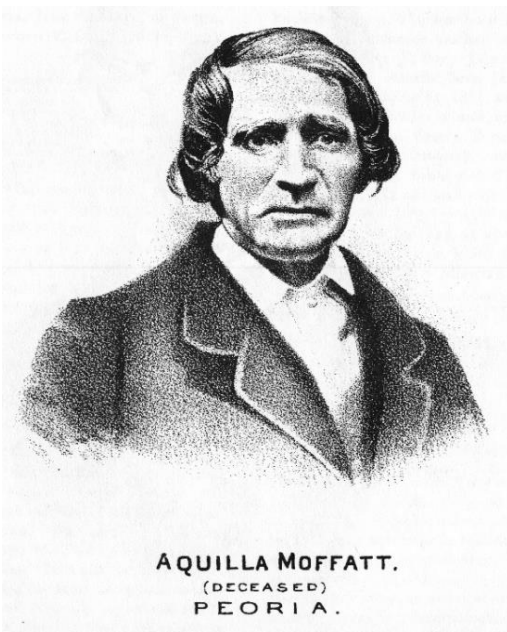


# THE MOFFATT CEMETERY STORY

Peoria’s centuries-long history has international and patriotic roots as well as ties to national social justice and equity movements being revisited today. Our City’s story also includes forgotten mysteries, some of which are tied to a nineteenth-century South Side cemetery now used for storage and light industry. Who started it; who is buried there; how did it disappear; and, how is it tied to Abraham Lincoln? The surprising answers span two centuries.

This all started when my wife asked me to find her Great-Grandfather’s grave. He was an immigrant who worked in the rail yards and later a tenant-farmer. Family lore said he died on the steps of the Swedish Lutheran Church on Christmas morning 1885 which turned out to be mostly true. However, what seemed like a simple quest became something much more. The first clue was in old transcripts of coroner notes at Peoria Public Library where one said, “Wife had him buried at Moffatt.” From this one line unfolded a much larger, and amazing story.

When Aquilla Moffatt came to Peoria in 1822 with his father and brother there were four cabins; they built the fifth near the river at the current State St.



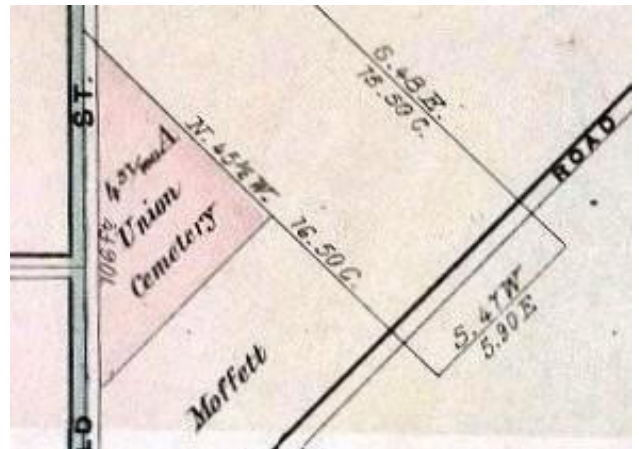
Pen and Ink Drawing – Peoria Public Library

He immediately started several mining and milling businesses and after the 1832 Black Hawk War he built a stately home on South Adams and set aside a small burying ground nearby for family and friends.



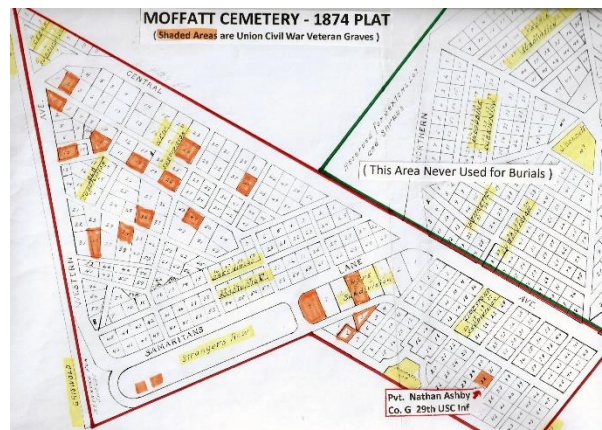
3917 S Adams St. (1832-1949) -- Peoria Public Library

In 1836 he received a large land grant and began to develop South Peoria. After the Civil War he named a parcel near his home ‘Union Cemetery’ intending it for later use by returning veterans.



