

# Samuel Barber Cemetery: Narrative History

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## 1.0 Introduction

The gravesite of Samuel Barber, unmarked and unknown for many years was found in 1994. A group of his descendants and local history buffs had been searching for it for up to five years based on information from old letters and from local descendants. The site has not been marked, nor substantially disturbed. The current property owner plans to develop the surrounding property as homesites, so it is important to have the cemetery located and designated while it is still easy to integrate it into the ultimate subdivision. The following narrative relates the history and significance of the cemetery. Additionally, since this cemetery has been so long abandoned and contains few of the usual surface artifacts, it documents the evidence showing that this actually is the burial place of Samuel Barber and possibly his kin.

## 2.0 Samuel Barber's History

Samuel Barber arrived in Louisiana from Virginia as a teenager and was a veteran of the Gutierrez-Magee Expedition of 1812, an attempt to aid the Mexicans in their war for independence from Spain<sup>1</sup>, and of the War of 1812, serving briefly during the Battle of New Orleans<sup>2</sup>. Samuel's service is commemorated by an historical marker placed in the Barber-Williams cemetery in Mont Belvieu by the Texas Society of the U. S. Daughters of 1812<sup>3</sup>. Samuel and his wife Elizabeth migrated to Texas with their seven children in 1829, driving a small herd of cattle and carrying their worldly possessions in a wagon. Like many other immigrants into Texas at that time, they had been small farmers and stock raisers in Louisiana and were pushing into Texas, then part of the Republic of Mexico, in search of cheap land.<sup>1</sup> The family paused for a few months just across the Sabine River in Texas where their eighth, and last, child, Elizabeth (Eliza), was born in February, 1830. It would be at Eliza's home that Samuel would die and be buried thirty-four years later.

Samuel and Elizabeth soon settled near Cove, in Liberty (now Chambers) County.<sup>4</sup> They never owned land but did raise small numbers of cattle.<sup>5</sup> The Texas Revolution found Samuel accused by some of being a Tory; more likely he was simply a non participant.<sup>6,7</sup> By the time of Texas statehood, or a year afterward, Samuel's children were grown and his youngest daughter was married to Theophilus Winfree, the son of a neighbor. Though Samuel received a certificate for a "league and labor" of land, his due as a citizen at the Revolution, he sold it for cash and never owned land of his own.<sup>8</sup>

By 1850, most of Samuel and Elizabeth's children had become substantial landowners. Their oldest son, Amos, was established atop a salt dome some eight miles away, later to be called Barber's Hill. Their second and third sons, John and Reuben, and their second daughter Melissa, were landowning ranchers in Gonzales County. Their first daughter Annie had married Charles Nathan Tilton, one of the largest landowners in the Liberty County area. Eliza's husband, Theophilus, had died when Eliza was only eighteen, leaving a daughter, Lucinda. Eliza soon married another neighbor, Augustus R. (Gus) Buck, and

they lived on 87 acres inherited as a result of the settlement of Theophilus' estate.<sup>4</sup> Joseph Addison was living alone in the Big Thicket. Only son Benjamin was still at home in Cove.<sup>9</sup>

Elizabeth died in March of 1863 and Samuel died in April of 1864. During the last dozen years of their lives they each lived with their children at different times, but seemingly not always together.<sup>10</sup> Both spent time in the western counties of Gonzales or Refugio, and in fact Elizabeth died and was buried in Refugio County.<sup>11</sup> But when they were back home in Liberty County, they always stayed with Eliza and Gus.<sup>10</sup>

In 1857 Eliza and Gus sold their 87 acre homesite near Cove and purchased 1107 acres from William P. Welch about eight miles north in the Charles C. P. Welch league. This property stretched about three miles from Old River toward Barber's Hill (see Figure 1) where Eliza's brother Amos was raising a family of twelve. They lived in a dog trot house, sheltering their own brood, which would eventually number ten, including Lucinda, with two dying in infancy. Around this time Elizabeth made a long visit with Eliza and Gus, then left for West Texas in 1859, not to be seen again as she died and was buried in Refugio in 1863.<sup>10, 12</sup> By 1860<sup>13</sup>, and probably in 1857<sup>4</sup>, Samuel was living with Eliza and Gus, and stayed continuously until his death on April 9, 1864. Lucinda tells of his final illness, death, and burial in a letter to a niece.<sup>10</sup> Samuel was buried there on the property. Though the exact location was not recorded, it was likely beside Buck children who died as infants and possibly beside Charles Welch and his wife Alcesta.

