



A SHORT HISTORY OF TURNER CEMETERY

3424 Beechwood Boulevard, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

- ◆ Turner Cemetery is located in the middle of a busy block of Beechwood Boulevard in the Squirrel Hill/Greenfield area of Pittsburgh. The small, half-acre graveyard, dating back to 1785, has a history that far outweighs its size, for it is believed to be the second oldest cemetery in Pittsburgh and maybe the third oldest in Allegheny County. It holds the remains of some of the early settlers of Squirrel Hill.
- ◆ Originally the cemetery was the burial plot of the Turner family. The land was owned by John Turner (1755-1840), who made a good living selling crops to the garrison at Fort Pitt. He called his 154-acre estate "Federal Hill," remembered today only as the small street that runs beside the graveyard.
- ◆ John Turner was born in 1755, in the days when England and France were vying for dominion in North America. Settlers from Europe were moving into the western Pennsylvania wilderness. The Native Americans found their traditional way of life threatened and their lands taken from them. The result was violent clashes. Surprise attacks were common and deadly.
- ◆ Turner's mother was Mary Newton (c. 1720-1785), who married a hunter and trapper named Simon Girty and had four sons. After Girty was killed by Indians, Mary married John Turner Sr. They had a son and named him John. While John was still an infant, Indians captured the family, murdered his father and divided the rest of the family among them.
- ◆ Political developments enabled Mary to reunite her family when John was about ten. They settled near the corner of Hazelwood Avenue and Beechwood Boulevard, not far from where the graveyard is now. Mary decided to keep her last name as Girty, since four of her sons bore that name. One of her sons was Simon Girty Jr., who gained notoriety by defecting to the British during the Revolutionary War.
- ◆ The first person believed to be buried in the graveyard was Mary Girty Turner, who died in 1785. The location of her grave is not known. The first burial on record is that of Mrs. William Craig, which took place in 1804, but no tombstone exists for her.
- ◆ The oldest tombstone in the graveyard is that of Nancy Reading (spelled Redding on the tombstone), who died in 1816 at the age of 15. The most recent tombstone at Turner's graveyard is that of Edward Schenley Ebdy, who died in 1880 at the age of 23.
- ◆ Turner Graveyard is much older than the Mary S. Brown Memorial-Ames United Methodist Church beside it, which dates to 1908. Some members of previous churches on the site were buried in the graveyard, but not Mary S. Brown and her family. They lie in Allegheny Cemetery with the exception of Mary's youngest son, W. Harry, who is buried with his family in his well-known pyramid mausoleum at Homewood Cemetery.
- ◆ One thing you'll notice when you look at Turner Graveyard is that the placement of the tombstones looks odd. Through the years, many of the tombstones were moved, probably several times.
- ◆ At least 50 people are believed to have been buried in Turner Graveyard, most in the first half of the 1800s. Today it is difficult to determine exactly how many are buried there. Lists of the burials were compiled many years after the last burial took place, but no original records have been found. Also, some of the deceased were later moved to other cemeteries by their descendants.
- ◆ Turner Cemetery holds the remains of at least seven and maybe as many as thirty military veterans, most from the Civil War. John Turner fought in different campaigns against the Indians. Abraham Boother fought in the Revolutionary War. William Craig served in the War of 1812. Henry Brewno fought in the Mexican-American War. Samuel Fowkes, William Nelson, and John Clark fought in the Civil War. Only the tombstones of Samuel Fowkes, William Nelson and John Clark remain in the graveyard.

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