

Tharp  
family

# Tracking the Jesse Tharp Family

By Raymond R. Tharp

**W**hen it comes to family history, my wife tells me I am "like an old hound dog on a scent." It is true. If I find a clue (even the smallest bit) about my family, I am on it like a hound dog on a scent. I will follow its footprints to see where it leads, hoping it will be a piece of the puzzle that brings family connection.

Jesse and Eliza (Roberson) Tharp are my great, great-grandparents. Their families traveled from Tennessee to Arkansas in the early 1840s. Jesse's parents were Lewis and Judy (Vernon) Tharp. Eliza's parents were John and Priscilla (Howry) Roberson. Jesse and Eliza married May 14, 1846, in Washington County, Arkansas. Ten children were born to this Tharp family. I have documentation to verify the following information for these children.<sup>1</sup> They are:

## **Emeline Matilda Tharp**

Birth: 1847, Washington County, Ark.

Death: Unknown

Spouse: John Clark Long

Birth: July 3, 1845, Tenn.

Death: September 1, 1912

Buried: Westview Cemetery, Harmon County, Okla.

Marriage Date: December 26, 1873, Washington County, Ark.

## **John Lewis Tharp**

Birth: January 1, 1848, Washington County, Ark.

Death: February 13, 1934, Leon County, Texas

Buried: Evans Chapel Cemetery, Leon County

Spouse: Annie Watson

Birth: June 1, 1855, Washington County, Ark.

Death: December 16, 1920, Near Rogers, Texas

## Deadline Nearing for Submissions for Fifth Annual Lemke Prize

Deadline for submitting an article for the fifth annual competition for the Walter J. Lemke Prize is June 30. Anyone interested in Washington County history, whether a professional or amateur historian, is encouraged to enter. Topics can be on any phase of Washington County's history or archeology, deal with an individual or institution connected with the county, and can address any time period.

The winning article will receive \$300; Second prize receives \$200. Both winners receive framed certificates. Winners will be recognized in August 2012.

Manuscripts will be judged on their contribution to the expansion of the county's history; the originality of the subject; and, the use of primary and secondary sources. The manuscripts must be original material, and not have been previously published; no more than 40 pages, typed, and double-spaced. Footnotes should be included on separate, double-spaced pages, although they do not count toward the 40-page limit. The title page should contain the heading "WALTER J. LEMKE ENTRY," the full title of the manuscript, the author's name, mailing address, telephone number, and email address.

Entries become the property of the Washington County Historical Society and will not be returned to the author. All submitted articles will be considered for publication in the *Flashback*. The historical society reserves the right to award one or no prizes.

Copies of all entries in the Lemke Prize will be deposited with the Special Collections Department at the University of Arkansas Libraries. Entries may be mailed to Lemke Prize, Washington County Historical Society, 118 E. Dickson Street, Fayetteville, AR 72701, or emailed to [charlie.alison@gmail.com](mailto:charlie.alison@gmail.com) by June 30, 2012. If the entries are emailed, they should be either in the PDF or Microsoft Word format. Entries received after June 30 will be considered for the 2013 prize.

For additional information, contact Charlie Alison at the above mailing address, at 575-6731 or at [charlie.alison@gmail.com](mailto:charlie.alison@gmail.com).



Photo courtesy of Raymond R. Tharp

**The parents of Eliza Tharp, John and Priscilla (Howry) Roberson. Jesse Tharp's parents were Lewis and Judy (Vernon) Tharp.**



Photo courtesy of Raymond R. Tharp

**Jesse and Eliza Tharp, undated.**

Buried: McCann Cemetery, Milam County, Texas  
Marriage Date: August 4, 1870, Washington County,  
Ark.

**Narcissa A. Tharp**

Birth: April 24, 1853, Washington Co., Ark.  
Death: April 8, 1932, Jackson County, Okla.  
Buried: Carmel Cemetery, Jackson Co., Okla.

Spouse: James Dickerson

Birth: July 23, 1855  
Death: Nov. 25, 1889  
Buried: Unknown

Marriage Date: April 7, 1872, Washington County,  
Ark.

