

Litchford Cemetery Perry Township (Upper Arlington)

In the 19th century Pleasant Litchford established a private cemetery on his property for family members and others in the community. Born into slavery in 1789 in Lynchburg, Virginia¹, Pleasant Litchford was granted his freedom and moved to central Ohio by 1831. By 1835 James Walcutt² and James & John Legg³ each sold Litchford two (2) separate but adjoining properties in Perry Township. In 1849 Robert Neil sold Litchford additional land.⁴ Litchford's resulting total of 227 acres of farmland made him one of the larger landowners in southern Perry Township.

Litchford's cemetery and home were on a 32.5 acre tract of farmland generally located northeast of the present intersection of Ridgeview and Brandon roads. After Pleasant died in 1879⁵, one of his daughters Catherine Litchford Depp inherited this tract.⁶ Over the years this property changed hands many times. In 1900 the daughters of Catherine Depp sold their inheritance, ending the ownership of this property by Litchford family members.⁷

In the early years the cemetery was never mentioned in the deeds. That omission changed in 1906 when Farmers and Merchants Bank brought suit against Charles Bower and others for \$2923.75 that was owed to the bank.⁸ Soon thereafter, due to non-payment, the land was sold to the bank at a sheriff's sale.⁸ This transaction deeded the same 32.5 acres, and for the first time the cemetery land was referenced in the deed. However, the language did not indicate a cemetery, only that ½ acre was "excepted and reserved," meaning that whoever bought the 32.5 acres did not have any legal interest in the cemetery.⁸ It maintained that Litchford's heirs would continue to have perpetual use of the ½ acre cemetery.

In subsequent years, land around the cemetery continued to be sold, changing ownership several times over. For the first time in a 1950 deed the ½ acre tract was specified as a graveyard and it appeared on the 1950 Franklin County Tax Map marked as "G.Y."⁹

In January 1951, Upper Arlington annexed a section of Perry Township that included this 32.5 tract. Now part of the City of Upper Arlington, the 32.5 acres were split into four (4) tracts as follows: 1) Leonard R. Snapp owned the west half of the 32.5 acres *except* for the ½ acre cemetery,¹⁰ 2) Bly Moats owned the east half of the 32.5 acres,¹¹ 3) Paul Benson owned a 0.269 acre tract out of the west half¹² and 4) Bernard Wilson owned a 2.5 acre tract out of the east half.¹³

In 1955 the Upper Arlington Board of Education bought all of these properties for the new location of the high school.¹⁴ At the time of this sale each of the above properties had the same owner with two(2) exceptions: 1) Leonard Snapp's widow Clara acquired the west half in 1954¹⁵ and 2) Bly Moats sold her tract to Wallace Ackley also in 1954.¹⁶

In addition, the school board spent six months reviewing court records, locating Litchford heirs and initiating condemnation proceedings to acquire the ½ acre cemetery described at the time as "long-abandoned."¹⁷ A jury hearing set the value of the property at \$1,600, which the school board paid to the court.¹⁷ Then the family members worked out the distribution of the monies. The cemetery remains were removed and reinterred primarily in Union Cemetery and some at Green Lawn. In 2020 the construction of the new high school near the current one along with advanced archeological technology resulted in the discovery of additional remains. Work is on-going until a complete and final resting place is achieved for all concerned.

Footnotes:

- 1 Death certificate of Pleasant Litchford, Ancestry.com, Find a Grave Index online, accessed at Upper Arlington Public Library Archives
- 2 Deed Book 11, page 464, 1835, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 3 Deed Book 14, page 85, 1835, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 4 Deed Book 39, page 156, 1849, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 5 Death certificate of Pleasant Litchford, Ancestry.com, Find a Grave Index online, accessed at Upper Arlington Public Library Archives; Obituary Notice for Pleasant Litchford "Death of a Pioneer," Daily Ohio State Journal, April 16, 1879, page 2, accessed at Upper Arlington Public Library Archives
- 6 Will record G, page 535; Last Will and Testament of Pleasant Litchford, Written on March 18, 1871, page 4, accessed at Upper Arlington Public Library Archives
- 7 Deed Book 322, pages 518, 519, 586; 1900, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 8 Deed Book 450, page 143, 1906, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 9 Deed Book 1591, page 569, 1950, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 10 Deed Book 1399, page 193, 1947, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 11 Deed Book 1591, page 569, 1950, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 12 Deed Book 1352, page 289, 1946, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 13 Deed Book 1254, page 81, 1944, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 14 Deed Book 1870, page 379, 1955, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder; Deed Book 1876, page 562, 1955, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder; Deed Book 1878, page 226, 1955, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder; Deed Book 1891, page 136, 1955, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 15 Deed Book 1792, page 578, 1954, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder; Deed Book 1866, page 105, 1955, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 16 Deed Book 1846, page 589, 1954, Franklin County (Ohio) Recorder
- 17 Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, Civil Case 192745, Board of Education of Upper Arlington City School District v. Clarence Ross, et al., filed June 10, 1955, on microfilm at Clerk of Courts, Franklin County Court of Common Pleas; "Moving Graveyard School Board's Job," The Columbus Dispatch, August 21, 1955, page 3-D

Submitted 12/9/2020