The Cemetery

Shortly after the Presbyterians moved into their new meeting house in 1789, the area around it became a burial ground. It was never limited to members of the Presbyterian Church. The cemetery expanded, especially during the cholera epidemic of 1833, and in 1839 the church purchased two acres of land on Walnut Street. Part of the new addition was set aside for use as a cemetery for enslaved persons.

In 1877, the cemetery became the site of the McDowell Monument, erected by the Kentucky Medical Society in honor of Dr. Ephraim McDowell. His remains, along with those of his wife, Susan Shelby McDowell, had been moved to the spot from their original resting place in the Shelby family burial plot at Travelers Rest. In 1881, the church gave the property to the city, and it became McDowell Park. Most of the remaining headstones were removed. In 1892, the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky moved the remains of Rev. David Rice and his wife from Green County to the place where the first meeting house of his Danville church once stood and placed a monument over their graves.

McDowell Park was returned to the Presbyterian Church in 1993 as it prepared to expand its facilities. Before the work on the addition to the building began, 156 graves, almost all of them unmarked, were discovered in the construction area. The remains were carefully removed and reinterred near the labyrinth.

There are still a few grave markers in the old Presbyterian cemetery. They are probably greatly outnumbered by the unmarked graves of Kentucky's early residents that surround them.