**Priscilla Guesswin Tharp**

Birth: August 5, 1855, Washington Co., Ark.  
Death: August 10, 1943, El Paso, Texas  
Buried: Evergreen Alameda Cem. El Paso, Texas  
Spouse: John Calvin Cantrell

Birth: Oct. 6, 1844, Bell County, Texas  
Death: Nov. 11, 1919, El Paso, Texas  
Buried: Evergreen Alameda Cem., El Paso, Texas  
Marriage Date: January 3, 1886, Montague County,  
Texas

**Mary E. Tharp**

Birth: 1860, Washington County, Ark.  
Death: January 8, 1938, Willard, Torrance Co., N.M.  
Buried: Torrance County, N.M.  
Spouse: J. C. Scivally  
Birth: 1861, Mo.  
Death: July 2, 1937, Willard, Torrance, N.M.  
Buried: Torrance County, New Mexico  
Marriage Date: January 6, 1889, Wise County, Texas

**Rachel D. Tharp**

Birth: Jan. 17, 1860, Washington County, Ark.  
Death: Nov. 26, 1925 – Washington County, Ark.  
Buried: McCord Cemetery, Elkins, Ark.  
Spouse: W. S. Springstun  
Birth: March 28, 1860  
Death: May 17, 1922, Washington County, Ark.  
Buried: McCord Cemetery, Elkins, Arkansas  
Marriage Date: March 9, 1884, Washington County,  
Ark.

**George W. Tharp**

Birth: 1862 – Washington County, Ark.  
Death: Unknown

**Susan J. Tharp**

Birth: 1864 – Washington County, Ark.  
Death: Unknown

**James L. Tharp**

Birth: February, 1866 – Washington County, Ark.  
Death: Unknown  
Spouse: Dona F.  
Birth: 1879 – Texas  
Death: Unknown  
Marriage Date: Unknown

**Lydia Tharp**

Birth: March, 1865 – Washington County, Ark.

Death: February 12, 1913 – Hollis, Okla.  
Buried: Westview Cemetery, Hollis, Okla.  
Spouse: Jefferson Davis Blagg

Birth: July, 1862

Death: May 10, 1912 – Hollis, Okla.

Buried: Westview Cemetery, Hollis, Okla.

Marriage Date: December 13, 1886 – Wise County,  
Texas

In my research, I found that Lewis and Judy (Vernon) Tharp were buried in the Reese Cemetery and John and Priscilla (Howry) Roberson were buried in the Roberson Cemetery. But my search for the gravesites of Jesse and Eliza Tharp was a puzzle.

Everything I found suggested they were buried in Washington County, Arkansas. This would seem logical since they were listed on the 1880 Federal Census in the White River Township in Washington County, Arkansas. The next census to check would be 1900 because there was no census available for 1890. Since their names did not appear on the 1900 Census, my thought was "They have died and are probably buried in Washington County, Arkansas since that is the last place listed as to where they lived."

When my wife and I were in Fayetteville several years ago, we visited the Tharp Cemetery. We visited several Tharp gravesites in hope of finding the gravesite of Jesse and Eliza Tharp but we left empty-handed.

In my research I read an article, "Wandering The Ozarks" by Velda Brotherton,<sup>2</sup> which included information about the Roberson Cemetery. In that article she said "A few weeks ago we ran a photograph of the coffin-like grave stones, fashioned by Nathan Tharp, which are found in some older cemeteries in the county." Immediately, I wanted to contact her about my Tharp family in Arkansas since she mentioned Nathan Tharp, who was Jesse Tharp's brother. In her response, she said, "The only information I had found about the Tharps was in a book written and published by Joyce Chandler" about the White House Community. She stated that no other information about the Tharps was found in the book. But she did wish me luck in my search.



Photos by Raymond R. Tharp

**Smyrna Cemetery and the headstones of Eliza and Jesse Tharp.**

As I continued my search for the burial site of Jesse and Eliza Tharp, I was continuously browsing the nooks and crannies of the Internet websites in hopes of finding something that would help me. It seemed that I was hopelessly bound with the suggestion that Jesse and Eliza Tharp were buried in Washington County, Ark., in an unmarked grave. I wasn't ready to accept that idea, so I plunged ahead in my search for that bit of information that would help me solve the mystery.

