

Waters Road Cemetery ~ Freedom Cemetery

History of the Cemetery

This cemetery land was originally settled by Roswell Preston, Jr. in 1832, and is situated west of the Preston farmstead (now the Karl and Theresa Schenk home). The original deed for the 40 acre parcel was recorded April 1, 1837, although the property was purchased earlier than that. The Preston family occupies the iron-fenced plot in the cemetery, with the earliest marked grave being that of Roswell Preston, Sr. dated July 1836. We presume that the family set off the cemetery on this high point of land when Roswell died. The Kendall family was related by marriage, and also has several members within the iron fence. In addition, the Rogers family (of Rogers Corner) has several graves here.

The name “Freedom Cemetery” was given to this site by Jacob Preston, per Preston's original written history of Freedom Township presented June 7, 1876 before the Pioneer Society of Michigan. This history was recovered during the 175th anniversary book preparation in 2009.

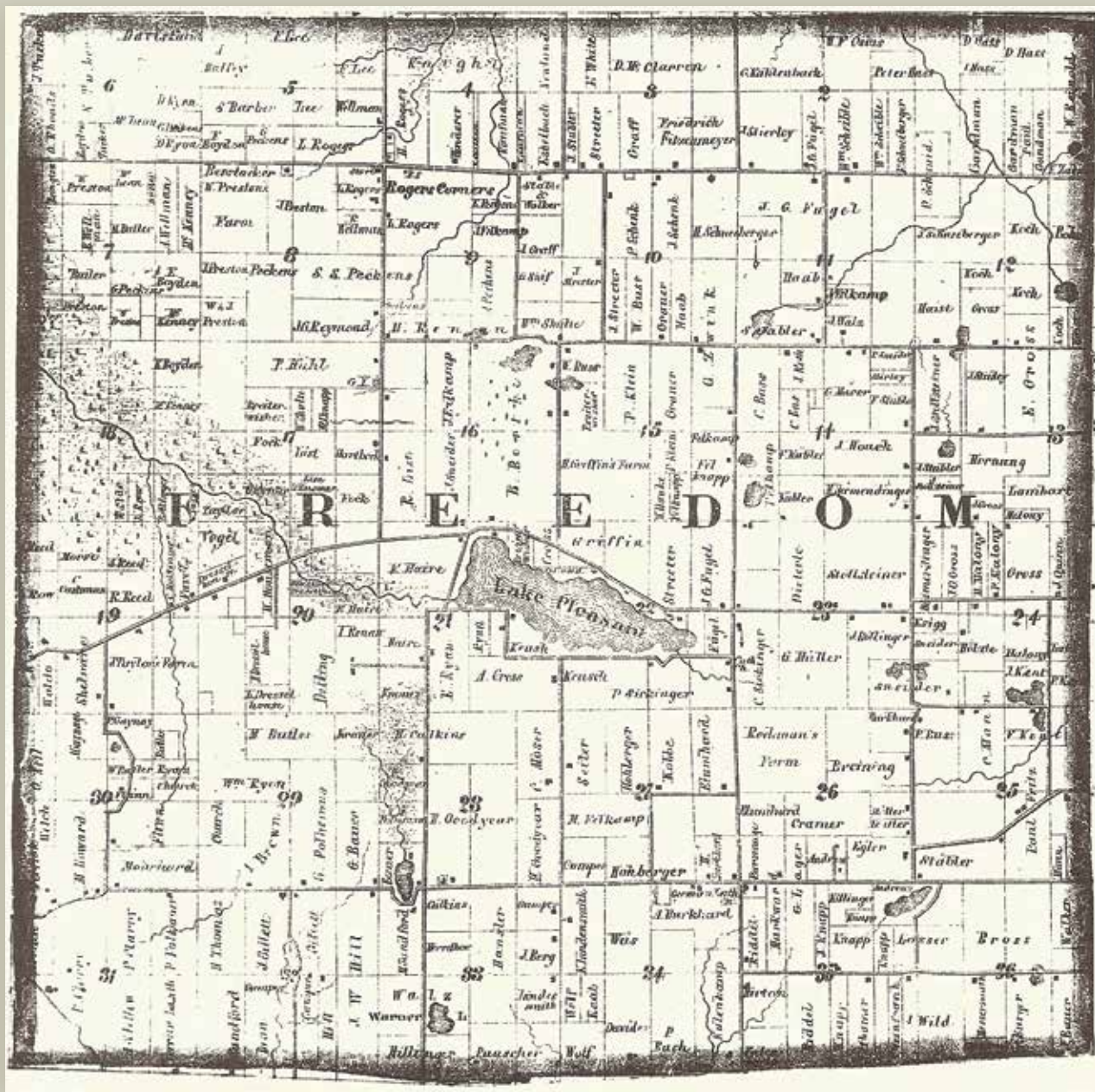
The cemetery was transferred into township ownership for \$1 by a deed dated April 17, 1848 from Edward and Amanda Litchfield, who were Preston family members by marriage and then owners of the land on which the cemetery sat. The April 3, 1848 Freedom Township Annual Meeting minutes confirm the township's agreement to this purchase. Township minutes also reference the construction of a new fence around the cemetery in 1859.

