

Greenbrier Ghost



1897 - 1979

St. Mary's Episcopal Church



Zona Osborne, who lives on Little Sewell Mountain about one and one half miles from the grave site was named for Zona Heaster Shue. Mrs. Osborne is pointing out there the marker will be placed.



Shirley Donnelly and Marion McQuade arrive in plenty of time for the event. Mr. Donnelly was the guest speaker and Mrs. McQuade was one of the several dignitaries who attended the event. Mrs. McQuade is founder of Grandparents Day.

Soule Chapel Methodist Church



Nestled on a knoll at the foot of Little Sewell Mountain, Soule Chapel Methodist Church stood before the dedication of the Zona Heaster Shue tombstone.

Mary O'Dell Phipps and little Miss JoAnn Osborne display a sign made especially for the dedication.



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INTRODUCTION

Jim Comstock, nationally known newspaperman and historian, called it "the most amazing story ever to come out of the state of West Virginia". So important was the story to West Virginia history, that Shirley Donnelly, Beckley Post Herald columnist, periodically reviews the events in his "Yesterday and Today" column. It has been included in various books and folklore articles and in newspapers both in and out of state. For generations grandparents have retold the story to their grandchildren; and yet, until the summer of 1979, Zona Heaster Shue's grave has gone unmarked.

Visitors have traveled to the foot of Little Sewell Mountain and walked behind the little church to try to find her grave. Parishioners were of little help in finding the proper location, and often those who had traveled many miles to locate the historic spot, left disappointed.

During the spring of 1979 Mary Phipps who attends the little church received a call from a neighbor, Mrs. Courtney Carter. Concerned that the "old timers" were all passing, Mrs. Carter felt a need to preserve this part of mountain heritage while remaining relatives could still locate the grave.

At a business meeting of Soule Chapel Church, Roy Gwinn, the newly appointed minister, asked if there was anything of historic significance connected with the church. Raleigh Sanford related the Shue story and Carolyn Phipps was appointed historian to publicize the first case of a dead person's testimony to another person ever being used in a court of law.

It would have been a little more unique if it could be said this were the only case in history of an apparition's testimony being used; however with a first there is sometimes a second and when a truth is discovered, it must also be reported. Jim Comstock discovered a similar story was recorded in the Maryland law books.

This realization, in no way detracts from the Shue

story; nor does the erection of a tombstone and the dedication day revive and preserve the story, for folklore will continue. Mountain people will still tell their new generations just as past generations have kept the story alive. The tombstone will only do what any granite object can do - serve as a marker for visitors and pay respect for the deceased, a tribute which anyone deserves.

Mrs. Helen Holland from Dawson, neice of Zona H. Shue, knew her aunt was buried beside Mary Heaster, mother of the "Greenbrier Ghost". Nestled near the shade of spreading branches in a small cemetery behind Soule Chapel Church, Zona Heaster Shue is only steps away from where the little log cabin stood where her body was delivered for an autopsy after it was exhumed from the grave in an era when such an occurrence was unheard of.

Bill Heaster, nephew of Mrs. Shue, marked the spot for Agnes McMann and Mary Phipps who later contacted Leroy Crane for the tombstone.

Publicity was released about the need for a tombstone. No large, soliciting campaign was conducted; and quietly and slowly the funds began to arrive. The Heaster family responded most generously, and others from far and near joined in to unite in a common goal.

Valley Flowers furnished a floral tribute for the dedication, and Sherry's Fabrics of Summersville gave the veil.

Gail Kerns, P.O.W. veteran from Lewisburg, built a frame for the sign Carolyn Phipps lettered. Pritchard Farley Collins helped with publicity for the event. Soon local residents were joining in with church members to see that the Zona Heaster Shue dedication would become a memorable event.

This book is offered as a token of appreciation to those donating to the tombstone and expenses of the day. After the event, it can be purchased at SPECIFIC GOSHEN in Charmco.

The following pages are excerpts from WEST VIRGINIA HERITAGE ENCYCLOPEDIA, whose editor, Jim Comstock, gave us permission to reprint.

A West Virginia story which has proved as controversial as it is strange, and which has been told in as many ways and in a great number of versions, is "The Greenbrier Ghost". The most reliable version, apparently, is a story which appeared shortly after the death of the man accused of murder by the ghost of the wife he supposedly killed. It was carried in the "New York Sunday American" and is as follows:

"LEWISBURG, W.Va., Sept. 19...Possibly the most startling and corroborative evidence mediums could offer to prove their contention of conversation with the dead is the conviction of Edward S. Shue in the Greenbrier Circuit Court at Lewisburg in 1897 for the slaying of his wife.

The State's case against this defendant, an apparent peaceable village blacksmith of the nineties, was based entirely upon circumstantial evidence. Evidence that was 'dreamed' by Mrs. Shue's aged mother while sleeping in her rustic home, 14 miles away from the scene of the killing on the other side of Sewell Mountain.

Ghost stories are legend. Dreamers have come down through the centuries. But little credence is given their visions.

But nobody has ever actually proved, with the exception of Mrs. Mary J. Heaster, mother of the slain Mrs. Shue, that the dead can come back in some form and communicate with the living.

Mrs. Heaster, beyond any semblance of doubt, is an exception. Musty reports, yellow with age, are on file in the ancient, historic courthouse at Lewisburg to prove it.

This remarkable woman, the records reveal, had four separate and distinct dreams. In each of them her daughter arose from the grave to tell and actually describe how she had been murdered. Fantastic is a poor description, but those dreams convicted Edward S. Shue of murder in the first degree.

When Mrs. Heaster first told of her dead daughter's visits, friendly neighbors and authorities shyly scoffed at the aged woman's accusations against her son-in-law.

Had not a competent doctor examined Mrs. Shue when her body was found, pronouncing her dead of natural causes after all known methods of resuscitation, applied in the presence of witnesses, had failed? Surely then, this griefstricken mother was the victim of wild and fantastic dreams, induced by a shocking loss.

But Mrs. Heaster steadfastly insisted her daughter's visits were not the work of her imagination; were not dreams in any sense, but actual communications.

Such beliefs and superstitions possibly were more rampant back in Mrs. Heaster's day than during the present era. Fortunate that they were. Soon she had enlisted a number of followers to her cause.

Neighbors of the late Mrs. Shue, over on the other side of the mountain, heard the strange story, and recalled unusual incidents that occurred directly after the young woman had been found dead. Dismissed as of no consequence at the time, they now loomed big, casting a shadow of doubt over the sincerity of Shue, the village blacksmith.

It was indeed true that Shue had acted most strange throughout the brief period immediately following his wife's death and preceding her burial.