Many of the search results that came up with each request I made on the web were of no value. Excitement arose the day I had a result that showed some Tharps were buried in Montague County, Texas, in the Smyrna Cemetery. The information given was very scant. It read:

"Tharp ? 14 Mar 18?? 22 Sep 1898 wife of Jesse Tharp  
Tharp Jesse (Unreadable stone)"<sup>3</sup>

The question that comes to mind, "Is this the bit of information I need to solve my mystery?" I needed to find out. So I started by reviewing the report on "Smyrna Cemetery" published in the *Montague Milestones*, October 4, 1990.<sup>4</sup> It was the results of the work and research done by Joyce and Ernest Whatley on the



Eliza Tharp's headstone



Jesse Tharp's headstone

cemetery records of those who were born and died in the 1800s that were buried in the Smyrna Cemetery. The information given stated that Jesse Tharp was born 1822 and died 1894. The birth year given agreed with the age given for Jesse on the 1870 Federal Census of Arkansas. This was a positive sign and enhanced my thought that I was on the right track.

A trip to Montague County, Texas, to visit the gravesite of the Tharps buried in the Smyrna Cemetery was in order. My wife and I packed our bags, camera, and the necessary materials to make rubbings of the Tharp grave markers. When we arrived at the cemetery, my adrenalin level rose. Would this be the gravesite of my great, great-grandparents, Jesse and Eliza Tharp? We found the markers fairly quickly. One was standing upright and the other one was broken and lying on the ground. I knelt down in front of the standing marker to examine it closely. My eyes moistened as I viewed the name. It spelled out ELIZA R. THARP. Quickly, I moved over to the other marker to examine it. I could make out the letters JESSE THARP. Indeed, these were my great, great-grandparents. I studied the markers

very carefully to determine what was imprinted on them. The vital information is given below.

Eliza's marker read:

IN MEMORY:  
OF ELIZA R. THARP  
BORN MARCH 14, 1828  
DIED SEPT. THE 22  
1898 AGE 65Y. 6M. 8D.  
WIFE OF JESSE THARP

Jesse's marker read:

IN  
MEMORY OF  
JESSE THARP  
B. MAR. THE 26  
1822 DIED DEC.  
THE 15 1894

As I continued my research, I found several interesting facts concerning the family of Jesse and Eliza Tharp. First, their daughter Rachel was married in Washington County in 1884. Second, their daughters, Lydia and Mary were married in Wise County, Texas. One in 1886 and the other in 1889. Third, their daughter Priscilla married in Montague County, Texas, in 1886. This would indicate that the Jesse Tharp family moved to Texas sometime between 1884 and 1886, probably 1885.

Mystery is faced in many areas of life, especially in family history. We just have to keep on searching to find that bit of information that will solve the mystery. I am glad this old hound dog still has his scent. It really helped me to find the gravesites of my great, great, grandparents, Jesse and Eliza Tharp. We must continue following the footprints of all clues; for this helps us to find the pieces of the puzzle that bring family connection.

### End Notes

1. United States Federal Census Collection, findagrave.com, marriage records.
2. Brotherton, Velda. "Wandering The Ozarks," *The White River Valley News*, November 13, 2008.
3. Wolfenbarger, Larry. "Montague Co., Tx.-Cemeteries-Smyrna Cemetery," 2004; <http://files.usgwarchives.net/tx/montague/cemeteries/smyrna.txt>.
4. Whatley, Joyce and Ernest. "Smyrna Cemetery," *Montague Milestones*. Vol. 4, No. 4, October 1990.

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# Nature Reclaims Skelton Family Cemetery

By Jon Schleuss

**A** Confederate flag peeks through the undergrowth that confines a cemetery buried in the heart of Fayetteville. The flag is colorful, unfaded. It was placed on top of John Thaddeus Skelton's grave. Skelton's family moved to Washington County in the early 1800s. The flag was placed to honor his service as a Confederate soldier during the Civil War. Skelton's descendants and members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans placed the flag along with an iron cross next to his tombstone.

