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Conroe Public Library
Geneological Section
Conroe, Texas 77301

Joseph C. Brewer, Jr.
2118 Cherrington Dr.
Katy, Texas 77450

Dear Librarian:

Attached you will find a brief article (with maps) which I wrote summarizing my experience in locating the Old China Grove Cemetery which contains the gravesites of my great-great grandparents who settled in the area just north of Conroe in the 1800s. While this cemetery is documented in the cemetery records in your geneological section, the location of the cemetery is very vague. It is not located on your cemetery location map either. I trust you will be able to keep these records to supplement the body of knowledge you have for the Old China Grove Cemetery.

Regards,



Joseph Brewer
713-395-8484

GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT
MONTGOMERY COUNTY LIBRARY
CONROE, TEXAS

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LOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The Old China Grove Cemetery

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Before he passed away, my Grandpa Jones spoke to me about his grandpa Jones. How he had moved from Alabama in the 1870's to settle near the intersection of Peach Creek and Turkey Creek in what is now far eastern Montgomery County, Texas. The small settlement of "China Grove" grew up just northwest of this intersection and became the homestead of the William Henry Jones family and the larger Dean family who had accompanied William Henry from Dale County, Alabama. Within a couple of generations, however, the "good roads" had bypassed China Grove to the north and south and the community began to fade. The church and cemetery, located at the only intersection in China Grove became the last vestige of the community. It was here my great-great grandfather was laid to rest in 1922 and a year latter my great-great grandmother, Martha Anne, followed. Later, a new China Grove church was built to the south and the old cemetery was left to stand its vigil against nature alone.

Those who had loved ones buried in the old cemetery tried to care for it. But they too succumbed to the erosion of age and soon the second generation was all that stood between the "Old China Grove Cemetery" and an uncertain future in archeology. Ownership of the land had changed. Access was more difficult. Landmarks were not stable. Maybe the old road was over there. Or was it here.

I don't consider myself a genealogist. I traverse my family roots so I can draw a line from my past through my present and ponder its direction. I particularly enjoy visiting the grave sites of my ancestors to see where they toiled; and I look at the sky and I look at the earth and I imagine their life and their fate. Since my early talks with my grandpa I had heard of the Old China Grove Cemetery and how someday we would go find it, though it was *deep* in the woods. But time has a way of slipping away, and so, lost somewhere in the Sam Houston National Forest was a small cemetery with earth and sky I had not yet pondered.

I owe much to those who have tried to document the history of prior life and times. In particular, I owe a large debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Bridges Browder who led a small expedition in 1978 to locate and document the tombstones of the Old China Grove Cemetery. I uncovered their diligence in the Clayton Genealogical Library in Houston, Texas and found that my great-great grandfather had in fact lived and died in China Grove. Their directions to the cemetery testified of its remoteness. After numerous efforts to locate it myself I solicited the Browder's personal help. Though sixteen years had passed Bridges carefully sketched out his recollections and with the help of my dad, Joe Brewer, we ventured ever deeper into the thick forest surrounding Peach Creek. After our seventh expedition Bridges recommended we obtain the help of Donald McKay, a local hunter who was familiar with the area and who had run across the old cemetery maybe eight years earlier with his hunting companion Red Hill.

We met Donald early that Saturday morning. I've always known that strangers are friends you haven't met yet, and Donald McKay is one of those friends. Willing to help at my first request, Donald put us in the vicinity within thirty minutes and my dad discovered the first tombstone within the hour. Puzzled that we hadn't found more tombstones, particularly those of my ancestors, I began to venture south through the thick forest. Soon I saw what looked to be structure and straight lines through the dense underbrush. The closer I came the more intense my heart pulsed. There under a thick canopy of hardwood trees was a small masonry curb encircling a plot containing four marked graves. I walked quickly over to the largest two and my hopes were at last realized. Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Jones were still resting in peace.

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Before I yelled my excited announcement to my dad and daughters I sat on the curb and looked to the sky and looked to the earth and surveyed the surroundings. I read slowly the words etched on the stones. The names, the dates. Pushing the layers of leaves from around the bottom of each tombstone were more words, much closer to earth than to sky. They whispered, "Gone but not forgotten", and I knew then why I had come. I had come to say, "It is true." They were gone, but their fifth generation descendants were there to confirm that they, in fact, were not forgotten.

If you, too, know of a lost cemetery holding its vigil alone, please document its location and if possible its tombstones and send the information to your local library and historical society. Someone who doesn't want to forget will be eternally grateful.

