

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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☐ not for publication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)

Patricia Matthews  
Signature of certifying official/Title

4/4/03  
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:) \_\_\_\_\_

Edson H. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper

5/29/03  
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.)

United States Department of the Interior  
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 eighteen marked graves, with twelve 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. One burial, located away from the family graves, is Robert Douglas, a house servant for CPT Rice. According to the living family members, Robert Douglas' parents were slaves of the Douglas family. However, it is now known exactly how he became a servant for the Rice family. In any case, he was a trusted servant who was buried in the family's cemetery.

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. According to the family, Moses Collins, a family slave, planted the trees. The cemetery contains eighteen 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. Most of the graves are located in the western and center area of the cemetery. In addition to the gravestones, other cemetery related pieces are located in the eastern section of 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.

There is a thirty year difference from the time Varner was settled to the first marked grave in the Rice Family Cemetery. There may be older, unmarked graves located nearby or maybe even in the eastern section of the cemetery

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

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

No dates – 4

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 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, William Felix Varner, and with the prominent horse race enthusiast, CPT Robert R. Rice. The Rice Family Cemetery contains eighteen marked graves, with twelve 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. COL Varner acquired his first land in a bend of Choctaw Bayou, a high point 150 yards from the present home on a site that, according to family legend, was once a village occupied by friendly Choctaws. The Varner family built the only general merchandise store within a 25 mile radius. At one time, the Varner's business reached \$150,000 a year.

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 and for his long beard. 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. According to one ad by Ripley's Believe or Not, W.B. Gates, a horse owned by the Rice family, won 119 races. 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.

Ironically enough, it was CPT Rice's race horses that 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 by the Western Jockey Club, Gov. Davis requested that CPT Rice's horse be permitted back on the track. The Western Jockey Club felt that CPT Rice's horses won too many of the races, thus not allowing others the chance win. When Gov. Davis' request was refused, he 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, and CPT Rice was reinstated with the Western Jockey Club.

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.

Rice Family Cemetery  
Name of Property

Lincoln County, Arkansas  
County and State

## 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.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

CPT Rice had married Medora "Dora" S. Varner, daughter of COL Varner. She was born on her parent's plantation on March 2, 1861. She married CPT Rice in 1881. She was a graduate of the Episcopal Girls College at Columbia, Tennessee. She gave local African-Americans a church building for them to worship. She also gave them a bell for the tower. The building was known as Dorabell Church, short for Dora's Bell. The church is no longer standing.

R.R. Rice III, son of CPT Rice and Medora, carried on the Rice Family interests in Varner. He was born in Varner in 1866. 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 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.

William Iverson Varner, or Uncle I, was the son of COL Varner. He was a life-long bachelor who was a sportsman and student to the end. Uncle I was born on 2 April 1863. He attended Webb School at Bellbuckle, Tennessee, and was valedictorian of his class at Vanderbilt University. He traveled and studied in Europe for several years before returning to the United States. He then lived in Long Island, New York, for five years, serving as master of the hunt at the Meadowbrook Hunt Club. While he was there, he introduced English ethics of fox hunting.

While master of the hunt, Uncle I wrote many articles on hound breeding, development and training for national sportsmen's magazines. He was a confirmed believer in in-breeding of each strain far past the danger point. He hypothesized that in-breeding developed the highest characteristics of nose, speed, and stamina. He then preserved the best of each strain by cross-breeding top animals of each.

When he returned to Varner, Uncle I often hunted deer and bear with CPT Rice, his brother-in-law. Uncle I owned so many hounds, that two servants were assigned to cook for them.

However, hunting wasn't Uncle I's only passion. He was a self-proclaim expert on the bible and mathematician. He wrote a half-dozen booklets in which he stated that the end of the world was near, using prophesies and mathematics as his proof. He claimed that after World War II, three major events would occur that would lead to the earth's destruction in 1972; 1) Return of Israelites to their native land, 2) Overthrow of Babylon, and 3) Second coming of Christ. He also claimed that he was able to solve the "impossible" mathematical problem, how to square a circle. He sent this work to leading mathematicians of his day, including the director of the Smithsonian Institution's Weights and Measures Division. However, nothing ever came out of it.

