

## Des Peres Presbyterian Churchyard

[Editors Note: The author of this paper is not known. It is believed to have been prepared as a property description for county records.]

*Locationa;*

2255 N. Geyer Rd.  
Frontenac, MO 63131

*Owner;*

Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church  
11155 Clayton Road  
Frontenac, MO 63131

**St. L. Co. Loc. No:** 20N310344

**Legal Description:** 1.45 acres in Section 23, Twp 45, R 5.

Located along N line of Geyer Rd., 40 feet N of S line, in the N 1/2 of the SE 1/4 of Section 23.

**Description:** 1.45 Acres

The little, one-room, limestone Des Peres Presbyterian Church, with a simple gable roof, sits on a bend in Geyer Road, indicating that the church is older than the road. The church has its back to the road. The Pitzman *Atlas of the City and County of St. Louis* indicates that the old wagon trail went right past the front door of the church, across the empty stretch of lawn that runs in front of the church, Geyer Road ran in a straight line, north and south, and the cemetery was across the street from the church.

The cemetery is an open lawn with several tall oak trees scattered throughout. Young flowering trees are planted in the center of the cemetery around a low, rectangular, limestone columbarium constructed in the 1980s, with a tall flagpole behind it. The newer trees include plums, magnolias, a hawthorne and some holly trees.

The grave markers are mostly nineteenth century white marble tablets, a few obelisks, and some square columns. There are some older limestone tablet fragments with scalloped tops. The tablets are carved with names and dates and epitaphs. There is little decorative carving of symbolic images, however a few of the marble tables are carved with willow trees, clasped hands, or flowers. Two marble pedestals have open Bibles on top. They are the gravemarkers for two former preachers from Des Peres: John N. Galbreath and W. A. Smith. Granite blocks, slants, and square columns from the twentieth century sit in the south end of the cemetery, farther from the church.

The little cemetery was restored in the late 1980s. Many of the tombstones were reset backwards. They no face the church to the west, instead of facing east as tombstones do in the early cemeteries. Some of the larger tombstones still face east. Some tombstone fragments have been cemented to thin stone slabs and stand upright once again.

**History and Significance:** established 1834.

In 1834, David Small, David Harshorn and Stephen Maddox each gave one acre of land to be used for a Presbyterian church and graveyard. The little stone church was built and the first bodies were laid in the ground that same year.

Early members of the Des Peres Presbyterian Church were predominantly Southerners and slave owners, and they allied themselves with the southern, conservative Old School Presbyterian Assembly, before and during the Civil War. Slaves are buried in unmarked graves in the southeast corner of the churchyard. This is one of the Presbyterian churches at which the abolitionist, Elijah Parish Lovejoy, preached before he was assassinated in 1837.

The little stone church was also used as a meeting house for the German Evangelical Zion Church, which began keeping records in 1838. Their early records indicate they buried some of their members at the Des Peres Presbyterian Churchyard. The German Evangelicals built their own church in 1839, and the congregation is now named Parkway United Church of Christ.

In 1955, as highways and subdivisions increased the population of west St. Louis County, the Des Peres Presbyterian Church built a large, brick "colonial revival" church on Clayton Road. The old churchyard, with its marble gravestones and ancient oaks, slumbered overgrown at the bend in Geyer Road, until the Bicentennial, when members of the church restored the old stone building and cleaned the cemetery to use for weddings and other small gatherings. The stone church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The cemetery was restored in the late 1980s, and in 1997, the body of a member of the Maddox family was uncovered on farmland being developed in Frontenac, and it was reinterred in the Des Peres Churchyard. [*editor's note: the bones found are buried in an unmarked grave near position 92 on the Old Stone Church Marker Cemetery Map*]

#### **Sources:**

Thomas, William L.; *History of St. Louis County, Missouri, Vol. I*; St. Louis: S.J. Clark Publishing Co., 1911. p. 75-76, 84.

Pitzman, Julius; *Atlas of the City and Count of St. Louis, Missouri*; Philadelphia: A.B. Holcombe & Co., 1978. p. 47.

*Plat Book of St. Louis County, Missouri*; Des Moines, Iowa: Northwest Publishing Co., 1909. p. 38-39.

*Old Cemeteries of St. Louis County, Mo., Vol. I*; St. Louis: St. Louis Genealogical Society, 1982, p. 46.

*The Past in Our Presence*; St. Louis County Dept. of Parks and Recreation, 1996, p. 32.

Missouri Historical Society Cemetery Files.