1869 Peoria Atlas – Peoria Public Library

In the 1870s he sold this parcel and the rectangular shaped land bordering Adams Street to investors who issued shares forming the Moffatt Cemetery Association. (Shaded areas: known veteran graves.)



1874 Plat – Peoria County Recorder of Deeds  
Large Area to the Right was never used for burials.

Investors used his name out of respect and recognition though he had no connection with the cemetery association. Burials increased rapidly until the City ordered it closed in 1905. It was soon abandoned and became a dumping ground and community eyesore. Various efforts over five decades to clean it up and save it ultimately failed.



Current View of old Cemetery Site from Griswold Street



Peoria Journal Transcript 9/13/1936 – Montage Photo  
Peoria Public Library

Court actions in the 1950s gathered association share rights and the cemetery was declared defunct. Gravestones, trees and overgrowth were cleared; the site was rezoned to light industrial, and parcels were sold to businesses.



Current View of old Cemetery Site from Adams Street  
“Mr. Quick” drive-in was on gravesites here in the 1960s

Cemetery association records were said to be lost and those buried there had been moved, but fewer than 100 transfers have been documented. Fortunately for Peoria’s history, Health Department ‘Undertaker Report’ books (1872-1915), unused and stored for over a century, were found at the Peoria Courthouse. These books record the death and burial of over 32,000 individuals, with over 2,500 at Moffatt Cemetery. About 200 other burials are documented resulting in over 2,600 persons, now known by name, who still lie at Moffatt Cemetery.



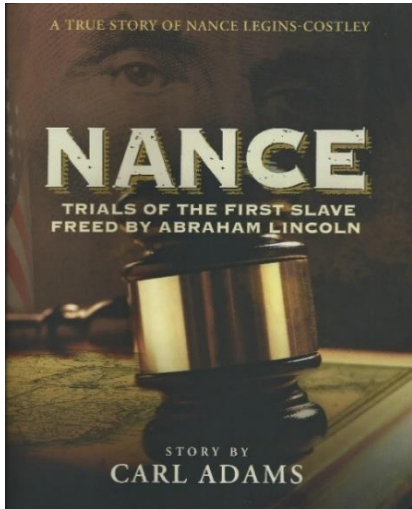
Aerial View – 2015 USDA Photo  
Actual Cemetery Used Shown in Outlined Area



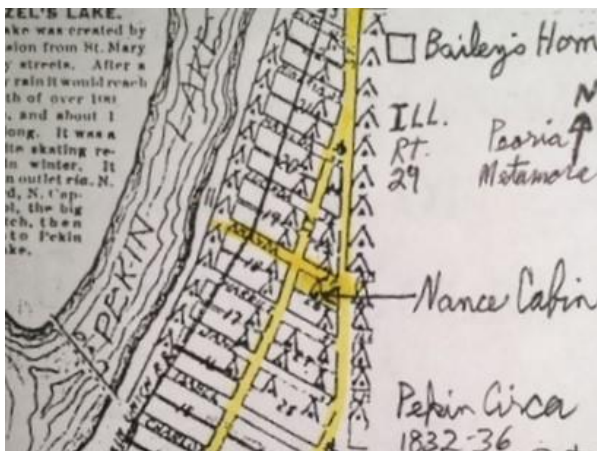
These huge old books were transcribed by Peoria County Genealogical Society members producing a data base and bound volumes now available to the public. They are believed to contain the only known

such records for as many as 3,500 Peorians, because of those lost at other cemeteries over the decades.

Who are these forgotten Peorians at Moffatt Cemetery? Perhaps the most famous is Nance Legins-Costley, known to history as the first enslaved person Abraham Lincoln helped free. Discovery of her burial location helped complete work by Lincoln historian Carl Adams to document her unrelenting quest for freedom in his book of her life and the efforts of her emancipator.



