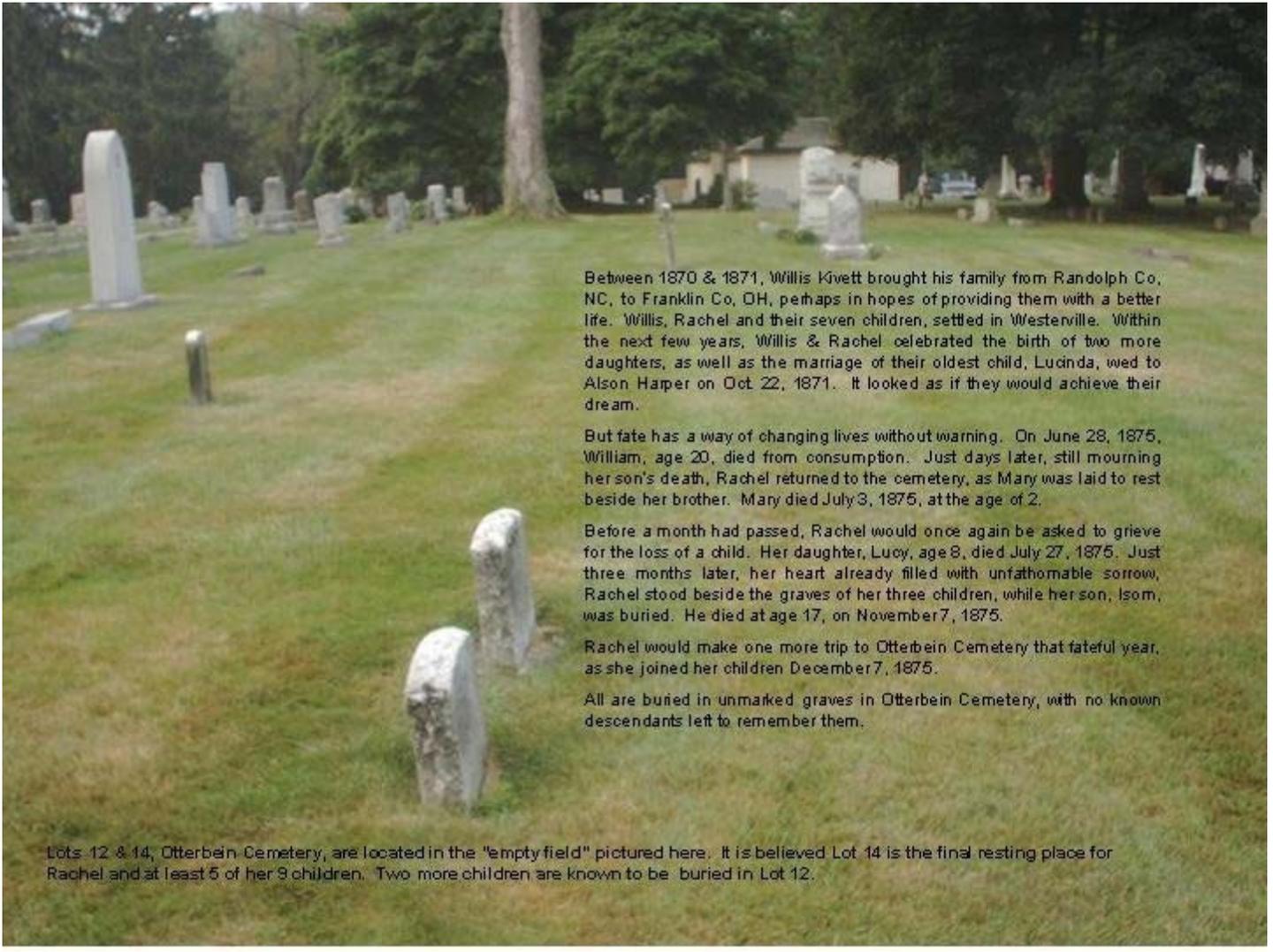


The Mysterious Kivett Family Members Buried in Westerville, Ohio Town Cemetery



Between 1870 & 1871, Willis Kivett brought his family from Randolph Co, NC, to Franklin Co, OH, perhaps in hopes of providing them with a better life. Willis, Rachel and their seven children, settled in Westerville. Within the next few years, Willis & Rachel celebrated the birth of two more daughters, as well as the marriage of their oldest child, Lucinda, wed to Alson Harper on Oct 22, 1871. It looked as if they would achieve their dream.