While the cemetery appears to have started as a Preston family cemetery, it also received others of Congregationalist, Presbyterian and Methodist-Episcopal backgrounds. The Prestons and other non-Germans on the north side of the township worshiped at a church in Jerusalem in Lima Township, as well as at individual homes with a traveling circuit minister. Since a traditional “English” Methodist, Presbyterian or Congregationalist church structure was never built in the township, and most subsequent German or Irish churches (Lutheran, Evangelical and Catholic) had dedicated adjacent cemeteries, the Freedom Cemetery is sometimes referred to as the “Cemetery of the Unchurched”, implying incorrectly that all persons buried within did not attend church.

Another historical anecdote states that the “Cemetery of the Unchurched” reference derived from Roswell and Mehitable Preston, where Mehitable was a committed Congregationalist, and a founding member of the first Presbyterian church in the area. At that time, the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches had agreed to divide up mission activity in the frontier areas, and Michigan was a Presbyterian area. The Presbyterian Church met in a school building in Lima Township, and passions regarding the church ran so high that someone burned the building down. Mehitable was apparently so disgusted with this that her family did not resume a church affiliation. Hence, the reference to the original Preston family cemetery as that of the “unchurched”.

1856 Freedom Township Map

Showing Location of Cemetery in NW Quarter of Section 10 and Nearby Farms



The Early Settlers

Freedom Township began settlement in 1831 as a result of four actions:

- Congress passed the Land Act of 1820. This bill provided for the sale of public lands in smaller lots and at a lower price than had previously been the case. For the first time, an individual with an average income could compete with wealthy speculators and easily acquire land. Land represented power and a chance to improve one's lot in life.

- The Erie Canal opened in 1825. Now it was possible to journey from the Atlantic to Lake Erie entirely by water. People could more easily and quickly reach the frontier.

- Maps of the previously unknown interior of Michigan were published and distributed in the East, providing critical information to potential settlers and speculators alike. Orange Risdon's 1825 map and John Farmer's 1826 map both showed Freedom Township as a discrete, unnamed “block” for the first time.

- Early in 1825, Congress authorized funds for the creation of the Chicago Road, a military road intended to link the forts in Detroit and Chicago, now known as U.S. 12 or Michigan Avenue. The Chicago Road was instrumental in bringing settlers to Freedom Township. Another route, the Territorial Road, was surveyed in 1829 to service the second row of Michigan counties via Lima and Sylvan Townships, and also helped draw traffic towards Freedom.

Immigration into Washtenaw County progressed slowly through the 1820s, but accelerated significantly after 1830, peaking from 1831-1837 during the time referred to as the “Michigan Fever”. This period was marked by rapid land purchases fueled by speculators and a tide of willing immigrants, significant road and infrastructure projects undertaken by the Territory of Michigan, the anti-Masonic movement in central New York State which drove out wealthier merchants, and a “financial boom” powered by wildcat banks in Michigan. Freedom Township experienced its first land patent sale in 1831, and by 1834 virtually all the usable land in the township had been sold.

Roswell Preston, Sr. and Mehitable Knowlton were married at the “meeting-house” on Hampton Hill, Connecticut on October 18, 1798. They resided at Hampton, where they had nine children:



