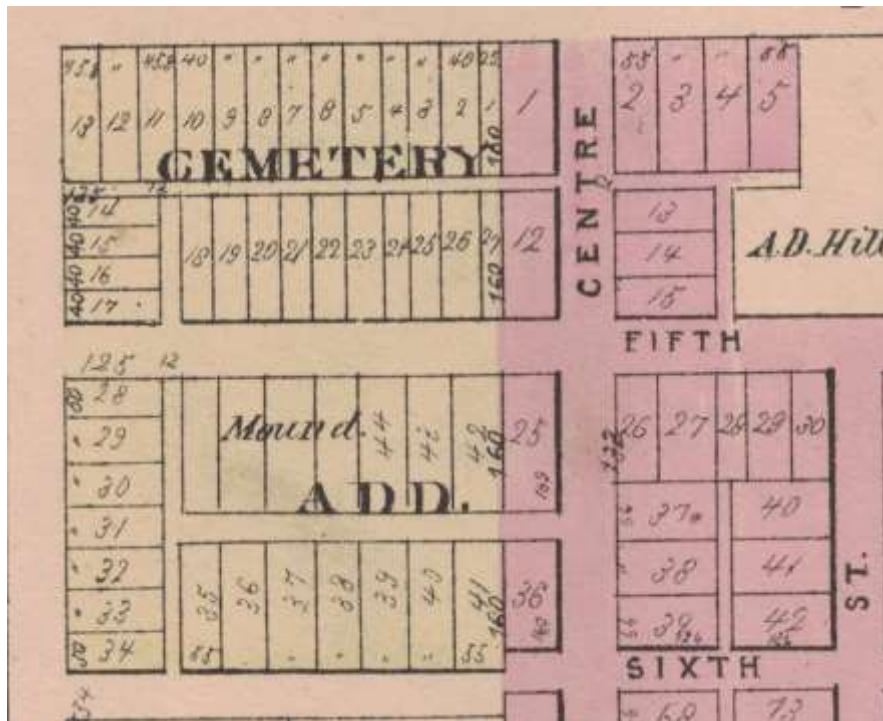
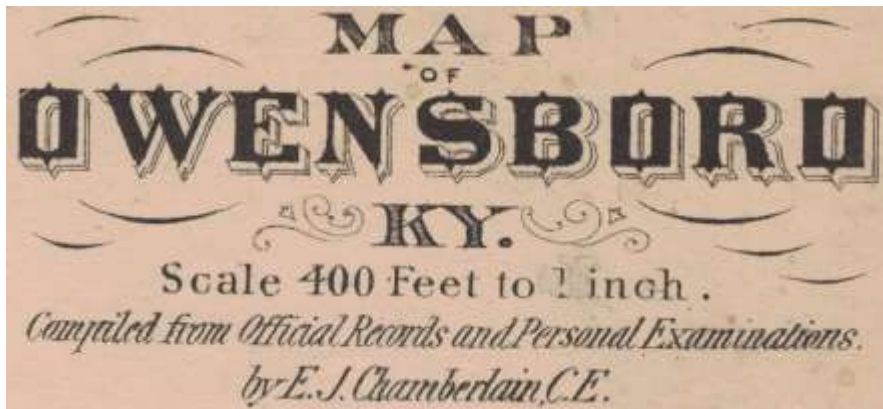


Rural Cemetery – Owensboro's Third Burying Ground

By Jerry Long
c.2024



An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Daviess County, KY.
Leo McDonough & Co., 1876, page 81:



Rural Cemetery Addition to Owensboro is outlined on this 1876 map. It was the site of the former Rural Cemetery that had been used as Owensboro's burial ground. The cemetery extended between Triplett, Center, Fourth and Sixth Streets. The cemetery was established by a company of stockholders. The first burial there was in 1854 (Elisha Athy). The need for more space led to the cemetery's closure in 1868 and the acquisition of a new location. Some of the graves there were moved to the new location, Elmwood Cemetery, but many were not. The name of the cemetery was established as "Rural Cemetery" by an 1856 deed; however, in several deeds the name was given as "Rural Hill Cemetery" and "Rose Hill Cemetery." On left in the above map is Triplett Street, on the right is Hathaway Street, at top is Fourth Street and at bottom is Sixth Street. Section labeled "Mound" is the Mosley family cemetery which was not part of the Rural Cemetery; The Moseley Cemetery, is where Thomas Moseley, Revolutionary War veteran, is buried. The Moseley Cemetery today remains on a knoll on the south side of Fifth Street a short distance east of Triplett Street.



