

**THE OLD RICKEY CEMETERY: WELLS TOWNSHIP,
JEFFERSON COUNTY, OHIO, 1825-1969**

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Figure 1: "Wellsburg Township," From the 40x60 inch *Map of Jefferson County, Ohio*; revised and corrected by Joseph M. Rickey (Philadelphia: Lee and Marsh, 1856) -- Courtesy of The Library of Congress

Across the Ohio River just down from Wellsburg in western Virginia, the Rickey family cemetery was located in the State of Ohio's Jefferson County within Wells Township section number 35—situated in the southern-central portion of that section. About a mile south of the village of Brilliant,¹ John Rickey's 200 acres of land was dissected by

¹ Apparently, this small village existed at least since 1819 and was previously known as La Grange or the Phillipsburgh Post Office (on the 1856 map). For details of the geological features, especially gravel, see G. Frederick Wright, "Age of the Second Terrace on the Ohio at Brilliant, near Steubenville," *The Journal of Geology* 4 (no. 2-3, February-March 1896): 218-219 and "[Response by T. C. Chamberlin,]" on pp. 219-221.

The Cleveland & Pittsburgh Railroad² in 1853; and the lower portion, the Belvidere or Joseph Simmons' Fruit Farm and the so-called Blockhouse Farm, sold.³

The earliest burial there might have been the senior John Rickey (calculated 1727-9 April 1825 when he fell from his horse and was crushed by a wagon) along with his wife, Machtel "Matilda" Veldtman (1745-after 1800). Logically speaking, their children might have been buried there as well: Brice (1773-1842) and Margaret Cole Rickey (1775-1814). We do know for certain that Ann Morrison (1791-1865) and John Rickey Jr. (1786-1874) were buried there with an "iron railing around his grave and his wife's covered by a marble slab."⁴ Their son, Alexander C. Rickey, who died in 1853 and would also have likely been buried there.

On 19 September 1890, a local newspaper wrote that "The Wellsburg Herald says: 'The Wheeling & Lake Erie Railroad⁵ people have bought the ground occupied by the old Rickey cemetery about a mile below Brilliant, to be used for ballast on the new road.

² Chartered in 1845, The Cleveland and Pittsburgh Railroad hauled freight, largely Pittsburgh number 8 bituminous coal on this line; and then, later, steel bound for Detroit. See "The Cleveland & Pittsburgh Rail Road Company vs John Rickey," 28 October 1853 for appropriation of private lands in Wells Township, fractional sections 34 and 35 including the grave yard; bound as Rail Road Appropriation No. 1 (1852-1854; 1887-1890), pages 251-255 held by the Jefferson County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society.

³ Originally, this cemetery was located on the northern boundary of John Rickey's farm on a high knob (labeled 1278 on page 254 of Appropriation) above today's State Route 7 on land which may now be owned by the Brilliant Sand Company (aka the Sand Pit at one point). Note that Smiley H. Johnson acquired "the Rickey farm of 100 acres, and subsequently several small patches of land, until to-day he is the owner of over 1,000 acres" according to J. A. Caldwell and J. H. Newton's History of Belmont and Jefferson County (Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company, 1880), p. 603, col. 2. As for the "new township cemetery," based on the current Highway Map of Jefferson County, Ohio (2007), this location (about K-14 on their map) sounds like the New Alexandria Cemetery, located just across the township boundary in Cross Creek Township in section 7. While it could be the Tent Church Cemetery (aka Center Cemetery) in the western portion of section 24 along Route 151, this cemetery has stones from the early-to-middle 1800s including those of Richey (sic) family members, so it's not new by any measure.

⁴ In a letter dated 4 August 1982 to Fred A. Huber, the State of Ohio's Adjutant General's Department provided evidence that John Rickey was buried on 28 April 1874 in the Rickey Cemetery located 500 feet of the South Sand Pit on the east side of Route 7. "This is a tabletop stone," according to Vivian Snyder, 1965 and may have had an iron railing around both stones.