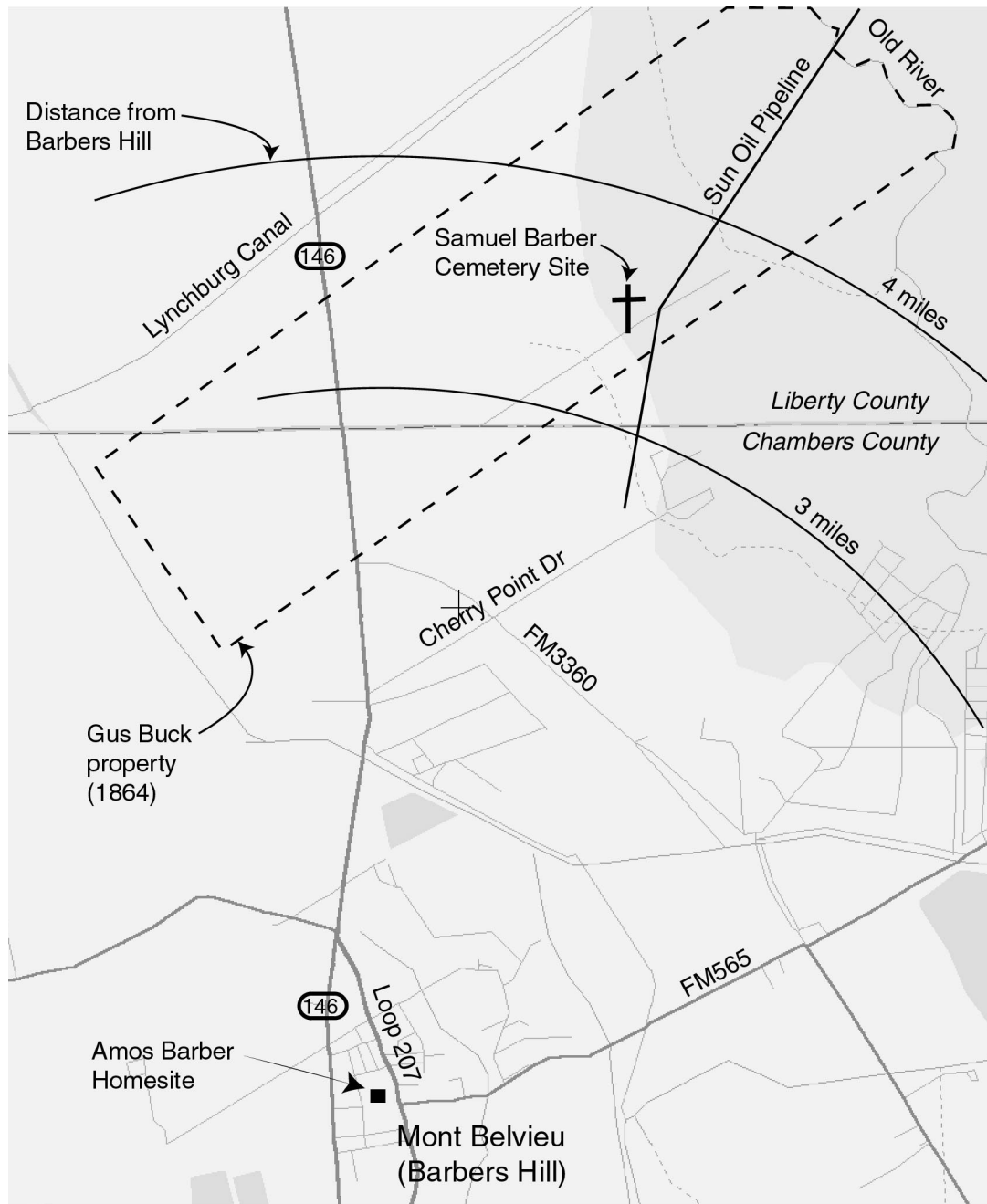
But just where on those 1107 acres was the Gus Buck place? Where was the house? Where was the cemetery? Nothing in any original records we have found give more than a general indication of the location of the house and cemetery. The house itself was cut in two and moved to Barber's Hill by Amos' stepson Frank Fitzgerald after Gus and Eliza moved to Refugio County and Frank acquired the property in 1891. Lucinda described Samuel's burial place as "on my mother's old home place on Old River about five miles north of Barber's Hill". This location must be taken as only approximate, as a five mile radius drawn from Barber's Hill passes beyond the furthest extreme of the Buck property, as shown in Figure 1. Also, Lucinda doesn't indicate whether Samuel was buried near the house, or just on the property. And it is not clear whether "on Old River" refers to the property, the remotest boundary of which does face on Old River, or is meant to suggest that the house itself or the burial site faced on Old River.

