

Unknown Cemetery Found In Owensboro

By Jerry Long
c.2024



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY
Tuesday, 14 August 1951, page 2:**

Unrecorded Cemetery, Unmarked Brick-Vault Graves, Found

Workman Monday removed several old graves from an abandoned cemetery located behind the Owensboro Wagon Co. The unmarked brick-vault graves were located on the southeast corner of the intersection of 2nd St. and Leitchfield Rd.

Coroner Allen Haley, who supervised the disinterment, said it was necessary for the Glenmore Distilleries Co., Inc., which purchased the old Owensboro Wagon Co. about six months ago, to have the graves removed in order to obtain a clear title to the property.

Harry Bruder, vice president and general manager, Glenmore Distilleries Co., Inc., said plans call for the site of the old cemetery to be landscaped and beautified.

Six graves, including one baby's grave, had been found Monday. All of the bones badly deteriorated and only small rotten slivers of the wooden caskets remained. However, a piece of yellowed ribbon, about 6 inches long, was found in the baby's grave along with the remains.

Coroner Haley said there was no way of telling how old the graves were since as far as can be determined there are no records available on the cemetery.

However, N. M. Greenlee, 41, of 1323 Breckenridge St., one of many spectators at the site of excavation recalled that when he was a youngster he and several of his playmates discovered one of the graves.

"Some old Negro woman came down here to look at the grave the next day," Greenlee said, "and she said this was a cemetery when she first came to Owensboro. She said Owensboro was called Yellow Banks at that time."

The Post Office in Owensboro bore the name of Yellow Banks from the time of its establishment in 1818 or 1819 until 1837 or 1838, which indicates that the graves could be from 113 to 133 years old or older. The city of Owensboro received a city charter from the State Legislature on Feb. 16, 1866.]

It was rumored among spectators at the site of the excavation that one of the graves was that of Bill Smothers who is credited with erecting the first house on the site now occupied by the city of Owensboro.

Smothers is believed to have erected a cabin here about 1796. However, no one could offer any definite proof as to the burial place of Smothers or when his death occurred. And no means of identification was discovered in any of the graves.

Coroner Haley said that a permit had been obtained by him from the Owensboro-Daviess County Health Department to remove the graves and bury the remains in Elmwood cemetery.

A bulldozer was used to uncover the unmarked graves after which the remains were removed by workmen.

John A. Bidwell, sexton of Elmwood Cemetery since May 7, 1901, was one of the workmen removing the remains from the uncovered graves, under the supervision of Coroner Haley and Paul Mischel, superintendent, of Elmwood Cemetery. Assisting Bidwell, father of Police Chief Vernie Bidwell, were Bob Stevens and Dave Nance.

Coroner Haley said that the attorney employed by Glenmore to obtain a clear title to the Owensboro Wagon Co. property had secured permission from the Kentucky State Department of Health to bury together the remains from every five graves uncovered.



DISINTERRED – open brick-vault grave, left, is one of six uncovered Monday in an abandoned cemetery behind the Owensboro Wagon Co. The remains of the wooden casket and body were still in the unmarked tomb at the time this picture was made. The picture at right shows another vault which has been exhumed and the remains placed in the box for reburial in Elmwood Cemetery. Gathered around are, from left, Coroner Allen Haley and Paul Mischel, superintendent of Elmwood Cemetery, Patrolman George Keplinger, John Bidwell, sexton at Elmwood cemetery for the past 50 years and Bob Stevens.

[Note: Records at Elmwood Cemetery show that several “unknowns” were buried in section G of Elmwood Cemetery in August 1951.]



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY
Friday, 19 February 1918, page 5:

REMAINS OF WOMAN
UNEARTHED IN EAST END

Boys playing in the streets near the intersection of Second street and the Leitchfield road Sunday afternoon broke through a dilapidated brick vault and brought to light a coffin containing the remains of a woman. The remains, which had the appearance of having been buried about fifty years, were in a bad state of decay. The vault is on the site of an old abandoned cemetery which has not been in use for many years for burials. The remains were returned to the vault by employes of the wagon factory Monday and the vault repaired and resealed.



