

Pieces of history

Stories of slavery buried in Thorntown cemetery.

Article by Rod Rose • Staff writer

On what might have been the last beautiful day of summer, a soft breeze barely stirred four small American flags meticulously placed at the only visible graves in a carefully-tended rural Thorntown cemetery.

Faint depressions in the grass showed the location of about 20 other graves.

There are more trees than tombstones in the quarter-acre cemetery, bordered by cornfields on the north, west and south.

A foam ring decorated with white and blue artificial flowers, blue ribbon twined around them, hung from a steel hook. Two more U.S. flags were attached to a small wooden sign near the road.

In red and blue on a white background, the sign reads, "Colored Cemetery. Established 1836." About 30 people are buried there, on the west side of County Road 825 West, about a half-mile north of Indiana 47.

Only four tombstones remain; three are illegible, their engravings eroded by wind, weather and time. Only the last name "Mitchell" can be clearly read on a gray gravestone. Two stones in the southwest corner of the cemetery are so eroded they are illegible; one has been cracked

into several pieces.

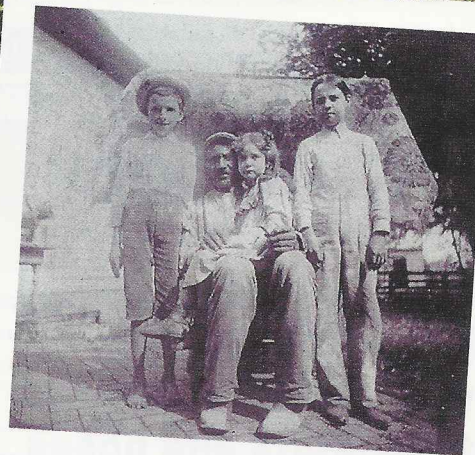
Some of the cemetery's history is known, but much is not. Records suggest that the Mitchell whose stone can be read was Daniel Mitchell, who died in 1887 at age 53.

Linda White, the local history and systems librarian at the Thorntown Public Library, has updated a list of burials originally compiled by the late David Guinn, a local historian for whom the library's local history and genealogy department is named.

"I've got some interesting obituaries about people who lived here," White said.

One obituary, from the *Lebanon Patriot*, tells of Charley Derrickson, who died Nov. 7, 1912. The obituary reflects the racial attitudes of the early 20th century – it reported he was buried "in the colored graveyard west of town" – but said his "early life reads like a romance."

Derrickson was born a slave on a Nichols County, Ky., plantation. "He earned his freedom by faithful service, and came to this country in the late (18)40s," the obituary read.



Photos submitted
Tom Rule, left
photo, who is
buried at the
"Colored Cem-
etery," above,
is shown in a
photo with three
children.