He never left the head of his wife's coffin in the presence of mourning relatives or visiting neighbors, come to pay their last respects.

When the doctor rushed to the house the day Mrs. Shue had been found dead, Shue was already there holding her lifeless form tenderly in his arms.

Not once during the physician's cursory examination did he relinquish Mrs. Shue's head, holding it close to his chest while he cried in anguish and prayed that a spark of life might be resurrected in her stiffened cold body.

But Mrs. Shue was beyond all help - dead of a broken neck?

Whether or not she actually returned to this world in some manner to convict Shue of a brutal murder which had escaped detection by authorities and even her family; or whether Mrs. Heaster, in her dreams, accidentally hit upon a solution to the crime, never will be determined to the satisfaction of all.

But her dream testimony finally brought about the arrest and subsequent conviction of Shue, throwing the populace of Greenbrier County into a furor and providing one of the most interesting and unusual murder mysteries in the history of West Virginia.

Only one witness to events following the discovery of Mrs. Shue's body and later the sensational trial, is still living. He is Anderson Jones, a respected Negro living at Lewisburg. Jones can vividly recall the startling events. His recitation of the fantastic mystery is given ample corroboration by court records.

Jones thinks he was about eleven years old in November 1896, when Shue married Miss Zona Heaster, of Meadow Bluff district, at the Old Methodist Church in Livesay's Mill. After the wedding they took up residence in a small two-story frame building which had been the residence of the late William G. Livesay, who gave the settlement its name.

Shue, a former resident of Pocahontas County, had come to Greenbrier a short time before the wedding to work for James Crookshanks at his blacksmith shop.

A towering man of unknown strength, he presented a striking figure as he forged shoes before the flaming fire. Despite his previous marriages to two women, both of whom died suddenly, young Miss Heaster fell madly in love with Shue and after a brief courtship they were married.

Their little home seemed complete with happiness. No one would ever suspect it was to end in tragedy.

During the first days of January, 1897, Mrs. Shue fell ill. For several weeks she was under the care of Dr. J. M. Knapp. Shue appeared very attentive to his bride's needs, giving no cause for suspicion of

what was in his mind.

Early on the morning of January 22 he appeared at the cabin of "Aunt Martha" Jones, mother of Anderson, to ask if the boy could go to his house and attend some chores for Mrs. Shue.

Shaking his greying head, Jones clearly recalled that memorable day. He said:

"I can remember it well. It was a Saturday. Mammy told Mr. Shue I had to go to Dr. Knapp's first and finish some work there. He seemed to resent this but asked if I could go later in the day.

"Four times he came back to the house for me. Each time I was busy. About 1 p.m. he came again and I agreed to run his errand.

"Going to the house I felt that something was wrong. All of the doors were closed and there was an air about the place I did not like.

"Reaching the steps, I saw a trail of blood. That scared me, but I went to the door and knocked. No one answered. I tried it and, finding the door unlocked, walked into the kitchen. The trail of blood continued across the floor to the dining room. This door, too, was closed.

"Once more I knocked and getting no answer walked in. I stumbled over Mrs. Shue's body. There she was, stretched out on the floor looking right up at me through wide-open eyes. She seemed to be laughing.

"I was frightened but still able to reach down and shake her. She was stiff and cold.

"Running from the house, I called across the field to Aunt Martha: 'Mrs. Shue is dead'.

"As she ran to the house I ran down the road for Mr. Shue, finding him at the blacksmith shop with Charles Tapscott. When I told him what I had found he let out a yell and with Mr. Tapscott started for the house. I continued on to get Dr. Knapp.

"When we reached the house Shue had taken his wife from the floor, placed her on the bed and was holding her head in his arms crying for her to come back.

"But strangest of all, although no one thought of it at the time, he had dressed Mrs. Shue, placing one of those old-fashioned high, stiff collars around her neck and holding it in place with some kind of scarf.

"Dr. Knapp immediately started an investigation to determine if Mrs. Shue was still alive. Throughout his efforts to revive the woman Shue continued to hold her head, refusing to let him examine her.

"Finally the doctor turned and said:

"It is an everlasting faint. Her heart has failed."

The next morning Mrs. Shue's body, accompanied by her husband and several neighbors, was taken over the mountain to Mrs. Heaster's home. On Monday, she was buried in the little family grave, high upon the side of the mountain.

In the interim before the funeral Shue never once left his dead wife's side in the presence of others. When not at the coffin he permitted no one else to go near it, not even her mother. Taking his place at the head of the corpse, he guarded it closely. In addition, he placed a folded sheet on one side of his wife's head and some nondescript garment on the other. They served to keep it in an upright position.

Several days after the funeral Mrs. Heaster was awakened from her slumber by a noise in the little cabin room. Startled, she recalled constant prayers since her daughter's death, seeking the real solution to it. Maybe they were about to be answered.

Peering through the darkened room Mrs. Heaster made out an object. It was her daughter, dressed in the very dress she had died in. The young girl seemed about to speak but when her mother reached out her hand, seeking the coffin, the girl disappeared.

The next night Mrs. Heaster resumed her prayers, praying long and earnestly that her daughter would return again to explain her death. Once more they were answered. Mrs. Shue talking more freely and giving her mother to understand she should be acquainted with the whole mysterious affair.

A third visit was followed by a fourth one before the murdered woman told her mother the entire circumstances surrounding her death.

Secure in the knowledge that her son-in-law, was a murderer, Mrs. Heaster set out to trap him. At first it was not easy. Neighbors listened a little sadly to the unusual story but merely shook their heads. Authorities offered little additional comfort.

Several days later, Johnson Heaster, a brother-in-law, satisfied the story had some foundation to it, went over the mountain to Livesay's Mill to talk with Shue. Their conversation further aroused his suspicions. Then after talking with Anderson Jones and others who had been present at the house when his niece's body was found, the uncle was convinced the girl was a victim of foul play.

Together, Mr. Heaster and his sister-in-law went to Lewisburg for a conference with Prosecuting Attorney John A. Preston, one of the most brilliant lawyers of his day.

Preston already had heard of the weird story which spread around the country like wildfire but he gave little credence to it.

Now, this girl's mother was before him, sincere in her efforts to trap a murderer, firm in the belief that what she had to tell was true. Her brother-in-law was also there to add his suspicions, gathered from neighbors.

For several hours the three conversed. When they concluded the meeting, Attorney Preston started the wheels of justice moving toward one of the strangest and most fantastic murder trials ever held.

First he questioned Dr. Knapp. That kindly old physician admitted his verdict of heart failure as the cause of Mrs. Shue's death could be wrong. She had been ailing but circumstances surrounding her death had even given him some cause for suspicion.

