

Found at Last: The Final Resting Place of Frederick Granger Williams

Velma Williams Skidmore

Would a trip to Nauvoo and Quincy, Illinois, accomplish what we had in mind? In August 2001, Sherrie Dunford, Julie Thomas (my two cousins), and I decided to try anyway. We had heard that a heritage memorial of some kind was in the works for Quincy in 2002 and wanted, if possible, for our ancestor, Frederick G. Williams, to be a part of it. Since my son, Jim, and his family were in the City of Joseph Pageant, I made plans to travel to Nauvoo. Sherrie and Julie made plans to meet me there.

Upon our arrival, it was our good fortune to learn that R. J. Snow, director of Nauvoo Restoration Inc., and Jan Chaney, public affairs spokesperson for the Nauvoo Stake, were involved with Quincy city officials in planning a memorial to honor several groups who played significant roles in the city's history. R. J. arranged for us to attend a planning meeting in Quincy the following day. The director of Quincy Park District would be present as well as a representative from the mayor's office.

I had had an uneasy feeling since leaving home. How could we convince anyone to let us be a part of a memorial that involved our ancestor when we had no burial record for him? We knew without doubt that Frederick G. Williams died in Quincy on 10 October 1842 because his death was published in the local newspaper of the time. Family tradition also held that a road had been laid over his grave.

Thirty minutes before the meeting time, I asked my cousins to drop me off at the Quincy Public Library to check out a couple of references. The reference librarian was available to help me. One of the two books requested

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Left to right: Velma Williams Skidmore, Julie Thomas, and Sherrie Dunford, 4 August 2002. The three women organized the efforts to place a monument in Quincy to honor Frederick G. Williams. Photograph courtesy of Edward L. and Velma Williams Skidmore.

was in a locked cabinet. While waiting for the librarian to retrieve it, I stood by one of the tables and idly looked at a pile of books sitting there. The book on top of the pile was titled *Quincy Memorial Park Cemetery and Early Quincy Cemetery*, published by the Great River Genealogical Society in September 1993. “This could be interesting,” I thought. I thumbed through the early Quincy listings and there it was—the burial record for Dr. F. G. Williams! After searching for more than twenty years, I found the missing piece of the puzzle right in front of me.

I had also learned from Carl Landrum’s written histories of Quincy that John Young, father of Brigham Young, died in Quincy in 1839 and was buried in a cemetery that is now Madison Park, located at Twenty-Fourth and Maine Streets. John Young’s burial record was in the same part of the book as Frederick G. Williams’, which showed they were buried in the same cemetery.

The record, “History of the Park System of Quincy, Illinois 1888–1917,” also contained another necessary piece of the puzzle. In 1891, the Park Association petitioned the Quincy City Council for permission to clear the area for the park by laying the existing gravestones into the ground and then landscaping over them. The petition was granted. The city engineer was also directed to prepare a plat showing the location of each burial lot and to file it with the city offices. However, no such plat appears to have been made. It also appears that some remains were removed to other cemeteries. However, since the Williams and Young families had left Quincy, Frederick and John likely remained where they were buried.¹



Madison Park, 24th and Maine, Quincy, Illinois, 18 December 2001. Frederick G. Williams died in Quincy on 10 October 1842 and was buried at this location the following day. John Young, father of Brigham Young, died in Quincy on 12 October 1839 and is also believed to be buried here. The site remained a cemetery until 1891 when the Park Association petitioned the Quincy City Council for permission to clear the area for a park. At that time the remains of many who were buried here were moved to new locations. However, the Latter-day Saints interred here were likely not moved. Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.

During the meeting with R. J. and Marilyn Snow, Jan Chaney, Mike Parks from the Park District, and Jan Whipple from the mayor's office, the decision was made that the Quincy Heritage Memorial should feature four groups important to Quincy's history—Native Americans, German immigrants, the Mormons, and Quincy's citizens who played a role in the underground railroad. We agreed and thought that perhaps a four-sided memorial featuring the four groups could be designed for Washington Park in the heart of downtown Quincy. The committee also came to a consensus that the information presented on the memorial should be historical in nature rather than personal. With this decision in place, Sherrie, Julie, and I concluded that since we would not be able to honor Frederick G. Williams on the city's monument, we should try to make arrangements to place a permanent memorial for him somewhere in Quincy.²

