

Title: Samuel and Catherine Phariss Memorial Cemetery – A Year in the Life & Rebirth, 2019

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The Samuel and Catherine Phariss Memorial Cemetery is located at 20335 Lawrence 2195, Aurora, in Lawrence County, Missouri. It's unknown when it was founded, but it was an existing cemetery in 1858. Over the last few decades, it had fallen into disrepair, and eventually the few remaining headstones disappeared, and the cemetery was lost. Its new incarnation began in 2017, when it was rediscovered. In 2019, the land was purchased by fourth cousins, Noralee Faulkner and Barbara Brauch, and the rebirth began. Noralee and Barbara are descendants of Samuel and Catherine Phariss, the only two people identified to have been buried in this cemetery more than 160 years ago.

The purpose is to re-establish this as an existing cemetery. We have begun to clear the land, and some of the trees, and mark the graves. We are fairly certain we have found the location of Samuel and Catherine's graves, and intend to replace their headstones.

The first known mention of this cemetery was in a remarkable letter written by Samuel and Catherine's son, Samuel M. Phariss, to his brother, Pleasant Phariss. The purpose of the letter, written on April 15, 1858, was to inform Pleasant of their father's death. Samuel Phariss had died on March 7, two months after Catherine's death on January 7, 1858. The letter states:

*"We interred them in plain raised lid coffins lined with white and covered with black **in the graveyard** a bit north of their late residence. Father selected the burial place for Mother and himself and he lies upon her right side, some three feet apart."*

We know Samuel Phariss owned 80 acres of land directly south of the cemetery. So, this was our first clue to the existence of the graveyard, and it implies that it was already existing in 1858. An

interesting note is that nobody owned the land where the cemetery was located at that time. So, it appears that local residents were using government land for burials. The land was purchased under the Homestead Act by their grandson, Paul McKinley, in 1880, 22 years after their deaths.

Thankfully, Paul McKinley and subsequent owners kept the cemetery intact. The land was eventually bought in 1950, by Don and Barbara Wrinkle. Their son, Kerry Wrinkle, remembers growing up knowing the graves were in a small grove of trees on his father's land. Kerry said his father never cultivated that portion of his land, because he knew the graves were in there. At that time, there were only two or three carved headstones.

A descendant of Samuel and Catherine's, named Bessie (Hillhouse) Young, visited her great-grandparents' graves over the years, and at some time before she died in 1976, at the age of 79, Bessie told a Lawrence County Historian, Fred Mieswinkel, about the cemetery, and gave him what history she knew of the Phariss family. In 1977, Mr. Mieswinkel wrote an article for the Lawrence County Historical Society Bulletin about the family, and mentioned the cemetery, although by the time Bessie told him about the cemetery, she couldn't remember where it was located. Several years later, Mr. Mieswinkel had somehow located the graveyard, and took Noralee and her parents, Raymond and Lois Phariss, to visit it in 1998. By this time, unfortunately, all of the headstones were missing.

After Don Wrinkle died in 2014, the land was sold, and the cemetery was forgotten. The new owners were unaware of its existence. That's when serendipity took over. It's a convoluted story that brought the cemetery to light again. Gloria Murphy, another Phariss descendant, saw Raymond's Phariss's name in a newspaper article. She contacted him because of the family name and met with Raymond, his wife, Lois, and daughter, Noralee Faulkner. At that time, the cemetery was mentioned, and Gloria later told her sister, Barbara Brauch about meeting with Noralee and the cemetery. Years

passed, and in 2017, Barbara took a DNA test through Ancestry, and soon recognized Noralee's name in her DNA Circles. Taking a leap of faith, a message was sent, responded to, and the two DNA cousins met. It wasn't long before the quest to find the missing cemetery became their focus. Following the scribbled directions from 1998, Noralee was able to find the cemetery. Contact was made with Kerry Wrinkle, who grew up on the farm. Mr. Wrinkle then put the cousins in touch with the current owner, who granted permission for them to trespass on his land to start cleaning up the cemetery, which was by now, totally grown up in trees and weeds. Surprisingly, when asked, the owners agreed to sell this one-third acre of land to Noralee and Barbara, and so began the re-birth of this abandoned cemetery.