Both men agreed an autopsy would prove whether or not Mrs. Heaster's strange theory was true. If

it was not, the examination would at least serve to relieve the aching heart of a saddened mother and throw undue suspicion from the shoulders of Shue.

The next day Preston and Dr. Knapp went to Lively's Mill, informed Shue of their plans and ordered him to accompany them over the mountain to his wife's grave. In addition, they took Aunt Martha and little Anderson along.

Shue vigorously protested against such action but dared not refuse to accompany the little investigating party. Throughout the long journey he kept muttering:

"I don't know what ...they are taking her up for. They are not going to find anything."

But he was wrong.

Reaching the mountain grave Preston ordered several neighbors to exhume the body of Mrs. Shue. Such action, although commonplace today, had never been heard of in Greenbrier County, so it was only after considerable argument and threats of arrest that Preston succeeded in having the coffin raised from the grave and carried up the road to the school house.

Shue was taken along to the little building, then required to remain in the room while Dr. Knapp performed his autopsy. First, the physician searched for poison, but found no trace of it.

For three days and nights he worked over the body seeking a cause of death. During that time, Shue, visibly nervous but maintaining his innocence, sat on a large packing box, whittling it with his knife.

Anderson Jones was there during the entire examination. On the third day Dr. Knapp was about to give up when he made a startling discovery that had been predicted by Mrs. Heaster.

Jones said:

"Dr. Knapp was working around Mrs. Shue's head. I could see Shue was getting more nervous. His whittling was not so good.

"Suddenly the doctor turned to Mr. Preston. They whispered together for a few minutes. Then Mr. Preston turned to Shue and said:

"Well, Shue, we have found your wife's neck to be broken."

"Shue's head dropped. A change came over him that I can't explain. But it certainly proved his guilt to me."

Mrs. Shue's body was placed once more in the little grave, its revenge complete. Shue was placed under arrest by Sheriff Hill Nickell. The authorities started back with him to his home at Livesay's Mill.

Arriving at the house the next day, Shue seemed in brighter spirits and offered the party breakfast. When they accepted, he cooked the meal himself, then announced he was ready to go to jail.

At Lewisburg he was charged with the murder of Mrs. Shue and placed in the county jail without bond to await the June term of Greenbrier County Circuit Court for trial before Judge J. M. McWhorter.

Prosecuting Attorney Preston and his assistant, Henry Gilmer, spent several months seeking additional evidence against Shue, both fearing the testimony of Mrs. Heaster would not convict their prisoner. In the meantime Shue obtained Dr. William Rucker and James P.D. Gardner to defend him. Gardner, a Negro attorney, was the first of his race ever to practice in the county court.

The case finally came before the court of June 30. The little courtroom, still used today, was taxed to capacity by neighbors from both sides of Sewell Mountain. Some came to testify. Others to hear Mrs. Heaster's recital of her "dreams".

Little difficulty was encountered in securing a jury. Within an hour the trial was on.

In his opening argument Attorney Preston told the jury that the State's case against Shue was entirely circumstantial but that the evidence was such as had never been presented in any court before.

He laid stress upon the fact that the dream testimony to be presented, would prove beyond doubt to be authentic and informed the jurors he could prove it.

Dr. Knapp was the first witness called. He told of conducting the post-mortem examination and finding Mrs. Shue's death had resulted from a broken neck, dislocated so perfectly it escaped his observation for three days.

At the same time the physician pointed out that the break was of such a nature it could not have been done by Mrs. Shue, in a suicide attempt. He further disclosed there was absolutely no evidence to how she had subjected herself to any sort of violence.

The physician declared he made the usual examination when Mrs. Shue was found dead and had pronounced her demise due to heart failure only after Shue had refused to relinquish his wife's head, requesting him to make no examination of it.

Anderson Jones testified to the defendant's repeated efforts to get him to go to the house and see if his wife wanted anything. Then Jones told of finding the body.

Other witnesses stated Shue was the only person seen about or known to have been in the house that morning prior to the time his wife had been found dead.

Others told how he insisted in dressing Mrs. Shue and in doing so placed a high, stiff collar around her neck. Then he added a large veil, several times folded and tied in a large bow under the chin, around the collar.

Still other witnesses related how the victim's head had appeared to be very loose at the neck and, when not supported, dropped from side to side. Others testified that in his conversation and conduct after Mrs. Shue's death, the defendant failed to show a proper appreciation of the loss he had sustained.

One testified that when Shue had been summoned to the post-mortem and inquest over at Sewell the defendant declared he knew he would come back under arrest, but he knew they could not prove him guilty of murder.

All of this testimony was leading up to the expected dramatic appearance of Mrs. Heaster. Everything so far was purely circumstantial, and if Shue denied

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it, there was an equal chance of his being cleared free of the crime.

Never before in the history of American courts had a jury been asked to convict a defendant on testimony which resulted from a dream. Finally the aged mother was called to the stand.

With an air of determination she told how she had been unsatisfied about the crime of her daughter's death and how she had prayed that Mrs. Shue might return from her grave and solve the mystery.

She told of the four separate visits made to her little bedroom by the daughter and how the girl described her own death at the hands of a scheming and brutal husband.

Attorney Preston knew undue elaboration on Mrs. Heaster's dreams would make them too fantastic for any jury to believe, so merely traced them lightly with his star witness.

He further realized defense attorneys would make every effort to break down this startling testimony. Then his case would be won, just as Mrs. Heaster had won him over from his own efforts to break her story down as one of vivid imagination.

Dr. Rucker, defense counsel, lost no time in getting at the dreams. Unaware of their full significance, he endeavored to blast them out of the courtroom as a start of his defense.

At this point the story can be better appreciated by the testimony found in the Lewisburg court records. So important was it considered that Thomas H. Dennis, then editor of The Greenbrier Independent at Lewisburg, printed the entire question and answer testimony, something rarely resorted to by newspapers before the present decade.

The testimony follows, the questions being asked by Mr. Rucker:

Q. Mrs. Heaster, did you not have a dream that aroused your suspicions to lead you to have the body exhumed? — A. Well, I was not satisfied that my daughter came to her death from natural causes, so

I prayed that it might be revealed to me how she died. After about an hour spent in prayer, I turned and there stood my daughter. I put my hand out to feel the coffin, but it was not there. She seemed to hesitate to speak to me, then departed. The next night, after I prayed again the manner of her death might be shown, she appeared and talked more freely, giving me to understand that I should be acquainted with the whole matter. The third night she appeared again and disclosed more to me. And on the fourth night she returned and told me all about the difficulty, how it occurred and how it was brought about.