John T. Skelton died and was buried in the cemetery on property he once owned. By his death in 1908 the property had been well established as a burial site for early Washington County families. Signs made for the cemetery said the area was established as a graveyard in 1878.

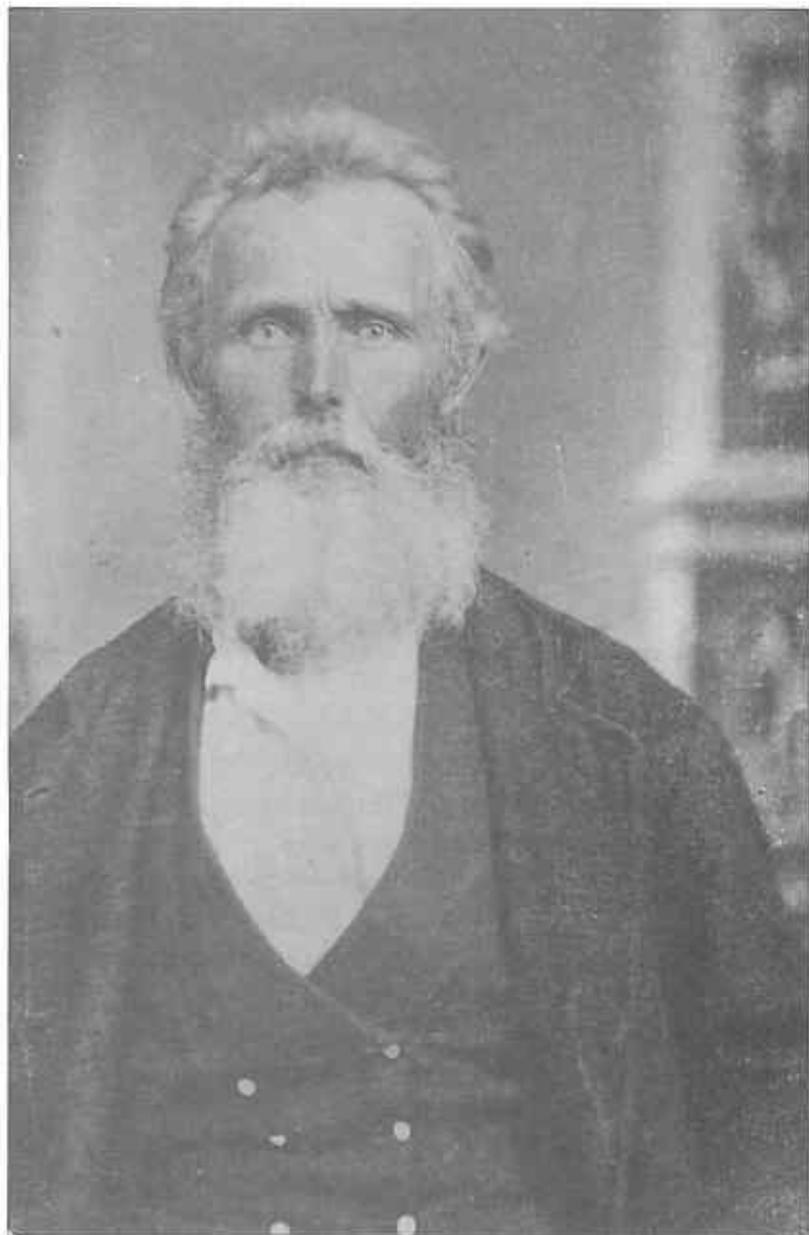
All of the signs have vanished.

The two-acre Skelton Family Cemetery has been reclaimed by nature over the decades, sprinkled with a few attempts to clean the cemetery, to push back the weeds and to restore a tidy peace in the cemetery.

Today the cemetery is hidden by fallen trees, honeysuckle vines and young saplings. It stands neglected, reclaimed again by nature. Its inhabitants are squirrels, birds and ticks. It's a difficult place to find. A large branch hangs above a trail entrance at the dead end of Rayview Drive, which is in a residential area sandwiched between College Avenue and Old Wire Road.

