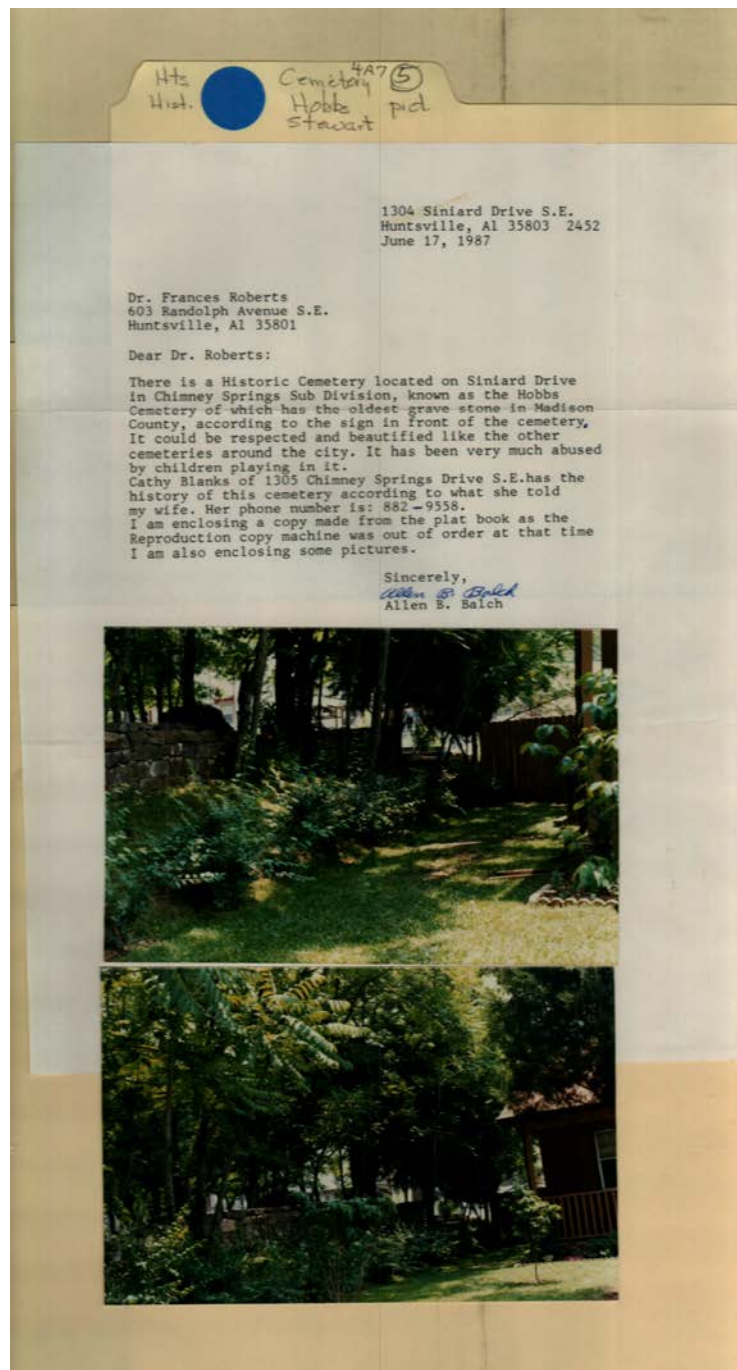


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Hobbs and Stewart Cemeteries, Correspondence and Newspaper Article Photos

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Names:

Balch, Allen B.

Blanks, Cathy

Hobbs Cemetery

Roberts, Frances, Dr.