Here is what Zona Heaster told her mother:

"He came that night from the shop and seemed angry. I told him supper was ready and he began to chide me because I had prepared no meat. I replied there was plenty - bread and butter, apple sauce, preserves, and other things that made a good supper. He flew into a rage, got up and came toward me.

"When I raised up, he seized each side of my head with his hands and by a sudden wrench dislocated my neck."

Mrs. Heaster continued the remainder of her answer:

Then my daughter went on to describe the home where she lived and surroundings in the neighborhood, so it was fixed in my mind as a reality. When I later described it for people living near there, they told me they could not have been more accurate themselves. And she told me I could look back of Aunt Martha Jones' in the meadow in a rocky place; that I could look in the cellar behind a loose plank and see. Her house was a square log house, hewed right up to the square, and she said for me to look at the right-hand side of the door as you go in and in the right-hand corner. Well, I saw the place exactly as she told me, and I saw blood there as she told me.

Q. Now, Mrs. Heaster, this sad affair was particularly impressed upon your mind and there was not a moment during your waking hours that you did not dwell upon it? - A. No sir, And there is not yet, either.

Q. And this was not a dream founded upon your distressed condition of mind? - A. No sir. It was not a dream. I was as wide awake as I ever was.

Q. Then, if not a dream or dreams, what do you call it? - A. I prayed to the Lord that she might come back and tell me what happened. And I prayed that she might come herself and tell on him.

Q. Do you think you actually saw your daughter in flesh and blood? - A. Yes, sir, I do. I told them the very dress she was wearing when she was murdered. When she was about to leave the room, she turned her head completely around and looked at me like she wanted me to know all about it. And the very next time she came back she told me all about it. The first time she came she seemed as if she did not want to tell me as much as afterward. The last night she came she told me she had done everything she could, and I am satisfied she did all that, too.

Q. Now, Mrs. Heaster, don't you know these visions, as you term or describe them were nothing more or less than four dreams founded upon your distress - A. No, I don't know it. The Lord sent her to me to tell it. I was the only friend she knew she could tell and put any confidence in. I was the nearest one to her. Shue gave me a ring he pretended she wanted me to have. But I don't know what dead woman he might have taken it off of. I wanted my daughter's own ring, but he would not let me have it.

Q. Mrs. Heaster, are you positively sure there were not four dreams? - A. Yes, sir. They were not dreams. I do not dream when I am wide awake, to be sure. And I know I saw her right there before me.

Q. Are you not considerably superstitious? - A. No, sir. I am not. I was never that way before and am not now.

Q. Do you believe in the scripture? - A. Yes, sir; I have no reason not to believe in them.

Q. Do you believe the Scripture contains the words of God and his Son? - A. Yes, sir, I do. Don't you

believe it?

Q. Now, I would like, if I could, to get you to say these were four dreams and not visions or appearances of your daughter in flesh and blood? - A. If I am going to say that, I am going to lie.

Q. Then you insist your daughter actually appeared in flesh and blood before you on four different occasions? - A. Yes, sir.

Q. Did she not have any other conversation with you other than the matter of her death? - A. Yes, sir; some other little things. Some things I have forgotten - just a few words. I just wanted the particulars about her death, and I got them.

Q. When she came, did you touch her? - A. Yes, sir. I got up on my elbows and reached out a little further, as I wanted to see if people came in their coffins. I leaned up and made a light. I wanted to see if there was a coffin, but there was not. She was just like she was when she left this world. It was just after I had gone to bed. I wanted her to come and talk to me, and she did. This was before the inquest, and I told my neighbors. They said she was exactly as I told them she was.

Q. Had you ever seen the premises where your daughter lived before these visits? - A. No, sir; I had not. But I found them exactly as she told me they were. And never laid eyes on them until after her death. She told me all of this before I knew anything about the building at all.

Q. How long was it after you had those interviews with your daughter until you did see the building? - A. It must have been a month or more after the examination.

Q. You said your daughter told you that down by the fence in a rocky place, you would find something? - A. She said for me to look there, but she didn't say I would find anything. Just for me to look there.

Q. Did she tell you what to look for? - A. No, sir. She did not. I was so glad to see her, I forgot to ask.

Q. Have you examined the place since? - A. Yes, sir. We looked at the fence a little but didn't find anything.

Shue spent nearly an entire day on the witness stand seeking to build a defense for himself. He talked at great length and was very minute and particular in describing unimportant events but denied practically everything testified to by the other witnesses. He entered a positive denial of the charge against him, terming the prosecution spite work. In closing, he vehemently protested his innocence, calling on God to witness. Though admitting he had served a term in the penitentiary, he declared he loved his late wife dearly and appealed to members of the jury to look into his eyes and then say if he was guilty.

But this man's testimony and his desperate efforts failed to sway the jury but it made a most unfavorable impression. So great did the State's case appear against him that Mr. Dennis, editor of the Greenbrier Independent, said in his paper:

"There is no middle ground for the jury to take. The verdict inevitably must be for murder in the first degree or for an acquittal."

After lengthy arguments of the evidence by counsel for both the State and the defendant, Shue's case was given to the jury.

This body solemnly filed from the room to perform their duty, returning in an hour with a verdict of murder in the first degree, but recommending life imprisonment.

After the verdict had been announced, Mr. Dennis again wrote in his paper:

"Taking the verdict of the jury as ascertaining the truth, we must conclude that Shue deliberately broke his wife's neck - probably with his strong hands - and with no other motive than to be rid of her so that he might get another one more to his liking."

The twelve-man jury and many spectators in the courtroom did not see eye for eye in regards to a

proper verdict - many persons not connected with the trial expressed the opinion that the death penalty should have been imposed.

Rumors of mob violence grew. Sentiment crystallized. On the Sunday following Shue's conviction a small mob gathered at Meadow Bluff camp grounds for the purpose of taking the prisoner from his cell in the county jail and hanging him.

Shue's fate, the mob decreed, should be the same he had judged and carried out for his innocent wife - death by a broken neck.

At 10 o'clock they gathered at their rendezvous, eight miles from Lewisburg. One man, however, decided his neighbors were making a terrible mistake. He was George M. Harrah. Harrah, hearing of the plan, mounted his horse and hurried to the house of Sheriff Nickell at Meadow Bluff. Both men started for Lewisburg to protect the prisoner, but to reach there, had to pass the camp grounds.

Somebody in the mob recognized the sheriff as he sped down the road past the grounds on his horse. Several would-be lynchers gave chase. They captured the two men at the point of pistols.

Sheriff Nickell drew his gun and was about to fire, despite overwhelming odds, when he recognized his assailant. Deciding to kill the gunman, even at the cost of his own life, the sheriff tried moral persuasion.