History of Daviess County, Kentucky,
Inter-State Publishing Co., Chicago, IL, 1883, pages 405-406:

CEMETERIES.

The first burying ground for Owensboro was on Fourth street, south of the public square, and in the vicinity of the old "Masonic Lodge" building. It extended west to St. Elizabeth street. Most of the dead who were buried there still remain. In 1840 the place of burial was changed to a point on the Henderson road, just beyond the city limits. Most of the remains buried here have been removed. Paupers, however, are still buried in this ground. In 1852 the cemetery was moved to the southeastern portion of the city, comprising the ground between Triplett and Center streets, and Fourth and Sixth. All the dead buried here have been removed. These grounds were owned by a company of stockholders, and controlled by a directory. The first two spoken of above were owned and controlled by the city.

Elmwood Cemetery. — In the year 1856, seeing the necessity for a cemetery, a company of the citizens of Owensboro was formed, composed of William Bell, James Weir, R. M. Hathaway, George Scarborough, D. M. Griffith, F. M. Pearl, J. B. Anderson, Robert Craig, John H. McHenry, Sr., S. M. Wing and E. A. Hathaway, who purchased of R. M. Hathaway and F. M. Pearl nine acres and a fraction of ground in what is known as Hathaway's addition to Owensboro, and named same "Rural Cemetery."

The use of said grounds was continued until 1868, When, owing to their smallness and the growth of the city around them, it became necessary to seek a more spacious and suitable place for a cemetery. After due consideration, forty acres of ground, situated about one mile southeast of Owensboro, on the Hartford road, were selected and purchased of John G. Barkley, by the following persons: S. M. Wing, James Weir, R. M. Hathaway, D. M. Griffith, J. F. Kimbley, C. Griffith, T. S. Venable, W. B. Tyler, W. N. Sweeney, B. Bransford, T. S. Anderson, David Hamilton, J. H. McHenry, Jr., Charles Werner, John G. Barkley, W. T. Courtney, S. H. Ford and W. H. Perkins. C. R. Milne, in May, 1875, was admitted into the company, on the same footing with the above-named stockholders, and each one received a certificate of the company's indebtedness to him for \$200, to bear

twelve per cent interest, annually. The name given to the grounds was “ Rural Hill Cemetery”—changed in April, 1869, to Elmwood, its present name.

Nearly all the persons buried in the old cemetery were removed to the new at the expense of the company, and each lot-owner in the old cemetery received a lot in the new one instead.



Daviess County Deed Book M, pages 571-575: Purchase of land for Rural Cemetery

Abstract – R. M. Hathaway and F. M. Pearl sold nine acres two rods and sixteen poles of land less 3/4 of an acre to the president (William Bell) and directors (James B. Anderson, R. M. Hathaway, Daniel M. Griffith and James Weir), of company organized to establish a cemetery to be named “Rural Cemetery.” The company authorized the president and directors to acquire land for the cemetery and they & their successors are authorized to sell lots. Other by laws of the company for the operation of the cemetery are outlined (13 clauses). On the 5 April 1856 document was signed by the stockholders of the company – William Bell, James Weir, R. M. Hathaway, George Scarborough, D. M. Griffith, F. M. Pearl, J. B. Anderson, Robert Craig, John H. McHenry, Sr. Instrument was recorded on 20 June 1856.

Daviess County Deed Book W, page 200: Plat of former Rural Cemetery



State of Kentucky
Daviess County

I T. C. Jones, Clerk of Daviess County Court, do certify that the above and foregoing plat of Old Rural Hill Cemetery as laid off, by R. M. Hathaway, S. H. Ford & F. L. Hall the Committee appointed by Elmwood Cemetery to sell & Convey the lots of old Rural Hill Cemetery as laid off above, and asked to be recorded which is hereby done.

Witness my hand this 5th day of August 1869.

T. C. Jones, Clk.
Phil T. Watkins, D.C.

[Note: On plat street at top labeled "IV Street" is Fourth Street and street labeled "V Street" is Fifth Street.]



**Owensboro Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY,
Thursday, 30 October 1879, page 4:**

"RURAL CEMETERY."

A Deserted City of the Dead.