Places:

Huntsville, AL

Types:

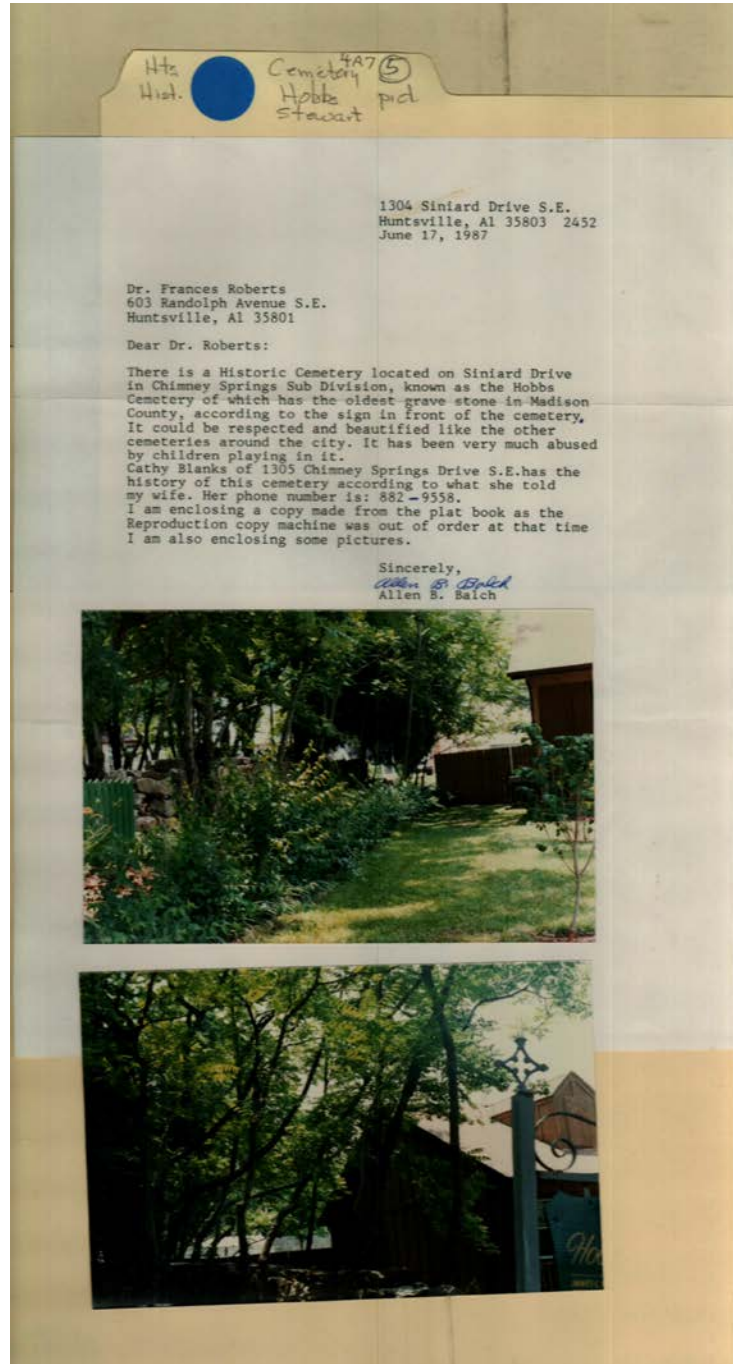
correspondence

photographs

Dates:

June 17, 1987

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Names:

Balch, Allen B.

Blanks, Cathy

Hobbs Cemetery

Roberts, Frances, Dr.

Places:

Huntsville, AL

Types:

