

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR Listed 5/29/03

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Rice Family Cemetery

other names/site number LI0080

2. Location

street & number NE intersection corner of US Hwy 65 and AR Hwy 388

not for publication

City or town Varner

vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Lincoln code 079 zip code 71644

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination
request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic
Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets
does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant

nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Cedric Matthews

6/9/03

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Rice Family Cemetery
Name of Property

Lincoln County, Arkansas
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

FUNERARY/cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A
walls METAL: cast iron

roof N/A
other STONE: Marble, granite, and concrete

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

Period of Significance

1870-1953

Significant Dates

1870 (first burial)

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
Previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal Agency
Local Government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Rice Family Cemetery
Name of Property

Lincoln County, Arkansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .25 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 628112 3767572
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at the Southwest corner of the Southwest quarter of the Northeast quarter of section 8 (8) Township eight (8) South, Range five (5) West at the northeast corner of intersection of US Hwy 65 (2400 feet north) and AR Hwy 388 (800 feet east). The cemetery is bounded by one hundred (100) feet on the North and South sides and forty (40) feet on the East and West sides.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all of the extant resources historically associated with the Rice Family Cemetery.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Wendy S. Perkins, National Register Historian
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 31 January 2003
street & number 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street telephone 501-324-9874
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Dorothy Kientz
street & number 3315 Poplar telephone 870-535-2037
city or town Pine Bluff state AR zip code 71603

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

SUMMARY

The Rice Family Cemetery is located in the northeast section of Lincoln County, on the northeast corner of the intersection of US Highway 65 and AR Highway 388. The cemetery encompasses less than one acre of land and is associated with the founding father of the community of Varner and with the prominent horse race enthusiast, CPT Robert R. Rice. The Rice Family Cemetery contains seventeen marked graves, with eleven marked historic and four being historic, although not marked with a date. Only two of the graves are non-contributing.

ELABORATION

The Rice Family Cemetery is located in the community of Varner, in the smooth valley of the northeast section of Lincoln County. Sitting on the northeast corner of the intersection of US Highway 65 and AR Highway 388, the cemetery is located a quarter mile northwest of Arkansas Department of Corrections, Cummings Prison Unit, and also five miles south of the Arkansas River. The cemetery is situated on property that originally was part of CPT R.R. Rice's plantation. The last burial in the cemetery occurred in 1965. Those buried at the Rice Family Cemetery represent the three pioneer families to Lincoln County, the Varners, the Rices, and the Douglasses.

The Rice Family Cemetery is enclosed with a wrought iron fence with one opening facing west. Large walnut trees dot the perimeter, and some have grown over the fence. The cemetery contains seventeen identified burials marked with carved gravestones. The gravestones range from tablets, draped obelisks, a little girl likeness sculpture, a cradle grave, and two joined box tombs. Many of the stones include popular funerary imagery such as urns, flowers (roses), an anchor, ivy, and a dove. In addition to the gravestones, other cemetery related pieces are located in the Rice Family Cemetery. These pieces include a statue of St. Francis of Assisi, iron chairs and benches, and a sun dial. St. Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals and ecology. This statue may represent that the family owned and operated a race track and plantation. The sun dial was placed to remind visitors that death is near to all. The Garden pieces, or "cemetery furniture," were popular in the Victorian period.

This is a breakdown of burials by decade (marked graves):

1870s - 5
1880s - 1
1890s - 2
1900s - 0
1910s - 1
1920s - 0
1930s - 0
1940s - 2
1950s - 0
1960s - 2

No dates - 4

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SUMMARY

The Rice Family Cemetery is located in the northeast section of Lincoln County, on the northeast corner of the intersection of US Highway 65 and AR Highway 388. The cemetery encompasses less than one acre of land and is associated with the founding father of the community of Varner, William Felix Varner, and with the prominent horse race enthusiast, CPT Robert R. Rice. The Rice Family Cemetery contains seventeen marked graves, with eleven marked historic and four being historic, although not marked with a date. Only two of the graves are non-contributing. The Rice Family Cemetery is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** for its association with the pioneer settlers of Varner and Lincoln County. The cemetery is also being nominated under **Criteria Consideration D: cemeteries**.

