

Chatham County Historical Association, Inc.

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www.chathamhistory.org

30 January 2008

Mr. Rusty Ammons
Parker Springs, LLC
318 W. Millbrook Rd, Suite 101
Raleigh, NC 27609

Dear Mr. Ammons:

Thank you so much for meeting us yesterday at the Parker Springs subdivision site to let us see and hear more about your plans for the historical area there. We are very pleased that you have chosen to set aside the historical area. We appreciate your recognition and respect for the historical significance of the old homestead on your property, and your willingness to entertain our suggestions for preserving this part of Chatham County's history.

One of our primary suggestions would be that you have the now-damaged and uprooted grave markers in the Ellington/Knight cemetery professionally repaired and reset. We are well aware that the focus on this site is primarily one of preservation, rather than restoration. However, we feel that repair and resetting would both reduce their exposure to weathering elements, and also make the cemetery look more tidy and deserving of care. We have had experience with one or two persons who offer this kind of service, and suspect that John Clauser might be able to recommend others. Gravestone preservation groups stress the need for professional attention to these activities.

We enthusiastically support your offer to erect an attractive fence around the perimeter of the historical area, as this should reduce foot traffic and bicycle traffic in the fragile area. We hope that you will erect signs to provide some of the historical information you discover about the site. If it would be helpful, we will be happy to work with you to suggest sign content when more information becomes available. We believe that, in combination with other information about the area, such signs may increase neighborhood pride in the area and thus help ensure its preservation.

We have given some thought to the various options for maintenance of the area, trying to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each. As we mentioned yesterday, cemeteries are often grassed, as a way to control erosion, but we think a more natural, wooded state would be appropriate for the cemetery and the rest of the historical area on your property. The more natural state will require less mowing and other maintenance that could threaten the historical artifacts that are present on your site. So, we would like to see the area maintained in a relatively natural, wooded state, with minimal tree and brush removal and no grass. If you (or later, the homeowners association) desire to tidy the area by removing excessive deadfall and/or invasive species such as the *Elaeagnus* that is prevalent there, and the *Microstegium* (Japanese stilt grass) that is likely to invade the area once you begin to disturb the soil on nearby properties, care should be taken not to disturb the historical features. For example, stones on the property should not be moved, because their placement is part of the archaeological evidence that might still provide clues about how the homesteaders lived on that property. If herbicides are used to control unwanted growth, they should be very carefully administered, to avoid accidental extermination of desirable species and also to avoid potential corrosive effects on the grave markers and artifacts. You may discover daffodils or other plantings within the historical area that have survived since the last century, and we would urge you to preserve these as well. Our only wishes regarding the access to the historical area are that it be clear and inviting.

At the risk of appearing to take advantage of your generous offer to allow us to help guide your decisions about these issues, we would like to make two additional suggestions.

First, we encourage you to consider hiring an archaeologist (or perhaps a graduate student archaeologist) to undertake a limited study of your site to (1) more accurately delineate the burial area and (2) provide some interpretation of the structural remains on your site. Among the outputs of such a study should be a diagram of the area and a detailed diagram of the cemetery, as well as photographs of the area and grave markers. Before and after clean-up photographs would be nice documentation to have. Archaeologists often find graves (through probing and other techniques) that are not visible on the surface, and such experts also might be able to say, for example, whether there were two structures or one, make some guesses about the uses or age of the structures, describe how the chimneys were built (stacked stone bottoms with mud and stick tops?), etc.

The information provided by such a study, we think, could profitably be used in a booklet of some sort—possibly serving as marketing material for you and, from our point of view, serving as a way to get the folks who move into Parker Springs to learn something about their part of Chatham County. It could include information on deeds, wills, and anything else you discover, along with other interesting facts and speculations about the area. For example, noting that the big double sweet gum tree that is in the midst of the gravestones in the cemetery is about 80 years old (or whatever expert opinion on that might be), some 60 years younger than the earliest known burial there, or that the periwinkle (myrtle) groundcover in the historical area most likely has spread from plants placed in the graveyard back in the late 1800s. We think that kind of information is engaging and helps people come to know and love Chatham County. In other words, the site-specific information can be supplemented with more generic historical information—such as what kinds of plants grew in Chatham County gardens at the time those structures were standing, how chimneys or wells were constructed, information about the nearby Old Raleigh Road, what churches or stores were nearby, etc.

Finally, we hope you might give some consideration to the idea of putting a rudimentary, low dry-stacked stone wall (or some other low-key, historically appropriate fence or barrier) around the cemetery area itself. This would further set off the cemetery area, and we hope, suggest that it be used even more gently than the rest of the historical area. (Again, if stones are to be used for this purpose, they should not be taken from the historical area.)

We commend you for your interest in the historical part of your property and for your willingness to help preserve it and make it accessible to the future inhabitants of Parker Springs subdivision. We hope you find our suggestions reasonable and workable, and that you will call on us to help in whatever ways we are able.

Sincerely,

Jane Pyle, Jim and Beverly Wiggins
Chatham County Historical Association

Cc: Lynn Richardson

Some references of possible interest:

A Graveyard Preservation Primer, by Lynette Strangstad

<http://www.gravestonestudies.org/preservation.htm>

<http://www.ncwildflower.org/invasives/invasives.htm>