

Stroll Among 19th Century Graves Strikes Chord In Researcher's Mind

BY IRIS KAPIL

An abandoned cemetery sits, half-hidden by trees, behind a parking lot in Shallotte, only a minute from noisy highway traffic.

One sunny morning I discovered it, quite unexpectedly, and spent a quiet hour reading tombstones, trying to imagine the lives of the people buried beneath my feet.

Twenty-eight tombstones stand or lie broken there. The earliest birth was in 1803; the most recent death, 1933. Undoubtedly, the people were farmers, although one man was a reverend and another a professor.

I read and reflected on 19th century Shallotte, sometimes touching the carved letters and numbers, and images filled my mind. Some were from tales told me half a century ago by my West Virginia grandparents. Others were of farm families I know today in the villages

of Turkey, India and Indonesia. I felt as if I had been placed in a juncture between three worlds different in time and culture, yet more similar to one another than to our modern way of life.

Among the tombstones were small stone markers, marking the tiny graves of babies. I counted them and thought of the village women I know who bear eight or nine babies and lose two or more to an early death. Before the era of vaccines and antibiotics, every mother could expect that, or worse.

I am not yet 60, but remember the first mass vaccinations of school children in this country. I remember also talk of dreaded whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria and parents' fear of smallpox and polio. Before the 1940s, when penicillin became available, pneumonia killed and a child's sore throat could mean a damaged heart for life.

Health care for children in Asian countries is improving. Governments provide some vaccination services. Major epidemics and horrendous famines are under control. When a child is stricken, the farm family can sometimes afford the trip into town to the hospital or doctor's office. Most governments promote family planning and city families are small. In a smaller family the chances are better that all the children will survive. Yet, on the farm, a child's labor is needed.

Critically, for most farmers, a son means security. Infant/child mortality rates are still high enough that a poor couple might reason, correctly, that they must have six babies to ensure that at least one son will be alive to care for them when they grow old.

Many of the 19th century Shallotte women did not live to old age. Twelve of the 28 tombstones are for women. Two women died before they reached middle age; three in childbirth.

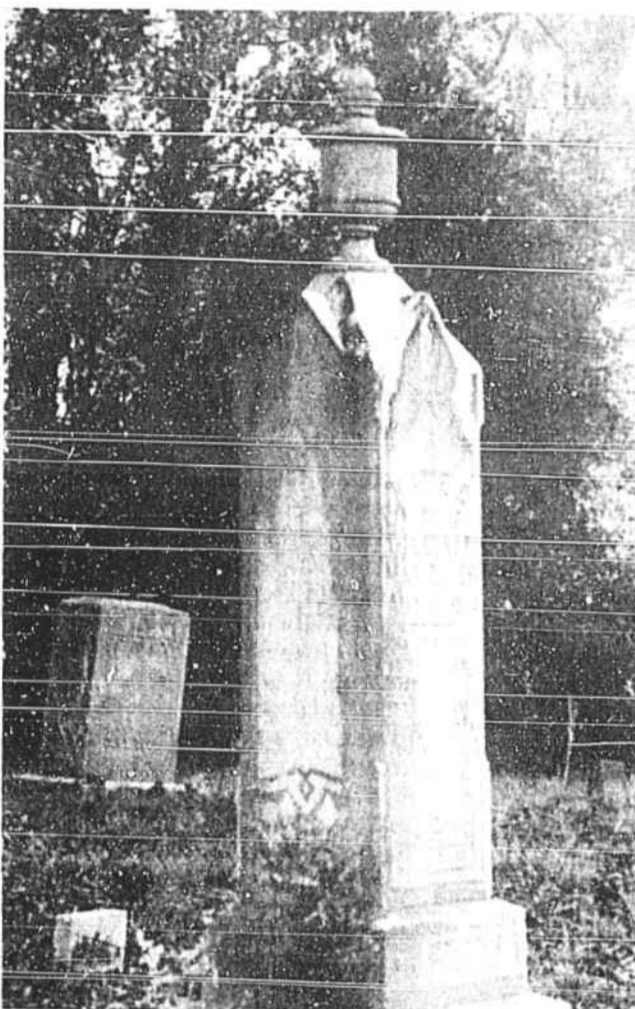
Katie died at age 33 and was buried with her newborn infant. A grieving husband carved on her tombstone: "Can I forget the agonizing hour when those loved eyes were closed to wake no more?"

