

THE GREEN FIELD AT AFTON A Brief History of Creveling Cemetery

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Creveling Cemetery in the village of Almedia (originally called Afton) is representative of many burial parks in rural areas. From its small beginnings as a private family cemetery in 1825, Creveling Cemetery became an association in 1865 with an elected board to oversee the grounds. Thenceforth, other parcels of land were purchased by the board until today the cemetery has grown in size to approximately ten acres. There are 760 lots, more or less, each containing approximately eight grave spaces for full body interments—over 5000 gravesites in all. The surrounding land, originally farmland, has slowly been developed until today the cemetery is surrounded by homes and businesses.

The village of Almedia is situated along the Susquehanna River one mile above Espy. According to the Beers county history of 1915, “It contained several appealing houses, the stores of the C. M. Creveling Company and Frank White, two churches, a school house, and blacksmith shops of W. H. Engelhart and William Sneiderman. The population in the early twentieth century was approximately three hundred persons. Most of the old lime quarries here were operated by the Creveling Family. Coal dredging was a common industry in many towns along the Susquehanna. Almedia was no exception. Residents relied entirely on anthracite taken from the river bed for winter fuel.”

The cemetery began as a Creveling family grave site of sixty square feet, which was likely dedicated and parceled out of land owned by John Creveling Sr. That tiny family graveyard is situated in the front center of the modern cemetery ground along what had been previously known as the Great Road (from Northumberland to Wyoming Valley), today’s Old Berwick Road.

The Beers county history notes that “This branch of the Crevelings is one of the long standing families of Scott Township and Columbia County. The first settler was John who was born 1772 in New Jersey and married Charity in 1792 and took up land here in Almedia. John and other of his relatives owned and operated the rich vein of limestone that ran just to the north of Almedia and Lime Ridge. John was a Major in the state militia and held in high repute throughout the community.

“John and Charity spent most of their lives in Scott Township. He died in 1827 at the age of fifty-five years. She passed away in 1858 and is buried next to her beloved John. They were members of the Society of Friends (Quakers). The famous Creveling grape was propagated by Charity in her back yard.” More than fifteen of their descendants and their families are buried near them.

A visitor who scans across the width and depth of the cemetery grounds will note numerous varied headstones, markers, and quarried polished tablets. Many of the marble stones are broken, and engravings have been eroded away by the ravages of time and the elements. However, burial records have been kept and well maintained over the years and are available for researchers through the cemetery or at the Columbia County Historical and Genealogical Society.

In the Western Division of the cemetery there are a number of tall obelisks, standing like sentinels on watch around the “old grounds.” Of particular interest is a unique cast-aluminum column rising apart from the rest. These pillars, columns, and tablets were in vogue during the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

Today most markers and stones are quarried from Vermont and Georgia granite. Also there are increasing numbers of bronze plaques being used, especially by those who served in the military.

The most prominent feature of the cemetery is the Hummel Mausoleum situated in the East Division. It was built by John Hummel in the 1860s and is where his first wife, Hannah, was laid to rest in 1882. John followed her in 1884, and a second wife, Margaret, succumbed in 1892. Hannah, born a Boone, was possibly a descendant of one of Pennsylvania’s pioneers, Daniel Boone.

Research has revealed little else about this branch of the Hummel family. Despite the fact that many other Hummels are buried here, none of them seems to be closely related to this John Hummel.

Another family with a plot here—the Abbotts of Espy—had an offspring who became world-famous. The Abbott family markers stand along the Central and Western Divisions near the Creveling family lot. Harry Abbott, buried here, is the father of Bud Abbott of “Abbott and Costello,” the noted comic movie duo during the mid-twentieth century.

As the local newspaper, the *Press-Enterprise*, noted in a 2005 story, “Harry was born in Espy and as a teen ran away to work with a traveling circus. As an adult he became manager of the “big top.” Charles was a brother to Harry and uncle to Bud. Bud made occasional visits to Espy to see family and friends. Bud and Lou [Costello] also participated in a war bond rally and parade in Bloomsburg during World War II. Charles and wife Erma were well known and highly respected citizens. He ran a fertilizer and hardware store. Charles and Harry also managed Columbia Park in Lime Ridge for a time.”

Not everyone buried at Creveling was known around the world; on the contrary, many persons buried here were from the fringes of society. Most cemeteries have free burial grounds for the poor, strangers, and criminals. Such grounds are sometimes called “potter’s fields” from a Biblical reference to a burial ground bought from a potter “to bury strangers in” (Matt. 27:7). Creveling Cemetery records refer to these graves as common or promiscuous lots. Because of the number of such interred persons, Creveling became known as a paupers’ cemetery.

Cemetery records reveal that an “unknown black male” was buried in the Northern Division in a “promiscuous” grave. There is some speculation that the “black man” may have come to the area during the Civil War, along the “Underground Railroad” and died here on his way to freedom, from slavery, in Canada.

According to the Columbia County Agency for Veterans Affairs, as of 2006 there were three hundred and two veterans buried in the cemetery who served in the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, Korean War, and Gulf War. The Agency maintains records of these servicemen and women and awards annual stipends to the cemetery for the care and upkeep of their graves and markers.

It is a grand and stirring sight to behold the American flags that are set out on veterans' graves, especially as they wave on warm summer days. The American Legion, Post 273, Bloomsburg, places flags for Memorial Day and gathers them for winter storage after Labor Day.

There are many potted and planted flowers and shrubs placed at numerous grave sites by families and friends. The cemetery association established a "Flower Fund" many years ago. Those who have contributed to that fund will have geraniums planted on the graves of those families every Memorial Day in perpetuity.