### 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 unique 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.

Rice Family Cemetery

Name of Property

Lincoln, Arkansas

County and State

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

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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**.



United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

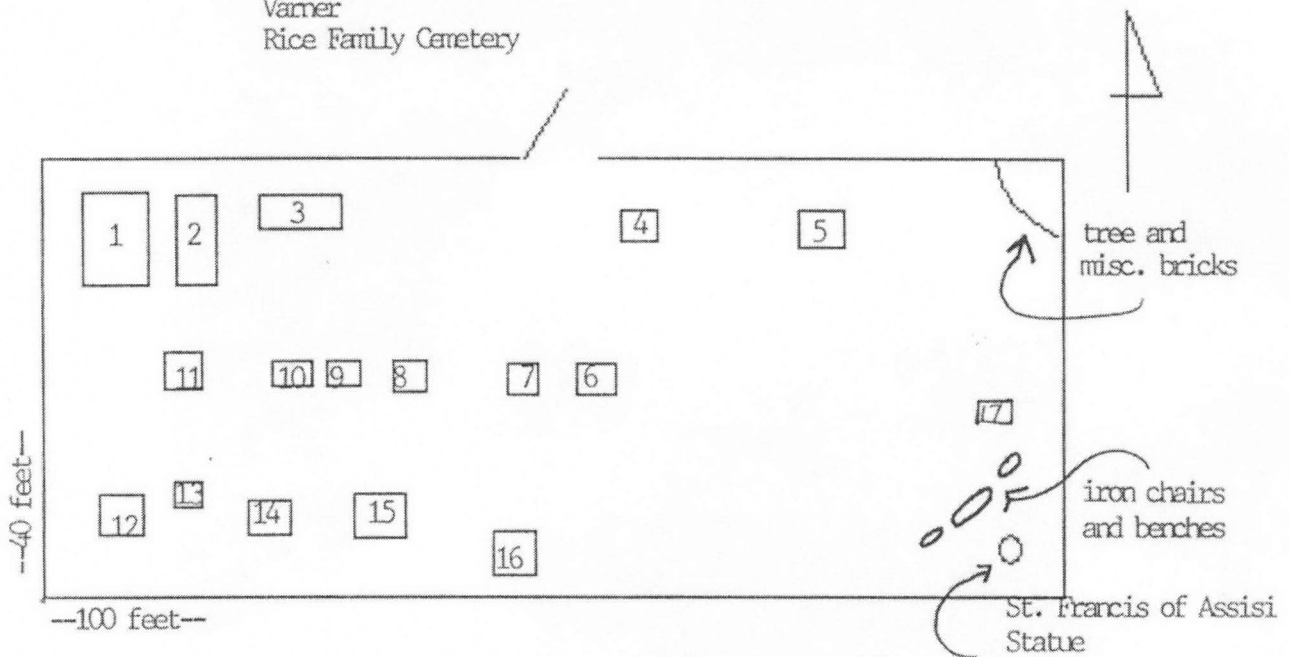
*Arkansas Gazette*. "Death of Capt. Rice Removes Most Picturesque Citizen." January 10, 1918.

Barker, Ethel. *Lincoln County, Arkansas: WPA Writer's Project*.

*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.

LI0080  
 Lincoln County  
 Varner  
 Rice Family Cemetery



1. Shirley Varner Rice and Emma Douglas Rice
2. Robert Ritchie Rice 1849-1918
3. Medora Varner Rice 1861-1949
4. Sundial (Robert R. Rice) 1886-1961
5. Mary Rice Harper 1892-1965
6. William Iverson Varner 1863-1946
7. Mrs. S. E. Varner 1840-1870
8. Wm. Felix Varner 1832-1898
9. Joseph W. Varner 1823-1875(?)
10. Mattie Varner 1846-1891
11. Early Varner 1869-1870
12. Lieut. J. C. Varner 1832-1883
13. M.V.
14. Herbert M. Varner 1843-1877
15. Mary T. Varner 1847-1878
16. Little Mamie
17. Robert Douglas 1875-1937