⁵ The tracks seem to be those of the Cleveland and Pittsburgh Railroad Company, which may have been part of the Pennsylvania Line (by 1900)—see figure 4 below. See John B. Corns, The Wheeling and Lake Erie Railway, 2 vols. (Lynchburg, VA: TLC Publishing, 1991 and 2002) and an [1892 timetable](#) for the River Division is available.

They are said to be offering \$800 to anyone who will remove to remains of the dead to the new Wells township cemetery."⁶ However, it is not clear if this proposed relocation ever occurred because in 1892, a Mrs. Margaret Obney of East Liverpool, Columbiana County, Ohio was interred in the Rickey Cemetery.⁷

In the first half of the 20th century, two items seem to document its continued existence. First, in 1916 a graveyard appears on Gary Kessler's property in the "Right of Way and Track Map" of the Cleveland and Pittsburgh Railroad.⁸ Then in the 1930s, a WPA project in cooperation with the American Legion and the Adjutant General of Ohio documented its existence as one mile south of Brilliant, 500 feet east off State Route 7, and south of the road to Sand Pit. However, they erroneously thought that this .025 acre cemetery was established about 1869.⁹ In subsequent years, though, the Rickey family descendants moved away and the cemetery apparently fell into disrepair.

In the early 1960s, John Gooseman, now a Wells Township Trustee, remembers the cemetery because it was on his way to the Sand Pit where he fished and swam; it still had an iron fence around it.¹⁰ In a 7 August 1965 inventory entitled "Rickey Cemetery," Vivian Snyder reported finding the Rickey Cemetery — "completely grown up, terrible condition;" but, she went on to list the tombstones of eighteen individuals¹¹ buried therein that she could identify: 1) **Amy Eliza Brainerd** (died 3 Nov 1852, aged 24 years—born about 1828); 2) the **Chalfant** family members including a) **Reuben** (26 Dec 1818-30 Jan 1865), b) **Sarah** wife of R. Chalfant (12 Jun 1829-31 Jul 1873), and c) **Caroline**, daughter (23 Sep 1854-17 Jul 1873); 3) **Lloyd Farmer** (died 11 Aug 1867, 74 years—born about 1793); 4) **George Graget/Gragey** (died 28 June 1873, 76 years—born

⁶ Steubenville Weekly Herald, 19 September 1890, page 3.

⁷ "Brilliant," The Wheeling Register 27 (no. 251, 20 March 1892), p. 3. She does not appear in findagrave.com as of 16 April 2017, but Margaret Obney (born about 1829) appeared in the 1880 Census in La Grange Village, Wells Township in Jefferson County, Ohio.

⁸ Office of Valuation Engineer, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, R.R., River Division, "Right of Way and Track Map," (Pittsburgh, PA: Pennsylvania Company, 30 June 1916). A title search by the County Auditor suggests that it was part of parcel ID 50-00875-000.

⁹ "Veterans Graves Registration: Official Project Nos 465-42-3-467 and 665-42-3-232," (Washington, DC: WPA, undated) located in County Recorder's Office in Steubenville, Ohio.

¹⁰ John Gooseman, Wells Township Trustee. Phone Interview, 7 August 2017.

¹¹ An April 2017 search of findagrave.com, by name and death year, did not locate any of these individuals reburied elsewhere in Ohio cemeteries.

about 1797); 5) **Virginia Green**, daughter of L&M (died 25 Jan 1853, 9 years, 5 months, and 1 day—born cal 24 Aug 1843); 6) the **Reed** family, a) **J. M.** (died 7 Aug 1877, 76 years—born about 1801), b) **Elizabeth** (died 18 Jun 1890, 67 years—born about 1823), and c) **Mary L.** daughter (died 23 Aug 1887, 36 years—born about 1851); 7) the **John Rickey** family, a) **John** born in Center County, PA, 23 Mar 1786 and died 15 Apr 1874 along with his wife, **Ann Morrison**, born in Chester County, PA on 20 Feb 1791, and died 21 Jun 1865); 8) the **William Rickey** family including a) **William E.**, died 13 Jun 1853, 29 years—born about 1824), b) **A. J.** died 21 Dec 1853 (25 years, 11 months and 1 day, born cal 20 Jan 1828), c) **Caroline**, wife of A.J. (died 30 Jul 1851, 25 years, and 2 months—born cal 30 May 1826), d) **Henry** died 1847 (stone broken); 9) **John Robinson** (died 11 Mar 1853, 22 years, 1 month and 1 day—born cal 30 May 1826); and, 10) **Lucinda Wells**, daughter of W.R. and G. A. (died 31 May 1861, 1 year, 6 months, and 28 days--born cal 3 Nov 1859). Snyder concluded her report—“many more graves, now grown up and most stones down.”¹²

