

# Where Have All The Rains Gone?

by Fletch Coke

During 2016, the restoration of a Davidson County cemetery opened the way for more investigation into the lives of some important early settlers.

Since November 1999, family graveyards have been surveyed throughout Davidson County. This project was initiated by twelve Nashville members of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in Tennessee. To date, 375 community volunteers have participated and 505 cemeteries have been surveyed and another 100 cemeteries have been identified as “Lost or Destroyed or Removed.”<sup>1</sup>

One of these family graveyards, the John Rains Cemetery on Nolensville Pike (near present-day Old Hickory Blvd.), was surveyed on April 6, 2002. The first burial, in 1830, was John Rains’ daughter Fannie and the last burial, in 1874, was his son James.<sup>2</sup> This cemetery was identified in a Davidson County Deed on April 13, 1888, and was designated a “Grave Yard” in the county property records on December 10, 1900.<sup>3</sup> Thus the burying ground has been protected from encroachment or relocation.

In 2016, Rains descendants asked for assistance to restore the cemetery. Dan Allen, archaeologist and stone conservator, working with Metro Historical Commission, completed the restoration work in October 2016. Side slabs for box tombs were recreated, fallen tombstones were reset, unmarked graves were found and two tombstones were discovered two feet underground.<sup>4</sup> One of these newly discovered tombstones was for John Rains who died September 26, 1855, at age 82 years, on whose property the cemetery was located. The tombstone for his wife Fannie was repaired. The two tombstones were placed side by side.<sup>5</sup> Then many questions were raised, including this genealogical one: how did this John Rains relate to Captain John Rains, one of the original pioneer settlers of the Cumberland in 1779?



**Rains Cemetery before and after restoration**  
(photos by Dan Allen)

<sup>1</sup> “About This Project,” *Davidson County Cemetery Survey Project* ([www.davidsoncocemeterysurvey.com](http://www.davidsoncocemeterysurvey.com))

<sup>2</sup> “Rains, John Cemetery,” *Davidson County Cemetery Survey Project*

<sup>3</sup> Davidson County, Tenn., *Deeds* [1888], p. 303-304. Sale of John Rains’ land by his grandchildren, registered April 13, 1888. (Metro Planning Commission Parcel ID # 16112000100).

<sup>4</sup> Before & after photos of restoration. By Dan Allen at John Rains Cemetery

<sup>5</sup> Restored tombstones for John & Fannie Rains.

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Captain John Rains, an Indian scout and fighter, figured prominently in Paul Clements' book *The Cumberland Settlements 1779-1796*. Captain Rains brought his wife Christiana, his children as well as 19 cows, 2 steers and 17 horses to the Bluffs in 1779. He built Rains Station, a fort to provide safety during Indian attacks, south of Nashville, on what is today called Rains Hill. A Metro Historical Marker for Captain Rains and Rains Station is located at the corner of Rains & Merritt avenues.<sup>6</sup> Near the early fort, Captain Rains built his home. Captain and Mrs. Rains had eleven children. Their third child John Rains, born in Virginia, married Fannie Ogilvie in Davidson County in 1800. He wrote "Narrative History of John Rains," for the *South-Western Monthly*, Volume II, published 1852, in which he described his father's fort "stockaded with the spring inside of it."

The family Bible, owned by Jonathan H. Rains, Captain Rains' son, is in the Tennessee Bible Records at the State Library & Archives. Among the entries: "Christiana Rains, my mother, Departed this life on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1826" and "John Rains, my father, on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1834."<sup>7</sup>

*National Banner & Nashville Daily Advertiser* reported on March 28, 1834:

"Died in the vicinity of this city on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup> instant, Captain John Rains, aged upwards of 80 years. Capt. R., was one of the pioneers of the West – one of the earliest emigrants to this part of Tennessee; and as a soldier and citizen, bore an honorable and conspicuous share of all the toils and privations incident to the early settlement of the country."<sup>8</sup>

Captain John Rains died without leaving a will. On March 19, 1835, the Davidson County Court ordered the partitioning of Captain Rains' 651 acres south of town. The partitions were made for his eight living children and the offspring of his three deceased children. The acreage extended from what-is-today Humphreys Street, along both sides of Nolensville Pike, going south, including the present Tennessee State Fair Grounds.<sup>9</sup> Sally Rains Merritt drew the first Lot of 43 acres which was located "near the dwelling house of the deceased." Elizabeth Rains Dunn drew the second Lot of 43 acres, adjacent to Sally Merritt's Lot. At the same time the Court partitioned a town lot belonging to the Rains estate, Lot No. 105, on the corner of High Street (now 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue North) & Broad, for his heirs. On July 11, 1835, the Court made a report on sales of Captain Rains' personal estate. Each of the eleven heirs received \$934, from the sales which included household furniture, tools, cattle and horses.<sup>10</sup>

Many writers have stated that Christina Rains and Captain John Rains were buried at City Cemetery. This would seem reasonable since City Cemetery, located just north of the Rains property, opened in 1822 and Christiana died in 1826 and Captain Rains in 1834. However, Captain John and Christiana Rains were never buried at City Cemetery. A photograph by Harriet Berry Jewell shows the Rains box tomb at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Inscriptions for Captain John and Christiana Rains were carved on the monument.