ELABORATION

The settlement of Lincoln County began along the Arkansas River. Among the early pioneers included the Douglasses, COL W.F. Varner, and R.R. Rice. R.R. Rice, at one time, operated the only store located between Pine Bluff and Old Napoleon on the river. R.R. Rice (moving from Nashville, Tennessee, in 1844) and COL Varner (moving from Georgia in 1846) both acquired large plantations in the future community of Varner. The two men wielded influence throughout the Varner Judicial District, and also in the progress and politics of the state.

Varner, founded by COL Varner, was a center of trade and shipping. The principal businessman of Varner was CPT R.R. Rice. The son of R.R. Rice, CPT Rice was born in Varner in 1849. CPT Rice served as secretary to CPT Paul Sherley, a fleet captain with the Pacific squadron of the United States Navy. He later became the fleet captain and served in that capacity for three years. He then returned to his home in Varner.

CPT Rice was known for being an avid sportsman. He maintained a pack of over one hundred hounds for hunting bear and deer. His real love was horse-racing. He owned many impressive horses, which won several races and derbies. In July 1889, CPT Rice inaugurated his own racetrack in Varner. He had hoped his racetrack would simulate the initiation of county fairs and other civic affairs. However, the Varner racetrack was too far for many to travel, and only the one race was held. For many years, the track was used for training purposes. By the mid-1920s, the track had been plowed.

CPT Rice's race horses actually stopped horse racing in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1907. Then Governor Jeff Davis and CPT Rice were warm friends. When CPT Rice's horses were ruled off the track at Hot Springs, Gov. Davis requested that CPT Rice's horse be permitted back on the track. When this request was refused, Gov. Davis retaliated by forcing the passage of the anti-racing bill, which stopped horse racing in Arkansas. In 1917, horse racing was permitted back in Hot Springs.

After Lincoln County was established in 1871, CPT Rice tried to have the county seat of Lincoln County moved from Star City to Varner. At his own expense, CPT Rice built a courthouse with an inside jail. However, the switch of county seats was defeated at the polls in 1880. Faced with an empty courthouse, CPT Rice used the building as a hotel. It has since been torn down.

CPT Rice held one political office. He was elected county sheriff from 1875 to 1876, and also 1882 to 1890. In 1918, CPT Rice passed away. Although he had been in poor health for many months, he refused to postpone his annual deer hunt. It was his last. He had married Medora S. Varner, daughter of COL Varner.

R. Rice III carried on the Rice Family interests in Varner. Educated in the public schools of Memphis and at the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee, Rice III managed a mercantile and agricultural company. He owned five thousand acres of land, raising about a thousand bales of cotton annually. He employed over one hundred and seventy-five African-American families. In addition to his farm, he handled another five thousand bales of cotton through his mercantile agency and department stores.

In the 1910s, Rice III promoted drainage, levee and public highway projects in Arkansas. He sat on the the board of commissioners of the southeastern Arkansas levee district, the board of the Cummings drainage district, and the Arkansas-Louisiana highway and the Arkansas-Louisiana Tourist Way Association. The three projects benefited five counties and represented twelve to fourteen million dollars.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Rice Family Cemetery is significant in that it represents the final resting-place for the early pioneers of Lincoln County, and the founder of the community of Varner. The Rice Family was the prominent family in Varner, leading in agricultural, mercantile, and political interests.

Those buried at the Rice Family Cemetery were trailblazers in their own right, including entrepreneurs, farmers, and soldiers. Their combined experience gave them the courage to settle the area south of the Arkansas River, and create a viable and sustainable community with an economic base of mercantile operations and agriculture.

The Rice Family Cemetery is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** for its association with the pioneer settlers of Varner and Lincoln County. The cemetery is also being nominated under **Criteria Consideration D: cemeteries**.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas. The Goodspeed Publishing Company: Chicago, Nashville, and St. Louis, 1890.

Centennial History of Arkansas: Volume III. The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company: Chicago, Little Rock, 1922.