Sometime after March 1966, when Bob Wetherell started work at the Ohio Power Company's Tidd Plant, he says that he watched Arthur H. “Art or Arch” Stover (1925-1987) of Stover Construction use a D6 dozer to dig up some graves in order to get access to the sand and gravel. In fact, he distinctly remembers seeing bodies in “buckskin suits or buckskin clothes. He further speculated that the bodies were reinterred in a mass grave.¹³ Interestingly, Troutman suggests that in 1969, this cemetery was actually relocated, supposedly to the New Alexandria Cemetery in Cross Creek Township, Jefferson County, Ohio.¹⁴ Indeed, Donald Mosti of Steubenville actually reinterred the abandoned cemetery for the Wells Township trustees. When he surveyed it for the township trustees, he found a leveled off area with a high wall. According to his

¹² Vivian Snyder, “Rickey Cemetery,” 7 August 1965; possession of Ohio Genealogical Society (FFO 3262). The author has enhanced the above biographical information based on her initial inventory; and in April 2017, a GenealogyBank.com search of these individuals did not turn up any local obituaries.

¹³ Bob Wetherell, New Alexandria Cemetery Gravedigger. Telephone Interview, 7 August 2017 and 14 August 2017.

¹⁴ See K. Roger Troutman, Ohio Cemeteries: 1803-2003 (Mansfield, OH: Ohio Genealogical Society, 2003), p. 336, col. 2 and Richard D. F. Roe, The Jefferson County, Ohio, Cemeteries No. 4 (Steubenville, OH: Public Library of Steubenville and Jefferson County, 1997) which includes the New Alexandria Cemetery, but only lists three Rickey names and does not mention any mass reburial of the Rickey family at any time (see p. 249).

following recollection:¹⁵ he initially surveyed the site, finding some exposed wooden caskets with the shoulder wider than the foot; at that time, he estimated some 20-25 graves with some small gravestones (note that the largest was a 6 foot dark marble/granite bookmark-shaped tombstone which was too heavy to move). Using a back hoe, he removed top soil to the burial level and using a grid he excavating the graves. He recalled bagging 80-90 sites, but there was not much to find, other than some skulls, a toupee made from horsehair, buttons, various trinkets, and fragments of clothing. He placed all of this material (including any of the original broken monuments) into two concrete vaults which were reburied at the New Alexandria Cemetery. According to Donna Cronin, the cemetery clerk, John Gooseman for the Wells Township Trustees purchased lot 92 at the very top of the hill in Section D for the reinternment. While there are no extant markers, she could definitely confirm from her records that at least eight people were interred on 19 July 1969: Amy Brainerd; George Cragey; three member of the Rickey family: A.J., Caroline, and William E.; J.M. and Mary L. Reed; and John Robinson.¹⁶

In conclusion, after repeated visits to local Steubenville cemeteries, telephone calls and email messages to various trustees as well as answered and unanswered letters to the relevant parties, it seems that the ultimate fate of The Old Rickey Cemetery is now known for certain and is no longer lost in the shrouds of time.

