

Clayton Memorial Unitarian Universalist Church

Newberry, South Carolina

Church History



The early history of Clayton Memorial is somewhat unclear, as it began in the years before the Civil War. Family legend has it that Major David Halfacre, dissatisfied with other churches in the Newberry area, one day found a pamphlet on Universalism while riding one day on his horse. Intrigued by the pamphlet, he began to attend a Universalist congregation in neighboring Fairfield County (across the Broad River from Newberry) and shortly after decided to establish a Universalist congregation in Newberry. As near as we can determine, the congregation began meeting somewhere in the 1840s and met in parlors, on porches, and at a spring near the Halfacre home.

An entry dated 1867 at the Clerk of Court of Newberry County states, "One acre of land shall be set aside for a family cemetery." The building itself was constructed in 1905 on land at the cemetery using lumber provided by a sawmill owned by Benjamin Halfacre.

As is often the case with events from the turbulent years before, during, and after the Civil War, information is often dependent on personal memories passed down through generations. Below is a history of the cemetery, as recalled by one of the congregation's senior members.

The following was written by Mary Nell Eargle (August 18, 1930 -) on Sunday, Sept. 9, 1990. The information was given to her by her father, Walton Benjamin Halfacre (October 1, 1906 - December 1994), who stated that these were the statements as he remembers being told down through the years.

Major David Halfacre was raised in the vicinity of Cannons Creek and now Highway 219. He bought what was known as the Piester and Gray Plantation. He operated what was known as the Piester Mill. Later, he built what is known as the Major David & Christina Halfacre home, being livable at the beginning of the Civil War. In settling up his estate, Lizzie Halfacre received the old home place because Major David thought his two sons could build their own homes. Lizzie later married Dave Ruff and by them were two children, namely, David and Christina Ruff. David Ruff built his home on Highway 219, and Christina heired the old home place. Her adopted son, Doyle Lee Gallman and his wife Mary Nell Wilson Gallman, heired the old home place and take pride in its upkeep and historical value. The third story of this mansion is a large room which was used during the Confederate War for the purpose of transacting business relating to the war, etc. One of the organizations that my father had always heard that used it was the Red Shirts.

While Major David Halfacre lived in the dwelling, his young son became ill, and realizing that he wasn't going to live long, both of them together decided to establish his own burial place on the knoll plainly in view of the mansion. This burial of the young son was the first in what is

now known as Clayton Memorial Cemetery. A while later Major David Halfacre moved the bodies of two older sons from the Halfacre Cemetery (which is located at Highway 219 and Landfill Road) to Clayton Memorial Cemetery. One of the two boys was killed at the 2nd Battle of Manassas and the other boy died of a disease in Charleston. Walton B. Halfacre stated that he always heard that a slave drove the wagon (containing the body) from Charleston to Newberry and that Major David Halfacre rode a horse out in front of the wagon to clear the way and possibly to note any danger. Another interesting incident in relation to the above story was the one told by Perry F. Halfacre, grandson of Major David Halfacre. After receiving the message that his son had been killed in the 2nd Battle of Manassas he had a dream one night and in this dream he could see the mortal wound on his son's body. When he picked up the body in Virginia he found the wound to be in the exact place as in his dream. Major David Halfacre gave one acre of land for the Clayton Memorial Burial Ground. Also, buried in Clayton Memorial Cemetery is another son, by a previous marriage of Major David Halfacre. His name was David Halfacre and his wife was buried there also, as late as 1913.

Late update: Per a visitor to the 2011 Universalist Convention, members of the Halfacre family migrated to Mississippi, where they became members of Our Home Universalist Unitarian Church, Ellisville, MS. The date for this migration was 1842, which indicates the Halfacre family was already Universalist by that time.