

Old Oak Grove Cemetery, Chilton County, Alabama

By Derric Scott, August 8, 2025 from various sources.

The Old Oak Grove Cemetery is the graveyard of the early site of the African-American Oak Grove Baptist Church near Plantersville. It is located in the woods about 500 feet north of County Road 308, in the SW ¼ of the SE ¼ of the SE ¼ of Section 26 Township 20 Range 11 East and encompasses 1.25 acres.

The land was carved out and sold to the "Trustees of the Church and School" on August 21, 1897. It was a 233.4 x 233.4 square, bought by the Trustees Andrew Shelton, George Shelton, and Reuben Shelton from James H. McGee. Apparently the church (and school) already existed at this time, but it is not known if it was located on this spot and it is not known when the cemetery was first used. The oldest visible stone says 1903.

In 1907 the church bought land just under ½ mile to the east. Today the church building and current cemetery is still on this land. The modern Oak Grove Cemetery was created and began burials in the 1970s. Since the time that the new cemetery began being used only a dozen or so burials have been made in the old cemetery, the most recent in 2021.

The church is intertwined with the Shelton family. At the same time the church purchased their land (above), Andrew Shelton (a trustee) also bought 6 acres, from the same James H. McGee, very nearby that would become his homestead. These Sheltons were former slaves and the likely enslaver was John M. Shelton, a physician and a very large slave holder just to the north in Bibb County. In 1860 John M. Shelton was listed as enslaving 69 people.

The Cemeteries of Chilton book records that local residents said there were more than 500 graves in this cemetery, however, nowhere near that many headstones, footstones, fieldstones, or depressions can be found today. It is likely that many graves were unmarked or used wooden markers that have long since disintegrated.

It's worth mentioning that only a few slave holding families owned these large tracts of land in this area. Per the deed, the church and school were already in existence in 1897. It is interesting to consider that this particular plot of land may have been in use as a slave cemetery prior to emancipation and then the church/school was operating there, finally obtaining ownership in 1897. However, there are no records or markers to substantiate this theory.

NOTE: This area of land changed counties a lot. Prior to statehood, it was on the line between Cahawba (Bibb) and Dallas. At statehood, it became part of the new Perry County and remained so for a long time. In 1866 it again became part of Dallas County. The original Baker (Chilton) County lines, defined in December 1868, included all this property. Only a year later (1869) the county lines were modified and this southwestern corner became part of Dallas County again. Then, in 1875, it was given back to Chilton County. Therefore these families were counted in the 1860 census (and earlier) in Perry County, in the 1870 census in Dallas County, and in Chilton County for 1880 and all later censuses.