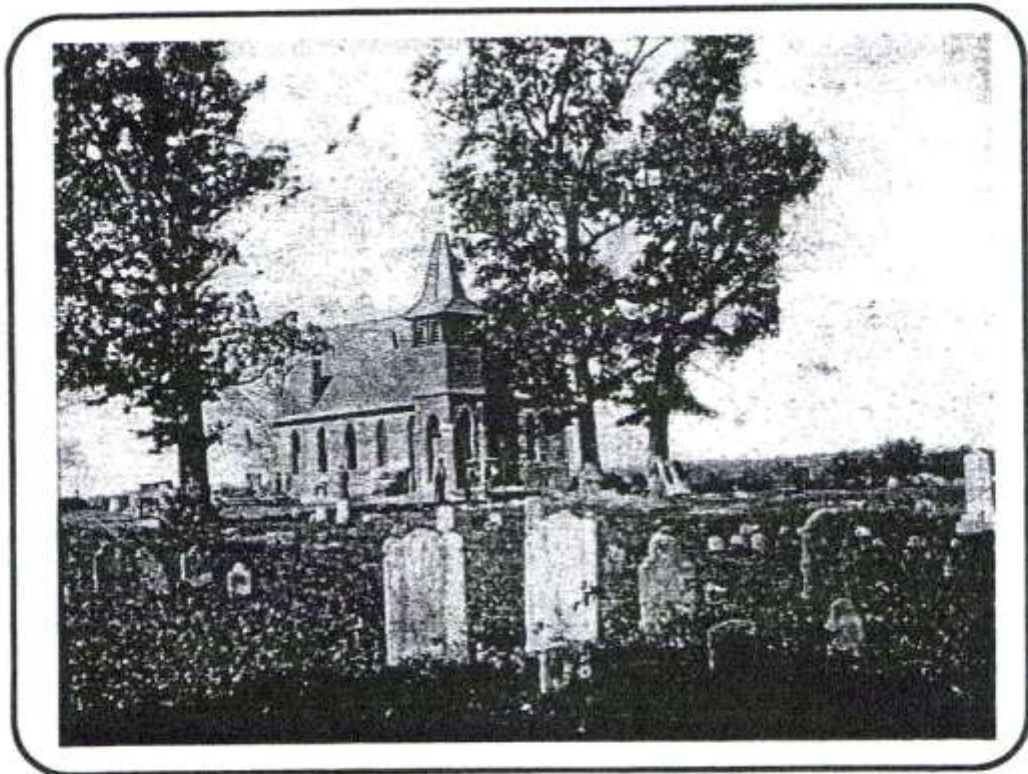


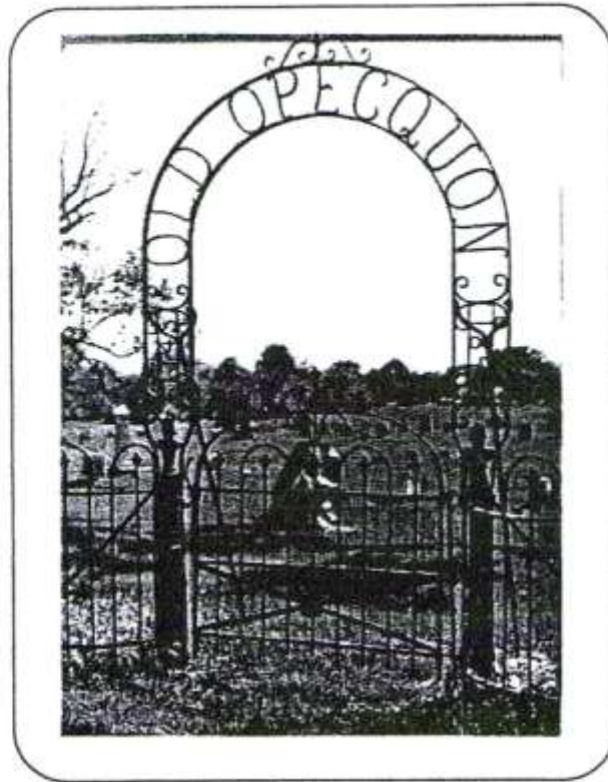
The
Old Burying Grounds
of
Opequon Presbyterian Church



