

May 1912

Once Used As Pantry Flooring

3 Gravestones Given To Dr. Mathews House

By NORRIS F. SCHNEIDER

Gravestones make good pantry floors. Three stones of the Mathews and Buckingham families served that purpose for 80 years in Spring Hill on Danville Street, the home of Benjamin Wheeler.

Roy Young salvaged the monuments, paved a driveway with them, and finally donated them to the Dr. Increase Mathews house where they may be seen in the basement.

The 13-room brick Wheeler mansion stood on a hill south of Sharon Avenue. Wheeler's grandson, Cass Gilbert, undoubtedly walked on those grave stones when he sneaked into the pantry to see what was in the cookie jar. Gilbert later designed the Woolworth tower in New York and the U. S. Supreme Court building.

Why did the prominent iron founder and farmer, Benjamin Wheeler, use gravestones to pave his pantry? Was any irreverence or disrespect involved? Or did the owner or contractor violate the law in securing these monuments?

No Recorded Answer

There is no recorded answer to these questions. Only detective work can explain the apparently rude and indecorous use of the monuments.

Here are the inscriptions:
"Abigail Mathews
wife of
Increase Mathews

Died June 14, 1802
in the 25th year of her age.
This stone was erected by her surviving partner to designate the spot where her body is interred, and memory of her virtuous and amiable deportment in the various relationships of life is engraved on his heart.

Mrs. Mathews was buried on the hill and the above engranged on a stone at her grave. Her remains were removed to this spot by her still surviving partner, June 17, 1850."

"Betsy Leavens
wife of
Doct. I. Mathews
Died May 3, 1852
in her 77th year
Her children arise up, and
call her blessed
Her husband also, and he
praiseth her"

"Sally Buckingham
2nd wife of
Ebenezer Buckingham
Born at
Fairfield, Conn.
Dec. 4, 1786
Died at Putnam
Apr. 9, 1855"

Consideration Taken

These inscriptions must be considered in the light of other historical facts to arrive at some explanation of their use in a floor.

Dr. Increase Mathews made

a journey from Massachusetts to the Ohio country in 1798. He visited his uncle, Gen. Rufus Putnam, at Marietta. A dozen miles south of Marietta he called upon Harmon Blennerhassett at his mansion on an island in the Ohio River.

Young Mathews decided to settle in the Muskingum Valley. He went home and married Abigail Willis on April 25, 1799.

In the autumn of 1800 Dr. Mathews returned to Marietta with his wife and infant daughter. In the spring of 1801 he moved to Zanesville where he conducted a store on lower Main Street. In the same year he joined his uncle, Rufus Putnam, and his cousin, Levi Whipple, in buying the site of Putnam. Dr. Mathews immediately moved across the river.

His wife died on June 14, 1802, two weeks after the birth of a second daughter.

Mrs. Mathews was buried on the hill near the intersection of Woodlawn Avenue and Pershing Road. Her husband donated a tract of two and one-half acres for a burying ground. These acres now form a part of Woodlawn Cemetery.

The inscription on the stone confirms the burial on a hill. It then informs us that "her remains were removed to this spot." What spot?

It would not have been Woodlawn Cemetery, because it was not dedicated until June 8, 1853. Planning for Woodlawn

did not begin until 1851.

That suggests the supposition that Dr. Mathews removed the remains of his first wife in 1850 from the hill to the Putnam cemetery on Moxahala Avenue.

Apparently the hill burying ground at the east end of Pershing Road was not popular. Levi Whipple had donated a tract on Moxahala Avenue for a cemetery. It was level and was closer to the homes of Putnam residents.

If this conjecture is correct, the remains of Abigail Mathews were probably moved a second time to Woodlawn Cemetery when it was opened.

Justification for this theory is found in a marker at Woodlawn for Abigail Willis, "first wife of Dr. Increase Mathews."

The same line of reasoning also applies to the grave stone of Betsy Leavens, second wife of Dr. Mathews. They were married at Marietta March 23, 1803.

Betsy Leavens Mathews died in 1852 at the age of 77.

Planning Stage

Woodlawn Cemetery was in the planning stage. Burials were still being made on Moxahala Avenue. It is reasonable to assume that Betsy Mathews was buried there.

She has a stone in the Mathews lot at Woodlawn. Her marker there tells that she was "the second wife of Dr. Increase Mathews.

Dr. Mathews died in 1856 at

Moxahala Avenue and removed to Woodlawn Cemetery when it was opened in 1853.

The markers in the Pioneer Society basement are made of sandstone. They are tall and comparatively thin and therefore easily broken. But they would be ideal for use face down as flooring.