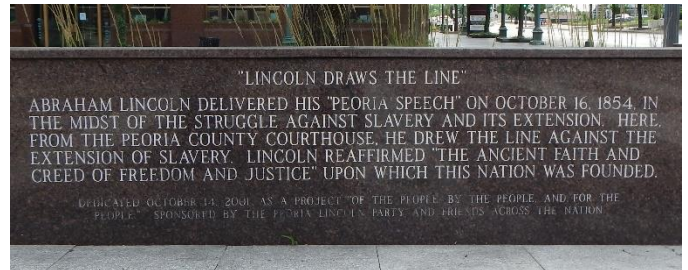
Nance’s story is one of perseverance in pursuit of her freedom. She was born in 1813 into indentured servitude in Kaskaskia and in 1826 when just age 13 auctioned and bought for \$151; she refused consent to the contract and was punished severely. Nance challenged her servitude in court but was ruled a ‘ward and servant’ and then brought to Pekin in 1829 where she was sold to David Bailey. When Nance said she had never consented to indentured servitude, Bailey allowed her to live nearby as a free woman and declined to pay the promissory note.



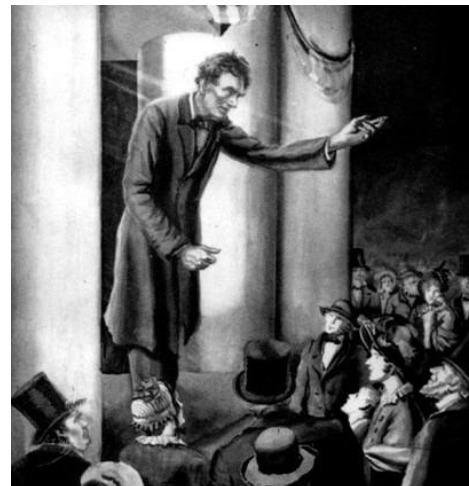
Wm. H. Bates 1910 Map of Pekin – Pekin Public Library

Bailey was sued and lost but appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court in the landmark case *Bailey v. Cromwell* (1841), where his attorney Abraham Lincoln argued successfully for the freedom of Nance and her first three children. Lincoln’s legal reasoning relied on the language of the Northwest Ordinance and the Illinois Constitution, that “*neither slavery nor involuntary servitude*” may exist in Illinois. This affirmed Illinois’ standing as a free state and helped close the indenture loophole by which slavery had endured. Nance’s story has been told in articles published nationwide in the past few years.

This court case had profound effect on young lawyer Lincoln and his views toward slavery. Thirteen years later in his famous “Peoria Speech” he drew the line against slavery when he said: “There can be no moral right in connection with one man’s making a slave of another.”



Lincoln Memorial -- Peoria County Courthouse Plaza



Charles Overall’s Painting of Lincoln in Peoria 1854

Nance married Benjamin Costley in Pekin and raised eight children. Their eldest son, William, was a Union Civil War soldier in the US Colored Troops present at the original Juneteenth in Galveston TX. In the 1870s, the Costleys moved to Peoria where

Ben died in 1883 and was buried at Moffatt. When Nance died in 1892, she was living with her daughter Amanda at 226 N Adams.



Photo of 226 N Adams Street – Peoria Public Library

Interestingly, from there one can today see the Abraham Lincoln mural on the Peoria Courthouse:



'Lincoln Blue' Mural, Peoria County Courthouse

Fifty-two veterans are also known to have been interred at Moffatt Cemetery: 49 were Union Civil War soldiers, including Nathan Ashby who was also in the US Colored Troops at Juneteenth; and one each from the 1792 Virginia Militia, the War of 1812, and the Spanish-American War. Several have ancestors who served in the Revolutionary War.

In addition to known persons at Moffatt Cemetery, there are also remains of uncountable unknowns buried in one mass grave. They were removed in 46 'soap boxes' from Peoria's old public cemetery while installing utilities along Lincoln Avenue in 1903.