Pinpointing the exact site of the Samuel Barber Cemetery required use of twentieth century sources—witness accounts, aerial photographs, and metal detectors. The site is near, but not on Buck Gully, a short tributary of Old River. Furthermore, the house site has been located as well on Buck Gully about a mile above its confluence with Old River.

## 2.1 Modern Clues to the Grave Location

While Eliza and Gus left their home in 1869, a few years after Samuel's burial, it is not reasonable to believe that the cemetery was left unmaintained. His oldest son lived less than five miles away and his oldest daughter about six miles away. Undoubtedly the cemetery was maintained for at least one or two generations. However, by the mid twentieth century it was sadly deteriorated, its location known only to a few hunters who have passed by it on foot or horseback.

Figure 1 shows the layout of the old Gus Buck property today. The northeastern portion is heavily wooded for over a mile from the Old River boundary. The southwestern



**Figure 1. Samuel Barber was buried in 1864 on the property of his son in law Gus Buck.**

portion was prairie in the nineteenth century and is partly cultivated today. State highway 146 traverses the far southwest end of the property and the buried Sun Oil pipeline traverses the northeastern portion.

Three people saw the cemetery in the 1950's and 1960's. Their recollections allowed the location of the cemetery to be narrowed down to an area of roughly 500 feet by 300 feet. A ground search then confirmed the exact location.

## 2.2 Benny Lansford

The Lansford family is descended from Francis Marion “Frank” Fitzgerald, the stepson of Amos Barber, Samuel’s oldest son. Frank Fitzgerald acquired the Buck property in 1891 and moved the Buck house to Barber’s Hill, where he raised a family of thirteen children.<sup>15</sup> Some of this property, including the tract next south from the cemetery site are still in the hands of Frank’s descendants, including the Lansfords.

Buck Lansford, a grandchild of Frank’s, and his son Benny were also regular visitors to the woods around the old Gus Buck place. Benny has described a fishing trip with his father in 1962 (Benny was a teenager at the time) in which the Samuel Barber cemetery was sighted. They were returning on horseback from the Lynchberg Canal to their family property. Their route of travel was on the prairie but immediately at the treeline, as shown in Figure 2. Many property lines are fenced here, and at one fenceline a short detour through the woods was required to reach the break in the fence. Benny also recalled that there was a jog in the woods line here, which also made cutting across the woods the shortest way. It was in this short wooded detour that he and his father paused at the cemetery. His father said they were “Barber graves”. Benny describes the site as enclosed by a cypress picket fence, mostly fallen and deteriorated. Two wooden crosses, one fallen, the other upright were described.

