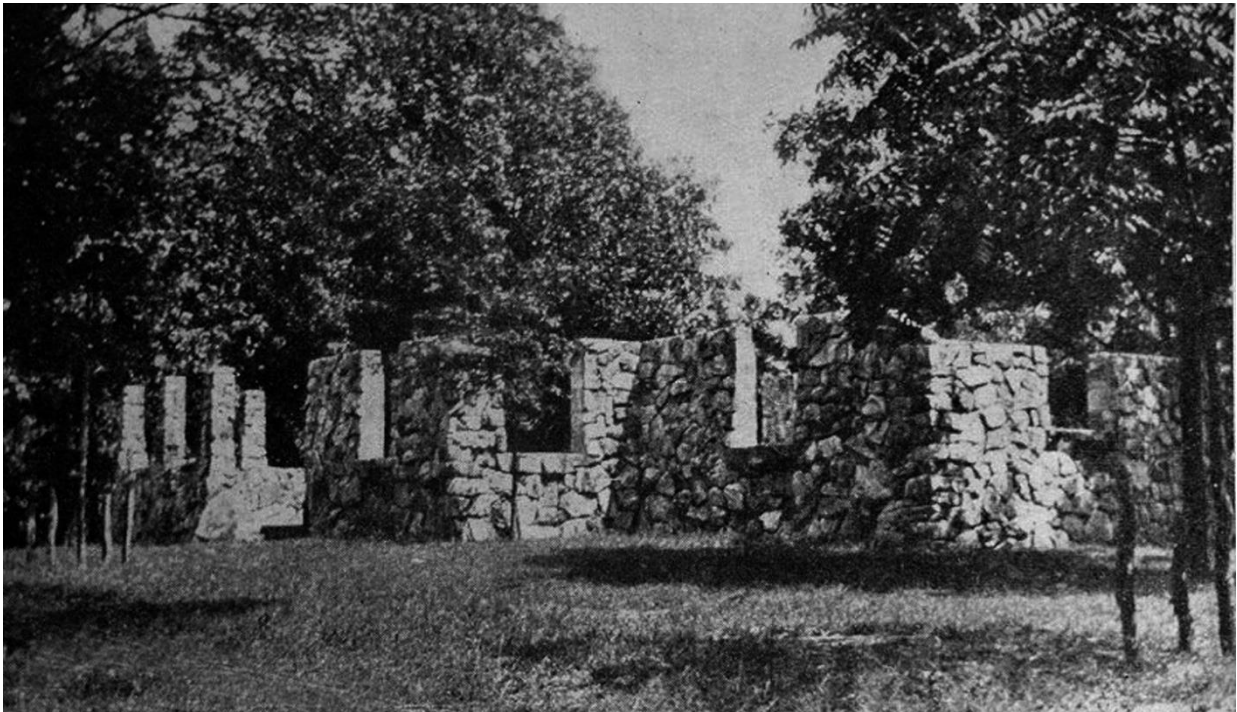


Huckleberries, the Unfinished Stone House and Ashes

By Jackie Layne Partin

In the Monteagle summers of the late 1940s and early 1950s, while I was yet a young barefoot girl, one chore given to us children was picking huckleberries for Mama to can for the cold winter months. To this day in 2016, those beautiful Mason/Kerr quart jars sitting on the concrete shelf in the cellar under our little house are as vivid in my mind as they were in the days they were placed there in my youth. Our best place to pick huckleberries was out Sunset Rock Road which roughly ran parallel to the north fence of the Monteagle Assembly grounds.

As our berry picking and playing in the sandy patches of ground sandstone in the old road led us toward Sunset Rock, we came to the mountain-stone house that was not finished—a beautiful shell of someone’s long ago dream. Since huckleberries were small, hard to come by, and lazy about filling the pail, Mama instructed us not to eat them; those “little people” would taste much better in the middle of January if they were baked in a crumbled-lard-cobbler-dough, coated with butter, and sprinkled with sugar. Mama also gave us strict instructions about how to behave around the **stone house** and its mysterious section of web wire fencing.