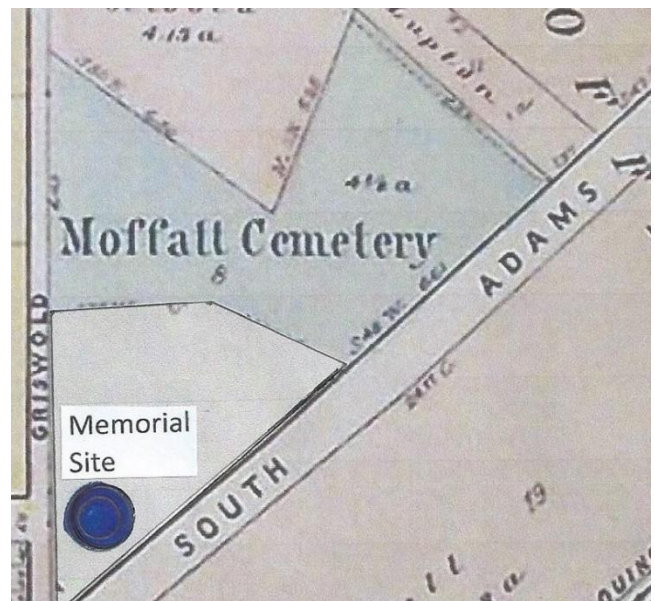
All remaining at Moffatt Cemetery are a cross section of our community and region. More than half are infants and children; some are indigents; many are immigrants; more than 50 are African Americans; and more than a thousand are just early Peorians. They should all be: "Forgotten No More."

## THE PLANNED MEMORIAL



A small group of local volunteers is working to create a memorial to commemorate those buried at Moffatt Cemetery who helped build and preserve our region, State and Nation. The name of the memorial evokes respect for the veterans and Nance Legins-Costley who fought for freedoms we enjoy today and calls all visitors to remember the more than 2,600 still buried there who have been forgotten for so long, right here in their home town. The logo in red, white, and blue is shaped to represent the site of the monument, the bordering City streets, and the Moffatt Cemetery parcel itself.

The highly visible memorial site is on the inside corner of SW Adams and Griswold Streets. This location is on the original property of Aquilla Moffatt's house and is near but not on the actual cemetery parcels. (*Note: the large 'suarish' area to the right in the 1896 atlas illustration was never used for burials. It is now a separate parcel of land.*)



1896 Peoria Atlas – Peoria Public Library

The small parcel for the memorial is being donated by the United Union of Roofers Local #69 whose office and training building is now approximately where Aquilla Moffatt's house stood for 117 years.

The South Side memorial site has very high traffic volumes and ideal visibility from all directions.



Memorial Site Viewed from Across Adams Street

The memorial site will be somewhat larger than the grassy area shown in the ariel photo below.

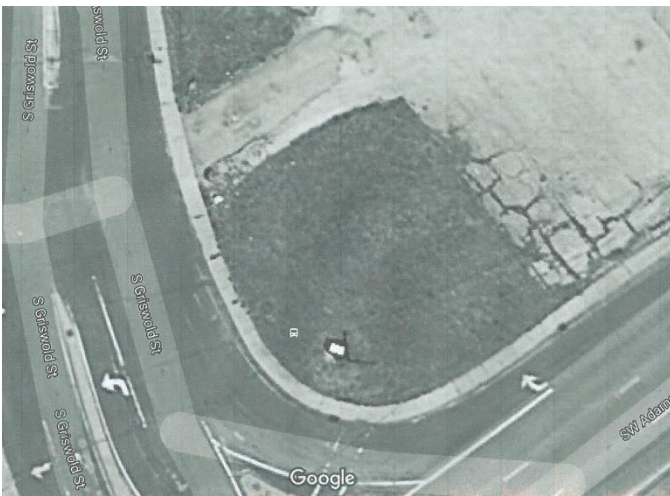


Photo: Google Maps

The key element of the memorial consists of three large (approximately 4' wide by over 4' tall and 115 lbs each) cast aluminum Illinois State Historical Society (ISHS) markers set in an arc of a 15' radius.