On yesterday Mr. C. R. Milne, assisted by a corps of workmen, was busy removing the remains of the following persons from the old cemetery, corner Fourth and Triplett streets, to "Elmwood," viz: Phil. B. Thompson, wife and two children; first wife of Robt. Craig; the wife of Dr. F. M. Pearl and infant son. But one grave that can be identified yet remains, that of Matthew Kirkpatrick, who died in 1852 at the age of twenty- four years. This grave is on the old Mosley lot, which was deeded to lie used for a grave-yard only, the property reverting to the heirs whenever used for other purposes. We give a brief historic sketch of the old and new cemeteries.

The necessity for a suitable place to bury the dead, becoming manifest to the citizens of Owensboro, in the year 1856, a company was organized composed of Wm. Bell, James Weir, R. M. Hathaway, Geo. Scarborough, D. M. Griffith, F. M. Pearl, J. B. Anderson, Robt. Craig, John H. McHenry, Sr., S. M. Wing and E. A. Hathaway. The newly organized company purchased of R. M. Hathaway and F. M. Pearl about nine acres of ground, in what was then known as Hathaway's addition, but now bounded by Fourth, Triplett, Sixth and Centre streets. The plot of ground purchased was appropriately arranged and laid out for a city of the dead, and dedicated as the "Rural Cemetery," the remains of Elisha Athy being the first deposited in it. Its use was continued until 1868, when the small area and the growth of the city necessitated a more spacious and suitable place. A new company was then organized composed of the following, persons, viz: S. M. Wing, James Weir, R. M. Hathaway, D. M. Griffith, F. Kimbly, C. Griffith, T. S. Venable, W. B. Tyler, W. N. Sweeney, B. Bransford, T. S. Anderson, David Hamilton, J. H. McHenry, Jr., Charles Werner, John G. Barkley, W. T. Courtney, S. H. Ford and W. H. Perkins. Forty acres of ground were purchased of John G. Barkley, situated about one mile south-east of Owensboro, which was handsomely laid out, beautifully adorned with shade trees and shrubbery and the name "Rural Hill Cemetery" given to it, which in April, 1869, was changed to its present name – "Elmwood." Mr. C. R. Milne was admitted into the company in May, 1875. Nearly all the remains were removed from the old to the new cemetery, as soon as change was made. Vast improvements

were made at a large expense, which encumbered the cemetery with a heavy debt. A publication on this subject, says: "The Directors were urged to make arrangements to pay off the debt, if possible, but they seemed unable to do so. T. S. Anderson, being the largest creditor, then proposed to give the company one year's time, without interest on his claim, if they would secure it, but this was declined. He then proposed to pay the entire debt of the cemetery, himself, if the company would transfer its property to him. It was generally conceded at the time that the entire property of the cemetery would not pay its debts at a forced sale, and, before said, the debt was increasing yearly. The Directors said the proposition was liberal, more so than they would be willing to make, and on the 25th of June, 1878, the cemetery and assets w conveyed by deed to T. S. Anderson, on condition that he should pay all debts of the cemetery, and that the grounds should be forever used as a burial-ground and kept in good order." Since the transfer was made to Mr. Anderson the grounds have been greatly improved, and it is no wonder to us that all who had departed relatives and friends in the old neglected cemetery were anxious to have them removed to Elmwood.

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**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY,
Tuesday, 10 October 1933, page 6:**

Someone asks if we knew a cemetery used to stand where the present Owensboro Wagon factory is located. True, but it wasn't called Rural Hill cemetery, as some think. It was known as the Rural cemetery, and Rural Hill cemetery which was laid out between what is now Fourth, Sixth Triplett and Center streets, was not founded until some years later.

•••••

**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday,
18 November 1942, page 4A:**



If a stray ghost is ever seen on the down-town streets of Owensboro, in the wee small hours of the morning, by a person who may have tipped the flowing bowl, too freely, the ghost may be

real, nevertheless. I may be the spirit of an early pioneer, waiting for the resurrection morn in his resting place, Owensboro's first cemetery, which was right down-town.

It was sometime after 1810 that the first cemetery was laid out on a plot of ground which is now Third and Fourth streets from St. Ann to St. Elizabeth streets. Foundations of many buildings in that section now rest on the dust from the bones of those early men and women, for the graves were not all moved, when another cemetery was opened on the outskirts of Owensboro which was Fifth street, in the 1850's.

And if any ghosts ever flit about in the shadows of the small wooded plot on the north side of West Ninth street near the railroad crossing, they too are spirits of early pioneers who were laid to rest and are still resting there. For being a town cemetery, where its paupers were buried, the city did not bother to disturb the sleeping ones when other cemeteries were opened in later years, and those men and women still sleep on, waiting for Gabriel and that last trumpet call.