The cemetery is only a few hundred yards from well-manicured lawns and a basketball goal.

About 25 people are buried in the cemetery, according to [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com). The page was mostly organized by Ann Skel-



Photograph courtesy of Ann Skelton Deemer

**John Thaddeus Skelton.**



Photograph by Charlie Alison

The gravestone of John Thaddeus Skelton and Mary Rebekah Skelton at Skelton Cemetery.

ton Deemer, who is John T.'s great-granddaughter. Ann and her brother Gordon Skelton cleaned the cemetery in 2000 and took an inventory of the gravestones, she said.

John T., the patriarch, is buried next to his family in a plot surrounded by a pipe fence. Mary R. Skelton, John T.'s wife, rests next to him in front of a large stone representing the couple. Not far from them is a monument honoring their son who drowned in the Illinois River when he was 21 years old. Other family members and infants are buried in the fenced area, which is about 30 feet wide and an equal length long.

A smaller group of tombstones belonging to the Thatch family sits beyond the Skeltons. Seven Thatches and one Minnie Mummert are buried in the small grouping, according to a recording by the Washington County chapter of the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council in 1968 stored in the University of

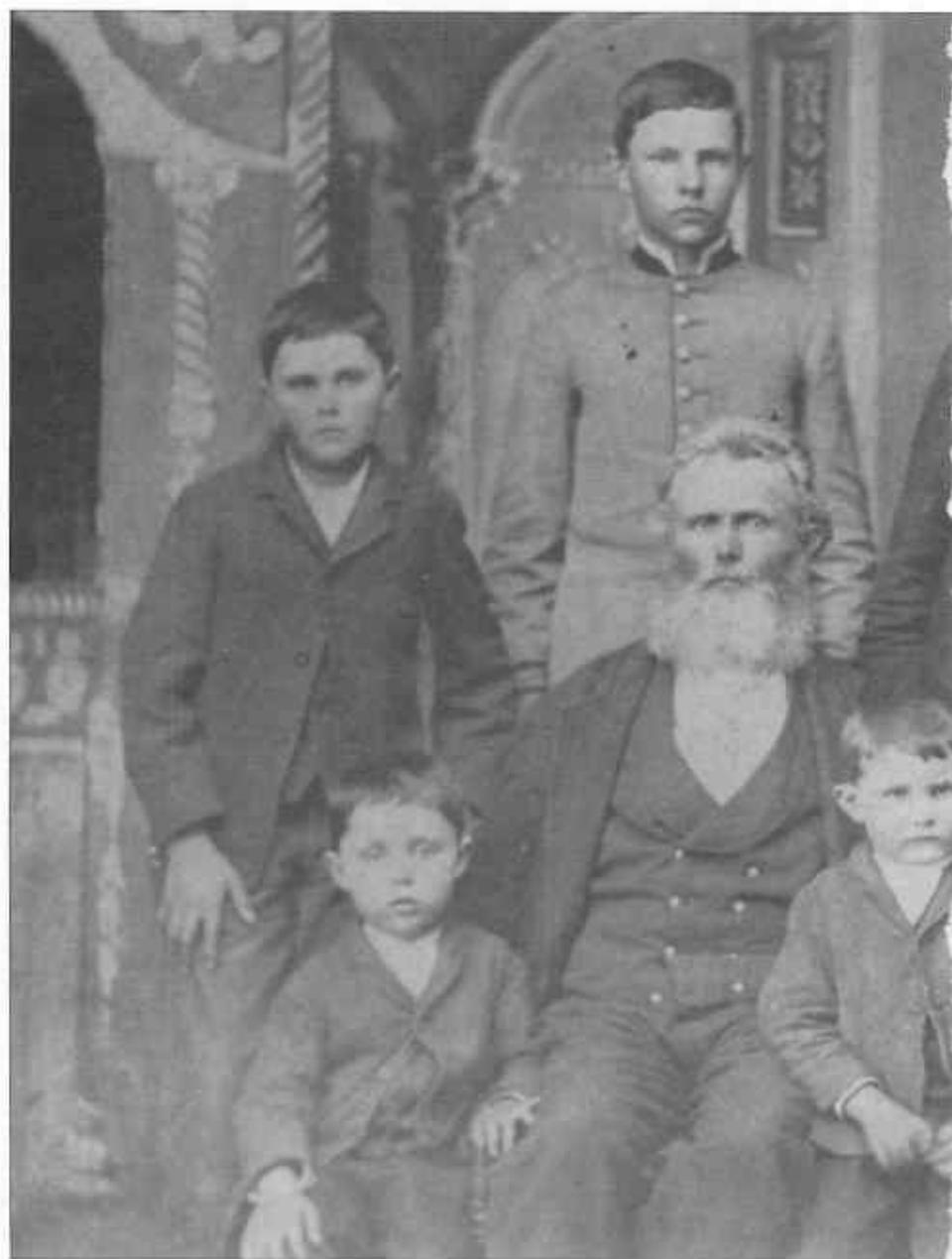


Photograph by Charlie Alison

**The gravestone of Frederic Skelton.**

Arkansas Special Collections. The Thatch family is surrounded by a collapsed chain-link fence and their plots are draped with a mass of honeysuckle vines. The flowery vines look like a roof.

William H. Thatch was the last person buried in the cemetery, according to records. He died in 1934.



The Skelton Family about 1883: From left, James, John E., Gordon, father John T.,



Photograph courtesy of Ann Skelton Deemer

Frederic, William, mother Mary, Polly and Charles.



Plat Map of Washington County, 1908

By 1908, when John T. Skelton died, he owned more than 180 acres north of the Fayetteville city limits. The northern edge of the Skelton farm is on a line with present-day Overcrest Drive; the western edge is aligned with present-day Woolsey Avenue; the southwestern edge follows present-day Sycamore; the western edges were about where present-day Wheeler Avenue is. Skelton's wife, Mary, and son James L. Skelton owned small parcels within the larger area.