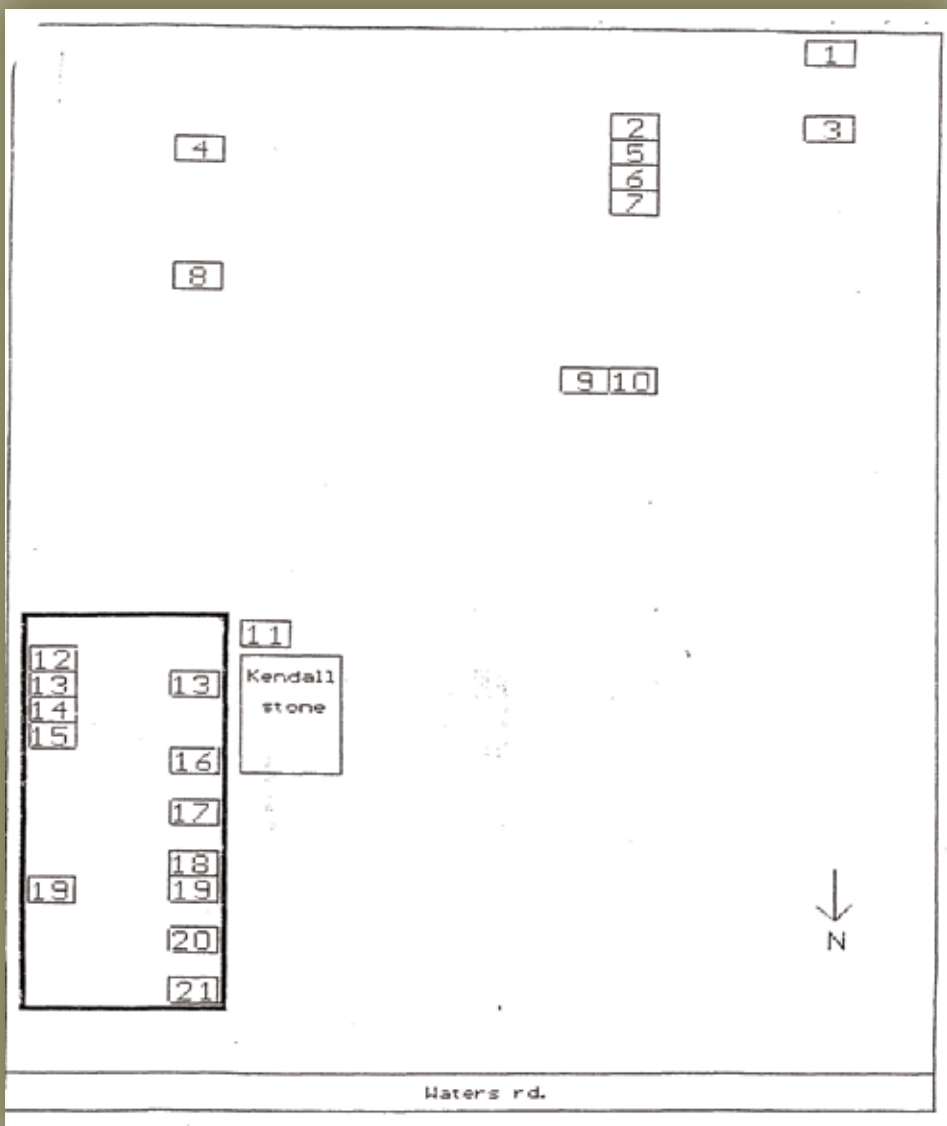
1. Chloe, b. 19 July, 1799; m. Nathan Kendall
2. Amanda, b. 8 March, 1801; m. Edward Litchfield
3. Alvah, b. 17 Nov., 1802; m. Olive Litchfield
4. Roswell Jr., b. 2 Oct., 1804; m. Frances Hurlburt
5. Mary, b. 6 July, 1806; m. Edmond Comins
6. William, b. 19 Aug., 1808; m. Angeline Raymond
7. Jacob, b. 2 May, 1810; m. Lucy W. Killam and others
8. Julia Ann, b. 22 Aug., 1812; m. David C. Raymond
9. Sabrina, b. 8 June, 1815; m. Richard Ayers

On January 8, 1832, Captain Roswell Preston sold his farmstead in Hampton, and in June 1832 he and his son Roswell Jr. came on horseback to Michigan. They located a 240 acre tract on the north half of Section 8 in Freedom, built a commodious log house and cleared the forest from about the dwelling. Captain Preston then returned to Hampton for the winter. The family began their final westward journey in May, 1833. The party consisted of Capt. Roswell Preston and wife, their sons William and Jacob, their daughter Sabrina and their married daughter Amanda, accompanied by her husband, Lieut. Edward Litchfield, and their five small children; twelve persons in all.

The party proceeded to Norwich, Conn., where they embarked on a boat and sailed down the Thames River and along Long Island sound to New York City, thence by steamer up the Hudson to Albany, where they boarded a canal boat and were thus transported to Buffalo. They crossed Lake Erie by steamship, which landed them at Detroit. They then completed the journey in wagons. On April 7, 1834, the first township meeting was held, with Roswell Preston, Sr. presiding, and also elected its first Justice of the Peace.

Roswell Preston, Jr. was an avowed abolitionist, was actively connected with the operations of the “Underground Railroad”, and harbored escaped slaves at his homestead adjacent to this cemetery. Jacob Preston worked as a surveyor and laid out many of Freedom Township's first roads, as well as serving as township school superintendent and writing Freedom's first history. Joseph Sternberg served as Township Supervisor in the 1840s. The Raymond and Ayers families were intermarried with the Prestons and are associated with the Fletcher Road Cemetery.

Cemetery Map and Burials



The above map indicates the relative position of marked graves in the cemetery, as noted in the following listing.

Cemetery also includes approximately 7 semi-buried, unreadable stones or fragments of stones.

Cemetery burials likely include John Schneider (October 1920) and Baby Bihlmeyer (January 1924), per death certificates.