It was in 1840 when the business district of Owensboro encroached on Third street that the city decided to start a cemetery out on the Henderson road, outside of town. So a plot of ground was purchased. The Henderson road then, as now, was Ninth street, and the cemetery, which is now that shady plot, and the scene of many an ardent evangelist's exhortations, was then in the country.

Some tombstones remained there for many years, and some of Owensboro's present residents remember that cemetery as they well remember the one in the southeast section of Owensboro covering ground between Triplett and Center streets and Fourth and Sixth streets. The latter cemetery was opened in 1852, and remnants of tombstones are still visible in lawns of some of the homes in that section. This cemetery was a part of Rural cemetery which was started in 1856, when Owensboro had grown so rapidly that it was encroaching on the cemetery at Fifth street. The Rural cemetery was merely an expansion of the one opened in 1852.

Rural cemetery was used until in 1868 when, owing to the continued growth of the city which was rapidly encroaching on the cemetery's territory, it became apparent that more spacious grounds would be necessary. In that year 40 acres of ground were purchased on the Hartford road a mile southeast of Owensboro. The company's minutes show that it offered to move all persons buried in the old Rural cemetery, providing written consent could be secured from the families. Many were moved to their new grounds, but some families refused to consent to the removal, and in other instances no families could be found to give the consent, and hence the dead remained undisturbed and still remain with inhabited homes as their monuments. That section is now a residential section, with a house on every lot and little mention is ever made of the cemetery, or the persons still buried there. In April, 1869, the name Rural Hill cemetery was changed to Elmwood which it has retained since that time.

John A. Bidwell, present sexton of Elmwood holds an unique record, having served in that capacity since May 7, 1901. Mr. Bidwell is the father of Police Chief Vernie Bidwell. The pauper cemetery is next to Elmwood, and contains more than two acres purchased by the city of Owensboro in 1868 from the Rural Hill company.

In 1861 the Catholic cemetery was opened on the Henderson road. The description given of it at that time was that it was a "half mile below town." Now the town extends beyond it.

Owensboro's newest cemetery, Rose Hill was opened in 1916. Containing more than 20 acres, the first burial was made on November 21, 1916, when J. Wesley Howard was laid to rest.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY,
Tuesday, 30 May 1978, page 1B:

3 tombstones remain in forgotten cemetery

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Matthew Kirkpatrick was 35 in the late fall of 1827 when his friends and neighbors buried him on the rural hillside a mile or so from the settlement of Owensboro.

Malvina Watkins was 24 when she was buried in an adjoining plot seven years later.

Sgt. Thomas Moseley, a Virginia veteran of the American Revolution, was 85 when he was laid to rest there another seven years later.

Of the hundreds of pioneer Owensboroans buried in the cemetery that stretched from what is now Triplett to Center Street and from Fourth to Sixth, only their tombstones remain this Memorial Day.

The woods in which this cemetery was begun has long vanished. And although the cemetery is listed on county records as "Old Rural Hill Cemetery" the nearest rural land today is more than two miles away as the crow flies.

L.W. "Luke" Vetter lives two houses' down from the small plot that remains from the once large cemetery. He stood on the little knoll overlooking the intersection of 5th and Triplett streets recently telling visitors about the old burying ground.

Vetter has lived all his 78 years in eastern Owensboro around the old cemetery. He remembers that when some of the houses on the north side of 5th Street were built, workers dug into old graves.

"When they were building that house over there," he pointed, "they hit a vault. A lot of the people that was buried here was moved out to Elmwood cemetery when it opened (in the 1860s) but a lot of them are still buried out here."

The three tombstones belonged to people wealthy enough to have that type of marker, he says. But the cemetery also held many people not that well off financially.

At one time, when the city was mowing the remains of the cemetery, Vetter says, all the small grave markers were given away to anyone that wanted them. He has a dozen or more in his back yard – one of which marks the final resting place of his dog "Tutue" against which Lassie wouldn't have stood a chance in trick competition, he says.

Occasionally on Memorial Day ceremonies are held at the Moseley grave, Vetter says, and a flag is flown there,

On Memorial Day 1926, the Daughters of the American Revolution unveiled a federal marker on Moseley's grave. Today it is also marked by a large rosebush growing on top of it.

Moseley, who ran a popular tavern on St. Ann Street in the early days of the settlement, is credited with owning Daviess County's first courthouse.

