

NEW HOPE CHURCH GROUNDS

This historical site has been preserved to its past beauty for all to see. Visitors will find the awe inspiring past rushing up to meet them when they view the craftsmanship in this religious building as well as the serene cemetery that has withstood the test of time.

There are stories from the past to go with New Hope United Methodist Church. In purity of spirit and simplicity of form this church recalls the early Christian era. The history that is contained within New Hope UMC's white frame structure and outside in the Burial Garden is a step back in time.

Burials have been made in New Hope UMC's cemetery since the 1840s. There are over 170 gravestones. Many of the graves have no stones or markers. The oldest marker: Martha D. White, born 1804 died 1856.

There are four civil war veterans buried on grove: Joseph Keaton, Co F 27 N.C. Inf. C.S.A.; James Bunch, Co F, NC State Troope, C.S.A.; William E Corbett, Co E, 33rd N. Car Inf, C.S.A; and Charles Johnson Corbitt, Co H 33 Regiment N.C. Infantry.

On the west-end of the grove was an Indian cemetery. It was discovered about 1910 when a tram road was being run to the river. Rough pieces of stone were dug up and many skeletons of Indians were found. The men building the road buried them again.¹

The New Hope United Methodist Church Cemetery preserves the county's few surviving grave houses—low, coffin-sized, gable roofed, wooden structures, marking and protecting graves. Buried in the two remaining grave houses are Elizabeth Nicholson and Armecia Landing. On September 18, 2003 both grave houses that were located in the church cemetery were destroyed during Hurricane Isabel. In August, 2008 Lee Stallings rebuilt the grave houses that are now in the cemetery.



Grave houses

The following information was obtained from Anne Elizabeth Wilson Chambers: "According to Calvin Banks, a native of the village of New Hope and long time member of New Hope United Methodist Church, there used to be a lot of these "houses" on

the church grove. He thought they were used to keep rain from washing into the graves and to keep anyone else from being buried to close. When I moved to Perquimans Co. in Jan. 1948, there were several of these left but were deteriorating rapidly so far as I know there were no head or foot stones for these graves. About 35 to 40 years ago some of the men of the church built the one that remains as an example to show how they had been built...the name Elizabeth Nicholson is carved on one end. There is no date that I can find. I don't know if this grave house is in the same place as the original. The house is about 6 inches off the ground and the corner post are resting on a piece of cement...I think the original corner post might have been settled in the ground to keep it from being moved."

Grave houses have been found in Africa, Scandinavia, Europe and all over North America. Most of the surviving ones are in the southeastern part of the U.S. and the upper South (grave houses exist from Virginia to Texas and from Kentucky to Florida). The origin of grave houses remains an unresolved issue but most likely came from Europe, specifically the British Isles. The lych-gate is a house-form structure long associated with British burial grounds and whose history goes back to at least the seventh century.²

Grave houses (wood on a stone foundation) are also known as a grave shed (wood), grave shelter, grave box, grave shelter, and spirit house. Grave houses were made from local materials such as brick, concrete

¹ *State Magazine* article by Moselle W. Maddry, dated 17 or 24 August 1940.

² Encyclopedia Britannica.

or cement, fieldstone, limestone, marble, native stone, sandstone, soapstone, and wood. It was the custom to build the grave house before nightfall on the day of the funeral. The purpose of this custom is unknown.

Covering graves with grave houses, stone slabs, or other weighty rocks prevented wild animals from scavenging graves and livestock from trampling on the graves. This is attributed to the days of open range for livestock. These little houses also protected the grave from both the elements and the grave robber. The grave houses face eastward. That way, the interred souls may be the first to see the next coming of the Messiah.