Although we knew Frederick was buried in Madison Park, it was highly unlikely that we would be able to get permission from the city. The



Nathan Pinkham seated in the wagon in front of his Quincy home situated on the southeast corner of 14th and Maine Streets, date unknown, ca. 1870s. Nathan and Lucy Williams (daughter of Frederick G. and Rebecca Swain Williams) were married in Quincy on 18 September 1842 by Heber C. Kimball. Pinkham became a prosperous citizen of Quincy. The monument placed by the Williams-Swain family to Frederick G. Williams is located on the Pinkham plot in Quincy's Woodland Cemetery. Photograph courtesy of Carl Landrum, and Edward L. and Velma Williams Skidmore.

Woodland Cemetery was the next logical choice since Nathan Pinkham, President Williams' son-in-law, is buried there.³ Before leaving, we were able to get permission from the cemetery sexton to place a monument on the Pinkham plot. We also contracted with the Brinkoetter Monument Company to design a beautiful, gray granite paradiso stone monument with rose-colored hues with the following inscription: "Brother Frederick G. Williams, being moved upon by the Holy Ghost, washed my feet in token of his fixed determination to be with me in suffering, or in journeying, in life or in death, and to be continually on my right hand."⁴

Years ago, President David O. McKay remarked to the Williams family descendants that President Williams was still on the right hand of the Prophet Joseph where he belonged. President Spencer W. Kimball had also confided to a family member that he felt Frederick G. Williams still held the

keys of this dispensation with the Prophet Joseph Smith. We decided to include on the monument an engraving of the Kirtland Temple, which President Williams saw in vision before it was built.⁵ It was also reported that he was privileged to see the Savior during the temple dedicatory services.⁶ Julie used her artistic and computer skills to work with the monument engraver in reproducing the temple and the inscription onto the stone.

Just as Quincians helped the Latter-day Saints in 1839, we

found Larry Lamb, a local Latter-day Saint, who helped make plans for a summer 2002 Williams reunion and gathering and dedication of the memorial. On 4 August 2002, two hundred Williams descendants congregated in Quincy to dedicate the monument. A meeting was held in the Latter-day Saint meetinghouse preceding the dedication in the cemetery. A front-page article about the dedication of the Williams monument appeared that morning in the *Quincy Herald-Whig*.⁷ Following the dedication, family members visited various sites in Quincy, including the 1840s home of President Williams, having been identified as located at 524 York Street.

The Woodland Cemetery where President Williams' memorial is located is one of Quincy's most scenic resting places. The forty-four-acre tract sits on top of hundred-foot-high bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. The cemetery's landscape, with its hills and ravines, retains the only area of Quincy that represents the city's original topography.

During our last morning in Quincy, my family went early to visit the site where the Latter-day Saints crossed the Mississippi River in 1839—a beau-



House reported to be the 1840s home of Frederick G. and Rebecca Swain Williams, 524 York Street, Quincy, Illinois, 2001. Photograph courtesy of Harrison and Dorothy Underwood.



Quincy Memorial, front side, honoring the Latter-day Saints, 3 August 2002. The monument is located at Clat Adams Bicentennial Park along the Mississippi River front in Quincy and was placed there by the city in June 2002 at a cost of \$1700.

The inscription reads:

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS CROSSED
THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AT THIS
APPROXIMATE SITE AND WERE
BEFRIENDED BY THE CITIZENS OF
QUINCY

In 1976, the Illinois State Historical Society and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints placed a marker in Washington Square commemorating the Mormon presence in Quincy. With the erection of the monument shown above, and the monument placed by the Williams-Swain family honoring Frederick G. Williams, there are three Mormon markers in Quincy.

Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.



Quincy Memorial, back side, Clat Adams Bicentennial Park, 3 August 2002.

The two inscriptions read:

"THE CITIZENS OF QUINCY (WILL)
BE HELD IN EVERLASTING
REMEMBRANCE FOR THEIR
UNPARALLELED LIBERALITY AND
MARKED KINDNESS TO OUR
PEOPLE, WHEN IN THEIR
GREATEST STATE OF SUFFERING
AND WANT."

