

The Solitary San Marcial Grave of Mary A. Featherston

by Dr. Peggy Hardman

That lonely, solitary grave, nearly in the middle of the road leading to San Marcial, has been a curiosity to many. SCHS Vice President, Dr. Peggy Hardman, spent several months in research and tracking down the family to learn the story of Mary A. Featherston – partially solving one of Socorro County's mysteries.

Anyone visiting San Marcial, New Mexico, sees and wonders about this solitary grave. The stone tells visitors **Mary A. Featherston** rests here. Who was this woman and why resting in such an isolated spot? More questions than answers exist as to why this particular location.

Floods destroyed San Marcial several times before the community faded (see Paul Harden's "San Marcial Floods" article on the SCHS website); there are three nearby San Marcial cemeteries that escaped the floodwaters (barely) and all in a sad state of disrepair. Why was Mary's body not buried in one of the nearby cemeteries? Did the land she rests on once belong to her family? Perhaps those answers will be discovered one day, but for now, it will be enough to know who this woman was, why she died in 1883, and remains in San Marcial, alone.

Her name was Mary, – **Mary Ann Minerva Featherston**, nee Appleby. Her father left Tennessee for Arkansas, but returned to the Volunteer State, claimed his bride, and took her back to Arkansas. Hezekiah Appleby married Margaret Herron. Beyond the fact of his Tennessee roots, not much is known about Hezekiah, other than he served in the War of 1812, and as many did in his time, moved West hoping to become a successful farmer in new and fertile land. In Washington County, Arkansas, on October



Photo: Paul Harden

Curious visitors to San Marcial stop at the solitary grave and wonder, "Who was Mary A. Featherston?"

24, 1832, Margaret gave birth to a daughter, Mary Ann (the Minerva part of her name is often shown in parentheses, sometimes left out). On March 2, 1834, a brother arrived, James Barnett Appleby. Sadly, Mary's sister, Margaret Elizabeth, born July 29, 1836, died at age three. Another family, also from Tennessee, by way of Virginia, lived in Waldron, Scott County, Arkansas, the Featherston family.



Photo: Peggy Hardman

**Mary A. Featherston's grave,
San Marcial, New Mexico**

William Grandison Featherston (hereafter referred to as William G.), patriarch, was one of the original four families who settled Scott County. A community leader, William G. participated in local, county, and state politics, owned businesses, including a tavern, and extensive land in the county. On May 28, 1846, he was appointed Post Master, and in 1862, County Treasurer. The first court session in Scott County is said to have convened in his barn. It seems likely his staunch support of the Confederacy, and his various civic and political duties would

put him in contact with Hezekiah Appleby and his family. Hezekiah also supported the Confederacy, and like William G., attended a meeting to discuss secession at least once.

By 1834, William G. and his wife, Isabella (also spelled Isabel and Isabelle) had two sons: George Washington, born November 5, 1829, and his brother, Robert M. William G. married at least three times, outliving each of his wives. During the Civil War, William G. moved his family to Arkadelphia, Arkansas, for safety; the Union army occupied their Scott County home. Likely, this episode prevented William Grandison Featherston from changing his attitude toward the Union. (The Featherston Society relates that William Grandison Featherston, as late as 1870, still refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the US).

It is not known what Hezekiah Appleby did during the war, but records indicate he owned one slave (nothing found thus far indicates the number of slaves, if any, owned by the Featherston family). But, his daughter, Mary, met the dashing young George Washington Featherston and presumably found him worth notice. George was educated, practiced law, and farmed the family land in Scott County. Records indicate he served as a Chaplain in the Confederate army, likely something else that attracted Mary to him.



Photo: Featherston family
**Mary Ann Minerva
 FEATHERSTON**

(1862-1930), Charles Henry (1867-1923), Georgia Anne (1869-1942), and Martha Edward "Eddie" (1873-1964).

The couple and their children lived in Arkansas, Texas, and New Mexico. As adults, the children had careers and married lives in New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and California. Whether or not George and Mary Ann lived in San Marcial is not clear, but they certainly visited family members who settled there. Sons Charles H. Featherston became one of the owners of the Rosedale Mine and William H. "Billy" Featherston lived in the area. Records indicate Billy and F. W. Keith owned a grocery store in San Marcial. George's brother, R. M. Featherston lived in Socorro proper, as did Robert Barney Featherston, another of George and Mary's sons. A growing community, situated on the Santa Fe rail line, San Marcial offered the Featherston men opportunity in Socorro County hard to pass up. Apparently, the Featherston clan was well-respected in San Marcial; locals called George Washington, "Major" (likely a reference to his CSA army days). The San