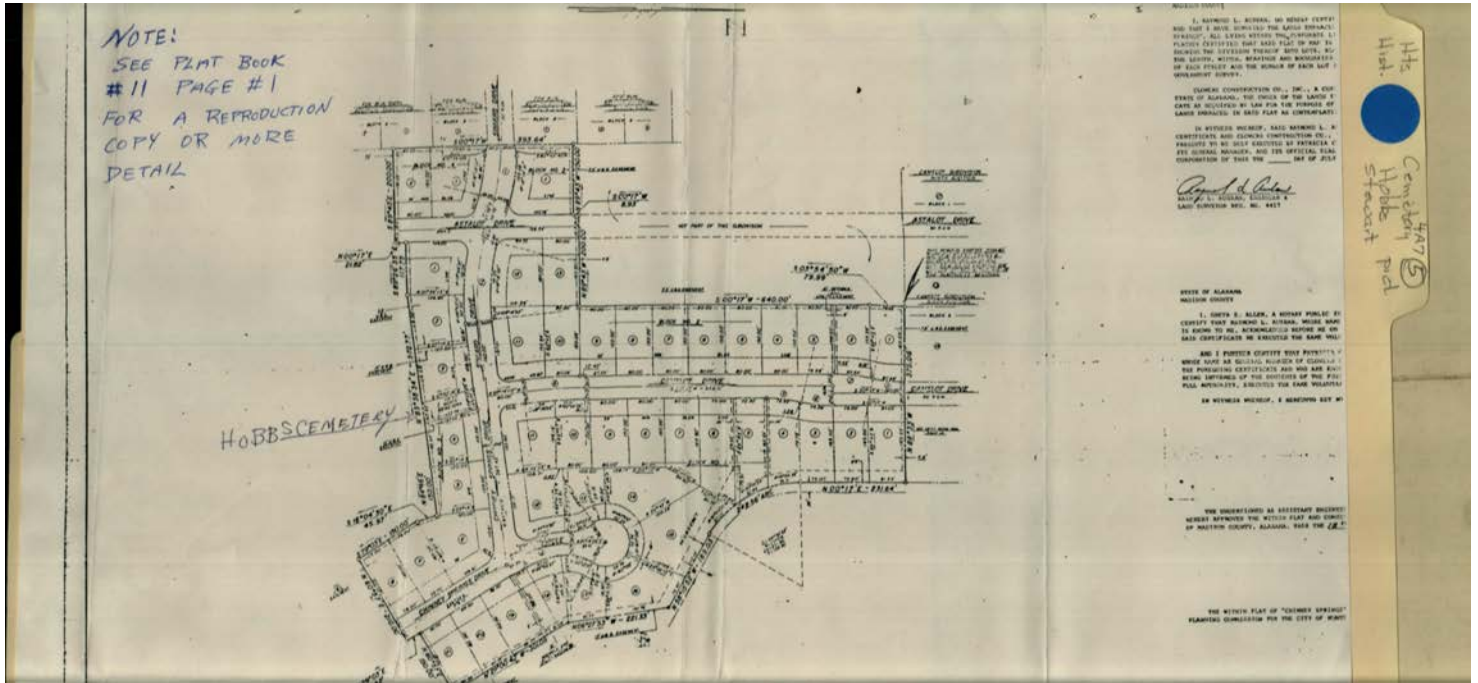
correspondence

photographs

Dates:

June 17, 1987

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Names:
Hobbs Cemetery

Places:
Huntsville, AL

Types:
plat

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Names:
Hobbs Cemetery

Places:
Huntsville, AL

Types:
plat

'At Rest'
Workmen Uncover Forgotten Family History

By RANDY QUARLES
 Times Staff Writer
 24 May 1981

They dug up the Stewarts last week.

They brought in a diesel-powered backhoe and shovel-wielding workmen and dug them all up: Mrs. Lou Walls Stewart, buried in 1897; her husband, James R. Stewart, buried in 1928; and their son, William Henry Stewart, who joined them in 1943.

A family of black farmers, the Stewarts lived north of what is now Weatherly Road and spent most of their lives tilling the rich red earth there. And when they died, they were laid to rest in it.

But with the passing of years Huntsville stretched southward across what used to be their farm. The tiny Stewart plot, on a once-isolated knoll shaded by cedar and hackberry trees, was slowly surrounded by houses and forgotten by the family's relatives.

Two more houses recently sprang up only a few yards from the graves. As developer Dennis Clowers explained, a cemetery in the houses' backyards might turn off many potential buyers.

So the backhoe and the workmen arrived Tuesday afternoon, supervised by engineer Raymond L. Ausban. And, moving the stone monument and vault lids, they dug them all up.

Born in Madison County in 1853 — into slavery, more than likely — James R. Stewart apparently sharecropped in the area for almost 20 years after the War Between the States. But by 1884 he had managed to scrape together enough money to pay local planter J.L. Watkins some \$400 for 80 acres of fertile farmland.

Cotton was still king here in those pre-soybean days, so Stewart probably used his three mules — themselves worth about a fourth as

much as his land — to prepare the ground for the planting of long rows of the fiber plant. In the fall, when puffs of white cotton decorated the stalks like Christmas ornaments, his wife, Lou, may have joined him in the fields with a long cloth sack to help pick it.