Quote of the Prophet Joseph Smith

"ETERNAL WILL BE OUR
GRATITUDE FOR THE PEOPLE OF
QUINCY WHO PROVIDED
SHELTER TO THE HOMELESS."

Quote of Gordon B. Hinckley,
President of the Church of
Latter-day Saints

Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh.

tiful spot that displays a wonderful new monument.⁸ The caretaker at the river-front park, upon learning the purpose of our visit, began telling us that Woodland Cemetery has a lot of history in it. “And now that fellow named Williams is there who had something to do with Joseph Smith,” he said. “That adds more history to it.”

Remembered at last!

Following are the remarks given at the dedication of the Frederick Granger Williams monument in the Woodland Cemetery, Quincy, Illinois, on 4 August 2002 by Frederick G. Williams III:⁹

REMARKS AT THE DEDICATION OF THE MONUMENT TO
PRESIDENT FREDERICK G. WILLIAMS (1787-1842)

Woodland Cemetery, Quincy, Illinois
Sunday, 4 August 2002
Frederick G. Williams

Quincy represents the culmination of the darkest days in the life of President Frederick G. Williams; but it also represents his finest hour as he triumphed over adversity in the final years of his life. His trials were comprehensive as well as oppressive, and they affected him physically, mentally, socially, spiritually and financially.

When I first began doing research on Frederick G. Williams, I was a bit defensive. Maybe he had been misrepresented; maybe there was a miscarriage of justice. Then I went to an explanation given the context. I suppose there is a place for all of the above, but now I have the sense that this really is a triumphant moment. Consider what he and his family had endured little more than a year before arriving in Quincy in early 1839. Try to put yourselves in their shoes. I only have time to list the major barriers.

On 29 May 1837, the Kirtland Stake High Council leveled charges of misconduct against Frederick G. Williams.¹⁰ On September 25, 1837, he resigned his commission as Justice of the Peace. He left for Missouri in the winter of 1837–38. In Far West on 7 November 1837, he was dropped from the First Presidency.¹¹ On 26 December 1837, he purchased forty acres in Kingston, Township 8, in Far West. Frederick and Rebecca’s eldest son, Joseph Swain, died in Far West on 12



Frederick Granger Williams III at the dedicatory services of the Frederick Granger Williams memorial, 4 August 2002.

Williams, a great-great grandson of Frederick, spoke at the dedication. Photograph courtesy of Edward L. and Velma Williams Skidmore.

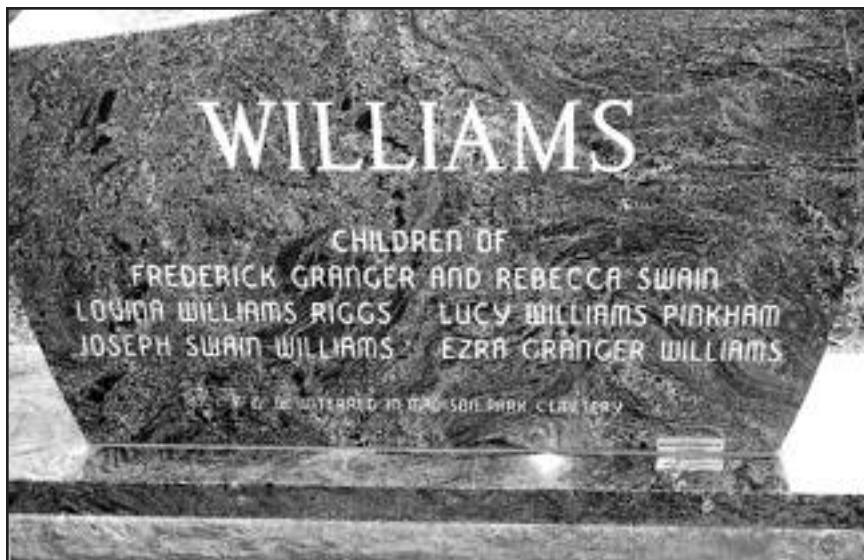


Frederick G. Williams monument, front side, Woodland Cemetery, Quincy, Illinois, 4 August 2002. The monument was erected by the Williams-Swain family organization. Photograph courtesy Edward L. and Velma Williams Skidmore.

