Old Fayetteville Cemetery To Get New Life
Wades Deed East Mountain Cemetery To Heritage Association

By Rose Ann Prater
Posted: May 24, 2014 at 1:20 a.m.

FAYETTEVILLE — A cemetery across from the Confederate Cemetery on Rock Street that may look lost to time is getting a new life.

The 1.18-acre tract, where several Fayetteville pioneers are buried, was owned by Lynn Wade and his father, the late Clifton Wade, and has been deeded to the Northwest Arkansas African American Heritage Association to oversee.

The cemetery runs north and east of the family burial plot of David Walker, an early resident of Fayetteville, and his family. The Walker plot is deeded to the Southern Memorial Association and isn’t included as part of the cemetery, Wade said.

Sharon Killian, president of the heritage association, envisions the redevelopment of the the cemetery to a park-like setting where students and historians of all ages can see and be guided through the restoration of the landscape. The association is committed to preserving and documenting the heritage of African Americans in Northwest Arkansas. The group does research about settlements in Benton, Carroll, Madison and Washington counties.

She estimated there are 80 to 100 graves there that provide historical information about Fayetteville.

The cemetery, known as East Mountain Cemetery, is believed to date to about 1840 and includes the remains of both black and white Fayetteville residents, Killian said. The restoration will be in collaboration with the Arkansas Archeological Survey.

A cleanup of large felled trees and underbrush has begun, using inmate labor from the Community Services Division of the Washington County Sheriff’s office. Al Vliet, who lives nearby, serves as the on-site caretaker, Wade said.

The deed was presented Friday morning to Killian by Wade, who noted the presentation was made in memory of Melba Lene Smith, a lifelong resident of Fayetteville. Smith, 69, died earlier this year while on a trip to New York.

“She was always interested in history,” Killian said. “She was a lover of people.”

Wade said he and his father bought the 10-acre tract in the 1960s. Over the years, the Washington County Masonic Lodge No. 1 and various Boy Scout troops and individuals have cleaned the cemetery from time to time, he said.

Killian said the cemetery is a resource for historical records. Much African American history isn’t recorded and cemeteries provide an avenue to open doors on history.

One small grave marker bears the name “Sally.” She hopes to discover Sally’s story in the process.

“This brings relationships alive,” she said. “I see art and history, all avenues coming from this park and pretty darn soon.”

NW News on 05/24/2014