Mob leaders went with him to the nearby home of D. A. Dwyer. There, after considerable argument, Sheriff Nickell won his point. The mob disbanded, giving him the new, stout rope with which they had planned to carry out the hanging of Shue.

Two days elapsed before Shue was removed to the Moundsville Penitentiary to serve the remainder of his life. He died there eight years later.¹

¹Comstock, West Virginia Heritage Encyclopedia, Vol. 10, 1976, pp. 2031 - 2041.

GHOST TELLS ON MURDERING BLACKSMITH

...The best known story of a spectral appearance is that of "The Greenbrier Ghost," a story told here before but often requested to be repeated. That story took place not far from Beckley.

A man named Edward Shue, who was a blacksmith by trade, came to the Meadow Bluff country to work in the shop owned by James Crookshanks.

Quiet and a bit retiring, Shue was a man of muscular build. People liked him albeit a lot of rumors about him were passing through the community.

The man had been married twice and both his mates were dead and gone. An air of mystery hovered around the death of this man's first wife.

It was almost impossible to get the straight of things about the first wife's death. However, it was known how his second wife came to die. She came to her death when a rock fell from a chimney her husband was repairing and crushed her skull!

Stones were put in a basket by the wife and were pulled up by a rope by the husband to where he was fixing the chimney. Some felt that the man had intentionally dropped the stone on his wife's head when she was bending over to put another rock in the basket.

Bereaved of two mates, the blacksmith's heart sought solace in a new courtship. He married Zona Heaster in November, 1896.

She was reportedly a beautiful creature as the matter of her beauty was told to me one day at a funeral in Rainelle by the very woman who washed her and "laid her out" when she was found dead.

In a day or so, the ill-fated mountain girl was buried. The doctor, who was called to pronounce her dead, judged she had died of a heart attack - natural causes, you know. A lot of eyebrows arched!

On a cold, bleak day, Zona Shue was buried. Mrs. Mary Heaster, her mother, was so grieved that she would not be comforted. A week after the funeral, Mrs. Mary Heaster's daughter appeared to her! When she reached

out to touch her, Zona vanished.

There were other spectral visits by the dead girl. Mrs. Heaster prayed without ceasing and felt led to go into Lewisburg to see the prosecuting attorney and tell him that the daughter said she had been killed by her husband.

Her pleas were dismissed by the authorities as the result of an overwrought mind. But the bereaved widow was importunate. Result was that the body of the dead girl was exhumed for a post-mortem.

It was found that her neck had been broken. Shue was arrested, indicted, tried and convicted of wife murder. He went to Moundsville penitentiary where eight years later he died.

In a quarrel over the previous evening's supper, the man had wrenched his wife's neck and broke it. He left her at home and went to his shop.

He sent young Reuben Jones, son of Mrs. Martha Jones, from the shop on an errand to the house. The young black boy found the dead woman and spread the alarm.

There's more to the story than can be told here but suffice it to say this super-natural story found its way into the law books of the land.

The father of Mrs. C. M. Allen, 500 Bailey Ave., Beckley, helped exhume the dead girl's body.

W. L. Collison of Eccles told me his mother was a relative of Zona Heaster.

Cecil Blofeld of Rainelle told me his father was one of the jurors who sat on the Shue murder case and voted him guilty.

Here in Beckley V. A. Hospital we had a patient who was a brother of the boy who found Mrs. Shue dead and told me about it.²

²Comstock, "Shirley Donnelly Sampler," West Virginia Heritage Encyclopedia, Vol. 16, 1974, pp.48-50.

GREENBRIER GHOST STORY DETAIL ADDED

One of the strangest stories of supernatural events occurring in West Virginia is one of the mysterious apparition of a dead woman locally known as "the Greenbrier ghost".

It is narrated in law books of this state and this column has carried the story of Zona Heaster Shue rising from her grave and appearing to her mother to tell her that the dead woman had been murdered by her husband, Edward S. "Trout" Shue.

This happened in the area of Rainelle.

After the young ghost appeared to her mother and related how she had been killed, the mother went to the authorities in Lewisburg and told them of the strange happenings in an effort to get legal action taken against the offender.

This was done, with the result that "Trout" Shue was indicted, tried and sentenced to the penitentiary at Moundsville where he died.

After reading columns I wrote about these things, David W. Burns, Rt. 1, Box 134, Meadow Bridge wrote on April 16 to tell me details of the tragic occurrence and its aftermath.

His letter is quoted here in full.

"I read your Yesterday and Today columns in the Beckley Post-Herald regularly. So does my neighbor, Boyd L. Patterson.

"Some time ago, you wrote an article about Edward S. Shue, or "Trout" Shue as he was called, explaining the murder by Shue of his wife Zona Heaster Shue, near Lewisburg.

"My father, the late W. H. 'Squire' Burns, was on the jury at the inquest which was conducted into the death of Mrs. Shue.

"She was buried in the Soule Chapel Cemetery and the inquest was held in the Nickel schoolhouse, which stood in a stone's throw of the Soule Chapel church. Shue wanted to be present at the inquest but those in charge wouldn't let him in.

"Jim Shawver, the constable, took the six jurors and they took the already-buried body up from the grave and brought it into the schoolhouse, Dr. Rupert, a surgeon, Dr. Knapp, and a Dr. Machesney performed the autopsy.

"Dr. Rupert examined the stomach for poison but did not find any. My father noticed that when the body was placed on the table the dead woman's head rolled around. This denoted a broken neck. Dr. Rupert's attention was called to this. The doctor then examined the neck and, sure enough, the neck was broken!

Shue was arrested and taken to jail at Lewisburg. A man named John Seward headed a mob to lynch Shue but Hill Nickell, who was sheriff of Greenbrier County at that time, persuaded Seward and the mob to refrain from their course.

"They would not have gotten Shue even if they had gone on with their plan because the sheriff had gotten a hint of the attempted lynching. He had taken John Dwyer, a deputy sheriff, and had handcuffed Shue to him.

"Then they were concealed in a cornfield near Lewisburg and remained there all night.³

³Comstock, "Shirley Donnelly Sampler", West Virginia Heritage Encyclopedia, Vol. 16, 1974, pp. 142 - 143.

THE GHOST WHO SOLVED A MURDER
"Yesterday and Today" column
Beckley Post Herald

1979

The Greenbrier Ghost of Mrs. Zona Heaster Shue will no more "down" than that of Banquo's ghost in the Shakespeare drama.

Those familiar with the story of this apparition will recall that Zona Heaster Shue was killed by her husband, the late Edward "Trout" Shue in 1896. That crime was committed in the land across the river in the Rainelle area.