1736-1938

A Historical Sketch
of the
Five Burying Grounds
of
Opequon Presbyterian Church

Winchester, Virginia



by

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The Old Burying Grounds of Opequon Presbyterian Church

Introduction

In the several burying grounds surrounding Opequon Presbyterian Church are the grave sites of some of the earliest settlers of the Shenandoah Valley. They had come from their native lands in Europe, and had high hopes of improving their lots in this new world. Many were also seeking religious freedom from the oppressive policies of the Roman Catholic church and the Church of England.

Braving the stormy Atlantic in their wooden sailing ships, they landed on these shores and proceeded to explore permanent settlement sites. After several years of uncertainty they gathered their horse drawn wagons in the York, Pennsylvania area, and in the year 1731 pioneered into this wilderness country inhabited only by Indians.

Far from their homelands of Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales, France, Germany and Holland, they put down their roots in this wild valley called the "Shennadore" and carved a civilization out of an untamed wilderness. Along with their primitive log cabins they built their house of worship and established the first Presbyterian congregation west of the Blue Ridge mountains. In the process they made provision for their burying grounds.

Among these early settler families were those of Glass, Vance, Wilson, Reid, Colville, Hamilton, McCauley, and Marquis from Ireland; Hoge, Allen, McMachon and White from Scotland; Griffith and Morgan from Wales; St. Julien and Dumas from France; Hite, Meem, and Beemer from Germany, and others from England and Holland. These were among the families who, in their desire to worship God as they chose, founded Opequon Meeting House in 1736. Many members of these families ended their life spans here, and found their final resting places in the burying grounds of old Opequon.

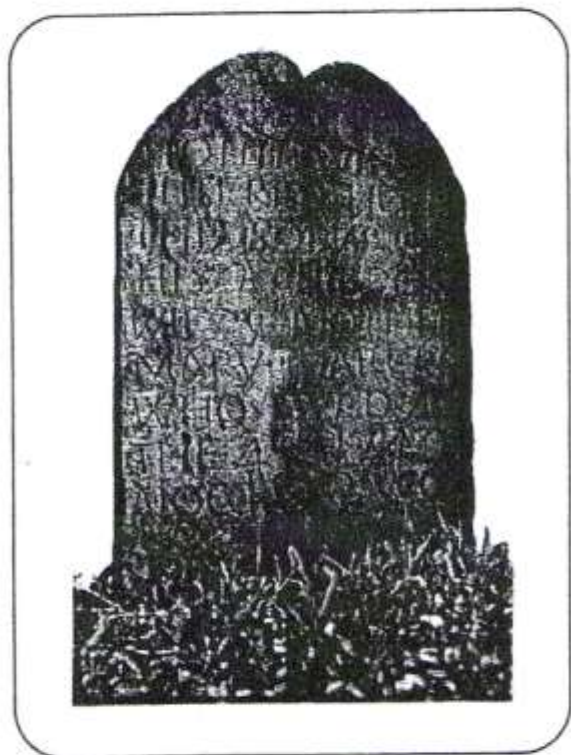
As the older generations gave way to the new, their ranks at Opequon were filled by later day immigrants, and by those born in this country. Among these were the families of Gilkeson, Davis, Chipley, Simrall, Ashby, Massie, Middleton, etc. Most of these families came on the scene during the last half of the seventeen hundreds, and in their time Opequon saw its greatest days.

Unfortunately, there are no church records for Opequon during its first hundred years of existence leaving a void regarding births, marriages, deaths, burials, etc. In attempting to establish developing patterns of the several burying grounds, other sources of information must be relied upon and certain educated assumptions made.