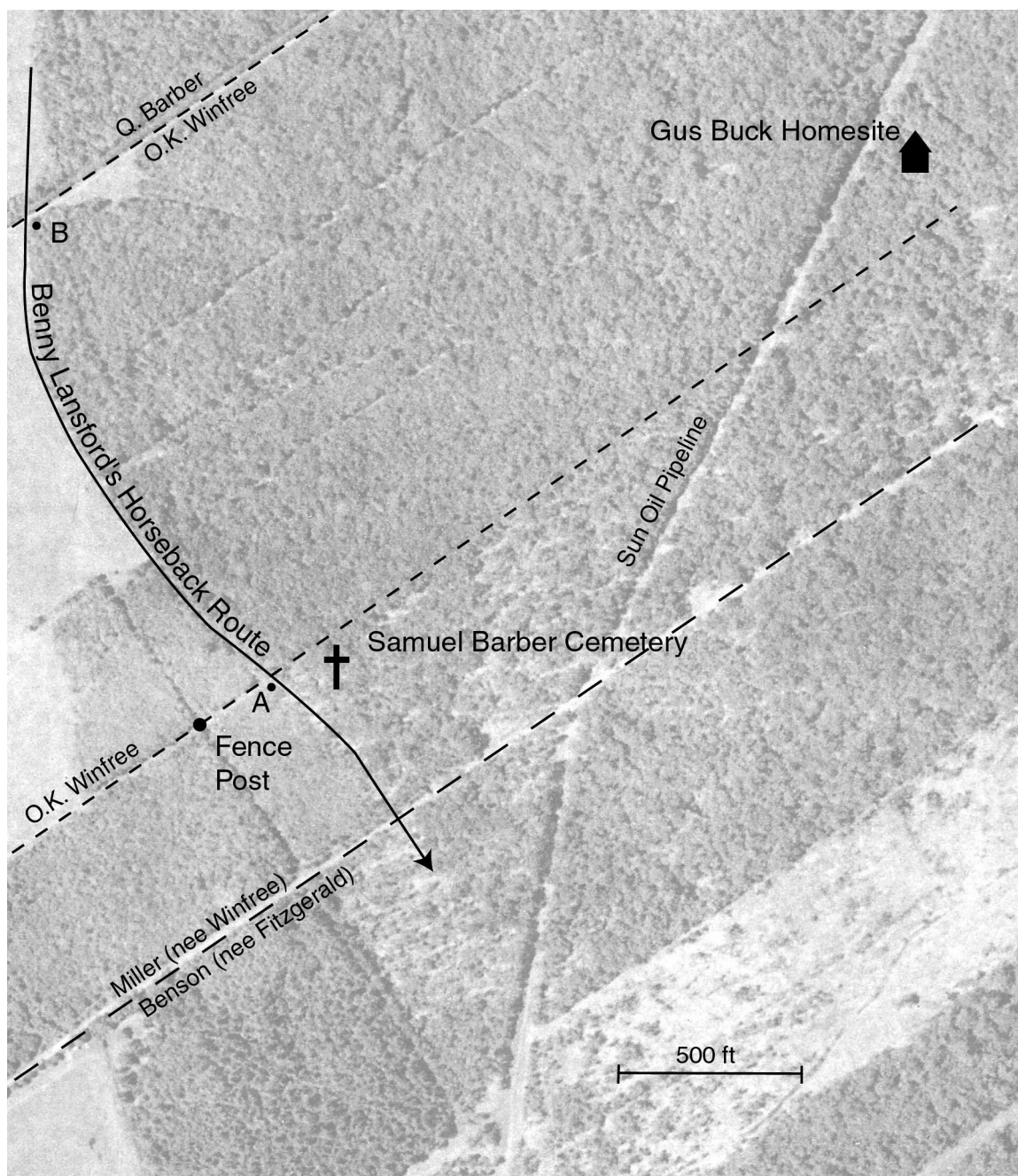
On October 17, 1993, I visited the area with Benny and others to search for the cemetery. Since fencelines and woodlines have changed in twenty five years, Benny was not able to accurately relate the current scene to what he remembered exactly. He felt certain that the correct fenceline was either that at “A” or at “B” in Figure 2. A cursory look through the nearby woods on that day produced no apparent cemetery.

