

# The Kenne

## *A Look Into the Past*

BY ANDREW J. BRAMLETT

About one block south from the heart of downtown Kennesaw is one of the most historic places in our community. It is not a building, nor is it a park. It has changed significantly over time, while remaining fundamentally the same. The Kennesaw City Cemetery has been a unique place here for more than a century.

The oldest known burial in the cemetery was in 1863, but the story of the land the cemetery occupies is much older. Before white settlers arrived, this area most recently had been inhabited by the Cherokee. Georgia began the process of taking their land and forcefully removing them in 1832, which was when their land in northwest Georgia became known as Cherokee County. The land then was surveyed and given away in a lottery. The property where the cemetery first started was won by the orphans of Preston Bailey, but, for reasons unknown, they chose not to accept the land.

In the 1840s and '50s, construction began on the Western and Atlantic Railroad, which would prove to be northwest Georgia's most important railroad. A small community was formed along the railroad as a water stop, called Big Shanty. During the Civil War, Big Shanty was the site of Camp McDonald, the largest training camp for soldiers in Georgia. Before it closed in 1863, the Great Locomotive Chase started on the tracks next to the camp. At least one witness of the chase, James A. Skelton, later was buried in the Kennesaw City Cemetery.

In October 1863, several months after Camp McDonald closed, 1-year-old Lucius Summers was buried on land that had been part of the camp. Lucius is the first known internment in the cemetery. At least four other people were laid to rest nearby before the decade ended. By 1880, the cemetery had 10 graves, and that number quadrupled by 1890. This era coincides with an important part of our community's history, the incorporation of the city. On Sept. 21, 1887, the town of Kennesaw was incorporated, and only later did it become a city. The name Kennesaw was chosen, instead of Big Shanty, to honor the famous mountain nearby.

Despite burials dating back to 1863, it was not until 1900 that the cemetery was sold to the town of Kennesaw. Jane E. Shumway donated one acre of land



*The Kennesaw City Cemetery has been a fixture in the community for more than a century.*



*Former Kennesaw Mayor Luther Chalker.*



# Kennesaw City Cemetery



to the town for use as a cemetery. In December of that year, Angie Carrie loaned the city \$100 at 8% interest to purchase an additional 3.5 acres from Shumway. Starting in January 1901, the cemetery was divided into lots. R.S. Eidson

was made first sexton (person charged to maintain the graveyard), and was given a 10% commission on all sales. The price for a plot was set at \$6 in May 1901.

In the decades that followed, some of Kennesaw's most prominent citizens were laid to rest in the cemetery. Several of the city's mayors are buried there, and many of the city's businessmen, railroad workers, preachers and farmers were laid to rest in the cemetery, including J. G. Lewis, businessman and mayor, who built a three-story building downtown. Dr. John W. Ellis, who was Kennesaw's only physician at one time; the Rev. William E. McCollum, who was so respected that around 1,000 people attended his funeral; and Charles Lawton "Hoss" Bozeman, who worked on the railroad for his entire career, also are buried there. Many other residents who helped make Kennesaw a thriving community are buried in the cemetery.

Beginning in the 1930s, Mayor Luther Chalker began using property next to the cemetery for burials. When he passed away in 1982, the land was acquired by the city of Kennesaw. This brought the cemetery's total size to 8 acres. One of the cemetery's sections later was

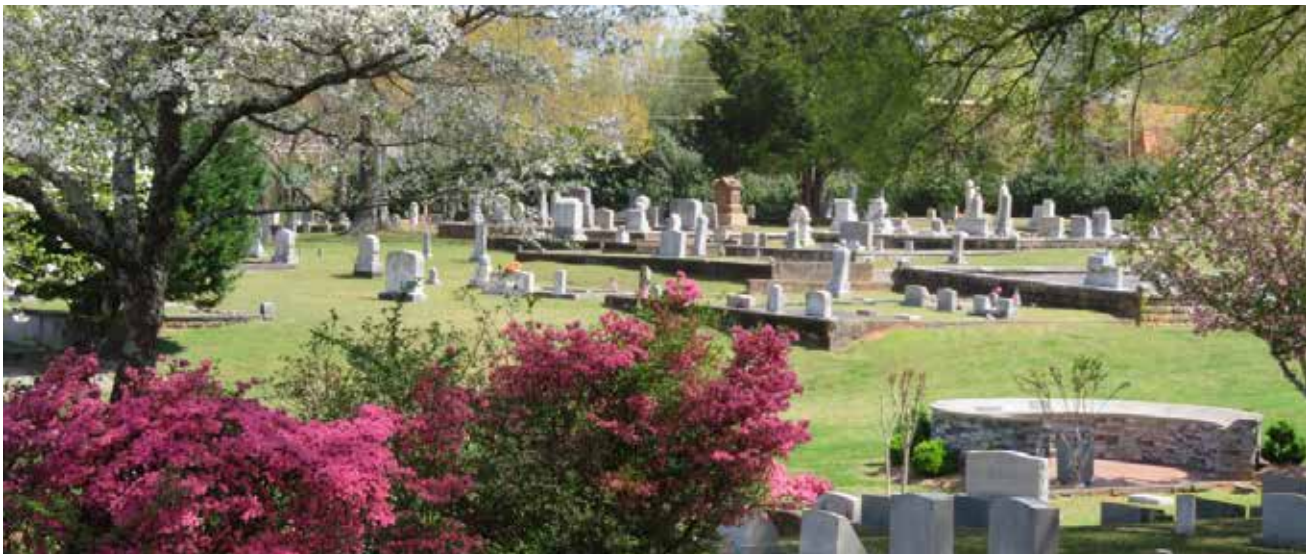
named the Chalker Section, in his honor. Chalker also is the namesake of Chalker Elementary School, and he is buried in the cemetery he helped expand.

Today, there are nearly 1,400 graves in the Kennesaw City Cemetery. Lots are sold through the City Clerk's office, and the cemetery is overseen by the Kennesaw Cemetery Preservation Commission. Little is known about the history of the commission, but the earliest record of a cemetery committee that could be found in the minutes of the Kennesaw City Council is from 1903. Fundraising efforts for the cemetery are led by the Kennesaw Cemetery Preservation Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Since the cemetery is not located on a main thoroughfare, it is easy to miss when passing through town. This often-overlooked section of our city has been an integral part of the community for more than 150 years, and it constantly has changed since its creation. Its historic nature, and the notable local residents laid to rest inside, are what make the Kennesaw City Cemetery an important part of our area's heritage.



*Andrew Bramlett is vice president of the Kennesaw Historical Society and an honorary member of the Kennesaw Cemetery Preservation Commission.*



*The cemetery wasn't divided into lots until 1901. Photos courtesy of the city of Kennesaw.*