That same year, on Oct. 9, Lou gave birth to a boy. They named him William Henry.

Along with the addition to his family, Stewart soon expanded his farm with the purchase of another 160 acres, bringing the place's value up to about \$1,440. He also owned at least one wagon, \$4 worth of guns or knives, and another \$3 worth of watches or clocks.

He once owned a horse, too, but he replaced it with a fourth mule. For an illiterate former slave in

post-Reconstruction Alabama, James R. Stewart must have been doing fairly well along about May 1897. Well enough to buy a nice casket with shiny, elaborate brass handles and a window in the lid after Lou died one Friday evening in their three-room house.

Stewart also had a modest but tasteful stone monument placed at the head of her grave. Along the top of the marker was carved a single word, "MOTHER." Below her name was the promise: "GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN."

"Here's another one!" called the workman kneeling in the deep trench. He pulled an eight-inch-long metal object from the dirt at the bottom of the hole, glanced at it and handed it up to one of the men standing at the edge of the grave.

Ausban, the engineer, examined it a few moments later. A nick and a scratch here and there revealed a brighter, yellowish metal below the tarnished gray surface. He admired aloud the intricate patterns on the handle and on the brackets that once held it to the wood of Lou's coffin. Then he placed it in the open wooden crate that already contained two or three other handles, pieces of rotted wood and an assortment of brown, rough bones that used to be part of Lou Walls Stewart — curved skull fragments, a pelvis bone, a thigh bone....

The workman climbed out of the grave and the backhoe's arm and claw arced downward again, scooping out more red dirt. A few scattered, splintered shreds of the decayed coffin jutted up from the hole's new bottom, and the man slid back in. He probed the bottom and walls of the grave while others sifted through the mound of dirt deposited by the backhoe.

Peering intently at the proceedings, the rest of the men oc-

Turn to Page A-4

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EARLY'S OPTICAL DISPENSARY

LAD OFF TEACHERS

STAY OFF GARAGE BUILDERS

MAE R. STEWART
 MARCH 4 1853
 NOV 19 1928

(Times Photo by Rod Whitted)

JAMES R. STEWART'S VAULT LID
Workmen Moved Family Vault Last Week

Handwritten notes on the right side of the page:
 Hist. Hts
 Cemetery 4A7 (5)
 Hobbs
 Stewart
 Prid.

Names:

Ausban, Raymond L.	Stewart, Lou Walls, Mrs.	Stewart, William Henry	At Rest Workmen
Clowers, Dennis		Watkins, J. L.	Uncover Forgotten
Stewart, James R.			Family History

Places:

Huntsville, AL

Types:

newspaper article

Dates:

May 24, 1981

Hts. Cemetery 4A7 5
 Hist. Hobbs Stewart pld



OLD CEMETERY FORCED OUT BY SPREADING SUBDIVISION
 Family's History Pieced Together From County Records

24 May 1981
**Graves on a Shaded Knoll:
 'Gone But Not Forgotten'**

Continued From Page A-1

casualty guided the searchers to partially covered bones, more metal ornaments from the coffin, and pieces of glass from the shattered window. A bent metal plaque on which the phrase "Rest In Peace" could have been discerned was handed up and duly deposited in the wooden crate.

"There's a bone!" one of the men shouted, and the workmen in the grave pulled another long leg bone from the dirt.

Following Lou's death, James R. Stewart continued to work his land. After being as a widower for almost three years, he married Elizabeth Elmira Robinson on Feb. 1, 1868.

Their marriage lasted until a cloudy Sunday morning in November, 1883, when a kidney ailment and more than 13 years of life in general finally claimed James R. Stewart. The quarry dropped to 38 degrees below zero the day of his funeral, Nov. 21, so the gravediggers' shovels must have had a hard time cutting through the frozen ground next to Lou's grave on the little knoll.

They did not have to dig too deep — less than three feet — because a wooden vault was placed in the hole to hold the casket. The vault itself rose several inches above the ground.

Stewart left behind 40 acres for Elmira and another 40 for his grandson, James H. Stewart. On the land stood a three-room house, two smaller houses and a 30-by-40-foot barn, all gone now.