The story is that Edward "Trout" Shue was a blacksmith. It was rumored that he had widowed himself twice before he married the pretty young Zona Heaster, who became his third victim.

A time after Zona Heaster and he got married he quarrelled at her about the supper she had prepared for him when he came in from work. Zona said it was a good supper, but Shue said it wasn't. He took her face in his large and sinewy hands and gave her neck a hard twist. It broke her neck and she was dead on the spot.

Alarmed at what he had done, Shue did all he could to cover up his crime. Without listing his actions here today, Shue himself prepared his wife for burial. As such matters were usually left for women to do in the death of a woman, Shue's action aroused community suspicions.

At any rate the dead girl was buried. In a narrow grave just six-by-three she was laid to rest in the village church yard of Soule Chapel Methodist Church at the foot of Little Sewell Mountain in the vicinity of Meadow Bluff in Greenbrier County.

Mrs. Mary Heaster, mother of Zona Heaster Shue (1876-1897) was a very religious woman of the Christian faith. Of course, the untimely death of her 21-year

old daughter bowed her down with great grief.

As was her wont, Mrs. Mary Heaster prayed a lot about the matter. One night as she lay in bed, the spirit of her deceased daughter appeared at her mother's side in the stillness of the midnight and spoke to her mother! When Mrs. Heaster would reach out to touch the ghost, the spirit would vanish in the darkness.

Mrs. Heaster did what the spirit of the dead girl asked her to do, such as to go and see where the killer had hidden his wife's clothes. Mrs. Heaster found it even so as the ghost had indicated.

Mrs. Heaster went into Lewisburg to see the court authorities and told them of the strange matter. John A. Preston was the prosecuting attorney. Judge J. M. McWhorter was the Circuit Court judge at the time. Dr. J. M. Knapp, M.D., had examined the dead girl and given as his judgment in the case that Zona Heaster Shue had died of a heart attack.

When the grief-stricken mother persisted that there was something wrong in the case, the court authorities ordered the body of the dead girl examined. An autopsy was ordered. A careful examination of the corpse revealed a broken neck!

Shue was arrested. A mob formed to hang Shue, but the mob's action was forestalled by George M. Harrah's tipping Sheriff Nickell off to what was going on. Sheriff Nickell talked the mob out of their plans and took from them the strong rope they had planned to use in hanging Shue.

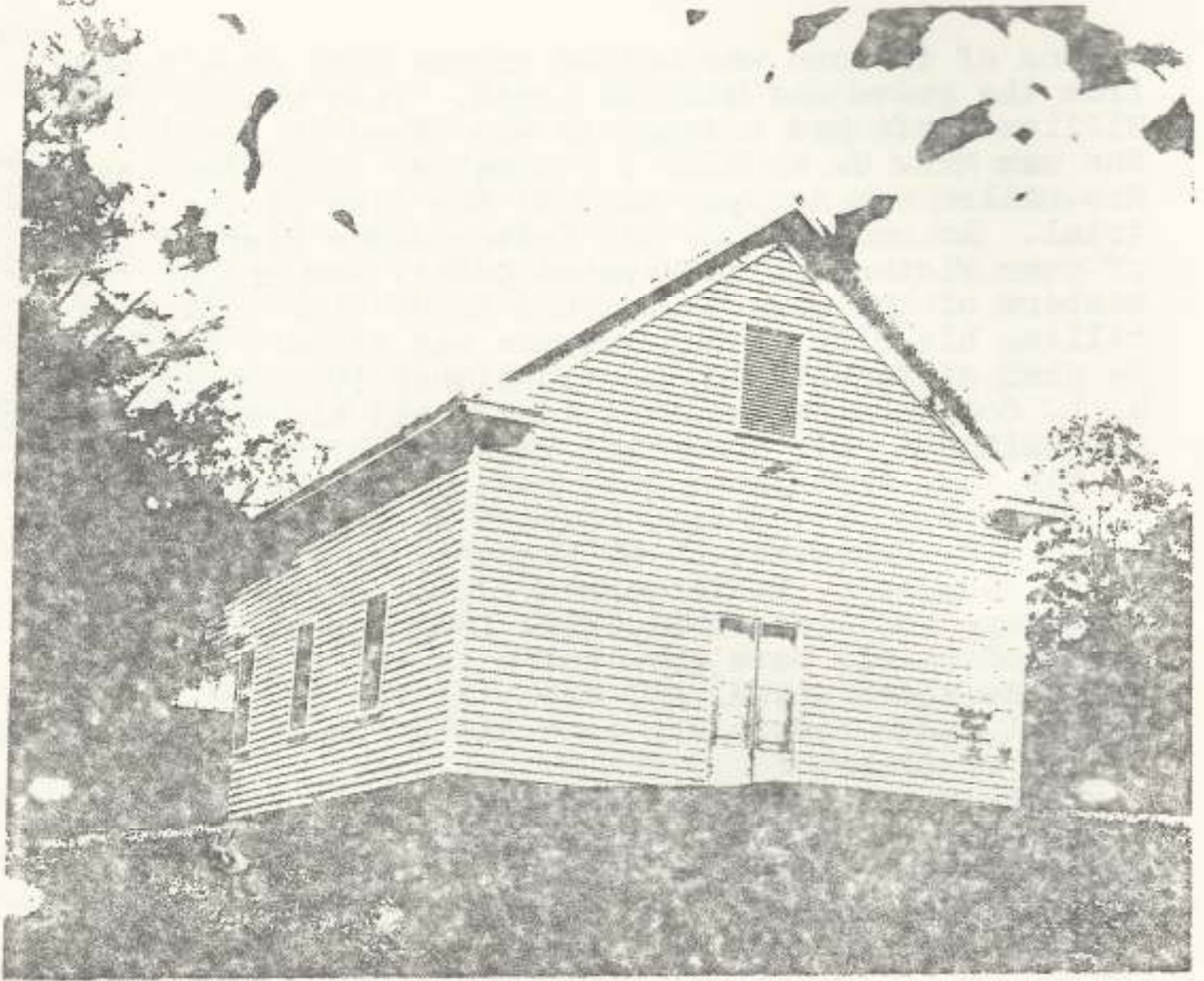
When Shue's trial was held in Lewisburg he was ably defended by attorneys William Rucker and P.D. Gardner, the latter a man of color, the first of his race to practice law in Greenbrier County. John A. Preston prosecuted Shue along with the assistance of Henry Gilmer.

Shue was found guilty and sentenced by Judge J. M. McWhorter to life in the State Penitentiary at Moundsville. There he was imprisoned until the time of his death in 1905, having served eight years behind the walls.