Imagine losing a child who is on the threshold of life. To a daughter dead at 18 years:

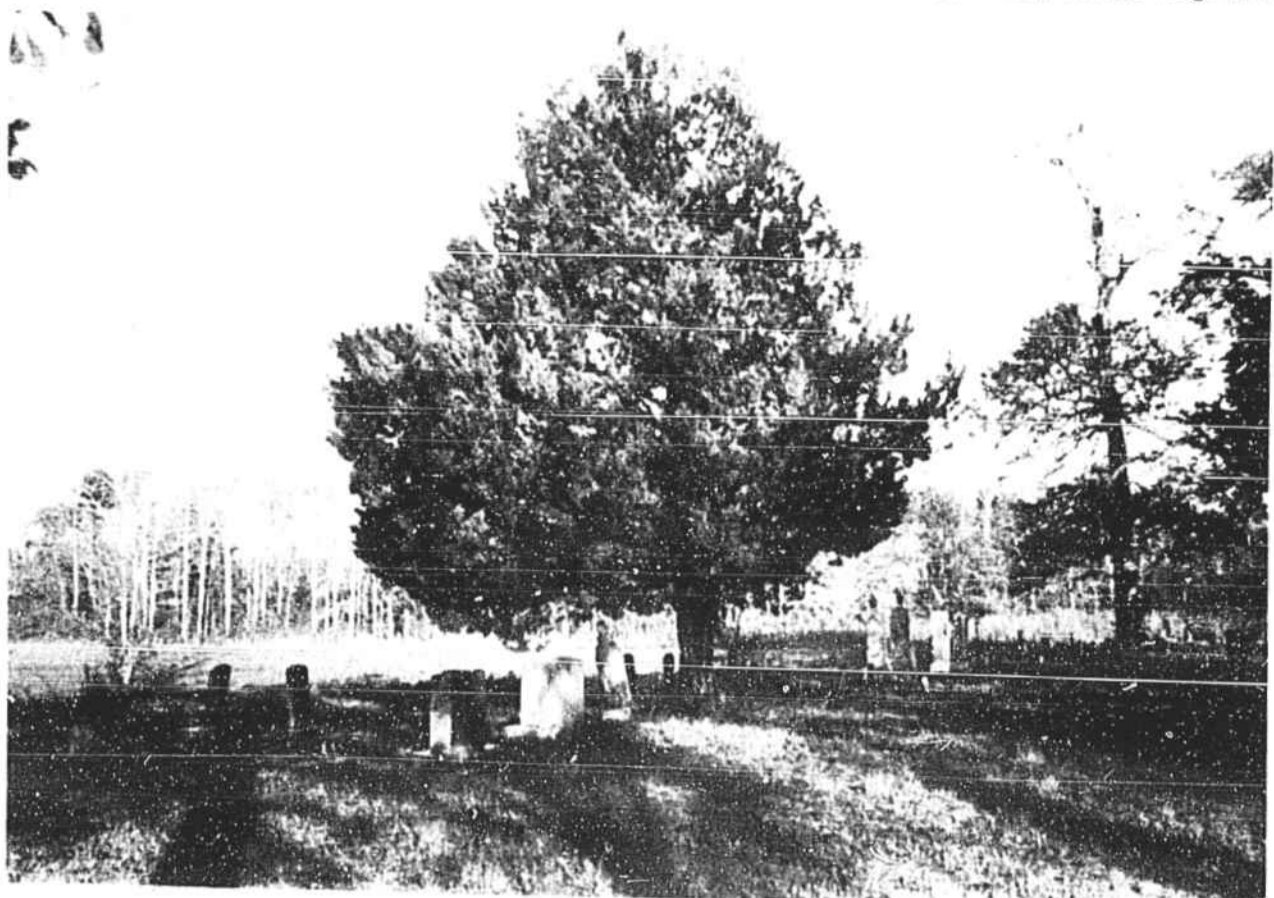
"A precious one from us is gone,
The voice we loved is stilled;
A place is vacant in our house,
Which never will be filled."

Of the remaining seven women, one died at 55, four lived into their early 70s, one to 80 and another to 82. My knowledge of Asian farm women leads me to suspect the six probably did not enjoy a vigorous, healthy old age.

After many pregnancies and nursing many babies, the old woman would have lost her teeth, itself a painful process without benefit of modern dentistry. Besides arthritis and other afflictions for which modern science still offers only uncertain relief, the Shallotte grandmother probably endured continual pain from the gynecological consequences of births and miscarriages, delicately alluded to as "women's problems."



SOME OF THE GRAVESTONES lean with age, their inscriptions barely legible. This stone marks the grave of Katie E. Leonard, who died in 1914 at the age of 33.



IN A FIELD edged with trees, the neglected monuments stand, hinting at the trials and joys of earlier Shallotte residents.

I wonder also if 19th century women were as well fed as their menfolk; the typical Asian village woman I know invariably denies herself meat, milk and eggs and tasty fruits when these foods are scarce, putting her husband's needs first. Poor nutrition tells on her aged body.

I wonder why six of eight tombstones are for daughters? Perhaps the girls' lasted longer by chance; but among poor Asian villagers boys are less likely to die than girls in childhood.