The point shown as “Fence Post” in Figures 2 and 3 is at the “1 1/4 G.I.P.” point in the 1965 McCully survey as described in “Samuel Barber Cemetery: Location”.

## 2.3 Chris Tilton

Tiltons have lived or travelled in the Cove and Barbers Hill area since Charles Nathan Tilton arrived in the 1820’s with privateer Jean Lafitte and later married Samuel’s oldest daughter Annie.<sup>14</sup> Addison Tilton, Charles Nathan’s grandson was a lifelong resident of the Old River woods, his home being on the east bank of the river, about three miles from the Gus Buck property. He and his son Chris Tilton also spent their lives roaming the woods which included the old Gus Buck place.

On February 9, 1987, Harry Daves, of Old River-Winfree, interviewed Chris Tilton. Harry asked about the Samuel Barber grave location, and kept careful notes of the reply. Chris had visited the cemetery many times, most recently in 1962, and described the location as in the woods, but near enough to see the prairie. Further, it is on “Winfree land” (see Figure 2 for the extent of Winfree owned land in the 1960’s) and not far from the Winfree-Fitzgerald fence. The cemetery was “about a quarter mile from the Gus Buck house”, which, in turn, was about 50 yards from Buck Gully and a mile from Old River. The cemetery we have discovered is 0.4 miles from the homesite on Buck Gully, 430 feet from the Winfree-Fitzgerald fence, and 230 feet from the unforested prairie, as it was in 1960<sup>16</sup>. Today, new growth extends another couple of hundred feet into the prairie. The homesite is 0.9 miles from Old River. Chris described the cemetery site as having two remaining wooden grave markers and a mostly fallen down wooden picket fence with crepe myrtle trees scattered among the pines and hackberry. Today, none of these are



**Figure 2. Benny Lansford passed the cemetery in 1962 when returning from Lynchberg Canal.** present except the pines and hackberry, but there is evidence of fire in the past, which would have destroyed the smallest trees as well as the fence and markers. Other evidence at the site will be described below.

## 2.4 James Tilton

In March, 1994, Chris Tilton's son, James, described visiting the cemetery in 1954 at age six with his father. They were hunting pigs together on horseback and, having wounded a pig, dismounted and followed it into the woods at the point indicated in Figure 3. They pursued it some distance through woods and dense brush until they came upon the

cemetery. Chris told James that one was Samuel Barber's grave. James has no idea how far they travelled through the woods but, since they crossed no fence nor left the woods, it's clear the cemetery site must be between the Winfree-Fitzgerald Fence and the fence at the property line between Juanita Miller (nee Winfree) and her nephew O.K. Winfree, Figure 3.