Research into the Mt. Olivet Cemetery Index to Interments 1891-1995, found that Capt. John Rains (died 1834) "Removed from Hamilton place together with the remains of wife Christiana" were reburied on Mrs. Frank Hagan's lot.<sup>11</sup> A request was made to Mt. Olivet Cemetery to check for an original lot Interment record. The record was provided (see illustration below) and stated as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> Captain John Rains Metro Historical Commission Historical Marker

<sup>7</sup> "Family Bible Records Project," *Tenn. State Library & Archives*, ([sos.tn.gov/tsla](http://sos.tn.gov/tsla)), J.H. Rains bible.

<sup>8</sup> Capt. John Rains obituary, *National Banner & Nashville Daily Advertiser*, March 28, 1834.

<sup>9</sup> Doug Drake, et al. *Founding of the Cumberland Settlements* (Gallatin, TN: Warioto Press, 2009), vol. 1, p.F8. John Rains land grant map, 640 acres, D1119.

<sup>10</sup> Davidson County, Tenn., *Deed Book X*, Capt. John Rains estate settlement, March 5, March 19, and July 11, 1835. Records located at Nashville Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Mt. Olivet Cemetery Records, *Index to Interments 1891-1895*. Tenn. State Library & Archives, microfilmed manuscript #576. Entry for Capt. John Rains.

[LOT INTERMENT.]

MT. OLIVET CEMETERY,  
THOS. CALLENDER, Treas.

Nashville, Tenn., *Apr 6 - 1893*

To Superintendent Mt. Olivet Cemetery:

Open a Grave for the interment of the  
remains of *Capt John Rains*

On *East part* Lot No. *26* Section *13*  
Owned by *Frank Hagan*  
Ordered by *W. R. Cornelius*

Services — o'clock — M. *10 Day*  
Size Box *4 ft.* feet *3* inches.  
Charges, \$ *6*  
Undertaker *W. R. Cornelius*  
Remarks *Remains taken up on the*  
*Hamilton Place.*

*Thos. Callender* Treas.

**Mt. Olivet Reinterment Record for  
Capt. John Rains from Hamilton Place**

James W. Hamilton died in 1890. His wife Mary Dunn Hamilton died two years later at her home on Rains Avenue near South Cherry Street (4<sup>th</sup> Avenue South).<sup>17</sup> They were buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery.<sup>18</sup> The Hamilton's two sons began planning for the sale of the Hamilton property. Their Rains cousin, Mrs. Christine Merritt Hagan, daughter of Gibson and Sally Rains Merritt, realizing that development was imminent, decided, in April

**Merritt-Hagan plot at Mt. Olivet Cemetery.  
John and Fannie Rains' relocated box tomb  
is in the foreground.  
(photo by Harriet Berry Jewel)**

*Mt. Olivet Cemetery Lot Interment Nashville, Tenn. April 6, 1893  
Open a Grave for the interment of the remains of Capt. John Rains  
East Part Lot No. 26 Section 13 Owned by Mrs. Frank Hagan  
Services today Charges \$6 Undertaker W.R. Cornelius  
Remains taken up on the Hamilton Place.  
Thos. Callender, Treas.*<sup>12</sup>

That discovery raised important questions: Where was Hamilton Place and who owned Hamilton Place? No local historian seemed to know. Taking another look at the names of Captain Rains' children who received portions of his land, there were definite clues.

- A year and half after Elizabeth Rains Dunn was named owner of Lot 2, she was killed, on November 11, 1837, in a carriage accident.<sup>13</sup>
- Elizabeth had a daughter named Mary Dunn. In the Dunn Cemetery (Dunn-Croft Cemetery today at "Grassmere"), two children of Mary and James W. Hamilton are buried.<sup>14</sup>
- Looking up the Davidson County Marriage records, it was learned that Mary Dunn married James W. Hamilton on August 8, 1838.<sup>15</sup>
- On the Nashville & Edgefield Map 1860 there are sketches for large houses and outbuildings on the Hamilton lot and the adjoining Merritt lot.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Original interment records located at Mt. Olivet Cemetery, 1101 Lebanon Pike, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Dunn obituary, *National Banner & Nashville Whig*, Nov. 13, 1837.