April 1838, and President Sydney Rigdon preached the funeral service.¹² Joseph Swain Williams was apparently an invalid, and President Williams' patriarchal blessing states that if he exercised faith, his son would recover. That did not happen. I believe this weighed heavily on his mind.

In the spring of 1838, while he was back in Kirtland, Frederick was arrested and jailed in Willoughby on what he termed a frivolous lawsuit.¹³ On 8 July 1838, he received a rebuke from the Lord in a revelation that explained why he had lost his former standing.¹⁴ His son, Ezra, and son-in-law, Burr Riggs, were both involved in the reprisals and counter-reprisals in Missouri, and both were called as witnesses for the state of Missouri in the trial of Joseph Smith Jr., which had begun 12 November 1838.¹⁵ He participated in activities involving several disaffected former members of the Church. Then, he was forced off the land in the expulsion order of Governor Boggs. Besides the loss of property in Missouri, the journey to Quincy in wintertime was injurious to his health. His deposition talks about that.¹⁶

Upon his arrival in Quincy, he learned that he had been excommunicated from the Church on 17 March 1839.¹⁷ His health was broken. He had been reduced to a state of poverty (those are his words). He had lost his former high standing in the Church and in the community. He had lost his membership in the Church. He had lost a son. The marriage of his daughter Lovina was coming unraveled, and his son-in-law, Burr Riggs, had fallen away from the Church. All his dreams had been shattered, and he could easily feel himself a failure, become embittered, and simply give up.



Frederick G. Williams monument, back side, Woodland Cemetery, Quincy, Illinois, 4 August 2002. Photograph courtesy Edward L. and Velma Williams Skidmore.

I believe his helpmeet, Rebecca, was the great strength in his life. But it was at this moment of terrible fire-forging that Frederick G. Williams shines. At the first opportunity, he presented himself humbly before the membership of the Church in general conference assembled and asked for forgiveness and requested rebaptism, which was granted.¹⁸

I came to appreciate the strength of character that President Williams demonstrated when I first served as bishop, and then as mission president, counseling with people who had faced trials, had been offended, and had lost their memberships in the Church. Frederick, I found, was the best example to use—and one I used over and over of how even as a mature man, he swallowed his pride, forgave and forgot past offenses, confessed his personal weakness, repented, and humbly asked for forgiveness. What an example!

Another man who was excommunicated at the same time, Thomas B. Marsh, and so many others could not swallow their pride, could not ask for forgiveness, could not confess their sins. It took Oliver Cowdery quite a few years before he could do that. But Frederick, in the very first opportunity, did it, and I see that as probably the greatest example.

No matter how badly things were going, no matter how much he felt he was a failure, no matter how poor his health, no matter how dark the way, he did not give up on the gospel. The quote on the monument, “Brother Frederick G. Williams, being moved upon by the Holy Ghost, washed my feet in token of his fixed determination to be with me in suffering, or in journeying, in life or in death, and to be continually on my right hand,”¹⁹ is a promise made to Frederick, and he kept it. Later, Joseph Smith gave Frederick the following blessing:

Brother Frederick G. Williams is one of those men in whom I place the greatest confidence and trust, for I have found him ever full of love and brotherly kindness. He is not a man of many words, but is ever winning, because of his constant mind. He shall ever have place in my heart, and is ever entitled to my confidence. He is perfectly honest and upright, and seeks with all his heart to magnify his Presidency in the Church of Christ, but fails in many instances, in consequence of a want of confidence in himself. God grant that he may overcome all evil. Blessed be Brother Frederick, for he shall never want a friend, and his generation after him shall flourish. The Lord hath appointed him an inheritance upon the land of Zion: yea, and his head shall blossom, and he shall be as an olive branch that is bowed down with fruit. Even so. Amen.²⁰

In the blessing, Joseph Smith said that Frederick and his family will blossom and will be fruitful. That certainly has been the case.

We all kind of wink in our retelling of the story found in Doctrine and Covenants 93 (where all three members of the First Presidency are rebuked by the Lord and told to teach their children light and truth), for his was the only family of the original First Presidency that came west. The First Presidency had been chastened by the Lord to do something about their families, and apparently Frederick (now this is where we wink) was the only one who did, for his was the only family that stayed in the Church and came west. I am grateful that he did.