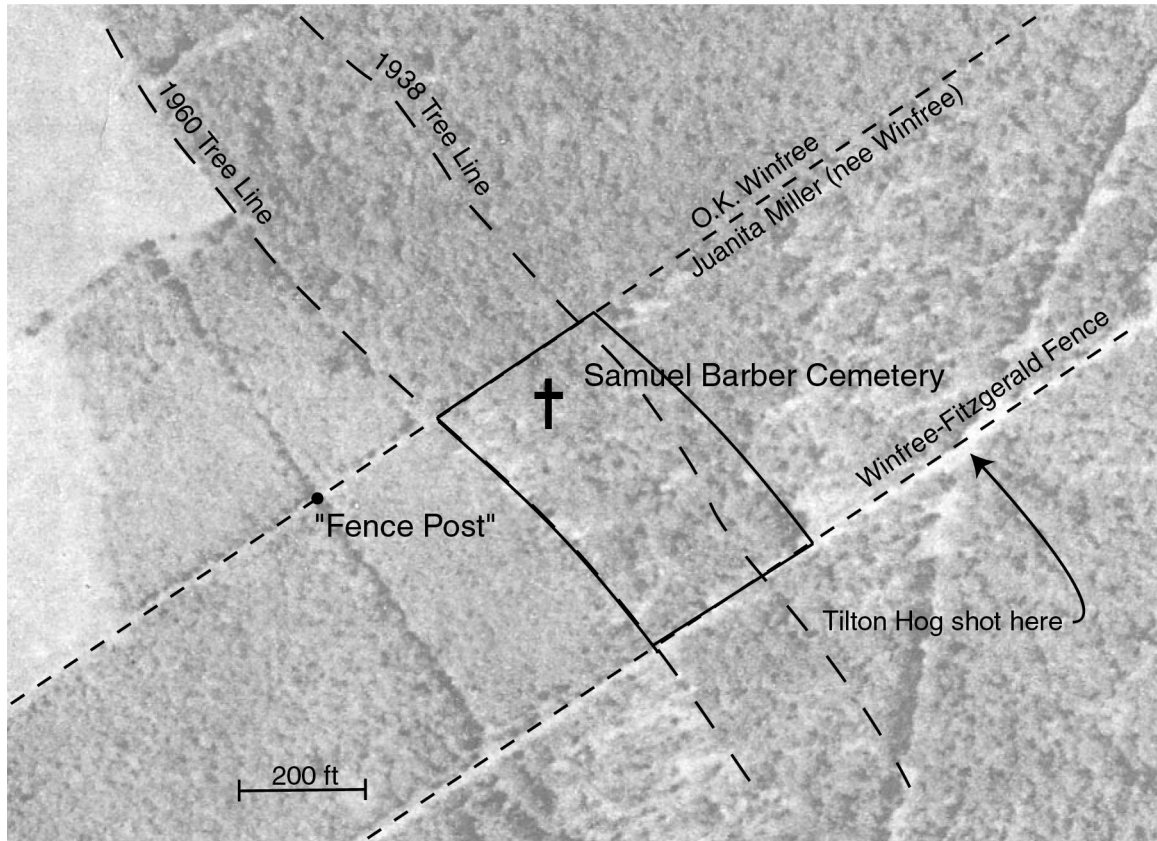


Figure 3. Sightings of the cemetery place it within the solid rectangle shown here.

## 2.5 The Target Zone

Both James Tilton's wounded pig and Chris Tilton's "not far from the Winfree-Fitzgerald fence suggest that Benny Lansford's point "A" must be the correct one, and "B", Figure 2, the incorrect one. The tree line in 1960 is easily determined from an aerial photograph of the time.<sup>16</sup> It's marked in Figure 3 along with the 1938 tree line<sup>17</sup>. Chris Tilton said he could see the prairie from the cemetery. Visibility through the woods was no more than one hundred feet in 1994 but the woods were more sparse in 1960, so this distance might be as much as a hundred yards. Thus the rectangle formed by 1) the tree line, 2) one hundred yards from the tree line, 3) the Winfree-Fitzgerald fence and, 4) the Juanita Miller-O.K. Winfree fence encloses all possible locations of the Samuel Barber Cemetery. This area is shown enclosed by solid lines in Figure 3.

### 3.0 The Search and the Results

All the surrounding woods were thoroughly searched. It soon became apparent that the picket fence and crosses were gone. There is evidence in the area of both logging and fire in recent decades. The fires here typically take out small wood and leave larger trees and would certainly have removed the fence and crosses. No crepe myrtle groves have been found in the area, only a single specimen well to the north of both of Benny's sites.

However, throughout the area round or irregularly shaped mounds abound and appear to be of natural origin; they typically consist of sandy soil. One particular mound was different and caught our eye. Rather than round or irregular it is symmetrical and oval with the long axis of the oval oriented approximately east to west (the eastern end is oriented  $12^\circ$  south of true east). It does not appear natural. It consists of gray clay, while the surrounding soil is black gumbo. It is about 12 by 24 feet at its furthest extent and 2 feet high and located at the position of the cross in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Convincing evidence that we had found the cemetery emerged when we returned with a metal detector. That search revealed that the site had once been encircled completely by a field wire fence. Figure 4 shows where individual pieces of field wire were found buried