<sup>14</sup> "Dunn-Croft Cemetery Grassmere," *Davidson County Cemetery Survey*.

<sup>15</sup> Davidson County, Tenn. *Marriage Book 2*, James W. Hamilton to Mary Dunn, Aug. 8, 1838, p.10.

<sup>16</sup> "City of Nashville and Edgefield (1860)," *Tennessee Virtual Archive (TeVA)*, *Tenn. State Library & Archives* (sos.tn.gov), map collection, item # 35483.

<sup>17</sup> James W. Hamilton obituary, *Daily American* (Nashville), October 13, 1890. Also Mary Dunn Hamilton obituary, June 22, 1892.

<sup>18</sup> Mt. Olivet Cemetery Records, *Index to Interments 1891-1895*. Entry for James W. & Mary Hamilton, section 8, lot 22.



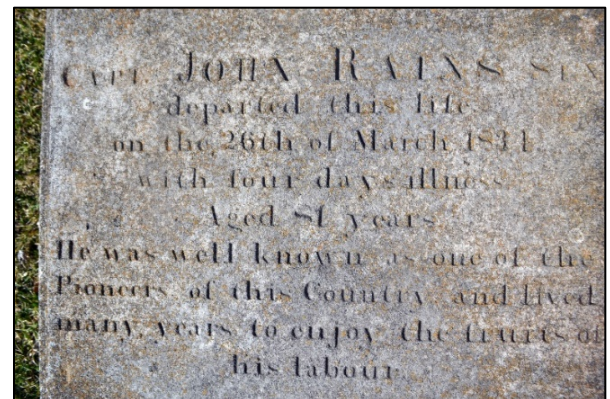
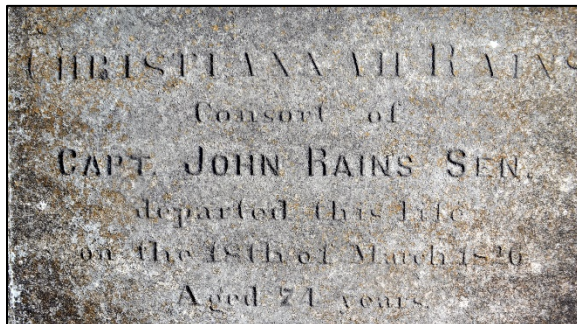
1893, to disinter and rebury her grandparents, Captain and Mrs. John Rains, in her lot at Mt. Olivet. Mrs. Hagan had purchased a lot at Mt. Olivet on August 26, 1890. Three days later she moved her parents from another lot in the cemetery to her lot.<sup>19</sup> The photographs above Gibson and Sally Rains Merritt, realizing that development was imminent, decided, in April 1893, to disinter and rebury her grandparents, Captain and Mrs. John Rains, in her lot at Mt. Olivet. Mrs. Hagan had purchased a lot at Mt. Olivet on August 26, 1890. Three days later she moved her parents from another lot in the cemetery to her lot.<sup>20</sup> The photographs above by Harriet Berry Jewell show the Hagan lot with Merritt & Hagan Markers and Rains box tomb.<sup>21</sup>



**This home was built about 1840 on the John Rains property, for his daughter Sally Rains Merritt. Beautifully preserved, it stands on Humphreys Street in Nashville today.  
(Metro Historical Commission)**

Hamilton Place was razed and many houses built in a new neighborhood. Today only a small building, possibly a kitchen or a smoke house, remains to remind onlookers of the once grand Hamilton Place. The Merritt-Hagan House on Humphreys Street, an Italianate brick mansion, with some logs from the original Rains cabin, was sold out of family hands in the 1920's. The house, beautifully restored by Patrick and Holly Murphy, won a Metro Historical Commission Preservation Award in 2008.<sup>22</sup>

During the past five years, there have been significant restorations of family cemeteries in Davidson County including Tucker-Hayes, Philips (Sylvan Hall), Hays-Rieves (Locust Hill), Morris Shane, Henry Compton and John Rains. Today the Metro Historical Commission Foundation accepts donations for cemetery restoration. Cemetery restoration projects often lead to the discovery of important family histories.