Appendices

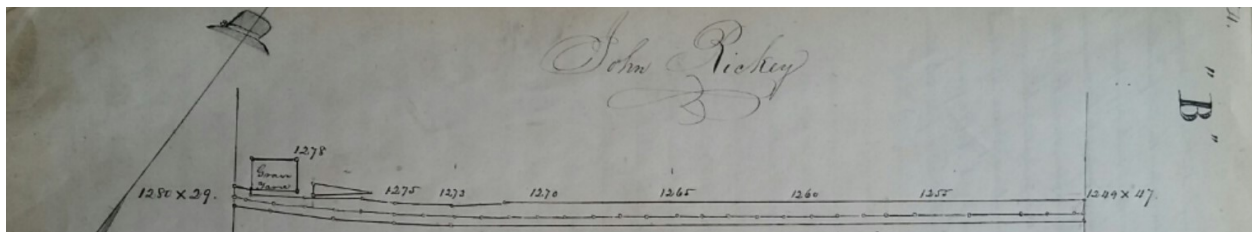


Figure 2: Grave Yard at point 1278 to 1280 from page 254 of [Rail Road Appropriation](#)
(Courtesy of the Jefferson County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society)

¹⁵ Donald R. Mosti, Mosti Funeral Homes Inc., Steubenville, Ohio. Telephone Interview, 1 September 2017 and David Mosti, 5 September 2017.

¹⁶ Donna Cronin, Clerk for New Alexandria Cemetery, Steubenville, Ohio. Telephone Interview, 5 September 2017.

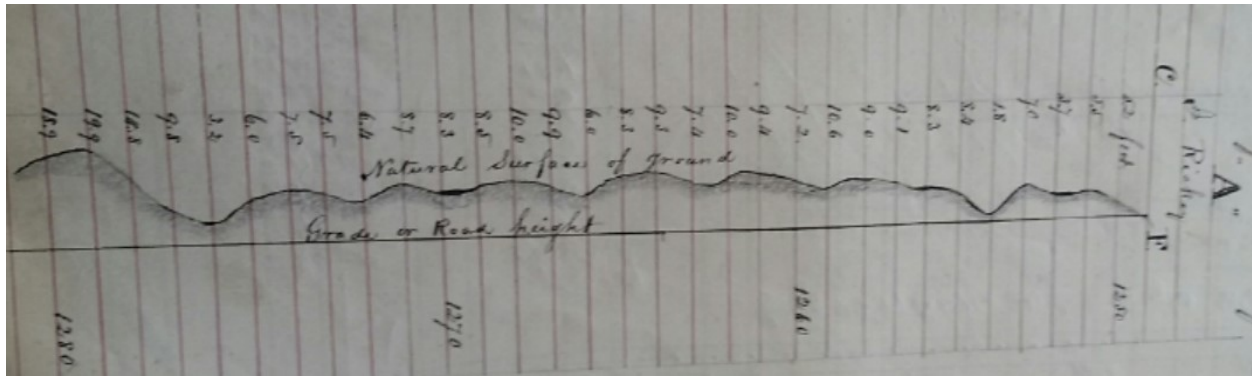


Figure 3: "Natural Surface of Ground/Grade of Road Height" from page 253
(Courtesy of the Jefferson County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society)



Figure 4: "Upper Ohio River Valley, Part V" In Eli L. Hayes' *Illustrated Atlas of the Upper Ohio River and Valley from Pittsburgh, Pa. to Cincinnati, Ohio* (Philadelphia: Titus, Simmons & Titus, 1877) where Scale 2 Inches to 1 Mile

Acknowledgements

Curt Morrow for contributing his insights about the Rickey's family cemetery in Jefferson County, Ohio; see his Family History of William & Hattie Hickerson (Columbus OH: NP, 2014, pages 3, 104-105, and 109). The Ohio Genealogical Society for providing information on its First Families of Ohio inductees and Flora L. VerStraten-Merrin, President of the Jefferson County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society for locating and then sharing images from their Rail Road Appropriation book. Mr. Jeffery A. Davis Jr., Manager of Real Estate for the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railway Company for repeatedly trying to locate records during April 2017 regarding the relevant 1890s

land transactions. Mr. Phil Lawrence, P.S. of the Jefferson County Engineer's Office for locating both the C&P's Right of Way Map and WPA's Grave Registration map and drawing my attention to them. And, finally I owe a special debt of gratitude to Robert Wetherell for following up on our initial conversation and suggesting that I get in touch with Donald R. Mosti of The Mosti Funeral Home Inc. in Steubenville, Ohio.