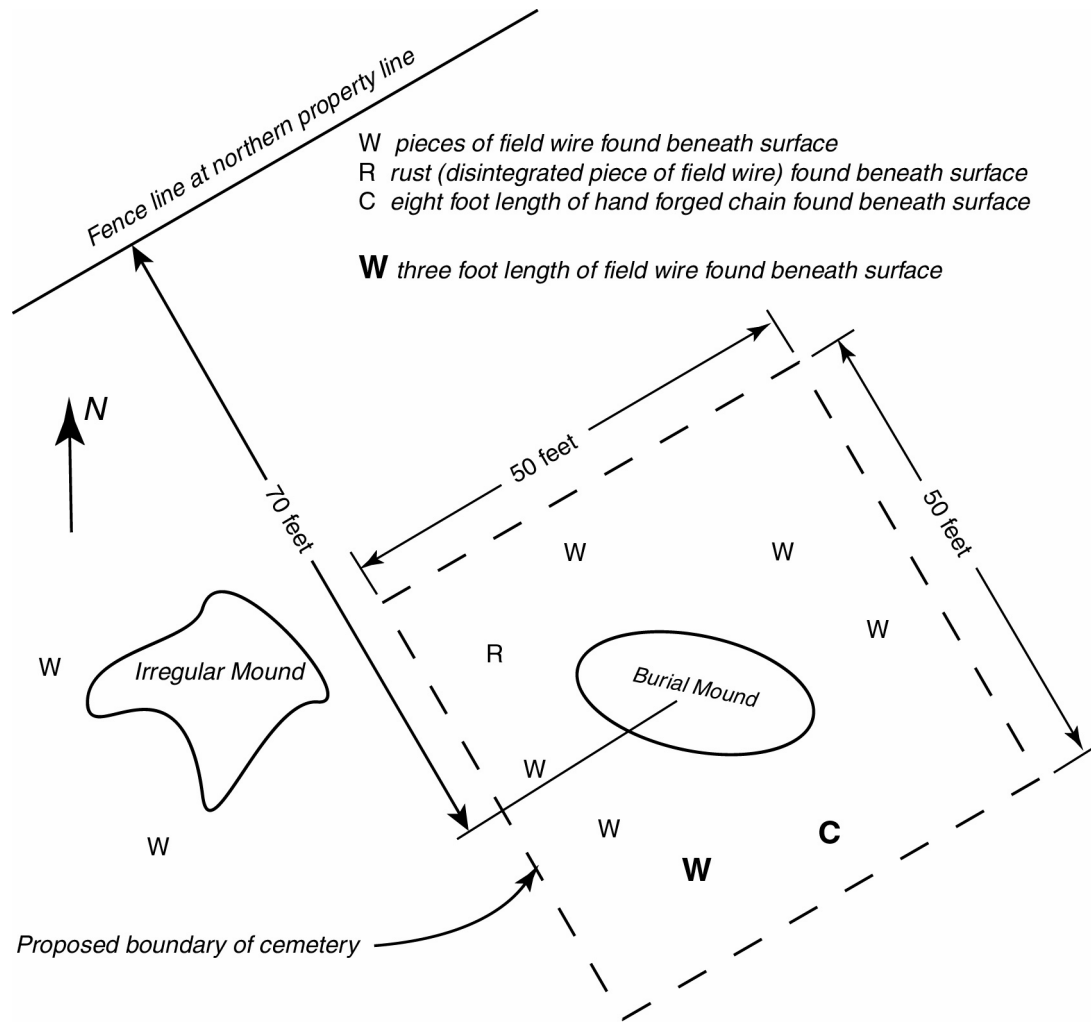


Figure 4. Layout of Samuel Barber cemetery site, showing location of mounds and artifacts.

at least 1 inch below the soil surface, which in turn was below an inch or more of loose leaves. In addition, an eight foot length of chain was found buried at the position indicated in Figure 4. This chain was identified by two Liberty antique dealers as hand forged in the mid-nineteenth century. It is evident that the field wire was used in addition to, or perhaps part of, the wooden picket fence. A simple picket fence would not have been sufficient to keep hogs out of an enclosed area. The chain, which appears like a trace chain, could have been used by a mule team during construction or improvement of the site, or it could have been used to close a gate in the surrounding fence. The mound shown in Figure 4 is easily large enough to contain two persons, and there is sufficient space within the field wire confines to hold more graves. This could include the Buck's two children as well as Charles and Alcesta Welch.