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Rice Family Cemetery  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ARKANSAS, Lincoln

DATE RECEIVED: 4/14/03 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 5/13/03  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/29/03 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/29/03  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 03000464

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 5/29/03 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the  
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N





RICE FAMILY CEMETERY

LINCOLN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

WENDY PERKINS

9 JANUARY 2003

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

SOUTHEAST CORNER - LOOKING NORTHWEST

#1







RICE FAMILY CEMETERY  
LINCOLN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

WENDY PERKINS

9 JANUARY 2003

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

CPT Robert R. Rice HEADSTONE

#2



WM FELIX VARNER

BORN

Jan. 7. 1832

DIED

Mar. 3. 1898



RICE FAMILY CEMETERY

LINCOLN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

WENDY PERKINS

9 JANUARY 2003

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

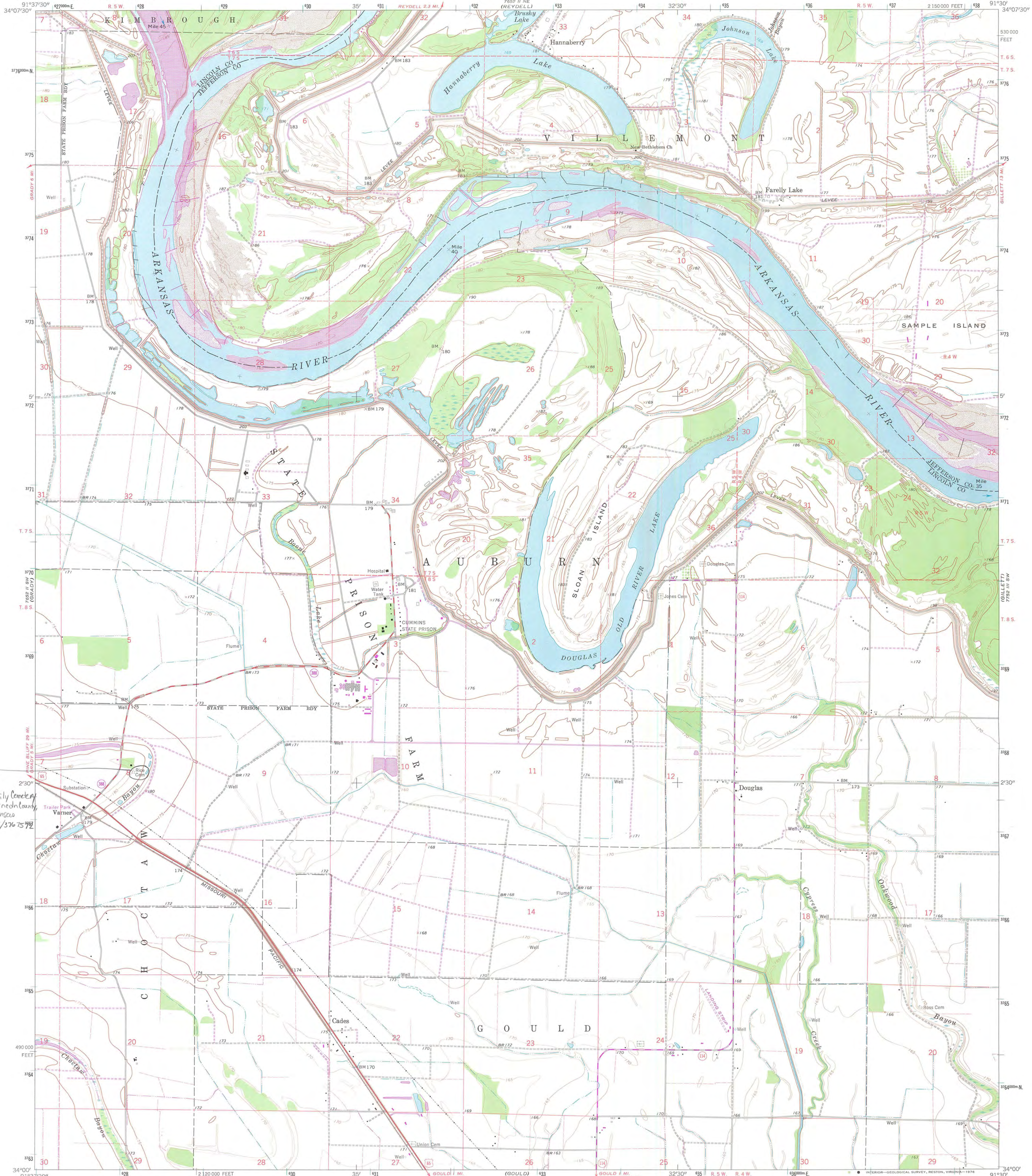
WILLIAM F VARNER Headstone

#3



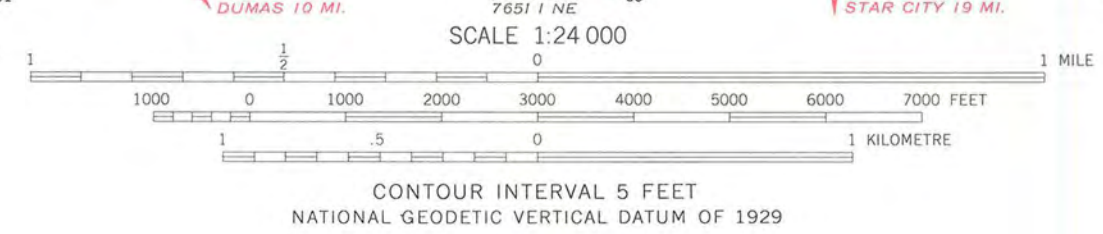
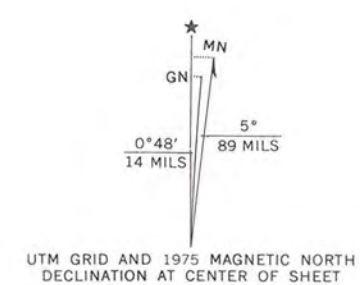
UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CADES QUADRANGLE  
ARKANSAS  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)  
SE 1/4 GRADY 15' QUADRANGLE



Rice Family Cemetery  
Vanner, Lincoln County,  
Arkansas  
15° 28' 11.2" N / 92° 37' 57.2" W

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE  
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1962. Topography by planetable surveys 1963-64  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Arkansas coordinate system, south zone  
