BENEVOLENT CEMETERY
MURFREESBORO, TN

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April 26, 2014
WHAT ARE AID SOCIETIES?

- Known by terms such as benevolent societies, mutual aid societies, voluntary associations, and fraternal organizations.
- Place for socialization
- Allowed for men and women to exercise leadership roles
- Some provided members with sickness and burial benefits
- Probably thousands of these groups existed in the United States from Reconstruction through the mid 20th century.
SOME OF THE GROUPS IN MURFREESBORO

• Benevolent Society

• Working People’s Labor & Art Association - also known as the WPLAA (later changed name to Sons and Daughters of Cyrene)

• Working People’s Labor Aid Association (splinter group formed by unhappy members of the Working People’s Labor Art Association)

• Grand United Order of Odd Fellows

• Court of Calanthe
BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

ERECTED
DEC. 11, 1902.
BENEVOLENT
SOCIETY
No. 11.
THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY IN TENNESSEE

• The Colored Benevolent Society was organized in Nashville in 1865.

• In 1868, the charter for the group was revised to allow the Benevolent Society to establish branches throughout the state.

• The purpose of the group was to provide “for the sick and afflicted, the support of widows and orphans, and doing charity to the needy.” (Articles of Incorporation, Benevolent Society of Cross Bridges)

• The group flourished throughout the state.

• Branches were located in Nashville, Fayetteville, Jackson, Brownsville, Port Royal, Memphis and elsewhere.
THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY IN TENNESSEE

http://www.zeemaps.com/view?group=935847&x=-87.756561&y=35.853582&z=10
BENEVOLENT CEMETERIES ACROSS THE STATE

I have surveyed cemeteries belonging to or started by the Benevolent Society in the following towns/cities:

- Goodlettsville (Davidson County)
- Shelbyville (Bedford County)
- Madison (Davidson County)
- Port Royal (Montgomery County)
- Antioch (Davidson County)
- Agnew (Giles County)
- Mt. Juliet (Wilson County)
- Murfreesboro (Rutherford County)
- Nashville (Davidson County)
MOUNT ARARAT CEMETERY
SHELBYVILLE, TN
BENEVOLENT ORDER #210 CEMETERY
PORT ROYAL, TN
BENEVOLENT CEMETERY
MT. JULIET, TN
MT. ARARAT CEMETERY
NASHVILLE, TN
BENEVOLENT SOCIETY IN MURFREESBORO

• Purchased the land for a cemetery on the Shelbyville Highway in 1897
• Trustees included Alexander Simmons, William Jordan, Samuel Curren, George Allen, Berry Seward, and Henry Moore.
• Mix of occupations – doctors, farm laborers, etc.
• Cemetery has World War I veterans and Spanish-American war veteran internments
• Over 650 internments
WHO WERE THE MEMBERS OF THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY?

• Mix of occupations – teachers, farmers, laborers, factory workers, cooks, laundresses, etc.

• Berry Seward was the first African American electrician in Murfreesboro.

• George C. Harden was a medical doctor and graduate of Meharry Medical College.

• Dr. John McClellan, a medical doctor. He graduated from Meharry in 1880 and worked his entire career in Murfreesboro.

• Dave Ransom was a railroad laborer and worked for the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Rail Road.
Photo from the *Constitution of the Working Peoples Labor and Art Society*. In addition to being a member of the Benevolent Society, Dr. Harden was a member of the Working People’s Labor Art Association (Sons and Daughters of Cyrene), serving as an officer.
DR. JOHN MCCLELLAN

- Dr. McClellan graduated from Meharry in 1880 and began his medical practice in Murfreesboro. He remained in Murfreesboro for his entire career.

- “He states that he is not miserably rich but happily poor.” *Murfreesboro Union*, October 13, 1928.

Photo from *Murfreesboro Union*
The Benevolent Society purchased a lot in town in November 1917.

Lot located on State Street and one of the adjoining property owners was the Sons and Daughters of Cyrene.

Owned lot until 1931.

Sold lot to Preston Scales and wife, Willie Scales.
THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING FOR ASSISTANCE

• MTSU Center for Historic Preservation
• Bradley Academy Museum
• John Lodl and the staff of the Rutherford County Archives
• Rutherford County Register of Deeds
• Historical Research Room, Linebaugh Library
• Walker Library, MTSU
• Tennessee State Library and Archives