The "Year in the Life" of the Samuel and Catherine Phariss Memorial Cemetery began in February of 2019, when the negotiations, surveys, and paperwork were all completed, and the deed signed. In March, Noralee hired a tree service to take out the fencerow, so that we now had access to the land without trespassing on the neighbor's property. That was the most dramatic change, as we could now see into the property, instead of an impenetrable wall of weeds. Soon after, Noralee and Barbara, along with another DNA cousin, Cora Wade, met to start this project in earnest. Noralee had hired two helpers who brought a chainsaw and started cleaning out dead trees and brush.

Over the new few months, several work days were scheduled and progress continued. One day in June, Noralee looked down and saw a partial headstone buried in the ground. This was in an area we had been over countless times, but all of the rain during the spring must have uncovered it. Unfortunately, there are only a few letters carved on this piece of stone, and they don't correspond with Samuel or Catherine's names. But, having found one, we're hopeful that there may be others just under the surface, so we continue searching for missing stones, especially Samuel and Catherine's

Throughout the spring and summer of 2019, work continued, by now we were mostly fighting buck brush and poison ivy. So, along with the burning of brush and general clean-up, a lot of time and effort was spent in spraying for these noxious weeds.

Barbara's brother, James "Bud" Allhands, found two big base stones, about two-foot by one-foot, with channels chiseled into them, which were the perfect size to hold a narrow headstone. As Samuel and Catherine were the only people we knew to have had headstones, we were in hopes we had found their graves, but no proof had been found. Then one day a neighbor stopped to talk. He mentioned that he had visited the cemetery in the 1980's, with Don Wrinkle. He said there were two or three headstones, and that he didn't remember names, but remembered dates in the 1700's. We knew from Bessie Young that Samuel and Catherine had headstones, and they were both born in the 1700's. The neighbor, Doug Wilson, said they had entered the cemetery from the south, by "the big tree", which is very identifiable, and that they came in about 10-15 feet to the graves. That is exactly where the big base stones were found. Because of this, we feel confident that we have found the graves of Samuel and Catherine. Most of the other graves are now marked with simple field stones, and that is definitely something we want to maintain.

Work has continued, but not just physical labor. An address was obtained, and we were able to add it to the database of Find-a-Grave, a website that records burials and cemeteries word-wide. Our cemetery can be found by searching for Samuel and Catherine Phariss Memorial Cemetery, or at <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2686682/>.

We have also created a Facebook page, which is named Phariss Memorial Cemetery, or the direct link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/563419067498334/>. We log our progress and post photos of this ongoing restoration process, as well as communicate with family and friends.

Another project is to locate as many of the burials as possible. Barbara has learned how to dowse graves, and yes, there is such a thing! She first saw this demonstrated on Ozarks Video Magazine on our local PBS station, KOZK. She has marked the cemetery in grids and is in the process of locating and marking graves in each section. As this process is not scientific, there is no proof yet of the number of burials in this cemetery, but with a total of 24 graves per section, and 30 sections in this one-third acre of land, the number of possible burials is well into the hundreds. Unfortunately, there appear to be burials about 20 feet to the west of the cemetery, into a farm field; and to the north, burials appear to be under the county road and on into the shoulder on the far side of the road. We're sorry we can't incorporate all of these graves into our cemetery but are glad we've been able to save as many as we have. At some point, we would like to have ground penetrating radar conducted, to prove the burial sites.

Noralee and Barbara have given two presentations about the cemetery – one for their Daughters of the American Revolution Chapter, Elk Horn Prairie, in Aurora in October; and one for Ozarks Genealogical Society at The Library Center in Springfield in November.

Noralee has designed and ordered a bronze historical marker, in conjunction with the Lawrence County Historical Society. And, a cemetery sign was donated by the Aurora Historical Society, designed by their Vice President, the late Ken Ackley, and member Carole Schreiber. We're hoping to have both signs placed in December.

We do plan to replace Samuel and Catherine's headstones, as we feel we know where they are buried. Also, in an area on the southeast corner where there appear to be no burials, we intend to place a small landscaped area, with a bench and flowers, and the bronze marker.

Our main concern is how to pass this cemetery along to future generations, so it's not lost again.

We've been in contact with other descendants of Samuel and Catherine through Facebook, Ancestry and word of mouth. Our plan is to hold a dedication in 2020 and invite any and all to attend.

This has been the project of a lifetime and has meant more to both of us than we can explain.

This place is so peaceful, and there always seems to be a breeze on this hilltop. One could almost think that the people who are resting here are grateful to have been found and honored again.