## 4.0 Acknowledgements

Harry Daves, of the Liberty County Historical Commission, was the first of us to take an interest in Samuel Barber's burial site by interviewing Chris Tilton in 1987. His interest continued with participation in virtually every group field trip since, plus some on his own. We don't go to the woods without Mike Pomykal. His inertial navigation never fails even when every tree looks like the next one and no one else knows which way is north. Neale Rabensburg, another Samuel Barber descendant, has also spent many mosquito-bitten hours in the woods in search of grave-clues, and Neale is the expert when it comes to Samuel Barber's history. Benny Lansford was enthusiastic enough to take to the field to try to recall the exact location of his thirty year old sighting of the graves. Both James and the late Chris Tilton spent time explaining all they knew about the cemetery location. Jean Epperson also cheerfully tromped the woods with us and offered advice. The archives of the Sam Houston Regional Library contain a treasure of original source material on this part of Texas, but it's their able staff that makes it valuable and accessible. Kevin Ladd, his excellent book on Chambers County History, and the files of the Wallisville Heritage Park, where he serves as Director, have all been immensely helpful. Finally, two ladies encouraged our search from the beginning: Barbara Benson, who grew up in the house Samuel died in, and Villamae Williams, who also opened her amazing library of Texana to us. Both, along with Barbara's daughter, Temple, shared their knowledge with us and freely criticized our work. For that we're grateful.

## 5.0 Notes

1. Margaret S. Henson and Kevin Ladd, *Chambers County, A Pictorial History*, Donning, Norfolk, Virginia, 1988; chapter 2.
2. Mary Smith Fay, *War of 1912 Veterans in Texas*, Polyanthos, New Orleans, 1979; page 21.
3. Betsy Webber, 'Hill' Historical Markers to be Dedicated Saturday, *The Baytown Sun*, June 24, 1976, page 4A.
4. A. Neale Rabensburg, *The Augustus Richard Buck Family of Texas*, unpublished manuscript, Wallisville Heritage Park Collection, Wallisville, Texas.
5. Gifford White, editor, *The 1840 Census of the Republic of Texas*, Pemberton Press, Austin, 1966.
6. Kent Gardien, *Kokernot and His Tory*, *Texana*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, 1970.
7. Henson, chapter 4.



8. Headright certificate 266, Liberty Co; Texas Land Office, Austin.
9. 1850 U.S. Census.
10. Letter from Lucinda Winfree Dunman to Lucille Tait, 1933; Flavia Fleischman, *Old River Country, A History of West Chambers County*, Ft Worth, 1976; reprinted by Wallisville Heritage Park, Gateway Press, Baltimore, 1999.
11. Villamae Williams, *Elizabeth Barrow Barber*, Gonzales Chapter DRT, 1986; dedication of DRT marker at Oakwood Cemetery, Refugio, Texas.
12. Besides her sesquicentennial marker at Oakwood Cemetery, Elizabeth as well as both her son-in-law Gus Buck and her daughter-in-law Nancy Robinson Barber have replicas of their original stones there. All were dedicated by the DRT and UDC on June 13, 1999.
13. 1860 U.S. Census.
14. Henson, chapter 13.
15. Henson, chapter 16.
16. Aerial photograph taken December 16, 1960; US Geological Survey, EROS Data Center, Sioux Falls, SD 57198, Project number "VACW", roll 1, Frame 145.
17. Aerial photograph taken December 26, 1938; image BRB-18R-59; National Archives, Cartographic and Architectural Branch, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740.