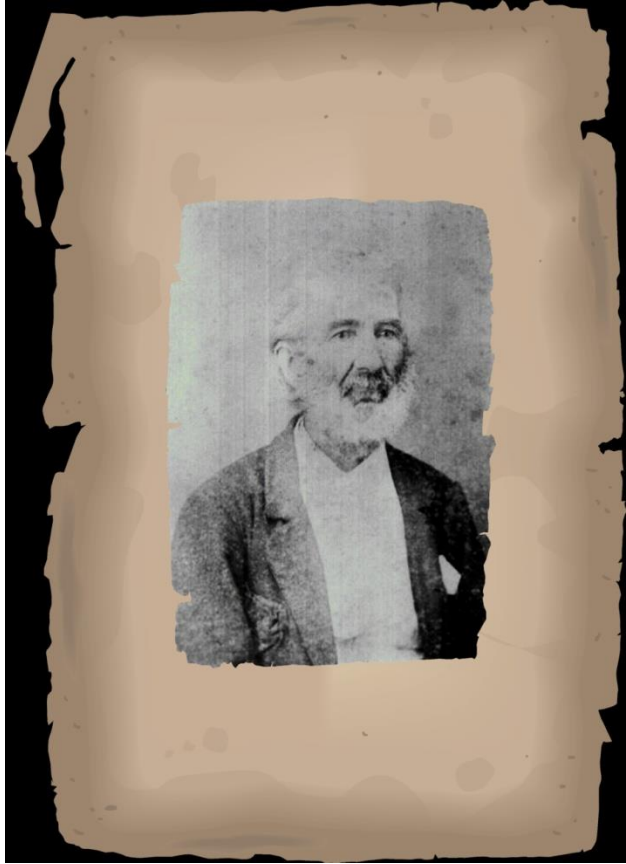


This is the way the unfinished Stone House looked when I was a child.

“Do not go into the house, and never touch the little fence at the end of the house,” were her instructions to us. Of course, as all young children would, we asked, “Why?” We could easily look into the lichen-covered stone house, for it had no windows or doors, only the openings for such. We could just as easily see the rusty, web wire fence. My first sighting of the fence caused me to think of the burial of a small child. It was a small rectangular section of slightly leaning fence but still obviously upright enough to protect its holdings. Throughout the years, my memories are that **Mama said** that someone’s ashes were buried within the fence; regardless of her exact words, I knew that a burial of some kind was part of the unknown mystery. No matter who was enclosed within the fence, Mama demanded respect for both the fence and its contents and the unfinished house.

While working on the two volumes, *Cemeteries of Grundy County TN*, I mentioned the fence and my remembrance of a burial there. I began to ask those older than I about it. There was **not** one person with whom I spoke who remembered the fence or any talk of a burial. Years ago, an older, MSSA, year- round resident, listened to my story, but basically denied that it had any substance. But I never forgot; I clung to my memories like a tick on a dog. I can close my eyes now (2016) and see the fence at the western end of the house from my vantage point. It was not attached to the house but stood alone. So the following story is my take on the mysterious house and fence.

In 1860 in Smith Township, Bradley County, Arkansas, there lived a rich farmer, Madison Tate McGehee, his wife, Lucy (Meriwether) McGehee, and several children. Madison’s real estate was valued at \$60,000.00, and his personal belongings were valued at \$75,000.00. His youngest daughter, Julia Tevis McGehee, is the family member that I have been interested in for years. I had seen her name on a couple of Grundy County Census records of the Monteagle area, and often wondered about her. Anything concerning Old Monteagle, my hometown, whets my appetite.



Madison T. McGehee (1808-1879) and wife, Lucy (Meriwether) McGehee (1814-1895)

In 1870, five years after the War Between the States, Madison Tate McGehee appeared to have lost much of his wealth. His real estate value fell to \$4,500.00; his personal belongings listed for only \$500.00. There were black domestic servants still on the farm—some with his surname of McGehee. Julia was still at home. He and his family's burial plot, the stones, plus the wrought iron fence, hint to the reader that he went back to building up his estate. The following history of the cemetery is compliments of Wanda (Mitchell) Newton.

***HISTORY:** Madison Tate McGehee and his wife Lucy (Cosby) McGehee sold this 4 acres of land on June 13, 1854 for forty dollars to the trustees of Temperance Chapel Methodist Church South. The trustees were S. Treadwell, S. Mathew, C. A. Standfield, C. Varnell and Thomas Chowning. A two story building was on this property at the time of purchase. The McGehee's specified the use of the lower floor by the Methodist Church and the upper floor to be used by the Masonic Fraternity and any Temperance Association. The remainder of the land was to be used as a public burying ground.*



The McGehee Family Burial Plot in the Cherry Cemetery in Cleveland Co., Ark. There are 45 burials listed with 11 McGehee family members. Julia Tevia McGehee is not one of them.

