

“A Glance Back”

By William Ray Turner

The Story of the Bonny Oak Cemetery

This story of the Bonny Oak Cemetery was originally written by Mr. George Tate of Coalmont, Tennessee in the *North Grundy Star* of September 5, 1957. Mr. Tate wrote the story as if the cemetery was the one telling the story. Here it is.

“ I, the Bonny Oak Cemetery near Coalmont, am now useful, and happy, but I can remember when things were different. From memory I’ll relate to you just how it was from the beginning.

Years and years ago I was just a barren piece of land, very ugly and uncared for. I dreamed of someday being beautiful or at least useful. Time passed and nothing seems to happen until at last one day I was a lovely forest and was very proud, -- That is, until some cruel men came along and cut all my beautiful trees. That made me sad and I longed for my beauty back.

Then there is a span of my life that I do not remember very clearly. I seem to remember that a nine-year-old boy Eddie Parson, walked from Paynes cove in a pair of steel toed shoes which blistered his feet and caused the poor child to have blood poisoning and die. He was buried here. Also, I seem to remember a girl of 15, Nancy Ann Ward who was staying with Aunt Nervie Parson’s mother when she died and was buried here.

It is confusing to try to remember which of the two was buried here first but of this fact I am sure Aunt Nervie’s mother was Mandy Sanders a sister to Dick Sanders, and Miss Ward later married Russell Nunley and became known as Granny Nunley.

I was then given the name of Parson’s graveyard, being made useful though not beautiful. This must have been about one hundred years ago.

Then, alas, some men built a school where the trees had once grown. I was still far from pretty but happy to see all the happy children and to know that I was helping them to become the citizens of tomorrow.

In 1922 my name was changed to Bonny Oak Cemetery which I liked, and in 1930 the County sold the little school building and the children attended school at a place called Sweeton Hill.

Now the graves had become so numerous that more ground was donated to take care of new ones which seemed to become more deserted looking all the time. When a new grave was added was the only time I ever saw anyone. All the happy children were gone, weeds and bushes grew high, the fence was torn down cows began destroying the Flowers, and in general I looked terrible.

In 1956 George Tate and Lillard Sweeton met here to appraise the situation and decided to try to improve my condition.

At a funeral several people who had friends buried here decided to buy a lawn mower to cut the tall weeds which were taking over everything. The two men already mentioned were sent to McMinnville by the newly formed Bonnie Oaks Memorial

Association to purchase the mower which was paid for by all the people who paid fifty cents a month for dues and who gave special donations.

Jim Woodlee, a resident of Colorado Springs, Colorado, donated seven dollars though he has been gone from Grundy County for over forty years.

At the present time an arch has been built over my entrance by some interested friends, the fence has been repaired, the weeds and bushes cut, grass planted and kept cut, flowers planted, a row of shrubbery set out on either side of the drive, and once again I am in good condition!

I wish to thank all the members of the Memorial Association and all donors for making me both beautiful and useful at last !

One lady, Mrs. Frank Campbell, recalled in a letter in the *North Grundy Star* on Sept. 12, 1957, that the Bonny Oak Cemetery was known as the Jessie Parson Graveyard about 60 years ago when she attended school in the first little one room log schoolhouse. And she also says that Miss Georgia Hillis, later Mrs. Sol Schaerer of Tracy City, should be given the thanks for giving the cemetery the beautiful name of Bonny Oak, while teaching school there many years ago. During the school year she boarded with a family living at the old Parson home place.