House Built

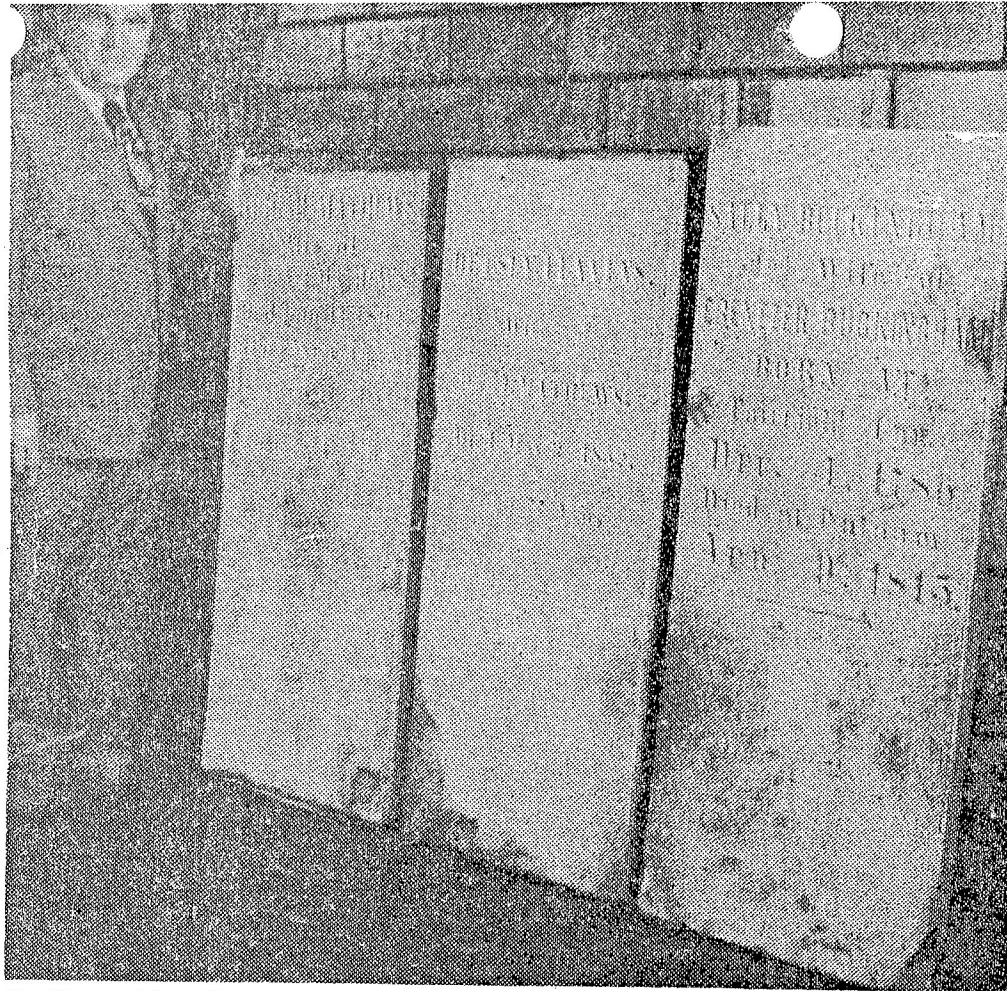
At the time the stones were discarded at Moxahala Avenue, Benjamin Wheeler was building his 13-room brick house on the present Danville Street south of Sharon Avenue.

Wheeler was born of Quaker parentage at Baltimore, Md., on June 1, 1802. In 1832 he and John A. Adams bought a foundry near Second Street on the canal. He is listed as an iron founder through the 1850s and as a farmer in the 1860s.

Wheeler built his pretentious L-shaped brick home fronting west in the 1850s. There was a ballroom in the house. A winding stairway led to a cupola.

When Wheeler's workmen were building his pantry, they remembered the discarded grave markers at Moxahala Avenue Cemetery. They probably told their employer that the stones were available and that they would make a smooth flooring. And it is likely that Wheeler approved their use.

Wheeler's daughter Elizabeth married Samuel A. Gilbert. Their son Cass Gilbert,



Roy Young of Danville Street stands beside the stones in the Mathews house he salvaged from the Benjamin Wheeler home when it was

demolished about 1940. (Photo by Marjorie Trost)

of Woodlawn Cemetery and was impressed by its promise of permanence and care.

It is reasonable to assume that Dr. Mathews and members of other pioneer families planned to buy adjoining lots in the most desirable location in the new cemetery.

Dr. Mathews could not help but feel favorably inclined to the new cemetery because he sold the 55½-acre tract to the directors of the cemetery association.

During the three years between the dedication of Woodlawn and the death of Dr. Mathews, he removed the remains of his relatives from Moxahala Avenue to Woodlawn and planned for his own burial there. He died on June 6, 1856.

The Sally Buckingham stone probably had the same history as the two Mathews markers.

The first wife of Ebenezer Buckingham, builder of the covered Y-Bridge in 1832, was Catherine Putnam, daughter of Gen. Rufus Putnam.

Catherine died in 1808 at the birth of her 15-pound son named Catharinus Putnam by her grieving husband. Catharinus attended West Point with Robert E. Lee. He was at his father's home when the Y-Bridge company planned a new structure, and Catharinus designed it.

Ebenezer Buckingham's second wife, Sally, died on April 9, 1815. It is logical to conclude that she was buried on

Cass was in his teens. He returned for several summers at the home of his grandfather Wheeler.

Benjamin Wheeler died in 1874. In the 1930s his home demolished for salvage. A sawmill was brought to the area, and the good timber was cut down.

There is no known photograph of the Wheeler mansion. The Cass Gilbert family deposited the personal and professional records of the great architect in the Library of Congress. Several years ago we saw the inventory containing a picture of the Wheeler house.

Last fall a request for a copy of the picture was sent to the Library. On Jan. 3, of this year a telephone call came to explain that the picture is missing. Why a telephone call rather than a 15-cent stamp? Maybe they did not want to put it in writing.

Calvert Park now occupies the site of the Wheeler estate, and the shelter house stands on the site of the mansion.

Roy Young saw four more large grave stones in the floor of the pantry that he did not salvage when the house was demolished about 1940.

It is appropriate that Young donated the markers to the Pioneer Society and that those with the names of Abigail and Betsy Mathews now in repose in the former Dr. Increase Mathews house.