

Mysterious Grave at UNC
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Who is the unknown Senator?

Members of the Dialectic Senate, the University of North Carolina's oldest forensic organization, were puzzled last week as to the identity of a member of the senate whose grave they discovered in the Senate plot in the town of Chapel Hill's cemetery here. The grave is one of the five, which were dug between the years 1824 and 1855.

Although members of the Senate in the past have cleaned the plot periodically, the current members were unaware that the special graveyard existed until Dr. R.W. Linker of the University Romance Languages Department called it to the attention of Arthur Murphey, the groups president.

This week, Murphey, Charles O. Long of Thomasville, Banks Talley of Bennettsville, S.C., John Sanders of Four Oaks, and Kay Holding of Raleigh moved into the cemetery armed with brushes, rakes, hoes, and fresh paint for the fretwork cast-iron fence which surrounds the plot.

There, in addition to the "mystery senator" whose grave is marked simply by two small stones with the initials "F.E.H.," they found four other graves, all marked with ornamental tombstones and monuments.

Biblical Illustrations

Outstanding among these is the grave of Lewis Bowen Holt which is marked by a concrete-brick constructed sarcophagus. The top of the sarcophagus has a carved illustration of the 6th and 7th verses of the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastes, "or ever the silver cord be loosed or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the cistern then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return to God who gave it."

The illustration pictures a Jerusalem scene with palm trees, a fountain, cistern, the broken pitcher and bowl, and the loosened cord. There is also a small hole leading into the inside of the structure which evidently was included to allow water to drain out of the illustration.

The inscription, which is below the illustration, reads, "Sacred to the memory of Lewis Bowen Holt of the County of Orange, a member of the Junior Class of the University of North Carolina, who departed this life, October 11, 1843, A. D., aged 22 years, 1 month and 5 days."

On the grave of Zenas Johnston, who was the first man buried there (unless the mystery senator preceded him) in 1824, Di members erected a simple concrete monument at each end of his grave with concrete also covering the ground in between. On his stone the senators inscribed, "sacred to the Memory of Zenas Johnston who became a member of the Dialectic Society in the University of North Carolina in August, 1822 and died in August 1824, aged 19 years, and 3 months.

As a testimony of their regard for a character in which the social companion and the Christian were happily united, the Society of which he was a member erected this monument."

Another elaborate marker is on the grave of John Alexander Smith who died in 1855. In his memory, he Senators erected a tall monument, about 8 feet high topped with a vase. Smith, according to the monument, was a native of Cumberland County, and died in Chapel Hill while a member of the freshman class. His grave is marked with this memorial: "The modesty, industry, and decorum of his youth gave promise of a useful and honorable manhood."

The fifth grave is that of James T. Smith of Anson County, who was the last senator to be buried there, in September, 1855, at the age of 20 years, 11 months and 29 days.

"He was a member of the Sophomore class, in scholarship of first rank, manners bland and amiable in moral character and immemorial hopes, a Christian. His fellow members of the Dialectic Society have erected this monument as a lasting testimony of their respect and affection," the inscription on his tombstone reads.

Couldn't Go Home

Old Senate records, while they do not reveal the identity of Senator F.E.H., do explain that the men were buried in Chapel Hill because inclement weather conditions prevented the shipment of their bodies home.

"We're hoping to find some record of a Senator whose initials were F.E.H.," Murphey said.