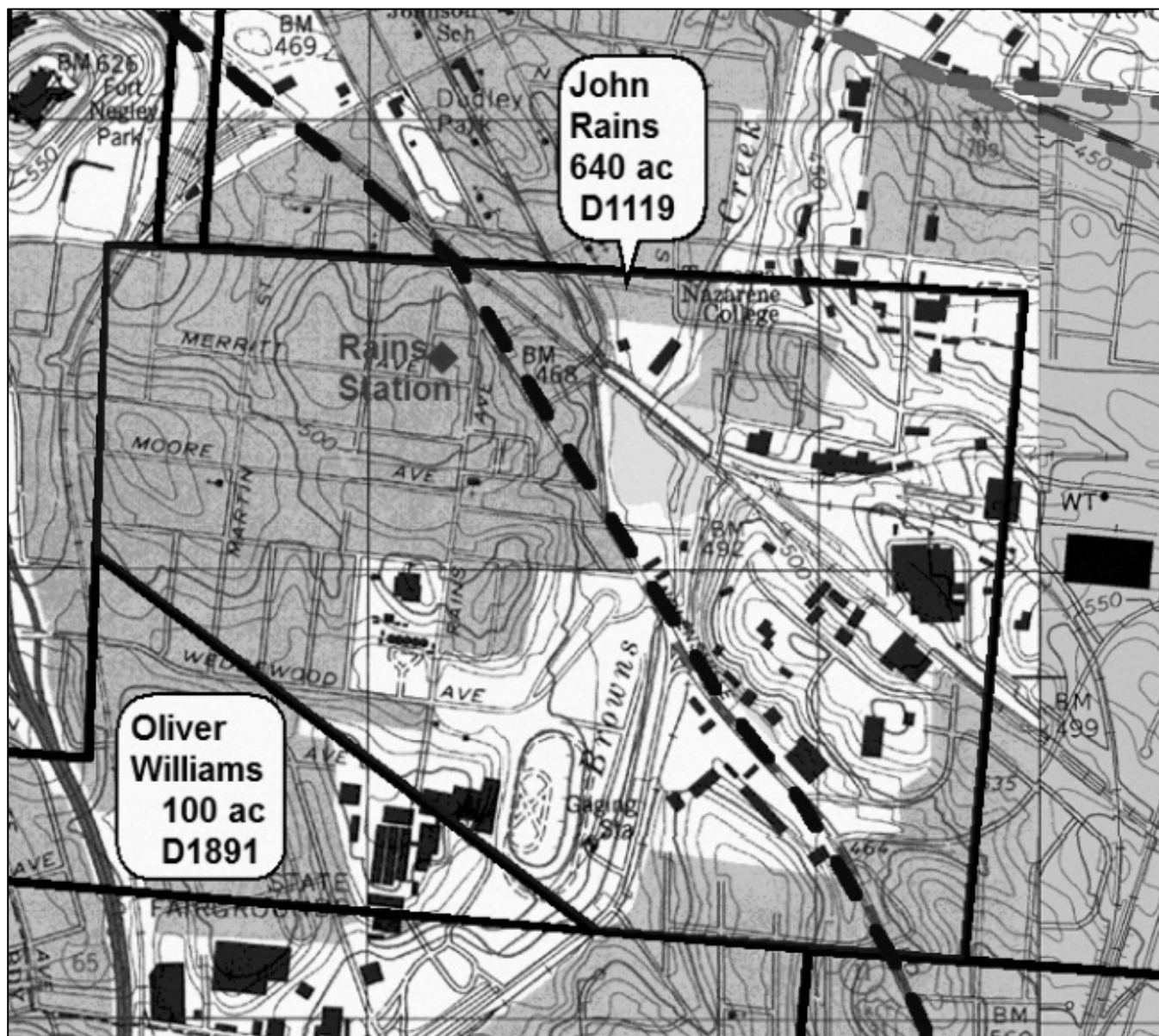


<sup>19</sup> Lot Owner Card File of Mount Olivet Cemetery, Nashville, 1851-1995. Tenn. State Library & Archives, microfilmed manuscript #1490. Hagan Lot Card, section 13, lot 26, bought August 26, 1890, includes burials with dates for Merritts, Rains and Hagans.

<sup>20</sup> Lot Owner Card File of Mount Olivet Cemetery, Nashville, 1851-1995. Tenn. State Library & Archives, microfilmed manuscript #1490. Hagan Lot Card, section 13, lot 26, bought August 26, 1890, includes burials with dates for Merritts, Rains and Hagans.

<sup>21</sup> Photograph Hagan lot at Mt. Olivet. Harriet Berry Jewell

<sup>22</sup> Ridley, Jim, "Merritt Mansion Survives," *Nashville Scene*, Oct. 23, 2014. ([www.nashvillescene.com](http://www.nashvillescene.com))



Map showing boundary of John Rains' land grant. Note location of Rains Station near top left, where today's Merritt Ave. meets Nolensville Pike (bold dashed line).

The Rains Cemetery was established at that spot, and the home called Hamilton Place later stood there.

*(Founding of the Cumberland Settlements)*