in which interval deponent collected taxes for Craven County, he had a conversation with Thomas Wheelwright Pearson, the said Pearson informed deponent he had purchased all the shares in the land on which deponent had settled except one. Signed John Gooding, the - day of -1804: before John Stanly.

April Term 1811. Sheriff of Craven commanded to summon Roger Jones, William Whitty, Jesse Vendrick, Ephraim Fulcher, and William S. Sparrow, to meet and make partition of said land called Nottingham Point, 250 acres, between Jonathan Fellows and Thomas Kelly, by his guardian John Oliver, according to their respective shares, etc. Witness Wright C. Stanly, Clerk of Court. September. 1810.

To further enhance the story of the Pierson/Pearson graves, Lee abstracted the following deeds from Craven County:

D/B 20 p. 432 - This Indenture made the 17 Feb. 1774, between Elizabeth Pearson and Esther Pearson, daughters of Thomas Pearson, late of Craven County in the Province of North Carolina, Esquire, deceased, of the one part and Thomas Wheelwright Pearson of the same county and province of the other part...Elizabeth and Esther for the sum of 40 pounds sell their estate right to Thomas Wheelwright Pearson...land situate on the north side of Neuse River called Nottingham Point containing 250 acres from Gilbert Dover (?) to Thomas Pearson bearing date 16 July 1734, also one lot of land in the town of New Bern known in the plan of the said town by No. 38 which lot was granted by the commissioners to Thomas Pearson - Witnesses: Joseph Crispin and Sidney Crispin; signed: Elizabeth Pearson by Esther Pearson, her attorney, Esther Pearson. Money received from Thomas W. 7 Feb. 1774.

D/B 2 P. 603 - Bath County, Craven Precinct - Dec. 23, 1712/3 - This came into Court Capt. Farnifold Green and acknowledged



George Baxter of Paradise Shores helps probe for other grave sites at the historical

Pierson Cemetery. No other graves were found.

his right to and interest in a pcell of land as followeth: Know all men by these present that I Farnifold Green of Bath County in Neus River doe bargaine and sell unto Martine Franks of the same County and place his Heirs Ex(rs), Asm(rs), or assigns one settlement tract or pcell of land containing two hundred and fifty acres lying and being in Notingams Neck and I doe make over all my right title and interest. Witnesses - Rich. Whitehouse, Rich. Williamson.

In Farnifold Green's Will, written October 26, 1711 - found on p. 210 in North Carolina Wills and Inventories by Grimes: It is noted that he willed to his daughter-in-law, Ann Smithwick, "one Tract of Land Lying on ye No. side Neus River, Called Nottingame point...Two hundred and fifty acres."

CONCLUSION

Upon gathering data about the unique Pierson/Pearson graves, an interesting story evolved. The first owners and settlers of the land around Pierson's Point in Pamlico County were seafaring men. Several traveled the waters and never returned. The need for help-mates was so great that widows and widowers had little trouble remarrying with other settlers.