One of the men who helped exhume Zona Shue's body from the grave was William Graft. That was in 1897. William Graft had a daughter who lived in Beckley. She was Mrs. C. M. Allen, 500 Bailey Ave., Beckley. Mrs. Allen was not yet born at the time of the Shue trial. An uncle of my old friend James Blofeld Lee of over Victor way in Fayette County was one of the members of the jury that found Trout Shue guilty of killing his wife. That jurymen was Richard Blofeld. He died at Mansefield, Mo. in either 1959 or 1960. W. L. Collison of Eccles told me that his mother, Mrs. Tom Collison, was a distant relative of Zona Shue.

The jury that found Shue guilty was composed of A. H. Gardner, S. Lockhart, Charles W. Dunbar, A. B. Stuart, C. W. Hoggsett, J. M. Hughart, T. W. McClung, J. A. Vaughn, C. M. Thomasson, J. A. Hartsook, J. R. Rudgeway, and Richard Blofeld. Long ago all of those court officials have gone out with the Tide of Time and made their appeal for mercy at the Bar of the Eternal Judge before who each one of us will have to do sooner or later.

Maybe some of the descendants of that jury of 82 years ago will attend the unveiling of the Zona Shue grave marker on Sunday afternoon, August 5 at the Soule Chapel Church. The general public is invited!



SOULE CHAPEL METHODIST CHURCH

Nestled on a knoll just off the Old James River and Kanawha Turnpike at the foot of Little Sewell Mountain, Soule Chapel Church invited visitors to Sunday School and Worship Service each Lord's Day. Services begin at 10:00 AM and 11:00 AM each Sunday.

Photo by PHOTO ARTS

SUMMARY

There are probably as many different versions of the "Greenbrier Ghost" story as there are people who relate it; however, the fact still remains: Zona Heaster Shue's appearance to her mother produced one of the most talked about trials in Greenbrier County and West Virginia. It was important enough to receive recognition in New York and other city newspapers, and its importance to this section of Greenbrier County may serve as a landmark in history.

Although the little log schoolhouse which stood to the rear of the cemetery is now gone, the church in front, still remains and is in use today.

It was built in 1886 and is a small wooden structure with hand-hewn benches made from virgin timber no longer available. Initials carved in the wood by former attendants not so enthused by the sermon, serve as a reminder of days when church was one of the main places to go in the community.

While it is unfortunate that the log schoolhouse was not preserved as a landmark, perhaps it is not too late to protect the little church from a similar fate.

Different people react to the "Greenbrier Ghost" story in different ways. To some, Mrs. Heaster was distraught by grief over the death of her young daughter. To others, she had a dream. Still others contend, it was a vision. A great many believe, as Mrs. Heaster related, the daughter actually returned in the flesh as a direct answer to prayer.

SOULE CHAPEL CHURCH IN WHOSE CEMETERY RESTS ZONA HEASTER SHUE "GREENBRIER GHOST"

Her Spirit Appeared To Her Mother In 1897 To Give Her The Distinction Of Being One
Time In History A Ghost's Testimony Was Used To Convict A Murderer.

Her Husband Was Convicted Of Murder After Her Body Was Exhumed In This Location. To
Reveal The Apparition's Story To Her Mother Was True.

Photo by PHOTO ARTS

6 - 1 - 1979
139 Yale Ave.
Miamisburg, Ohio 45342

Dear Mrs. Phipps:

I am enclosing a check for the amount of \$5.00 for the fund donation of the unmarked grave of Zona Heaster Shue.

I am Lucille (Heaster) Hughart. I am a second cousin to this woman.

My grandfather was a brother to Zona Heaster Shue's father.

This happened before I was born. I was born 10-14-1905.

I have heard about this so many times.

I want to be at the dedication, if possible.

I live in Ohio since my husband passed away nine years ago.

I lived at Rainelle for forty-three years. My husband worked for the Meadow River Lumber Company.

Thank you,
Lucille Hughart

Rt. 2, Box 365
Lewisburg, W.Va. 24901

Mary:

I am enclosing another \$5.00 donation on the marker for Zona Heaster Shue. Check the order and spelling to see if I have everything correct on the order. I think I have.

It's to be set by July 20th or soon after so you can have it for the dedication.

Thanks,
Leroy Crane

Upson Downs, Route 1
 Shirley Donnelly Road
 Oak Hill, W.Va. 25901

Dear Mrs. Mary Phipps,

Inclosed is my check for \$20.00 to apply on the case of the marker to go at the grave of Zona Shue. It is hoped a nice stone may be obtained if sufficient funds are available.

Carolyn, at Charmco, wrote me about this. I am planning to attend the dedication on Sunday, August 5.

It would be fine if it could be arranged to have all of us attend the morning service in the Soule Chapel Church that morning. Why not arrange for this and advertise it? Let me know if you would like this and I will write about it in my daily column.

I plan to attend August 5, Sunday.
 Let me hear from you.

Regards,

Shirley Donnelly

Lewisburg, W.Va.

Mrs. Mary O'Dell Phipps,

I am enclosing a check in memory of Miss Lena Hinkle who was a great friend of Zona Heaster Shue, and for Miss. Hinkle's nieces:

Ethel Falls

Emma H. Moody

Elizabeth H. Bonnell

Virginia H. Thompson

Miss. Hinkle is deceased.

Virginia H. Evans

May 28, 1979
Lewisburg, W.Va. 24901

Dear Mrs. Phipps,

I'm sending you a check for \$10.00 to be applied toward the purchase of a marker or tombstone for the grave of Mrs. Zona Heaster Shue.

I am quite familiar with the story of her death.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Gladys Goodwin

1908 Orchard Avenue
Belle, W.Va. 25015

Dear Friend:

Thank you for your card today. A receipt is not necessary. As you say, the cancelled check will be perfectly all right.

No, I'm not a relative of Mrs. Shue, except by sympathy, which, as you know, can be quite strong. I thought her story was so sad and so touching and that you were so kind to try to raise money for her marker that I wanted to help the little that I could.

I am sure the "mission accomplished" will result in everyone, especially Zona, being a little bit better satisfied.

Good luck & best wishes,
M. C. (Mary Cablish)

5.00 enclosed

June 27, 1979
 Box 561
 Rupert, W.Va. 25984

Dear Mrs. Phipps,

I'm Nannie R. Holliday, the daughter of John & Laria B. Heaster, and the granddaughter of Charles & Cynthia Heaster, and I am 67 years old.

I'm sending you \$25.00 for the memorium of Zona Heaster, and I hope you have good luck out of it.

