

Unmarked Grave Last Resting Place Of School Benefactor

An unmarked grave in an unmarked cemetery in a cultivated field in Nelson County is the last resting place of a man who hoped money he made during his life-time would go towards the founding of a free public school in Nelson and two free public schools in Albemarle.

The man was Martin Dawson, (1772-1835), for whom Dawson's Row at the University of Virginia was named. An award established by Paul Goodloe McIntire and given annually to a Lane High School senior for special work in a social or cultural field, is named for Dawson.

Dawson's will provided that the residue of his estate, after certain other bequests were fulfilled, would be used to establish three free schools for pupils not able to pay teachers tuition fees, two in Albemarle and one in Nelson.

According to information compiled by Dr. J. W. R. Smith, of St. Clair Avenue, Dawson realized that the courts might rule this portion of his will null and void:

Alternative Plan

So he devised an alternative plan, which provided that the same sum, originally designated for the schools, should become part of the Literary Fund of the State of Virginia, with two-thirds of the interest from it to be used by the school commissioners of Albemarle in the same way the school fund allotted Albemarle was used. The other third was to be used in the same manner by Nelson County.

The Virginia Treasury Department is now holding securities valued at \$35,500 for the Dawson fund. The interest is remitted annually according to Dawson's stipulations.

Dawson left the University of Virginia a 540-acre tract, "The College Trace," described as located on Biscuit Run and lying within three miles of the University, which was to be the source of fuel for the University.

The University leased the property until 1858 and then, since returns had gradually diminished, obtained permission from the General Assembly to dispose of it. According to Dr. Smith's compilation of facts, S. W. Ficklin purchased the northern section and W. P. Farish the southern section of the land, which is between Moore's Creek and Biscuit Run.

The University received \$19,425.50 for the land and the following year used the money to build the six or seven dormitories, known as Dawson's Row. All but two of these buildings have been removed to make way for new buildings, Dr. Smith states.

Dawson was the youngest of John and Sarah Carrol Dawson's nine children. John and his wife resided for the first years of their marriage on a farm on Carrol Creek, a half-mile east of the present Shadwell Station. In 1760, they moved to a new home near Faber, in Nelson near the Albemarle line. Martin was born on this place, "Rock Spring," in 1772.

When Martin came of age, he left home and came to Milton, which then was the chief shipping point in Albemarle County. He became a commission merchant for shipments to Richmond and did an extensive business in real estate mortgages, accumulating a handsome fortune for that time.

When Scottsville became the major shipping center for the county, Dawson moved to a farm, "Belle Aire," on Hardware River below Carter's Bridge. He lived there un-

til his death in 1835. He was a county magistrate from 1808 until he died and was one of the first school commissioners in Albemarle County.

In addition to the provisions of his will which gave land to the University and left money for free public education, Dawson instructed his executors to emancipate his 60 slaves and settle them in some country where slavery was prohibited, provided this did not conflict with state laws. He left \$200 for each slave emancipated to provide necessities of life.

He left \$2,000 to each surviving brother and sister and the same amount to the heirs of those who died before him. He left "Belle Air" to a nephew for the support and maintenance of the slave population there.

Dawson also instructed his executors to purchase 10 acres of ground, including the family cemetery at "Rock Spring" where his parents and many of his relatives were buried and where he desired to be buried. He wanted this to be held forever and known as "John Dawson and Family Graveyard." He instructed that a durable stone wall be erected around the cemetery.

The land, Dr. Smith's record show, was never bought and no wall built. Dr. Smith said he visited the site in 1952 and found no evidence of the graves and not even a plain field stone marker. He said the location is in the corner of a cultivated field, behind a barn.

Dawson saw two great vacancies in his life. One was the fact that he never married. In his will, he states, "Making this strangely impresses my mind of the blessings and comforts of a family. I therefore strongly recommend my faults in this respect to be avoided, by others."

The second was a lack of extensive formal education. Dawson made up for this, Dr. Smith points out, by energy and good judgment, which allowed him to prosper in business. His consciousness of the need for education led him as a wealthy man to want to aid the younger generation to get what had been denied him.

The younger generations of Nelson and Albemarle are still benefiting by this wish.

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