A few yards to the north and west lie more plots. Some have flat rocks buried vertically in the ground. Other graves have broken tombstones or bases of previous headstones. The letters "C R" are written on top of one small stone. A broken tombstone nearby has a barely legible, "APR. 7, 1897" carved on it. This is possibly the stone of Susan Minor. The homemaker group listed her and her husband as having died in 1897 and 1889, respectively.

Sunken areas also spot this area.

"I think it was a burial ground there before the Skeltons went up there," Gordon Skelton said by phone.

The neglect of family cemeteries is not uncommon.

They get lost through time, said Jerry Hilliard, who is a station assistant at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville Research Station, part of the Arkansas Archeological Survey.

"There are a lot of Washington County cemeteries out there that are real interesting," he said.

The survey recorded the Skelton cemetery, he said.

The group documents cemeteries to preserve them on paper when their physical locations aren't maintained, Hilliard said.

Sometimes the location of a cemetery dies off with the descendants that cared for it.

A family story says John T. Skelton picked the cemetery's location because he believed it would be far away from any future railway lines.

The property originally fell outside the Fayetteville's limits. It wasn't annexed by the city until 1946, according to the city's website.

"Once my great-grandfather died, everyone pretty much left," Gordon said.

Gordon's father, Alan Skelton, tried to find the cemetery in 1959. Alan was born in Fayetteville in 1912 and his family moved him to Vicksburg, Miss., a year later.

"As seems to be the case with most of us, I waited until I was old (47 in my case) and everybody in the family who could tell me anything about family history had passed away," Alan wrote

John Thaddeus Skelton next to the well at his home, holding a chain attached to the well bucket on one end and attached to a long lever, the lower end of which can be seen at left. The lever allowed easier drawing of the bucket from the well.



in 1965 for *Flashback*. Alan died in 1979, according to Social Security records.

Alan wrote several times for *Flashback*. He published a Skelton family history in 1960, noting that William Skelton, John T.'s father, moved from Tennessee to Washington County in 1827.