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

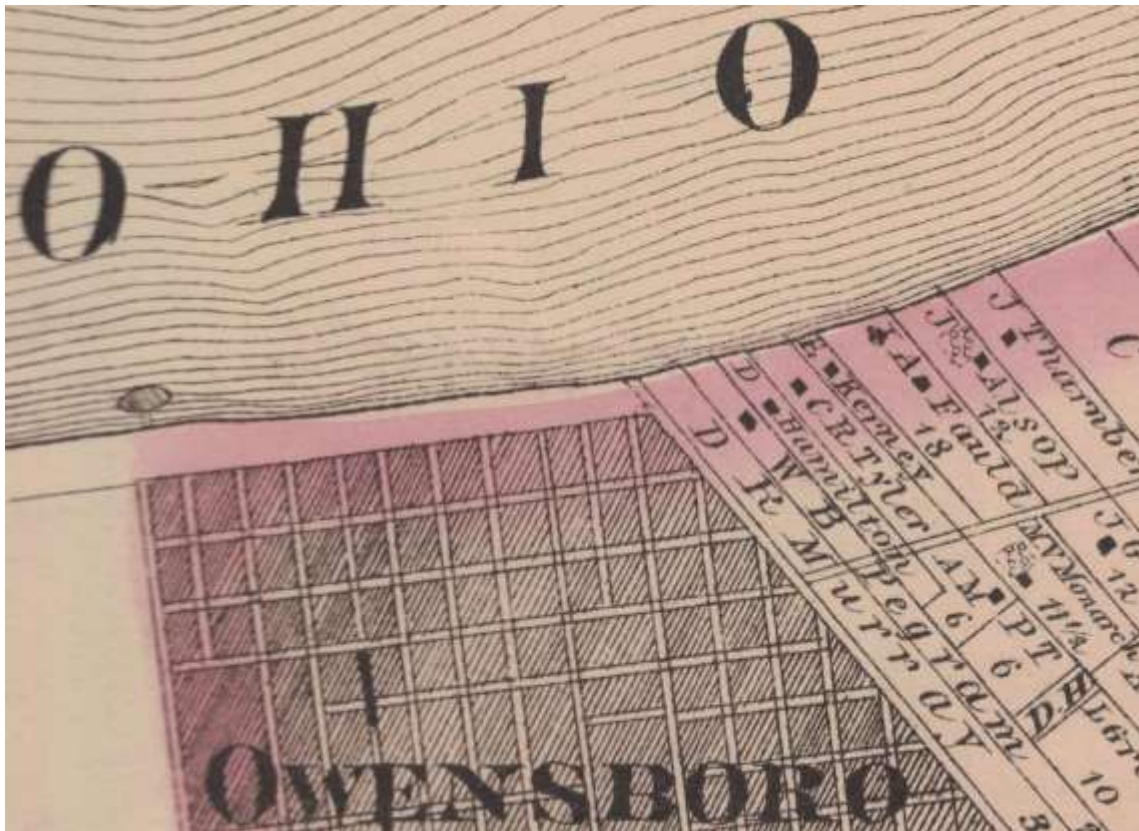
Someone asks if we knew a cemetery used to stand where the present Owensboro Wagon factory is located. True, but it wasn't called Rural Hill cemetery, as some think. It was known as the Rural cemetery, and Rural Hill cemetery which was laid out between what is now Fourth, Sixth Triplitt and Center streets,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



The unrecorded & unknown cemetery was found at southeast corner of the intersection of 2nd Street & Leitchfield Road near the Owensboro Wagon Company. Map of Owensboro circa 2000.



An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Daviess County, KY.
Leo McDonough & Co., 1876, page 38 (plat of Uppertown
Precinct) and page 81 (map of Owensboro):



Leitchfield Road is the double line extending above the * and running along the bottom of the name of D. R. Murray. Second Street is to the left of the name of D. R. Murray between the letters, D. & R., of Murray's name. M. V. Monarch along the right edge of map is shown as owning 11 ½ acres, this probably included the 3 ½ acres that he sold to the Owensboro Wagon Company upon its formation in 1883. The Owensboro Wagon Company property extended from Second Street to Fourth Cemetery along the east side of the Leitchfield Road. On the south side of Fourth Street a few blocks southwest of where the unidentified graves were found in 1918 and 1951 was "Rural Cemetery", an incorporated cemetery that served as a burial ground for the city of Owensboro during 1854-1868. Rural Cemetery (between Triplett, Center, Fourth and Sixth Streets) is labeled "Cemetery Add." on the 1876 map of Owensboro on the next page; Leitchfield Road is the double lined street on the upper right of map.





The Owensboro Wagon Company building on the northeast corner of Fourth Street and Leitchfield Road in Owensboro. The company on the east side of the Leitchfield Road extended from the south side of 2nd Street to the north side of 4th Street. The original plant had seven acres with lumber yards, a 12-fire blacksmith shop, a two-story woodworking department and several large warehouses. The building was deemed unsafe and was razed in April 1999 by its owner, the Owensboro Grain Company (see “Owensboro Wagon Co. being razed,” by Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 20 April 1999, p.1A). It was replaced by a parking lot. Picture made by Jerry Long in 1993.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY
Friday, 5 October 1883, page 4:**

The Owensboro Wagon Manufacturing Company have bought five acres of ground just at the head of Main street on which to locate their factory. The property was owned by M. V. Monarch and Hays & McDonald. The consideration was \$3,500.

**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY
Friday, 26 October 1883, page 4:**

Real Estate Transfers.

M. V. Monarch and wife to Owensboro Wagon Mfg. Co., 3 ½ acres of land, for 52,400.

W. McDonald & c., to Owensboro Wagon Mfg. Co., 1 45-100 acres of land for \$1,100.

Troutman, Rarrick & Co., to Owensboro Wagon Mfg. Co., property in city for \$15,000.



Troutman & Rarrick Co. was located at the corner of 4th Street & the Leitchfield Road adjacent to the Owensboro Wagon Company. The company was begun in 1870 by James P. Troutman and Peter Rarrick.

A reference to the unidentified and unknown cemetery discovered near the former Owensboro Wagon Company may possibly be referenced in the Daviess County deeds whereby Martin V. Monarch, W. McDonald, James P. Troutman and Peter Rarrick obtained their property in the vicinity of the southeast intersection of Second Street and the Leitchfield Road prior to 1883.

