

Tracing of Rev. Merry's death, funeral, burial, re-interment & monument

Daily American, Tuesday, July 15, 1884

Death Notice.

Sudden Death of the Pastor of the First Colored Baptist Church.

Died Monday, July 14, 1884. Funeral to take place at the church on Wednesday, July 16, 1884.

Daily American, Thursday, July 17, 1884

Funeral. The funeral took place at First Baptist Church on Spruce Street at 2 pm on July 16, 1884.

"... There were nearly two hundred vehicles, one hundred and forty of which were coaches, in the funeral train that followed the remains to the cemetery. As this long procession passed along the streets they were lined with thousands of colored people, many of whom had waited for hours to catch a glimpse of it. Not a few hundred of the people had come from the country early in the morning ... The horse drawing the buggy that the deceased had driven around this city for so many years, which is such a familiar sight to the citizens of Nashville, followed the hearse in the funeral procession. It was heavily upholstered with the drapery of woe, and instead of being driven was led..."

Nashville City Cemetery Lot Cards

Lot 2 Section 23 purchased by Nelson Merry on March 22, 1850.

Nashville City Cemetery Interment Books

Burial. July 15 (sic) 1884

Nelson G. Merry 61 Years Male Black

Apoplexy Central (avenue)

Note: City Cemetery Sexton incorrectly listed the burial date as the 15th. City Cemetery Interment Books listed twelve family or friends of Rev. Merry who were buried on the Merry Lot. Nelson G. Merry was the last family member to be buried on this lot.

Daily American, November 18, 1892

Nelson Merry Monument. Concert at Spruce Street Church to raise funds for the monument.

"At the conclusion of the programme... the Nelson Merry Monument Association will serve refreshments... The concert is for a charitable and worthy cause, an effort to place a monument over the grave of a most worthy man..."

Daily American, Monday, May 19, 1890

Rev. Nelson Merry

The Remains of the Well Known Colored Divine Reinterred

"The remains of Rev. Nelson Merry, colored, were removed from the old City Cemetery yesterday afternoon and reinterred at Mount Ararat. The ceremony was conducted by Elder Gilbert and the congregation of the Spruce Street Baptist Church, of which he was the founder and so long the pastor. In his time Nelson Merry was perhaps the best known man in his race in Tennessee. He came to Nashville many years before the war from Sumner County, having been set free by his master on his death bed and given money enough to buy a carriage, with which he made a livelihood. When a young man he was sexton of the First Baptist Church on Summer street, where he received his religious education. A few years before the war he began his crusade against sin among his people and developed a logical eloquence which brought him into prominence with white and black. He struggled for years before he built his church, and met with many obstacles. On one occasion his church secretary stole over \$1,000 of the church funds, but in spite of all drawbacks, he finally accomplished his object. With influential white men Nelson Merry found many friends and assistants. His funeral was perhaps the longest of any colored man ever seen in Nashville; when the hearse reached the graveyard the rear end of the procession had not left the church on Spruce street."

[Note: His funeral took place on July 16, 1884, 2 p.m. at the Spruce Street Church, located at 8th Avenue North near Charlotte Avenue. The church was torn down during construction of National Life & Accident Insurance building. Today (2016) site of the Snodgrass State Office Tower.]

Daily American, Sunday Morning, May 14, 1893

Nelson Merry Monument. Dedicated at Mt. Ararat with Ceremonies
Appropriate to the Occasion

"... The monument to the late Rev. Nelson Merry was unveiled at Mt. Ararat yesterday afternoon. The monument is the work of the Nelson Merry Monument Association and has been built at the cost of much time and patience, by the women having the matter in hand... In January 1890, twelve women, all members of the Spruce Street Baptist Church, met at the residence of Mrs. Mollie Strong at her request and organized themselves into an association known as the Nelson Merry Memorial Association. The object was to raise money to place a monument over the grave of Nelson Merry, who for thirty-eight years was pastor of their church.

During the three years of the existence of the association thirty-seven names were enrolled as members. Each member subscribed from \$1 to \$10. Of that number sixteen paid their subscriptions. One paid \$10, one \$7 and the rest from \$1 to \$5 each. During the second year all but eleven of the members dropped out. These carried the work through though they only worked four months in each year.

The monument cost \$800. The removal of the body from the cemetery to Mt. Ararat Cemetery, purchase of lots, printing and other expenses cost \$400.

The following are the brave eleven women who have so successfully brought the work to perfection: Mrs. Mollie Strong, President; Mrs. Nellie Seay, Vice President; Mrs. Hattie Tate, Treasurer; Mrs. Samuella Work; Mrs. Mary Bush; Mrs. Lizzie Gee; Mrs. James Trimble; Mrs. Anna Tappan; Mrs. Ella Hunter; Mrs. Emma Brownlow; Mrs. Lula Crosthwait; Miss J. Frankie Seay..."

For many years, in Rev. Nelson G. Merry's lot at City Cemetery were buried family members in unmarked graves. Nashville City Cemetery Association, the Metro Historical Commission, Spruce Street Baptist Church and Capitol Hill Baptist Church worked together to place a memorial marker on the graves of family members on the Merry lot.

Merry Family Memorial Marker was dedicated, in a service led by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, at Nashville City Cemetery on October 6, 2015.

Prepared by Fletch Coke
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