Madison Tate McGehee and his wife Lucy executed a joint will on January 6, 1877, in Dorsey County, Arkansas. The following is an excerpt from the will concerning Julia Tevis McGehee: *"1st --We will to our youngest daughter Julia Tevis an excess of Eighteen hundred Dollars in money over and above our other heirs or children and hereby declare her of age or capable of management of her own business this excess is in consequence of her being a **cripple**."* Although I have a copy of the whole will, the only other item that applies to Julia Tevis is the amount of money in all she would inherit. It appears that the other children were to be left \$2500.00 each in money, so if I am right, Julia would receive \$4300.00 in money at the death of her mother in 1895.

I can only speculate about Julia's "being a cripple." She obviously was an independent lady and able to care for herself for the most part. It appears to me that she more or less kept herself at a distance from her family if only to secure her independence.



Julia Tevis McGehee

(1857-1924)

**Julia had this photo taken at Alfred N.
Camp Photography Studio home based
in
Jamestown, Chautauqua County, N. Y.**

The above photo would lead us to believe that after Julia left home, she went to New York; of course, there is the possibility that the Camp Photography moved round, and Julia took advantage when it was near to have her photo taken. She probably came to the Monteagle area in the 1890s or earlier. No doubt she was familiar with Monteagle before she began her acquisition of land in the 1890s.

Julia obviously worked hard at the Monteagle Hotel where she was the “housekeeper” as stated in the **1900** Census record, and the proprietor was Robert Marion Payne. She saved and managed her own earned income and her inheritance money. As early as **1897** and on through **1909**, she began to buy land around the area of Doss Spring, Sweet Fern Ravine/Hollow, the new Turnpike (Payne’s Turnpike), the Old Stage Road and Bragg’s Point which I believe is synonymous with Sunset Rock. In **1897**, she bought tracts of land from Samuel A. Henley and J. C. Henley (father and son) and James R. Bradshaw. In **1899** she bought more land from the Henleys. In **1906**, she bought land from Samuel Gilliam, and in **1909**, she received a quit claim deed from Mr.

Gilliam. By the time Julia had stopped buying land, she owned five different tracts in the area of what is now known as the Wakeland/Kraft land and other owners across Hwy 41. While she was buying the land, Dixie Hwy/Hwy 41 did not exist. Until Robert M. Payne built his turnpike, the roads had names like the Stage Rd., Parks Rd., Trussell Rd.—just muddy, rocky, almost impassable wagon paths void of upkeep. Julia's new acquisitions of land would have included the section where the **Stone House** was or was to be. I drew this conclusion from the fact that all five tracts followed through to the present owner who concurs that the **Stone House** is a part of the Wakeland estate. Following are a few excerpts from Julia's five tracts of land:

Tract 1: *"Beginning at the top bluff of the mountain, west of where the Park's road reaches the top, the same being Bragg's point....."* (10 acres—Henleys to Julia in 1899)

Note: For those still contemplating where Bragg's Point is located, this deed should be mighty helpful. (jp)

Tract 2: *"Beginning on a stake at the top of Cumberland Mountain in the Thompson Entry line, the same being the W. boundary line of the Monteagle Assembly,...51 poles to a large rock overlooking the stage road.....43 poles to Bragg's point..."* (38 acres—Sam Alexander & son, James Campell Henley to Julia in 1897)

Tract 3: *"Beginning on a stake on east side of old stage road where Henley's north and south line crosses said road..."* (5 acres—J. R. Bradshaw to Julia in 1897)

Tract 4: *"Beginning at the first bridge below Daw's [sic – Doss' – jp] spring on road known as the Turnpike....ten acres, more or less all lying about the Turnpike in Sweet Fern Ravine...."* (ten acres—Samuel Gilliam to Julia—1909)

Tract 5: *"Beginning in the old stage--road where the Henley line crossed---old Stage road crossing the new pike road...to where the Trussell Road leaves the old Stage Road...where the Old road crosses the Sweet Fern Hollow..."* (50 acres—Samuel Gilliam to Julia--1906)

Julia owned her own home, not on her own land though, and had her own income in **1910**. She still lived in Monteagle, TN and was still a single lady. In **1920**, sixty-two-year old Julia was renting a room or house on the Monteagle Assembly grounds. This put her close to the land she owned and loved and the **Stone House** she had possibly begun to build after she had acquired her final piece of property in **1909**. My belief is that Julia soon started her **Stone House** around **1910**. It is also possible that the J. R. Bradshaw, the Samuel A. and J. C. Henley, or the Samuel Gilliam families started the house. After Rena (Cox) Reeves inherited the estate in **1924**, she sold it to

Bradley and Ethel Walker in **1928**. They too could have been the builders of the **Stone House**, but my thoughts are that it was present when Julia owned the land, either built by her or her predecessors. In turn, on May 6, **1953**, Ethel Walker, a widow by then, conveyed the land to Ray and Violet Wakeland. A very good read is before your eyes on the following site. For all those who knew and loved the Wakelands, it must be read in its entirety.