An outsider can see that little boys are better fed and better cared for, a fact the villagers would hardly be aware of. They think it natural a boy is more self-assured, more aggressive, more likely to get what he wants. Girls absorb at an early age the attitudes of the women and favor their brothers over themselves and their sisters.

Daughters are loved no less than sons; it is nature's harsh reality that shapes the social realities: Resources are scarce, farm work heavy, and daughters leave at marriage. The family centers on the males.

A proverb from India says, "Raising a daughter is like watering another man's tree."

Could 19th century Shallotte families have been less patriarchal than the wheat farming communities I know in Asia?

On all the women's tombstones, the woman was identified as "wife of . . ." "daughter of . . ." "mother of . . ." always of some man. As with my women friends in rural Asia, they had no identity outside their family roles.

Eight tombstones are for men. Why so few? Did young men leave the farm for the city or to move west?

Did they go to war and die on the battlefield? Katie's husband died when he was 40, three years after her death. Two other men died before their 40th birthdays. The professor, 48 when he lost his wife, lived to be 79. The minister, a widower at 39, lived for another 26 years. Each man is buried beside his wife. I wonder if it would have been improper for them to remarry?

Epitaphs for those older men and women show respect for and acceptance of death, as well as affection for the departed. The longest, most affectionate one is for an elderly mother. At least one man, perhaps the black sheep of the family or lacking close kin, had none.

I walked about the cemetery, warmed by an autumn sun, the air sweet smelling, pleased by the sight of carved stones clustered in a tree-encircled field. I remembered the beauty of the Appalachian-like hills of the country surrounding an Asian village.

Life is hard in a traditional farm community, but the people may well be as happy as we in the modern world. Our modern life compares poorly, I think, with theirs in terms of warmth of human relationships, richness of religion and ritual, delight in crafting things with one's hands.

If only some way could be found to keep all that and still live our modern lives.

Iris Kapil, an Ocean Isle Beach resident, is conducting field research on how the middle-aged and elderly seek health in an American community. Based in Paris, she has been extensively involved in health service planning and research in Southeast Asia, most recently helping to write five-year primary health care plans for Ismaili communities in Pakistan, India and Tanzania.



Join
THE STORK EXCHANGE

Congratulations on your expected arrival. The Brunswick Hospital truly understands the changes that are going to take place in your life.

We Can Help

The Stork Exchange is a club for expectant parents. The Stork Exchange is free. Members receive benefits and complimentary gifts while in The Brunswick Hospital.

Benefits include:
courtesy admission, discharge, childbirth preparation classes free of charge, special discounts through the Business Office.



...we deliver!

Complimentary Gifts:
tote bag, gift basket, hospital birth certificate, discount coupon for baby's first picture, baby bib, candlelight dinner for two.

The Family Centered Nursing Unit (FCNU)

The FCNU is dedicated solely to the care of the mother and newborn. It is staffed by skilled and experienced nurses that pride themselves in providing individualized care. The FCNU offers several birthing options to meet your needs. The traditional Labor and Delivery suite is a choice that many families prefer. You may choose the Birthing Room which offers a comfortable home-like atmosphere. Regardless of your birthing choice, your physician will have access to state of the art equipment to make your experience as pleasant and as safe as possible.

A Perfect Opportunity

Enjoy the excitement of your pregnancy. The Stork Exchange can make it a wonderful experience. Just fill out the coupon below and we will send you the membership forms. It is all so easy and at no cost to you. The Brunswick Hospital would like to have the opportunity to serve you and your family.



EXCHANGE
at...
The Brunswick Hospital
Hwy. 17 S., PO Box 139, Supply, 754-8121

Fill out and mail or bring this coupon to The Brunswick Hospital to become a member

Name _____
Address _____
State _____ Zip _____
Phone () _____
Doctor's Name _____
Due Date _____
 I would like to receive information on physicians located in my area.

Even after seeing and hearing about us, some of you (and you know who you are) are **STILL SKEPTICAL!**

So, we've asked one of our satisfied customers to tell why she enjoys Inches Limited.



Since starting the Inches Limited toning machines last Dec. 17, I have not experienced migraines at all. The stretch machine, which is my favorite, has taken the tension out of my neck and shoulders.

The machines have also strengthened my back muscles so that I can do my work without the back pain I usually have.

The added benefit is that, while relaxing, I am toning and losing inches in all areas of my body. I also have more energy and I feel great!



Merle Hardee
Shallotte

Call now for your FREE DEMONSTRATION.
Absolutely no obligation.

The Exercise Alternative

inches Limited

Stauffer Isotonic Machines

754-5680

**RESORT PLAZA, HWY. 17 S
SHALLOTTE**

THERESA WOOTEN & CECILIA SMITH
OWNERS/OPERATORS