NAME

3 Crane, Helen M. P.
Wife of A. H. Crane
Died Jan. 31, 1848
Aged 22 years

2 Egeler, Clarence N.
March 31, 1919 –
November 12, 1977

- Ivers, Jerusha
Died 1838
Grave location unknown

13 Kendall, Caroline
Wife of G. Coleman
Died Sept. 19, 1854
Aged 28 years 11 mos & 18 ds
Therefore be ye also ready for in
such an hour as ye think not the
son of man cometh

15 Kendall, Chloe
His wife (i.e., wife of Nathan #12)
1799-1841

12 Kendall, Nathan
1797-1861

14 Kendall, Nathan P.
1829-1848

1 Leonard, Louesa E.
Daughter (of) Cebra &
Harriett Leonard
Died April 24, 1857
AE 3 yrs. 6 mo. 10d.

20 Preston, Abner E.
Died Feb. 12 1852
Aged 2 years 8 mos. & 21 d.
Son of Jacob & Lucina E. Preston

18 Preston, Jacob
Died Sept. 30 1881
Aged 71 ys 4 ms 28 ds.

NAME

21 Preston, Lucina E.
wife of Jacob Preston
Died March 16, 1859
Aged 49 yrs.

19 Preston, Lucy Witter
Wife of Jacob Preston and
daughter of Benjamin T. &
Elisabeth Killam
Died Feb. 26, 1846
Aged 33 ys 7 ms 10 ds
(second stone says Aged 34 years)

16 Preston, Mehitable
wife of Roswell Preston
Died Nov. 27, 1854
Aged 80 Years and 7 mo

20 Preston, Norman R.
Died Aug. 10, 1848
Aged 8 mos & 8 ds
Son of Jacob & Lucina E. Preston

17 Preston, Roswell
Died July 16, 1836
Aged 65 Years
Haloed and Blessed is the memory
of the good

6,7 Rogers, Franklin
Son of L & O Rogers
Born Apr. 5, 1833
Died May 10, 1851
Aged 18 yrs, 1 mo, & 5 ds.

6 Rogers, Olive Boyden
Gone where the weary find rest
Born in Georgia, VT
April 28, 1806
Come to Freedom in 1832
Died in Sharon April 12, 1879
She was the wife of Levi Rogers

NAME

6,8 Rogers, Sarah L.
Daughter of L & O Rogers
Born May 30, 1838
Died April 3, 1855
Aged 16 ys 9 ms & 28 ds.

5 Rogers, Silas
In Memory
He departed this life Nov. 22 AD
1844
Aged 35 years
Stranger pause as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now you soon must be
Prepare for death and follow me

10 Scott, Louisa L.
Wife of Jesse Scott
and daughter of Nathan &
Sally Adams
Died March 20, 1847
In the 24 year of her age

9 Sternberg, Joseph
Died June 5, 1853
Aged 46 years 8 mos. & 12 d's

11 Whiting, Mary
Wife of James Litchfield
Was born June 11, 1810
And did (sic) Oct. 7, 1837

4 Woods, Samuel S.
Died March 15, 1842
In the 38 year of his age

Barn Raising



Minutes of the First Township Meeting, April 7, 1834

*Washtenaw County, Washtenaw County
Township of Freedom
At the annual township meeting held at the house
of Henry M. Griffin in the Township of Freedom
on April the 7th 1834
James W. Taylor was chosen moderator
William O. Raymond a clerk
Henry M. Griffin Deputy Clerk
Arnold Drake, Esq. Presiding
The voters present to choose their officers by ballot
for Supervisor Henry M. Griffin
for Township Clerk David C. Raymond
for Assessors William O. Raymond and Cornelius Perkins
and a Justice of the Peace
The following Commissioners James J. Raymond
Edward Litchfield and James Fellows
School Commissioners Samuel S. Perkins
and Thomas and James Giddell
School Inspectors Jacob Preston James Fellows
for Henry M. Griffin
Benjamin Drake, Dr. Henry and Henry Smith
Charles Foster, A. Fellows and Monahan, Dr.
William
Some voters Alexander Perkins Monahan
B. William and Frances Mann
Township Supervisor
Some voters did not half high all
The voters shall take the senses of the
of Freedom when they take the senses
of the taxable property
The number of votes taken at the first
annual township meeting was fifty eight*

This commemorative marker was purchased and installed in 2012. Funds were derived from donations and the sale of Freedom Township history books, maps and other souvenirs, as part of the Freedom Township 175th Anniversary Celebration held on September 26 and 27, 2009.

Further historical details are available at www.twp-freedom.org. Please visit also the Fletcher Road cemetery on Fletcher Road south of Ellsworth Road. More details are also published in the book **Freedom Township – The Early Days, 175th Anniversary, September 2009**.

Artwork by Sue Maher, Moxie Grafix LLC