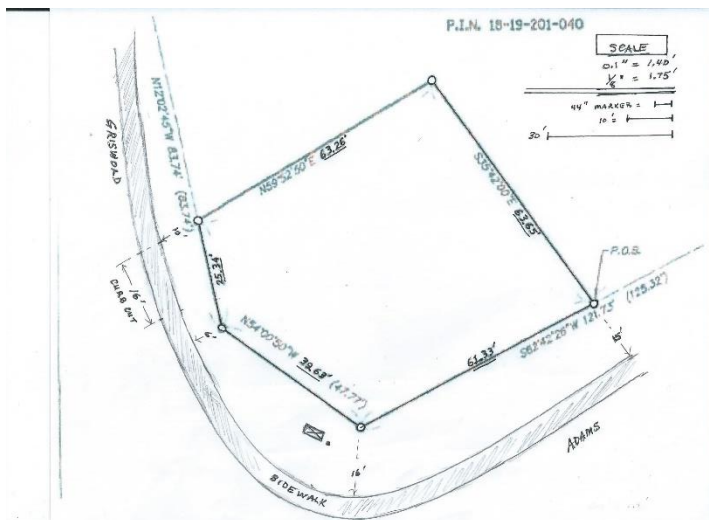


Illinois State Historical Society Markers  
 Rendering of Marker Arrangement on Site  
 (Actual mountings will be large single poles)

The finished markers are now on display downtown:



The Veterans Marker at Peoria Riverfront Museum



Sketch of Surveyed Memorial Parcel scaled to the Corner.  
 Areas beyond parcel to roadways are responsibility of IDOT.



The Moffatt and Nance Legins-Costley Markers  
 at Peoria Park District's RiverPlex Center

## A COMMUNITY PROJECT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The left marker in the memorial will tell the story of Peoria's Moffatt Cemetery sponsored by the United Union of Roofers Local #69, City of Peoria, Peoria Park District, the William G. Pomeroy Foundation (of NY), and the Illinois State Historical Society.

The center marker highlights the Veterans -- names, ranks, companies, units, and service. This marker is sponsored by our local Colonel John C. Bryner Camp 67 of the Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War with State and National SUVCW grants and funding.

The right marker tells the story of Nance Legins-Costley and her unrelenting quest for freedom. It is sponsored by the national Abraham Lincoln Association, the William G. Pomeroy Foundation (of NY), and the Illinois State Historical Society.

In the middle of the memorial arc will be a commercial grade 30' tall solar-lighted flagpole with internal halyard and security mechanisms.

Completing the memorial will be a storyboard stand with an information panel. It will be located a short distance out from the flagpole opposite the center marker. This element, the content of which is still under development, will recognize sponsors of the flagpole which are at this time the SUVCW, DUVCW, Sons of the American Revolution, and Legion Post 2.



Example of Storyboard – Photo: Peoria Heights

The Storyboard will also tell visitors where they can find additional information about the various subjects and the memorial itself, including Peoria Public Library, Pekin Public Library, Peoria Historical Society, Peoria County Genealogical Society, and Tazewell County Genealogical & Historical Society.

Peoria's Freedom & Remembrance Memorial commemorates our forgotten citizens, many of whom were involved in shaping State and National events. As the project began, this became very apparent across our community and beyond. Local partners quickly stepped forward to work together: Peoria Historical Society (501c3); Peoria Riverfront Museum (displays, events); City of Peoria (own site and memorial, install flagpole and storyboard); Peoria Park District (install the markers); Peoria County Genealogical Society, and Tazewell County Genealogical & Historical Society. Very significantly, the private organization of United Union of Roofers Local #69 generously made a very appropriate South Side neighborhood site available on land first owned by Aquilla Moffatt. Local history enthusiasts and scattered others soon began making contributions.

State of Illinois organizations joined the efforts with Illinois State Historical Society (ISHS) as our strategic partner, both contributing funds and successfully advocating for valuable grants. ISHS sponsorship guarantees widespread communication of the memorial, its location, meaning and relationship to other Abraham Lincoln historic sites in the State.

National grants came from Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War honoring their 49 fellow soldiers; other grants are from the Abraham Lincoln Association, the William G. Pomeroy Foundation of NY, Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), and Daughters of the Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Funding of memorial elements will be completed and the elements will be turned over to the City. Appropriate installation, dedication and celebration events will be planned and announced.

The Project Team of local history enthusiasts, thanks all who made this possible. We are: Carl Adams, formerly of Pekin: Lincoln historian, author; Jared Olar, Pekin: genealogist, Pekin Library History Room; Joe Hutchinson, East Peoria: SUVCW officer; David Pittman, West Peoria: VP Peoria NAACP Exec. Comm.; Bill Poorman, Peoria: writer, educator, social media consultant; and Bob Hoffer of Peoria, member PHS, PCGS, TCGHS, ISHS, and the SAR.