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 15, shown in blue  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
Revisions shown in purple and recompilation of woodland areas  
compiled from aerial photographs taken 1975. This information  
not field checked



ROAD CLASSIFICATION	
Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
U.S. Route	State Route

CADES, ARK.  
SE 1/4 GRADY 15' QUADRANGLE  
N3400—W9130/7.5  
1964  
PHOTOREVISED 1975  
AMS 7652 II SE—SERIES V884





# The Department of Arkansas Heritage

Mike Huckabee, Governor  
Cathie Matthews, Director

Arkansas Arts Council

Arkansas Natural Heritage  
Commission

Historic Arkansas Museum

Delta Cultural Center

Old State House Museum



## Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

1500 Tower Building  
323 Center Street  
Little Rock, AR 72201

(501)324-9880

fax: (501)324-9184

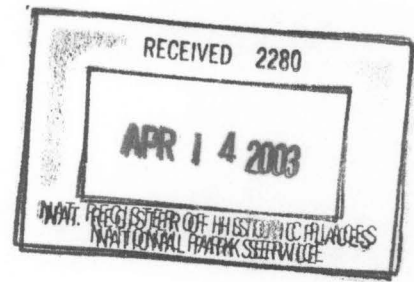
tdd: (501)324-9811

e-mail:

info@arkansaspreservation.org

website:

www.arkansaspreservation.org



4 April 2003

Carol D. Shull  
Chief of Registration  
United States Department of the Interior  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
8th Floor  
1201 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005

RE: Rice Family Cemetery – Varner, Lincoln County

Dear Carol:

We are enclosing for your review the nomination of the above-referenced property. The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program has complied with all applicable nominating procedures and notification requirements in the nomination process.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Cathie Matthews,  
State Historic Preservation Officer

CM:zc

Enclosures

An Equal Opportunity Employer



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SOY INK