DIRECTIONS TO THE OLD CHINA GROVE CEMETERY:

From Houston, Texas go north on Interstate 45 past Conroe to the Willis exit. Head east into Willis and once there head south (right) on Hwy 75. At the next light turn left (east) on to FM2432. Past the railroad tracks but within a quarter mile the road Y's with FM2432 heading to the right. Take the smaller road to the left which is called "County Line Road". Go exactly 6.5 miles east on this road and you'll see a dirt road to the left called McCrory Rd. (sometimes mislabeled as "Tanyard Road"). Turn left (north) onto this dirt road and go 1-1/2 miles to an intersection with another dirt road, the real Tanyard Rd. Turn right onto Tanyard (what was once the old "Willis to Coldsprings Rd.") and go exactly 1-1/2 miles. At this point you will see a small winding dirt road heading to your right. Follow this road for about 250 yards until you come to a gate. The property beyond this point belongs to George Darden, a lawyer in Conroe who was gracious enough to allow us access to his land. Following the dirt road to the left beyond this gate and staying left at all Y's will lead you ultimately to an old hunting shack at the end of the road. About 200 yards before the old hunting shack is another small dirt road heading south (take a compass). About 250 yards south on this road, just past its lowest spot, and then about sixty yards west into the forest is the Old China Grove Cemetery. The distance from Darden's gate to the cemetery is about 7/10 of a mile. The attached maps are my best attempt at documenting its location.



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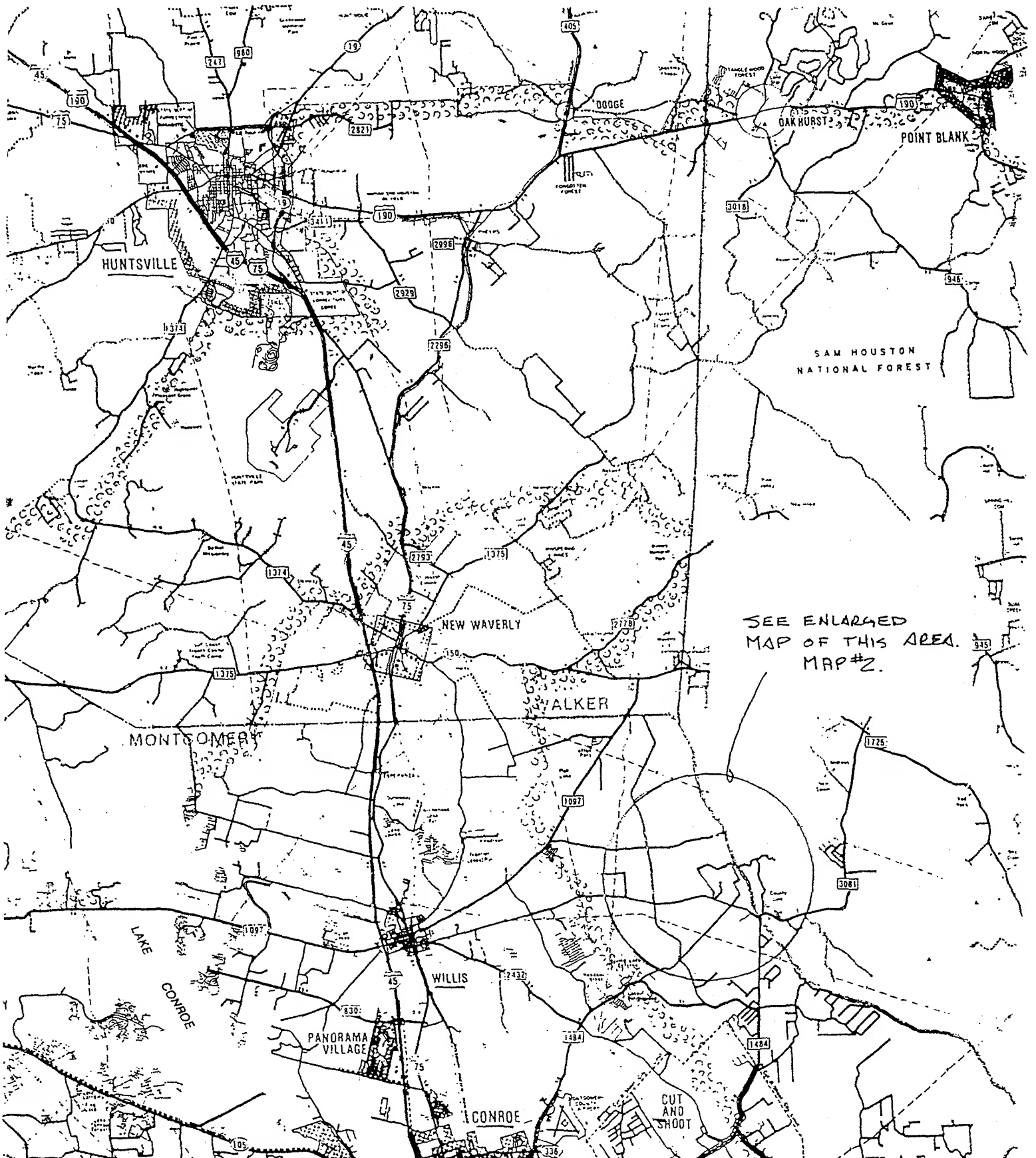
Jones Lineage:

*son of Joseph Clarke and Peggy Ann Jones Brewer
daughter of William Alton and Lila Fern Epperson Jones
son of Robert Franklin and Mary Etta Dean Jones
son of William Henry and Martha Anne Alley Jones
son of Henry E. and Catherine E. Jones
son of Joel and Kissiah Orr Jones*

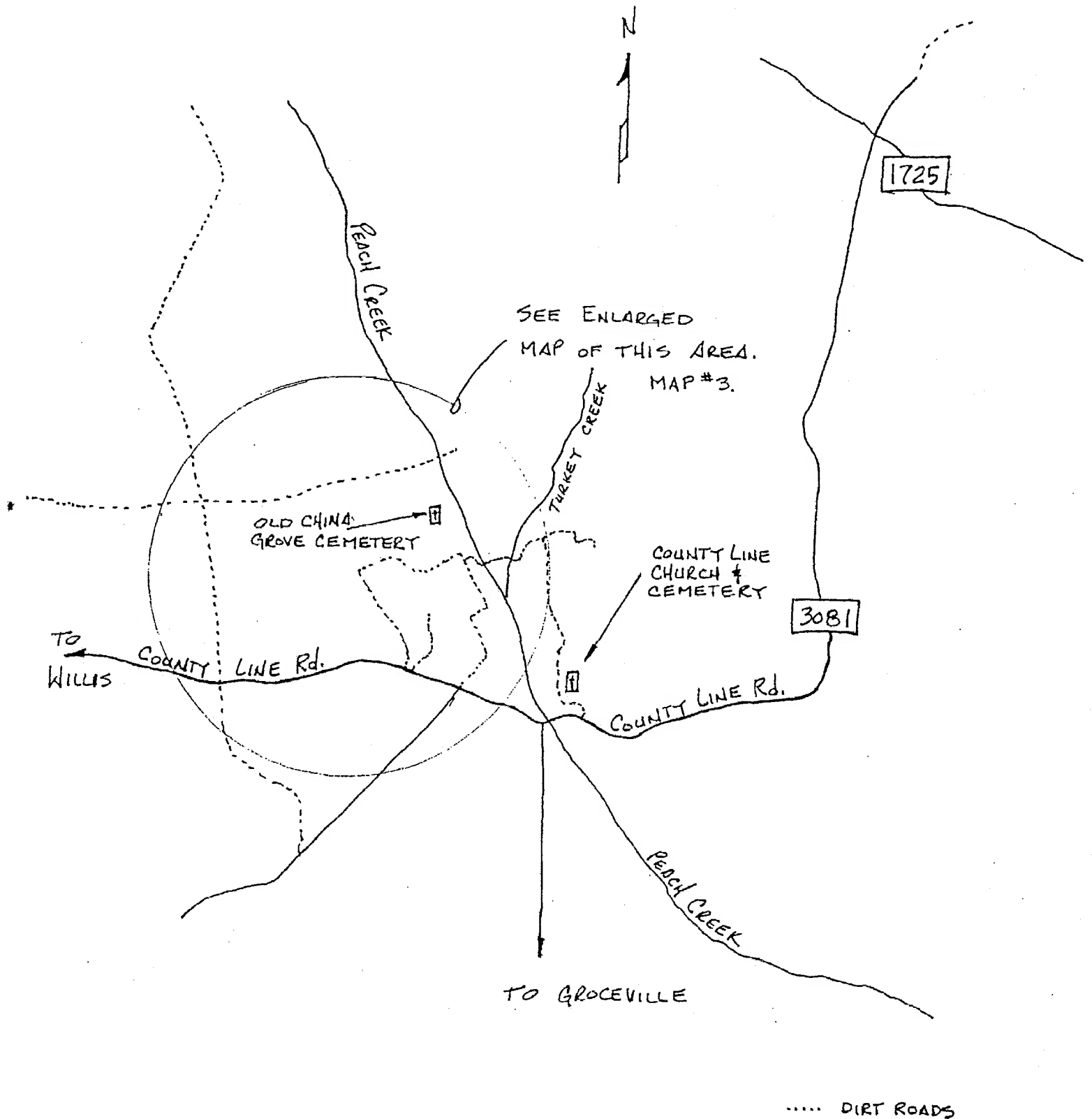
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DIRECTIONS TO THE OLD CHINA GROVE CEMETERY