Photo: Featherston family
**George Washington
 FEATHERSTON**

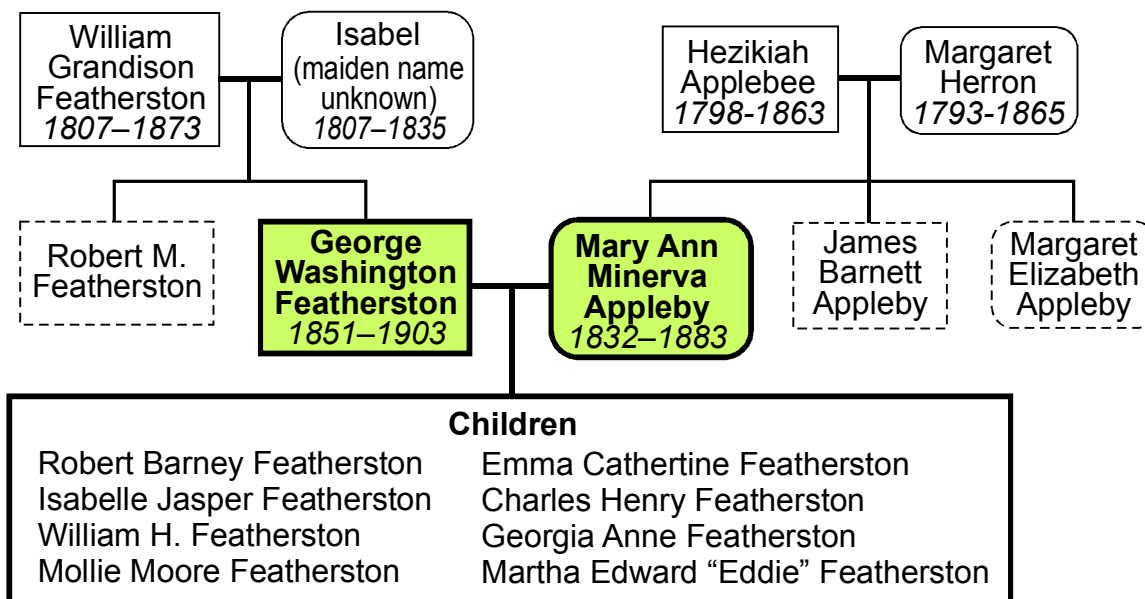
Marcial Bee referred to him by that title in 1885.

Around 1881, George and Mary Ann moved to Texas, settling in either Clay or Wichita County; she was 49 years old. 1880 Census records indicate the couple lived in Wichita Falls as did son, Robert

Marriage

On February 17, 1851, George's courting of Mary proved successful, and the couple married. For most of their married life, the couple lived in Arkansas, and there Mary gave birth to eight children: Robert Barney (1851-1933), Isabelle Jasper (1854-1892), William H. (1856-1925), Mollie Moore (1861-1956), Emma Catherine

Barney Featherston (Genealogy Magazine.com reports Robert Barney lived in Henrietta, a small community outside of Wichita Falls, Texas; he owned 1800 acres of land and raised beef cattle, so it is not unlikely that the Clay and Wichita County lines blurred at Census time, or his abode was inside Wichita County). Robert Barney had moved from New Mexico to the Lone Star state following



The Featherston Family Tree

an interesting career in Socorro, although he appears to have retained business connections in Socorro until 1887. He was proprietor of the Arcade Restaurant when that establishment was on Manzanares Avenue in 1886 and owned several pieces of property in Socorro and Socorro County. Robert Barney also is reported to have served a stint as a city marshal in Socorro, and had connections to the sheriff's office in the county.

Mary Ann Minerva Appleby, always listed in official records as a housekeeper (with eight children, that label seems inadequate, but was quite common in census data of her time), must have missed the sons who remained in New Mexico.

Mary's 1883 Death

Mary and George Featherston visited San Marcial in 1883. There, Mary fell ill with fever and died on May 30th. No death certificate has been located, but her great-granddaughter shared that George and Mary Ann did travel to San Marcial "to visit family." While visiting, Mary Ann Minerva Appleby "came down with a fever and died." At the time, a fever often called Tonto Fever or Crazy Fever, was prevalent in the Southwest, and cases had been noted in New Mexico. Maybe Mary succumbed to that scourge.

At this point, some questions still cannot be answered fully. Was it Tonto Fever that killed Mary, and why was she buried where she rests today? Did the Featherston sons own the land where she is buried (quite likely), or was she relocated from a San Marcial Cemetery? It is not known who erected the headstone or built the fence (originally a wooden picket fence) around her grave, but in the time period, families erected fence enclosures around burial sites, particularly those independent of formal cemeteries; so most likely, the Featherston family put up the fence, and the headstone.