http://www.grundycountyhistory.org/03_Ind/Walkland,%20Violette.pdf

Death came to Miss Julia Tevis McGehee at the age of sixty-seven at 10:30 p. m., on September 15, **1924**, in Monteagle. She had never married. The cause of death was chronic nephritis or kidney failure with chronic neuritis as a contributing factor. Soon after death, Charles L. Moffatt, undertaker in Tullahoma, TN, owner of the Daves Culbertson Funeral Home between 1912 and his death in 1928, prepared for Julia's funeral at 9:00 a. m. the next day – ten and 1/2 hours after her death. The present (2016) Daves Culbertson Funeral Home records concur that Moffatt was in charge of the funeral, thus the body. No time was to be lost in fulfilling Julia's wishes. The funeral was probably held at the Methodist Church in Monteagle and the body taken across the Dixie Hwy for placement on a train since her body was to be removed to the Cincinnati Cremation Company in Ohio. The certificate gives **September 17, 1924**, as the "burial or removal" date. The office lady at the crematory so kindly helped me with the information that Julia was cremated on September 17, 1924, but she had no record of her ashes having been buried there or where her ashes may have been sent. The county death registrar, Mrs. Ernest Norvell, did not fill out the official certificate for registration until **January 19, 1925**, a full four months after Julia's death. What happened to Julia's ashes? Where were they spread or buried? Or is she still on a shelf in someone's attic?

Julia's choice for her ashes could have been 1) leave them at the crematorium in Cincinnati, but we have already found out that there is no record of that happening there or anywhere near Cincinnati; 2) she could have requested that her ashes be sent home to Cleveland County, Arkansas to be placed in the family plot, but we have no burial stone or any notes to indicate that that was her choice, or 3) she could have requested that her ashes be buried on her beloved bluff land in Monteagle. To me, this is the most logical choice for Julia. She loved Monteagle; she had made it her home and had formed new friends there. Her ashes possibly came back to the undertaker in Tullahoma. Normally undertakers do all of these tasks for the family or loved ones of the deceased – included in the final bill. In turn, Mr. Charles L. Moffatt would have delivered the small box of ashes to Monteagle, most likely to Mrs. Reva (Cox) Reeves who would have known what to do with them.



Transcription of the Will of Julia McGehee

I, Julia McGehee of Monteagle, Grundy Co., Tennessee, do make and publish this, my last will and testament hereby revoking and making void all other wills by me heretofore at any other time made.

First: I direct that as soon after my death as possible my body be taken to Cincinnati, Ohio, and there cremated. That charges and expense incident there to be the first out of my estate, and as to such worldly estate as I may die seised and possessed of, I dispose of the same as follows:

Second: I direct that my just debts be paid.

Third: I give five hundred in governments [sic bonds] to my friend Mrs. Maud McGregor in memory of her many kindnesses, these bonds are registered in my name and can be changed to hers without cost.

Fourth: Also I will to my namesake Miss Julia McGehee Henley, five hundred dollars in government bonds registered in my name which may be changed at the Tracy City Bank to her without charge.

Fifth: I give to my niece and nephew each five dollars, conditional upon their writing for it. Seeing that for themselves they are better off than myself.

Sixth: I give, will, bequeath and devise all the rest, residue and remainder of my real personal and mixed, wherever located, being my entire estate with the exception of the above charges, and bequeath to Mrs. Rena Reeves of Monteagle, Tennessee to have and to hold the same to her sole and separate use her heirs and assigns forever.

Seventh: I hereby nominate and appoint Mrs. Rena Reeves, executrix of this my last will and testament, and it is my desire and I direct that no bond or other security be required of her as such executrix.

The foregoing instrument I declare to be my last will.

In witness whereof I have herewith affixed my hand and subscribed hereto in the presence of witnesses to this will written on these pages of paper with my name and the number of the page written in my own handwriting on the left hand margin of each page without erasin [sic-maybe erasing] or eliminations, this the 25th day of February, 1924. (signed: Julia McGehee, Nashville, TN, Witnesses: A. W. Harris and A. Hudson)

I have written all of this to lead the reader to my honest belief that Julia's ashes were placed in the yard of the unfinished **Stone House**, and out of respect and for protection a web wire fence surrounded and marked the spot. The funeral home, the crematory, her will, the family *Bible*, nor any other evidence that I can find, tell me where her final resting place is.

Oh! So many years ago, "**Mama said.**"

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