MAP #1

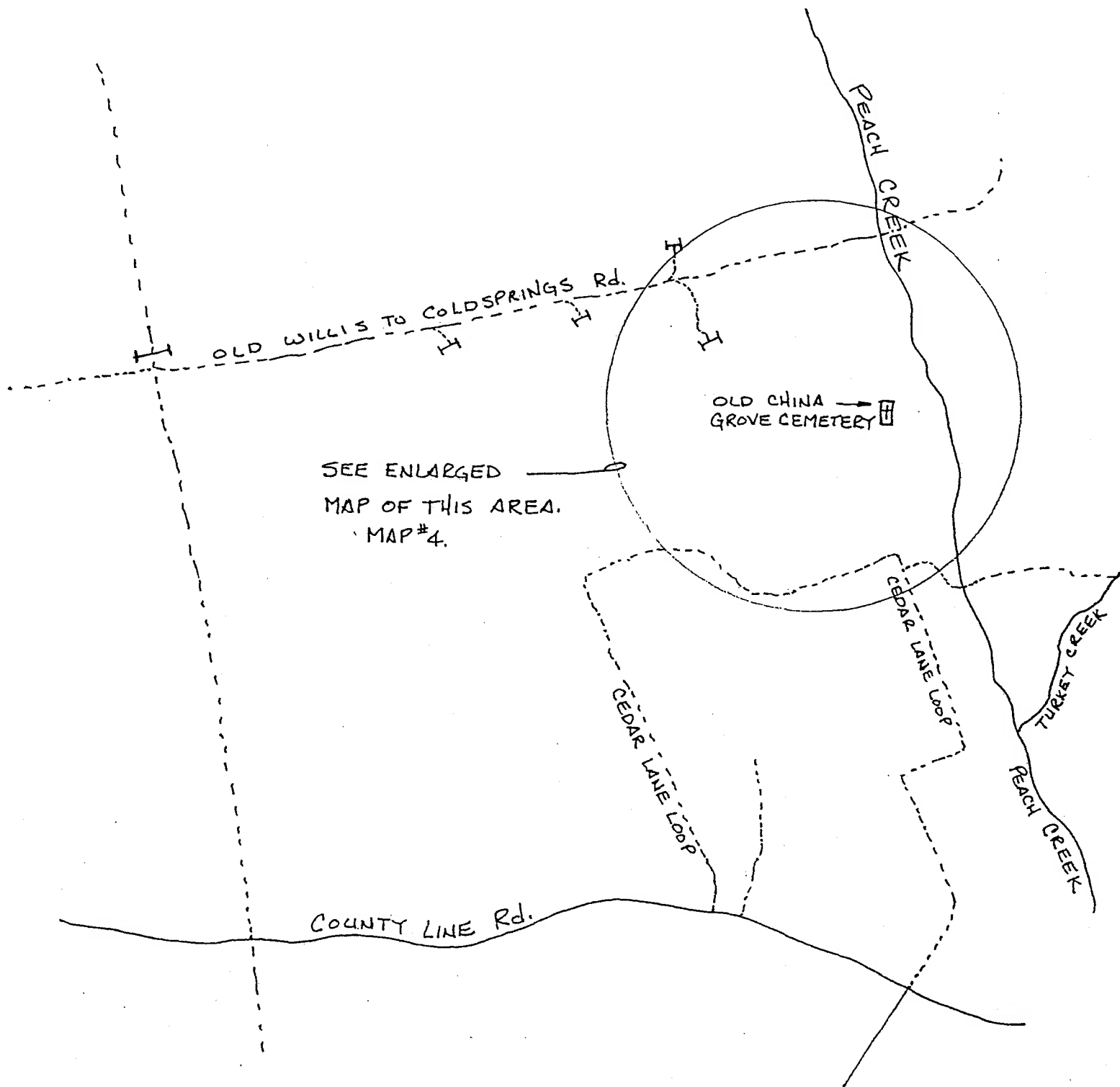


DIRECTIONS TO THE OLD CHINA GROVE CEMETERY MAP #2



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DIRECTIONS TO THE OLD CHINA GROVE CEMETERY MAP #3



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DIRECTIONS TO THE OLD CHINA GROVE CEMETERY MAP #4