The Lord has taught us to preach only repentance to this generation. And why? Because all the sins that would ever be committed were already resolved by the promised Atonement of Jesus Christ even before anyone stepped foot on this earth. The great problem of this earth life is not sin; that was taken care of. Christ paid for sin. The great challenge of this earth life is repentance so that His atonement can be efficacious in our lives. Thus, Satan will do everything in his power to keep us from repenting. He will tell us, "Oh, that is very small. You don't have to repent of that." Or, "That is so big, there is no way you could be forgiven of that." Both extremes are lies, and Frederick G. Williams, our progenitor, saw through the lie and said, "I will repent. I will ask for rebaptism. I will confess my sins before the Church." Does that take some courage?

I am grateful for President Williams. I am grateful for the example he has set and for the thousands of his descendants who are stalwart in the Church and who bear their testimonies of the Savior, as I do, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Notes

1. Significantly, Maurine C. Ward, editor of *Mormon Historical Studies*, also discovered the burial location of a number of early Latter-day Saints who died in Quincy about this same time. See Maurine C. Ward, "The Early Quincy Cemetery and Mormon Burials" 2, no. 1 (spring 2001): 149–62. Information regarding Frederick G. Williams is given on page 160. LDS sources generally list Frederick's father as Warren Wheeler Williams. However, this listing is incorrect. His actual father was William Wheeler Williams.

2. The proposed Quincy Heritage Memorial has still not be constructed.

3. Nathan Pinkham and Lucy Williams, daughter of Frederick G. Williams and

Rebecca Swain, were married on 18 September 1842 in Quincy, Illinois, by Heber C. Kimball. Lovina Williams Riggs, another daughter of Frederick and Rebecca and wife of Burr Riggs, died in Quincy on 6 November 1847. It is believed that she is also buried in the Woodland Cemetery. Burr Riggs (1811–1860) is buried in Woodland. He shares the same headstone as three of Williams' great-grandchildren—George Washington Cope (1863–1864), William Cope (1864–1864), and Harry Jessie Cope (1869–1870).

4. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 1:323, hereafter cited as *History of the Church*.

5. See Truman O. Angell quote in Elwin C. Robison, *The First Mormon Temple: Design, Construction, and Historic Context of the Kirtland Temple* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1997), 8. See also note 3, p. 24.

6. George A. Smith in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–1886), 11:10, 15 November 1864.

7. Jamie Busen, "Family finds 'missing mink,'" *Quincy Herald-Whig* (Quincy, Illinois), 5 August 2002.

8. The new monument is located at Clat Adams Bicentennial Park along the Mississippi River front at a cost of \$1700 to the city. See Steven Eighinger, "Public comment was more than 3 to 1 in favor of installing the marker," *Quincy Herald-Whig* (Quincy, Illinois), 13 June 2002. See also Edward Husar, "Cemetery May Get Recognition," *Quincy Herald-Whig* (Quincy, Illinois), 28 October 2001.

9. Frederick Granger Williams III is a great-great-grandson of Frederick G. Williams and Rebecca Swain. Frederick Granger Williams III is a great-great-grandson of Frederick G. Williams and Rebecca Swain, and is the Gerrit de Jong Jr., Professor of Luso-Brazilian Studies, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Brigham Young University. For a biographical overview of Frederick G. Williams, see Frederick G. Williams III, "Frederick Granger Williams of the First Presidency of the Church," *BYU Studies* 12, no. 3 (spring 1972): 243–61.

10. *History of the Church*, 2:484–85.

11. *History of the Church*, 2:522–23.

12. *History of the Church*, 3:32–33.

13. See Luke S. Johnson, "History of Luke Johnson," *Millennial Star* 27, no. 1 (7 January 1865): 6.

14. *History of the Church*, 3:46.

15. "Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &C. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; And the Evidence Given Before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, at the Court-House in Richmond, in a Criminal Court of Inquiry, Begun November 12, 1838, on the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State," *Boon's Lick Democrat* (Fayette, Missouri), 1841, 134–36, 143–44.

16. *History of the Church*, 4:69.

17. *History of the Church*, 3:284.

18. *History of the Church*, 4:110.

19. *History of the Church*, 1:323.

20. *History of the Church*, 1:444.