Thank you,
 Nannie R. Holliday

Rt. 2, Box 6
 Rupert, W.Va. 25984

Mrs. Phipps,

I am sending in a donation of \$25.00 for the Zona Heaster marker. I am a second cousin of hers. My grandfather was Charles Bivens Heaster, brother to Hedges Heaster. My father was John G. Heaster, son of Charles Bivens Heaster.

Madonia Heaster Robinson

Crawley, W.Va. 24931

Dear Mary,

I am sending check to start the marker fund. Helen said she would send you a check in a few days, too.

Sincerely,
 Bill (Heaster)

1908 Orchard Avenue
Belle, W.Va. 25015

Dear Mrs. Phipps:

Enclosed 2.00 for the marker. I am so glad that Mr. Comstock & Rev. Donnelly will be taking part in the ceremony, which I deeply regret being unable to attend. They are very fine men.

With best wishes & thanks for your self-sacrifice on behalf of the helpless departed.

Mrs. Mary Cablish

An extra special thanks to Agnes McMann, Carolyn Harvey, and Vicki Puffenbarger, for their perseverance during the printing and assembling of this booklet.

Soule Chapel Church also thanks Warren Hunter for his help in providing parking space for the Zona Heaster Shue Dedication Day.

A special note of appreciation is extended to O.G. Puckett, owner of Puckett's Store and life-long resident of Craig, for his help in locating members of the Heaster family.

Photographs used in this book are compliments of PHOTO ARTS of Rainelle. Drema Tuck is photographer. Because the booklet was reproduced with an electriconic stencil maker, the actual beauty of the photographs cannot be seen since an electronic stencil maker does not reproduce gray areas. Those wishing prints of any photo used in this booklet, may order a 5 X 7 for \$1.50 or an 8 X 10 for \$3.00 from PHOTO ARTS - Rainelle or SPECIFIC GOSHEN in Charmco.



THANKS

The following list of donors up to July 29, 1979 have helped to make Zona Heaster Shue's tombstone a reality for Dedication Day, August 5:

Zona Osborne	Lucille Hughart
Pritchard Collins	Ronald Martin
Lenora Gillespie	Helen Holland
Courtney Carter	Madonia Heaster
Bill Heaster	Nannie Holliday
Robert Hurley	Mary Cablish
Agnes McMann	Virginia Evans
Charles McMann	Madeline Hanson
Leroy Jrane	Butch Fleshman
Mary Cablish	Bill Shearer
Gertrude Hawkins	Clara Fleshman
Mary Phipps	Bob Barker
Gladys Goodwin	Greg, Sherri, Vivian, & Jonathan Riffey
Mary Cablish	George Deitz
Shirley Donnelly	Blanche Thompson
Erma Walker	Jane Echols
Leroy Crane	

Dedication Day

A bright sunny day, beautiful music, dinner on the ground, a talk by Shirley Donnelly, and approximately 500 attendants were all a part of the Soule Chapel Methodist Church Homecoming Day and Zana Heaster Shue Dedication Service held Sunday, August 5, 1979 at the small country church near Meadow Bluff.

In addition to Shirley Donnelly, well known historian and minister from Oak Hill, Mr. and Mrs. Joe McQuade and many other dignitaries attended the event.

Music was provided by "The Traveller's Quartet" and "The Kincaid Family". The minister of Soule Chapel Church, Ray Guinn, also presented musical selections.

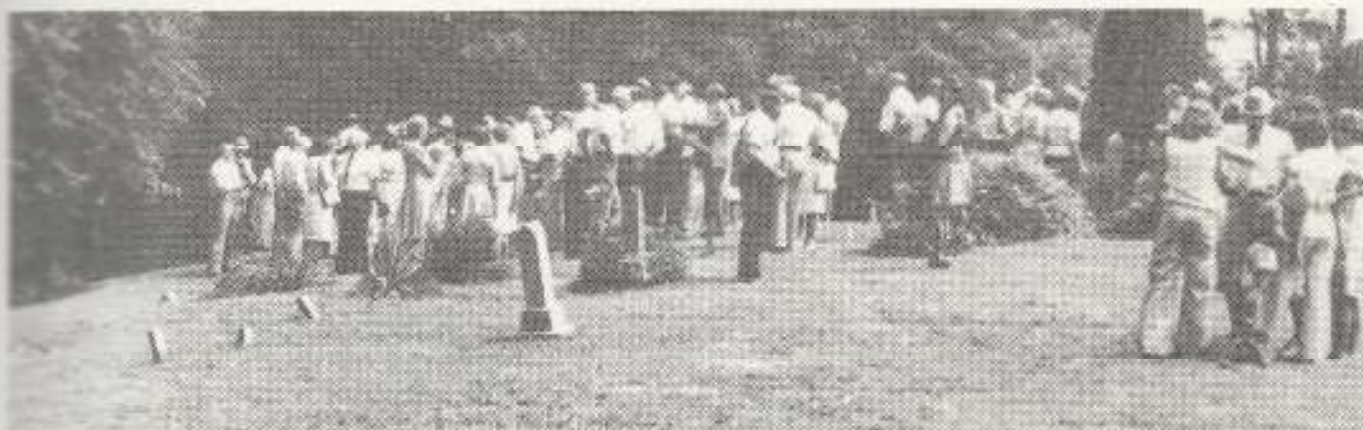
After the music part of the event and dinner on the ground, Mr. Donnelly led the large group to the small cemetery where Zana Heaster Shue's tombstone was unveiled following a brief ceremony. Mrs. Mary Phipps, who had spear-headed the fund-raising drive to purchase the tombstone for the unmarked grave, placed a flower arrangement donated by Valley Flowers for the occasion.

People traveled from as far away as Indiana, Georgia, Texas, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, Florida, Michigan, Louisiana, and throughout West Virginia to attend the event. Many writers, historians, photographers, and family members from both sides intermingled during the afternoon.

Mrs. Phipps, who helped coordinate the event, stated, "It was rewarding, to see so many former students and friends; but the most rewarding thing was to see each person work and combine their efforts to foster an event that may serve to keep Soule Chapel as a landmark in this little community."



Doris Heaster Berseri, Bill Heaster, and Helen Heaster Holland arrive for the event. Helen and Bill live at Crawley. It was through their efforts the grave site was found after many years of folks asking at the church where Mrs. Shue was buried. Doris traveled from Louisiana to attend the dedication.



Many traveled to attend the event at Soule Chapel.



Three ministers are shown at the unveiling. Donnelly reaches for the veil while Roy Gwinn, minister of Soule Chapel Church bows in prayer. Bernard Skeens, a former Soule Chapel Methodist Church minister, stands behind Mr. Gwinn.



The tombstone is unveiled as people gather around.

A tombstone for a lady
— a milestone for history.