All in all, even though the nation as a whole was still enjoying an 18-feted boom, like many southern farmers the Stewart family had seen better times. Rather than a monument like the one on Lou's grave, Stewart's family had to settle for having his name, birthday and death date carved into top of the vault lid. His death date was one day off.

According to the lid, Stewart was "AT REST."

Half a century or more had shattered James R.'s vault lid, but one of the workmen speculated that the body must have been raised up fairly well because his bones were preserved better than those in the other two graves. Particularly his skull, which except for the jawbone and a hole in the top was pretty much intact.

They also found bits of metal from his casket, but nothing so fancy as those from Lou's grave. The bones recovered from the vault, marked "William Henry Stewart" were not in such good shape, Ausban said. There was no skull or even a piece of a skull, he said.

Maybe that's why they had to bury William Henry, the engineer, mused.

William Henry Stewart actually died of natural causes at his home southeast of Huntsville at 5 1/2 p. m. on Feb. 12, 1883, following a two-month illness. He was 38. His death certificate vaguely attributed his demise to "cardio-renal decomposition," or failure of the heart and kidneys.

Records at the Madison County Courthouse and elsewhere provide little insight into the life and times of William Henry Stewart, except that he enjoyed neither the prosperity nor the longevity that had been the good fortune of his father.

Around 1860 William Henry began farming a 170-acre tract once owned by his father near the base of Green Mountain. Eight years later, when the elder Stewart died, William Henry owned three two-room houses and a small barn along with the land. His wife's name was Alberta.

But his farm prospered as the Depression tightened, and by 1887 William Henry's name had disappeared from the land record book for that area. When he died, his vault lid bore his name in plain square letters. It indicated that he died in 1882, and lived — apparently in error — the year of his birth as 1865.

There was no other inscription.

Once the excavation of Lou's grave was completed, Ausban had the backhoe dig in several other spots that he believed were unmarked graves. In four or five different tries, only one small bone was produced — a silver that looked as if it might have belonged to an animal rather than a human — along with some burned trash.

The workmen concluded that in the other spots, beneath an upper layer of mud from the previous year's rain, the ground had never been disturbed. They tossed the bone and several scoops of dirt in yet another wooden crate anyway.

Lou's grave was loaded onto a flatbed truck next to the two horses containing James and William Henry. Once there the workmen opened the lid and put in more dirt.

A vetiner and other scattered bones and fragments were spotted in the "large mound of dirt" and added to Lou's remains. In another spot of dirt — from which grave they were not sure — a workman found what he believed to be part of a jawbone with teeth in it. They placed it in Lou's box.

The men crowded under the shelter of the backhoe leaves as a spring rain became a shower. Soon the lid was raised down on the fourth box, and two workmen carried it to the truck.

Then the truck pulled out and headed for the city's Northside Cemetery on the Ardmore Highway, where — side by side in one big hole — the remains were laid in their most eternal resting place.

By the early 1950s the land north of Weathersby Road that once was farmed by the Stewarts had been sold out of the family, piece by piece, and even a distant relative contacted recently could shed no light on the rest of the family's history since then.

Mrs. Elizabeth Lightfoot of 216 Corrine St. N.W., who explained that James R. Stewart was her mother's uncle, said she long ago had touch with the Stewarts.

"All of them has passed away, that I know about."

Names:

Ausban, Raymond L.
 Lightfoot, Elizabeth,
 Mrs.
 Northside Cemetery

Robinson, Elmira
 Stewart, Alberta
 Stewart, James H.
 Stewart, James R.

Stewart, Lou Walls,
 Mrs.
 Stewart, William
 Henry

Graves on a Shaded
 Knoll: Gone But
 Not Forgotten

Places:

Huntsville, AL

Types:

newspaper article

Dates:

May 24, 1981

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Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection

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Collection Scope and Content: The Collection of 114 Linear ft. includes a total of 156 Archival Boxes. The Frances Cabaniss Roberts collection covers the historical records of the Cabaniss Roberts family. This collection contains extensive correspondence records of the Cabaniss Roberts family circa 1830 to 1930.

Archives/Special Collections Access Restrictions: None

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