Photograph courtesy of Ann Skelton Deemer

John T. served as 2nd corporal in the Confederate army and participated in the Battle of Prairie Grove, among other battles and skirmishes, Alan wrote.

"At Prairie Grove the hat brim over his left ear was cut off by a ball," Alan wrote. After the war, during reconstruction, John T.



Surrounded by woods, the Skelton family plot within Skelton Cemetery shows

carried a "walking cane sword which he kept handy."

Tensions were high between Confederate and Union troops during this time. Gordon recounted a family story that illustrated this tension nicely.

"My great-grandfather went off to fight in the war," he said. He had a handicapped sister, Meck Skelton, he said.



Photograph by Charlie Alison

how quickly nature overtakes the land.

"Apparently a couple of Union soldiers pushed her down the stairs," Gordon said. "They were local boys."

"My great-grandfather blew one away and chased the other into Indian territory," he said.

After John T.'s death, the family sold all their property, Gordon said.

Washington County owns the cemetery property, said a person who answered the phone at the assessor's office.

"It's kind of owned by the county and kind of not," County Attorney George Butler said.

An 1878 deed conveys the property to the county, but holds it in trust for several people, including John T. Skelton, according to records at the Fayetteville Public Library.

In 2000 Gordon told the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* that the Washington County Historical Society owned the property. A representative for the group said they were approached by the county in the 1970s, but declined the offer.

The murkiness around ownership may be the cause for the cemetery's decrepitude.

Butler recalled that the county cleaned it up in the 1990s and that the descendants would take over the care of the cemetery.

This is corroborated by a 1991 *Northwest Arkansas Times* article.

County officials were exploring the possibility of preserving the site as natural area, according to the article. Toppled tombstones were shown in pictures that ran with the article.

Four years later a Boy Scout proposed to clean the site, according to another *Times* article. The chairman of the troop proposed the idea as an Eagle Scout project.

"This cemetery has bore on my mind," said Jerry Haptonstall, the troop chairman, in a letter, according to the article.

"The county judge signed off on it," Butler said.

A form in a county file showed an empty spot for the Scout master's signature, he said.

"I don't know if they ever did this," Butler said. "I kind of think they haven't."

Butler found another note in the file that said the county judge gave Gordon Skelton clearance to mow the cemetery in 2000 and then the file dead ends, he said.

Few records mention the cemetery after 2000.

"It has once again retreated from everyone's minds until now," Butler said.

He made several calls to people listed in the file and descendants of people buried in the cemetery, he said.

"It looks like there was a group of people to maintain it," he said.

There was a dispute between the neighbors and the Skelton descendants as to whether to clean up the cemetery or not. Residents wanted to turn it into a park, according to Lawrence Skelton, who was interviewed in 2000 for an *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* article.

"Nothing ever came of it," he said. "They could never agree on what they wanted to do."

Ann and her brother have taken on the goal of cleaning the cemetery and repairing tombstones when time permits. Ann lives in Westwego, La., and Gordon lives in Madison, Miss.

In 2009, Ann and her son returned to the area and cleaned the cemetery with the help of Sons of Confederate Veterans, she said. Several trees fell down during a January 2009 ice storm.

"We cut our way in," she said. "We cleaned the entire plot and I could not believe the growth that had gotten in there."

Five or six men came to put an iron cross on John T.'s grave, she said.

"They came through the woods and you could see the Confederate flag coming," she said.

They put a picture of John T. on his tombstone and prayed for him, she said.

"You don't want to forget," she said.



*Jonathan Schleuss is a journalism major at the University of Arkansas and researched this article for a feature-writing class.*





Plat courtesy of the Washington County Archives

A 1923 plat of the Fayetteville City Park Addition, published here with north to the top of the page, clarified the location of a natural amphitheatre near present-day Wilson Park. The pond at lower left is Trent's Pond, the location of the present-day city park softball field. The amphitheatre was in the large open space between Park Avenue and College Avenue, north of Scull Creek and Trenton Boulevard near the present-day location of Lollar Lane. A footnote in an article about Wilson Park, published in the Winter 2011 edition of *Flashback* (Vol. 61, No. 4) incorrectly identified the amphitheatre's location.