

St. Margaret's Church History & Archives Project At Whitehall Cemetery

by Mollie Ridout & Michael Winn

Members and friends of St. Margaret's Church History & Archives Project spent a recent summer afternoon (2015) visiting historic Whitehall Cemetery, hosted by long-time St. Margaret's member Orlando (Lanny) Ridout IV along with his daughter and neighbor Mollie Ridout. A picnic on Lanny's porch overlooking Whitehall Creek followed.



This land is part of the once 2,000 acre Whitehall (White Hall) Plantation owned by St. Margaret's Church from 1749-1764. White Hall manor pictured below as it appears today was constructed by Horatio Sharpe, sitting colonial governor, after he acquired the plantation from St. Margaret's Church.



The Whitehall Cemetery, or *family burying ground* sits atop a quiet bluff on Whitehall Creek. In the 18th and 19th centuries it would have overlooked the boat landing that was the point of arrival and departure for anyone traveling back and forth to Annapolis.

John Ridout [the first Ridout in Maryland, secretary to Governor Sharpe, reportedly treasurer of St. Margaret's Church, and broker of the transfer of the 2,000 acres from St. Margaret's Church to Governor Sharpe] began managing the Whitehall property in 1773 and assumed ownership in 1780.



His was the first known burial there, reported in the Maryland Gazette in 1797. His infant daughter Meliora, who died in 1781, may well be buried there too. Also certainly buried there are John Ridout's wife Mary, his younger son Horatio who inherited Whitehall, and Horatio's two wives, Rachel Goldsborough and Ann Weems.

These early graves were not marked. In the 18th century, families who owned land usually preferred to bury family members on private property as they often observed vandalism and neglect in churchyards. Earlier burial practices were understated and sober. As Horatio Ridout directed when he wrote his will in 1828, *My body I wish to be buried in the family burying ground at Whitehall...in a plain decent manner, without pomp or parade.*

The earliest marked graves date from the 1850s and 1860s and belong to the third generation of Ridouts associated with the property. A total of 61 headstones mark the passage of one generation after another through three centuries.



The most elaborate monument is that of the Rev. Samuel Ridout, MD and his wife Hester Ann Chase Ridout, in the center of the cemetery. He was the rector of St. Margaret's Church for 30 years [1844-1860 and 1870-1885]. He died in 1885. The couple owned both the Whitehall property and the Chase Lloyd House in Annapolis.

Izzy Winn at the monument of the Rev. Samuel Ridout, MD



Amelia Martin was a servant at Whitehall who died at the young age of 22 in about 1899 and is buried outside the cemetery fence. Amelia's marble stone is a reminder that many enslaved persons and servants lie buried outside the cemetery fence, but sharing the overlook of the boat landing. Their graves were marked with cedar or locust posts identified by boards painted white and inscribed with the individuals' names. These markers endured through the 1930s but the area was cleared by the property owners during World War II.

Ellie Thompson at the marker of Amelia Martin

Mary Colbert Martin, Amelia's mother, along with other members of the Colbert family, had been an enslaved person at Whitehall. After manumission she continued to work for the Ridouts for many years. The Colberts farmed on land that they bought from the Whitehall estate in the 1870s. They earned wages working for various members of the Ridout family for many years. The last of these farm workers retired in the 1980s and the Colberts still live on Colbert Road near Whitehall.



Another African American grave has a permanent marker. Timothy Harris was a freed enslaved person of 71. He asked on his death bed to be buried in *the family burying ground*. The request was granted; according to the Maryland Gazette, *old Uncle Tim was a favorite with the family, and the funeral was well attended by both colored and white people*.

***Timothy Harris Born March 31, 1842 Died March 1, 1905
With the upright man , thou shalt show thyself upright.***

Almost a century later Harris's great-great-great granddaughter, Bernadette Pulley-Pruitt, was inspired by Alex Haley's book *Roots* to research her family history. She traced one of her lines back to the family name Harris. As luck would have it, she worked for Orlando (Lanny) Ridout IV at the Maryland Historical Trust, and they made the connection that their ancestors' gravestones still stood side by side inside the cemetery fence.

Bernadette Pulley-Pruitt at the marker of Timothy Harris

When Whitehall was sold in 1896, Orlando Ridout, Jr. retained personal ownership of the half acre cemetery and the road that accessed it. His son, Orlando III inherited it. In 1983 the cemetery was incorporated into a non-profit organization. It is still managed and maintained by the seventh generation of the Ridout family.



Members & friends of St. Margaret's History & Archives Project, left to right Barbara Breeden, Bernadette Pulley-Pruitt, Sue Snyder, Michael Winn, Lanny Ridout, Dalyn Huntley, Ellie Thompson, Mollie Ridout, Jane Hague+, Judy Hall, Jean Clarke, Izzy Winn



Lanny Ridout with Bernadette Pulley-Pruitt at Whitehall Cemetery.

Ellie Thompson and Jane Hague+ look out over Whitehall Creek



Mollie Ridout describes to Judy Hall some of the historic treasures found in her father's home.

Jean Clarke and Dalyn Huntley check historical dates in Whitehall Cemetery.



Horatio Ridout died in the 1901 fire at the home of his brother parish registrar Zachariah Ridout, MD. The fire destroyed all St. Margaret's records except the historic parish register Horatio managed to save before perishing.