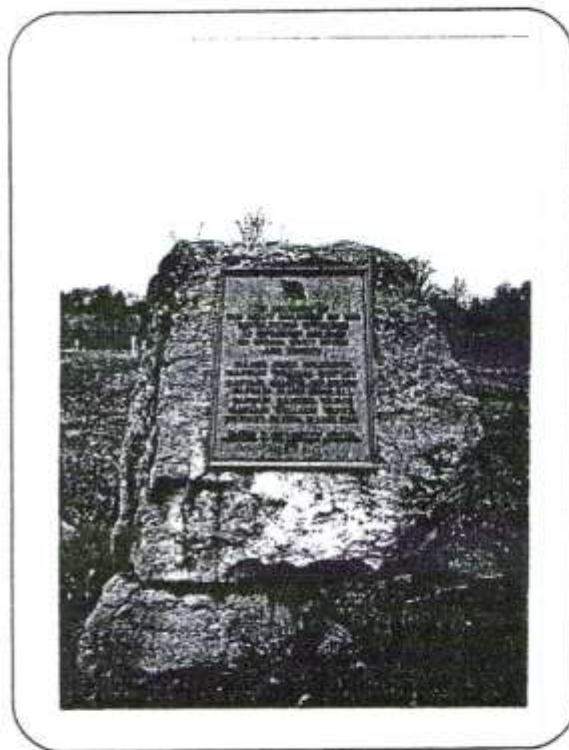
In the absence of bona fide documentation, one must assume that upon establishment of their house of worship these early settlers would adopt and continue the same burial customs which were prevalent in their native lands. Generally, this custom was that burial sites be as near to the church or house of worship as was practical and possible, and that these burying grounds be enclosed by stone walls. It will be noted that both of these customs were implemented at Opequon during its early years.

Assuming the above to be correct, it is very likely the earliest burials at Opequon were adjacent to the Meeting House. Generally, this would have been most of those burials occurring in the nine year period between 1736 and 1745 because in 1745 a new and separate burying ground was established. This new and separate burying ground will be further described.

There are five different burying grounds surrounding Opequon church. Each of them have been used at various times as burial sites for those who were members of Opequon, and at times for others who were citizens of the community. Each has its own story regarding time frame, dimensions, description. etc. It is appropriate that each be addressed separately, and all information known about them be detailed.



*Oldest marked grave site in the
Shenandoah Valley
(Wilson - 1742)*



*Monument honoring veterans of the American
Revolution who are buried at Opequon*

BURYING GROUND #1

1736 - 1799

(Adjacent to north wall of Sanctuary)

This burying ground is considered to be the oldest burial site at Opequon. It is not large in size, measuring about forty feet by forty five feet in area. It lies immediately adjacent to the north wall of the sanctuary, and extends forty five feet northward and forty feet westward. Most, if not all of the burials in this location occurred in the seventeen hundreds, but due to Civil War destruction and removal of grave site markers, most identities are lost. A few however are known and can be noted.

One of the oldest burials here is that of Rene St. Julien, a French Huguenot who was born in France in 1660 and who died and was buried here in 1740. His wife, Mary Bullock is buried beside him. He had joined the army of William of Orange in Holland, participated in the English revolution in 1688 which brought William and Mary to the throne of England, and fought in the battle of the Boyne River in Ireland in 1690. He came to this country in the early 1700's.

There are many members of the Hite family buried in this location. It is known that the Hite family had a strong attachment to Opequon meeting house, and that quite a few of them were buried here in the seventeen hundreds. Strong evidence exists that Joist Hite was buried here in 1761. His grave site is supposedly located ten to fifteen feet north of the sanctuary wall near the bell tower entrance. His second wife, Maria Magdalena was buried beside him in 1792. Additional information exists that in this burying ground "old Robert Allen", a friend and contemporary of Joist Hite, is buried beside him. Robert Allen, who was buried here in 1769 was one of the early settlers and founders of Opequon. Joist Hite always called him his "old friend".