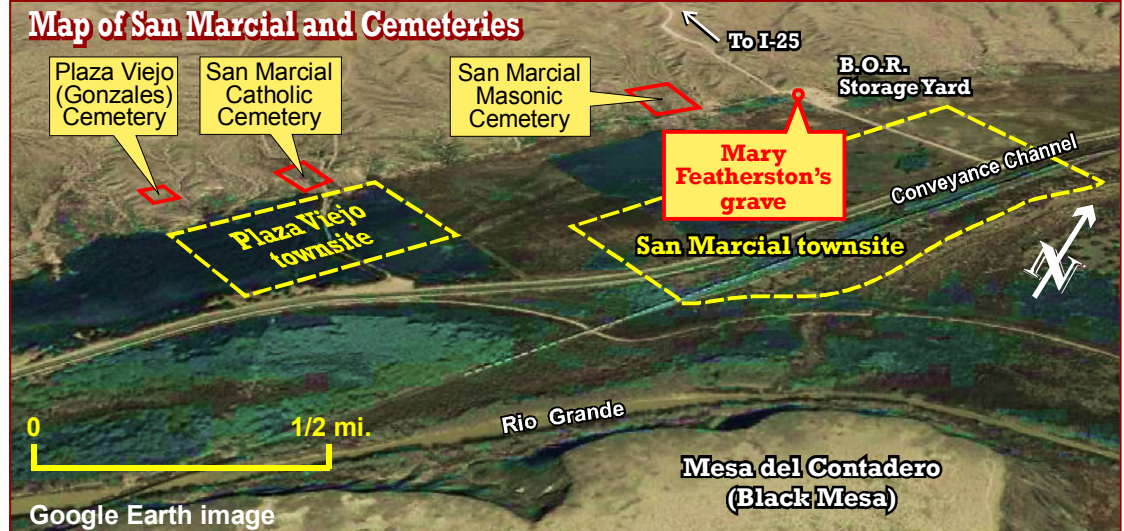
In the 1980s, the Bureau of Reclamation fortified the conveyance channels now slicing through the San Marcial townsite, and the storage yard near Mary's grave. It is believed the BOR placed today's metal fence around the grave to protect it, rather than attempt to relocate the grave.

Without all the answers, in many ways Mary Ann Minerva Featherston remains a woman of mystery in San Marcial, Socorro County, New Mexico.

The Family After Mary

Following Mary's death, the San Marcial Bee reported in 1885, that George W. and his daughter, Georgia, returned to visit his brother, Robert M,

and likely, Mary Ann's grave. George seems to have remained in the area with Robert M. for a time as the Socorro Chieftain reported on February 11, 1887, that G.W. Featherston had begun practicing law again (one report suggests



George Washington Featherston lived and work as a lawyer in San Marcial, but no corroboration of that has been found). Sometime after that, the Featherston brothers left New Mexico for good.

Robert Barney Featherston gave up his New Mexico holdings and moved to his land and home in Texas. His brother, Charles H. lived with him off and on until he moved to California. Both William H. "Billy," and Charles H. lived out their lives in Los Angeles County, California.

George Washington Featherston, Mary's husband, moved with his daughter, Martha,



Photo: Peggy Hardman

Mary Featherston's great-great-grandson, Norman Buckley, visits the grave with the author in 2018. Norman lives in California.

(known to all as "Eddie" – a source of great confusion researching the Featherston family) to Stephens County, Oklahoma; George W. died there October 12, 1903. He rests near family and friends in the Marlow Cemetery, Marlow, Oklahoma, but Mary Ann, his wife of so many years, sleeps alone in the New Mexico ghost town of San Marcial.

Some of the references used in this article:

- Ancestry.com (subscription services)
- US Census Records 1850-1920
- Featherstone Society
<http://www.featherstone.one-name.net>
- Southwest Business-Directory at:
<http://www.nmahgp.genealogyvillage.com>
- GenealogyMagazine.com
- Robert-Barney-Featherston biography at:
<https://www.genealogymagazine.com>
- Newspapers.com
- The Southern Standard* (Arkadelphia, Arkansas)
05 Sep 1885, p. 3.
- San Marcial Bee* (1885), various issues
- The Socorro Chieftain* (Socorro, New Mexico)
09 Feb 1901, p.1.
- Tennessee Death Records (1880-1908)

Special appreciation to Norman and Betty Buckley (great great grandson and great granddaughter of Mary Ann Minerva Featherston)

As a result of researching this family story, descendant Norman Buckley recently traveled to Socorro and San Marcial to visit the gravesite and expressed gratitude to Peggy Hardman and SCHS for keeping Mary's remembrance alive.