According to county history, Moseley's tavern served as a courtroom while the county was in the process of building a public facility. Records aren't too clear on why some of those buried in the old cemetery remained behind when others were moved to Elmwood. But the exodus cost the cemetery one of its more illustrious residents.

Thompson, an extensive land owner and one of Daviess County's first tobacco brokers, became the first Owensboroan to serve in Congress in 1823. He was buried in Old Rural Hill Cemetery in 1837 and moved to Elmwood some 30 years later.

As the years rolled by, the settlement turned into a village, a town and a city. The old cemetery was engulfed by progress.

It's doubtful if any of those who lie here, except perhaps for Moseley, were remembered this Memorial Day.

[Note: Thomas Moseley (c1765-1841), Malvina Watkins and Matthew Kirkpatrick referred to in the article had been buried in the Moseley family cemetery. The Moseley Cemetery predated and was not a part of the incorporated Rural Cemetery. Thomas Moseley had reserved the plot of ground as a burying ground and he requested that his remains be laid there. Thus when the neighboring Rural Cemetery was closed in 1868 those graves were not moved to Elmwood Cemetery but remained in the Moseley Cemetery.]



First Burial in Rural Cemetery

Elisha Athy was the first burial in the Rural Cemetery (“Rural Cemetery: A Deserted City of the Dead,” Owensboro Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 30 October 1879, p.4:

After the closure of the Rural Cemetery in 1868 his remains were reinterred at Owensboro’s Elmwood Cemetery. His name is included in a listing of monuments in section D at the cemetery (copy of listing of Elmwood Cemetery by Albert J. Davis in the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library in Owensboro).

Elisha Athy was born 23 July 1782 in Virginia. He was the son of John Athy & Sarah Foster. His father was an officer in the Revolutionary War (“Brief Illness Ends In Death Of Mrs. Mary Athy Bransford, Owensboro Messenger, Tuesday, 5 November 1912, p.3). Elisha married Nancy Ann Rowley White in Jefferson County, KY on 2 March 1811. Elisha is listed in the 1820, 1830 and 1840 censuses of Jefferson County, KY. For several years he was a merchant in Louisville, KY. He moved to Daviess County, KY in 1844 (An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Daviess County, KY., Leo McDonough & Co., 1876, p. 37). In the 1850 census of Daviess County, KY his occupation was given as farmer. He died 27 April 1854.

The graves of Elisha’s widow, Ann R., and two of their sons, Mortimer F. & Lee Elisha, were also moved from the Rural Cemetery to Elmwood Cemetery. Ann R. Athy was born 21 October 1787 VA and died 13 May 1859 in Owensboro, KY. Her death was noted in the St. Louis newspaper, Daily Missouri Democrat (23 May 1859, p.2) – “Died: On the 13th inst., in Owensboro, Ky., Ann Athy, relict of Elisha Athy, in the 73d year of her age.”

The children of Elisha & Ann Athy included – John William (1812-1853), Mortimer Foster (1819-1853), Mary Eleanor (1825-1912) and Lee Elisha (1827-1859). John W. Athy was buried at Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville, KY and the other three children are buried at Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro.

Elisha and Ann’s daughter, Mary Eleanor Athy, was born 8 December 1825 in Louisville, KY. On 25 June 1846 she married Benjamin Bransford (Daviess County, KY Marriage Book A, p.165). Benjamin Bransford (1819-1892) served as the third mayor of the city of Owensboro during 1872-1874. Mary Athy died in Owensboro on 4 November 1912.

The late Albert J. Davis (1924-2002) in a listing of monuments in section D at Elmwood Cemetery recorded the names of Elisha & Ann Athy, their two sons and daughter, Mary Bransford. The monument of Benjamin & Mary E. (Athy) Bransford, shown below, one of the most impressive in Elmwood Cemetery, is located in the west end of section D. I searched section D for

the monument(s) of Mary's parents, Elisha & Ann Athy, and her two brothers, Mortimer F. Athy and Lee Elisha Athy, but could not locate their memorials.



Left: Tombstone of Mary E. Athy Bransford (1825-1912 & her husband, Benjamin Bransford (1819-1892) in section D of Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY. Right: Tombstone of John W. Athy (1812-1853) & his wife, Phoebe J. Yarnall Athy (1814-1890) in Cave Hill Cemetery, Louisville, KY, son of Elisha & Ann R. (White) Athy.

