

Verde Heritage: Cemetery history project with QR codes

By GLENDA FARLEY, Special to The Independent Feb 14, 2026

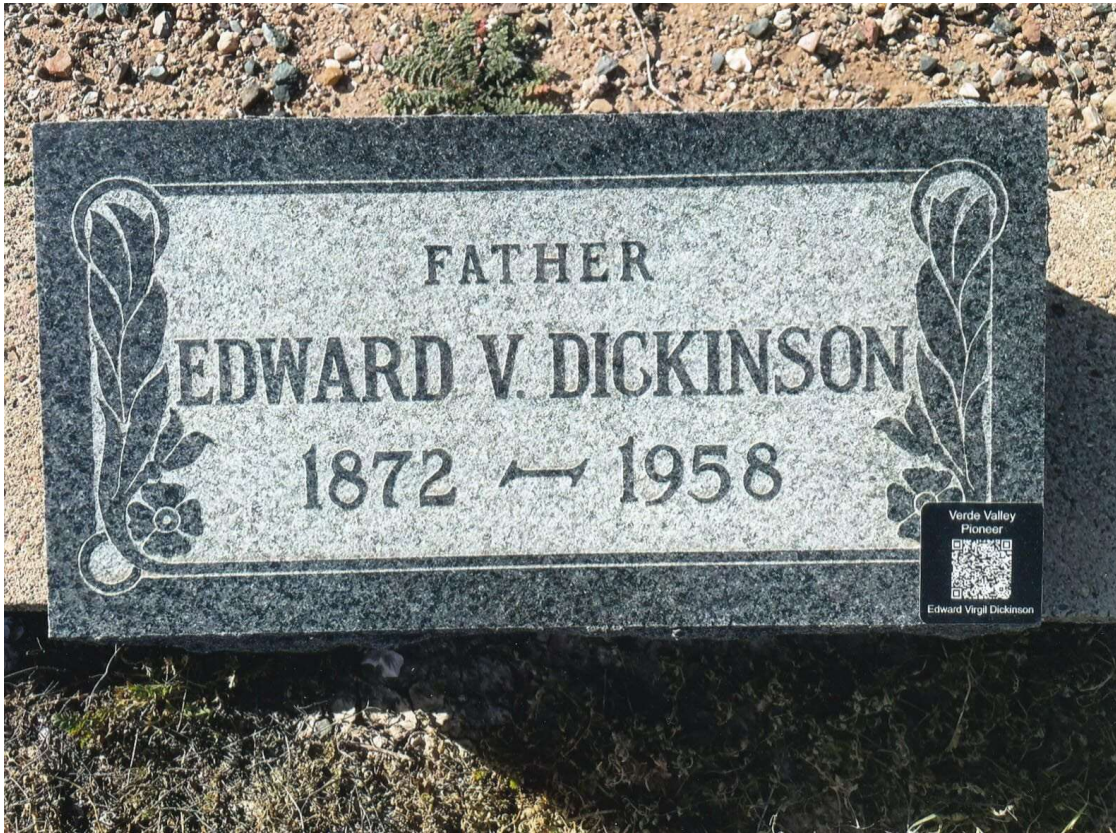


Photo Credit Bill Rowe

In the Dickinson Family Plot, QR codes have been cemented to existing headstones.

Over 150 years of Cottonwood and Verde Valley history is becoming available at the Cottonwood Cemetery where the stories of the pioneers and their descendants are being told through the use of QR codes on the gravestones. Traditional inscriptions contain only basic information and begin to tell the story. The addition of QR codes opens a whole new database of information including photographs, biographies and complete stories.

The QR code, or “Quick Response” code is a two-dimensional square matrix of black and white squares or dots, called modules, that represent the encoded data in binary. QR code was developed from 1992 onward by four team members to mark assemblies and components for logistics in the Toyota Groups automotive productions. (Wikipedia) QR codes are now used for many other purposes.

The QR code on a grave marker, when scanned, will provide additional information about the person and their family. This new cemetery database is intended to be a complete profile of each person and family, and it may be edited or updated as more information is gathered.

The pioneer family of Samuel and Nancy (Green) Dickinson traveled from Missouri to the Verde Valley with a large wagon train which arrived during August 1875. Bill Rowe has been collecting information about his wife's great-grandparents, Samuel and Nancy Dickinson, and their descendants. He has installed a few new grave markers as well as added QR codes to existing gravestones and set up a database with easy access to information, photographs and stories.

As of today, 21 graves of the "Verde Valley Pioneer" Dickinson family, their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and relatives have been given QR codes. Though most of the Dickinson family members were buried in the Cottonwood Cemetery, graves of family members in other Verde Valley, Glendale, Mesa and Casa Grande cemeteries have also been given QR codes.

Many of the graves in the Cottonwood Cemetery were originally marked with a wooden cross or headstone. Time and weather slowly destroyed these headstones leaving the graves unmarked. Because many graves are in family plots, the unmarked graves could receive new headstones with a QR code. Information is being gathered and a fund is being established to install new markers on these graves.

According to Bill Rowe, these QR code markers have been locally sourced in Cottonwood. The larger markers are 12 inches by 12 inches and have space for the name, dates and information about the person and the QR code at a cost of \$125. Smaller QR code markers with three lines of type measure 2.5 inches by 2.5 inches and are applied to the surface of existing markers at a cost of \$25.

More information about the database and QR code markers can be obtained from Bill Rowe: "email @ billrowe.com" (remove spaces) to leave a message.

QR codes will enhance the experience of visiting the cemetery and reveal many unusual and exciting stories about area residents. Hopefully, many people will be interested in this project. As an example, the grave marker for

John Hawkins has space for a brief statement about him. When the QR code is scanned, the database includes: Tragedy struck when “A young man named Hawkins, who resided with his parents, was thrown from a bronco horse and died. The deceased leaves a sorrowing father and mother and was brother to Mr. P. B. Hawkins of Chino Valley.” (Az Weekly Miner; Nov. 17, 1876.) John Sylvester Hawkins was born at Stockton, California, on Jan. 23, 1859. He was 17 years old, but nearly 18 when he died. Biographical information indicates he died on Sunday, Nov. 5, 1876. According to Inez (Loy) Lay, “John Hawkins’ grave was the first in the cemetery. He was killed when thrown from a horse when he was only 18 years old in the year 1876.”

David Wingfield wrote, “There was only one grave in the cemetery, that of John Hawkins,” Inez and David attended the Upper Verde School together when it was located at the north end of the Cottonwood Cemetery. (“Those Early Days;” 146-147; “Pioneer Stories;” 143.) The son of P. B. Hawkins, Jefferson Hawkins, age 15, had also been killed by a horse a few months earlier. The database contains the complete story of these tragic deaths.