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"YOUR HOMETOWN
MAGAZINE"



163rd Shelby County Fair & Horse Show

The Mystery of the Empty Chair

Many people have inquired about an unusual gravesite at Grove Hill Cemetery—an empty chair next to a large headstone engraved with the surname KIRK. So, an effort was made to resolve the mystery.

Starting with information on the gravesite, Dr. William Thomas Kirk was born in Simpsonville on October 27, 1833. He was the son of Allen Taylor Kirk and Frances Elizabeth Pemberton, and spent his childhood and obtained his education in Shelby County.

Kirk first studied medicine at Dr. Frank Atkinson's office in Simpsonville. In 1854, he graduated from the University of Louisville School of Medicine as a Doctor of Allopathy. After graduation, he practiced for one year at Mt. Pleasant in Farmer City, Illinois.

Upon his return to Shelbyville, William married Maria Amanda Veeder in 1856. The couple then moved to Atlanta, Illinois, where they began a family. Dr. Kirk also became an active civic and political leader in the community.

An encounter of particular interest occurred during one of Dr. Kirk's moments of public service on July 4, 1859. He and several other Atlanta, Illinois, citizens celebrated the holiday with a special event. The guest speaker was a young lawyer from Springfield named Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln agreed to come but suggested James H. Matheny was a better orator. Lincoln and Matheny did indeed attend the event, and Dr. Kirk led the opening prayer and introduced Lincoln to the crowd.

During the Civil War, Dr. Kirk returned to his homeland, where he served as a surgeon in the Union Army. He cared for patients at the General Hospital on Third Street in Louisville. Before the war ended, his wife, Maria, died on June 1, 1864, at 31 years of age.

After the war, William and his three children returned to Atlanta, Illinois, where he continued in his medical profession and civic activities. In 1871, he married Olive J. Morris of Illinois. In time, the Kirks expanded their family to include three more children.

Dr. Kirk was involved in politics for many years and served as chairman of the Democratic Party in Central Illinois in 1882. He was also actively involved in the Knights Templar, Freemasons, the Odd Fellows, and other

fraternal organizations. In 1886, he was elected president of the Illinois Medical Association.

On March 22, 1887, Dr. Kirk was struck by a heart attack. Though stimulants revived him, he remained in critical condition and gradually failed. On March 25, 1887, surrounded by his family and others, he quietly passed away.

Dr. Kirk's first funeral was held in Atlanta, and the Knights Templar of Lincoln conducted the rites. Members of the Odd-Fellows, Masonic, and A.O.U.W. Lodges and the G.A.R. Post also attended. His remains were sent to Shelbyville, Kentucky, for burial.

His second funeral was held at the Christian Church in Shelbyville, led by Rev. W. T. Poynter. He was buried with Masonic Rites at Grove Hill Cemetery in Section C, Lot/Row: 72, Space: 3. According to gravestone folklore, an empty chair, such as the one next to his headstone, represents the loss of a loved one.

The engraved symbol found on the base of the empty chair features a Templar Cross with another cross inside a crown, inserted in the middle. This is the emblem of the Knights Templar, and membership is only open to Freemasons who profess a belief in Christ.

This history mystery is now solved, and hundreds of more interesting stories are waiting to be discovered at Grove Hill Cemetery. Anyone interested in participating is encouraged to get involved; you can help in several ways.

Volunteers who make up Friends of Grove Hill Cemetery regularly work to clean and repair the monuments. The schedule for this summer and fall:

June 20-21

July 18-19

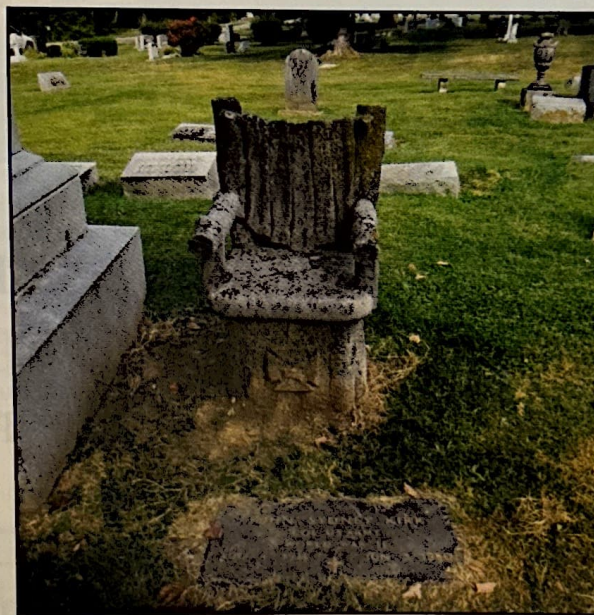
August 15-16

September 12-13

October 10-11



**Bobbie
Smith
Bryant**



In addition to stone cleaning and landscaping chores, efforts like this one to research and write about the dearly departed are fun ways to participate. Help is also needed to host special events to raise money for stone cleaning supplies and the ongoing use of the chapel and grounds. I sure hope we'll see you there!

Friends of Grove Hill is an auxiliary of Grove Hill Cemetery, DBA Shelbyville Cemetery Company. Tax-deductible donations may be made to Friends of Grove Hill, 458 Mt. Eden Road, Shelbyville, KY 40065. For more information or to volunteer, contact Bonnie Burks Gray at grovehillfriends@gmail.com



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