But fate has a way of changing lives without warning. On June 28, 1875, William, age 20, died from consumption. Just days later, still mourning her son's death, Rachel returned to the cemetery, as Mary was laid to rest beside her brother. Mary died July 3, 1875, at the age of 2.

Before a month had passed, Rachel would once again be asked to grieve for the loss of a child. Her daughter, Lucy, age 8, died July 27, 1875. Just three months later, her heart already filled with unfathomable sorrow, Rachel stood beside the graves of her three children, while her son, Isom, was buried. He died at age 17, on November 7, 1875.

Rachel would make one more trip to Otterbein Cemetery that fateful year, as she joined her children December 7, 1875.

All are buried in unmarked graves in Otterbein Cemetery, with no known descendants left to remember them.

Lots 12 & 14, Otterbein Cemetery, are located in the "empty field" pictured here. It is believed Lot 14 is the final resting place for Rachel and at least 5 of her 9 children. Two more children are known to be buried in Lot 12.

Photo and text by Sharon Lytle of Westerville, Ohio

My name is Sharon Lytle. I work for the City of Westerville, Ohio. My Department, sometime in the 1950s or so, took over ownership of three local cemeteries. Recently I started a records restoration program, as the records kept by the Township were very sketchy. In some places there are only names, and maybe a year of death.

A few weeks ago, it came to light that there was a Potters Field within one of these cemeteries, which most assumed was just an empty section of the cemetery. However, we have now learned it may hold up to 40 graves which, for reason I'll never understand, were not recorded in the cemetery records. My focus now is to find the names and information on as many of these people as possible. Although we will never really know in which grave each one is buried, we will at least know where they were laid to rest, and they will once again be remembered. My boss has even offered to erect a plaque containing the names of all those I can find.

The truly sad part is that the Kivett family was truly a forgotten family in these parts. As I said, all I know about them is what I wrote you yesterday. I would love to know the name of the father, and if there were any more children.

Any help you could give me would be appreciated beyond words. Please feel free to take any or all of the information I send you for your own records. I will pass along any other information I can find.

Possibilities of the Origins of the Kivit (Kivett) Family Who Died in Ohio:

After the Civil War, the former slave owned by Henry Kivett, named Willis formalized a then legally recognized marriage to one of the former slave women, now known as Rachel Staley, previously owned by neighbor John Staley. Perhaps the other two female slaves shown in the NC 1860 census as owned by John Staley married other male slaves – their identity lost. Some or all of the children shown with these females in 1860 seem to have gone to live with Willis and Rachel. Perhaps some were already fathered by Willis prior to this formal marriage documented as transpiring in 1866. The out-of-age-order listing of some children in the NC 1870 census implies that the older two listed last may have been mothered by another of the two females living with the Staley family in 1860 – who knows?

Anyway, the woman Rachel Kivett and some of these children shown in 1870 seem to be found in census records for Ohio in 1880 and later. Willis may have died by 1880. How they got to Ohio is totally unknown, but information from the Westerville, OH library web site implies that that area was a stopover for slaves escaping to the North. Perhaps this mulatto Kivett family had heard of such a receptive location for persons of color. For more about this, go back and click on the [Alston Freed Slaves](#) Button.

What with the advent of Reconstruction, Henry Kivett's considerable holdings were probably lost shortly after the war. Maybe that spurred him to temporarily seek employment on the bridge project near Fayetteville. It looks like his former slave Willis and his now legally recognized wife Rachel and their maybe extended family had taken up residence in Henry Kivett's former home. Maybe Henry gave it to them to watch over while he was off in Fayetteville, or maybe it was less voluntarily appropriated by Willis and the sympathetic new local government.

As politics changed, and Reconstruction governments were replaced, by the early 1870's it likely became less comfortable for non-whites in Randolph Co., NC. Perhaps sometime before 1875 Willis and Rachel decided to flee to the North, and settled on Ohio. Who knows, Willis may even have met an untimely violent death there in Randolph Co. that set off the migration of Rachel and the Kivett children. Eventually, as we see in 1880 (census documents not included here), a very elderly Henry Kivett and wife Sarah are back in their old house, after the relocation of Rachel. This house is known to have survived into the 1930's – many photographs and reports of visits there are still preserved.

It appears that some of the by then young adult children of this mulatto Kivett family were living in 1880 with scattered white families in Ohio. It seems from the death records that Rachel and several of the other children had already died at different times, all in 1875 – perhaps from some epidemic disease. Of the three that were reported to have survived, Maggie reportedly never married, Emma married Norman Alsup (race unknown), and George W. [H ?] disappeared. Based on this there may have been additional as yet unidentified descendants of Emma named Alsup, and George named Kivet [or Kivett].