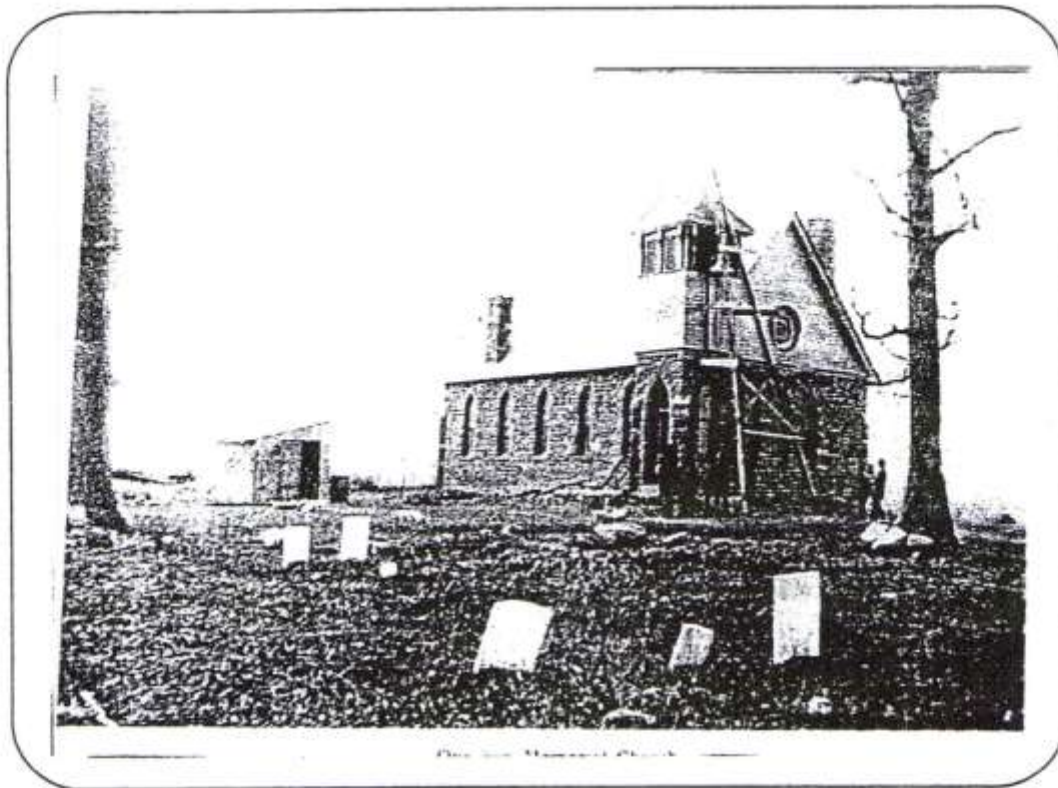


This recent photograph outlines the location of the oldest burial sites at Opequon. It is designated as Burying Ground #1.

Other burials in this location include Sarah Allen, wife of Robert, and their son John. John Allen fought in the Revolutionary war, and was buried here in 1794. Other burials include a "Middleton lady", William Reid and his wife Mary Allen Reid and some members of the Hamilton family. All of these burials occurred in the 1700's with the latest being that of Sarah Allen in 1799. Apparently this old burying ground became filled at about this time.

It is known that prior to the Civil War this burying ground was enclosed by stone walls, and that it contained many grave site markers. Foundation stones which supported these old stone walls can still be faintly seen. During the Civil war Union soldiers desecrated the church building and the burying grounds, tearing down the stone walls and removing the grave site markers and hauling them away for other uses.

Today, as we utilize this area for various purposes, most of us are unaware we are standing upon the grave sites of many of those who helped establish Opequon congregation in 1736. We scarce realize that most of those who rest beneath have rested there for more than two hundred years.



This photograph was taken in 1897 and shows the church bell being installed in the belfry. The two men on the right side of the picture holding a rope are standing on Burying Ground #1.