

SPOTLIGHT

A Page in History

David N. White establishes presence here, in nation

"A Page in History" will chronicle some of the most distinguished and interesting residents who are now at rest in Sewickley Cemetery, and each essay will be collected to make a walking tour of the cemetery.

This article will introduce the cemetery's first superintendent."

Building the Sewickley Cemetery in the 1860s was a leap of faith for the president G. E. Warner and the 30 original incorporators.

Borrowed money was used for the purchase of land and all the expensive necessities such as clearing the forested site, building roads and walls, grading and landscaping. It took 15 years of most careful management before the sale of lots wiped out the debt.

Guiding the enterprise was David N. White, first superintendent, a post he held for 28 years.

Although identified with all the public interests of the town, he was the very founder of the cemetery and did more than any one else to make it the beautiful place it is. Prior to his tenure there, White lived a noteworthy life.

He was born Aug. 22, 1805, in Wareham, Mass., on Buzzards Bay. He was raised there and apprenticed to a printer.

In 1827 he came west to Pittsburgh knowing his skill in the printing trade would be valued. He found employment with the Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, the city's oldest newspaper, having been founded in 1796. Eventually White started a printing business of his own.

He married his wife Diana in 1828, and they had the first of several children in 1829. In 1840 he moved the growing family farther west to Illinois where he found editing work.

Not finding the situation there suitable, the Whites returned to Pittsburgh, and he acquired an interest in the Pittsburgh Gazette. He shared control of the paper until April 1847 when he surrendered his holdings for a time because of ill health.

In 1848 he returned to the paper as editor and sole proprietor. For eight years, White ran the Gazette and turned it into a major voice of the abolition movement. While at the helm of this prominent Pittsburgh daily, he participated in a pivotal moment in American political history.

In the 1850s, the growing anti-slavery sentiments in the country were not being addressed by any existing political party, and White was concerned.

He wrote, "I resolved then to start a new political party in Allegheny County, and in the State, if possible — not the Liberty Party or the Free-Soil Party, but one free from all entangling alliances — the Republican Party."

The Gazette issued calls in August 1855 for a county and a state convention, both of which took place. These efforts were noticed by the new Governor of Ohio, Salmon P. Chase, later to be Lincoln's secretary of the treasury, and when he visited Pittsburgh in November 1855, he requested White call upon him at his hotel room in the Monongehela House.

A discussion ensued, the upshot of which was that a national convention should be held to form a party to resist the further expansion of slavery. The two men corresponded with Democrats, Whigs, Know-nothings and Free-soilers, and the result was the issuance of a call for a national convention to be held in Pittsburgh, Feb. 22 and 23, 1856, to unify all the various organizations opposed to the expansion of slavery.

It was a mass meeting open to all at Lafayette Hall on the corner of Wood Street and Fourth Avenue. Representatives were present from all the northern states and from several of the southern states.

The convention passed resolutions against the further extension of slavery and called for a convention in Philadelphia that June to nominate candidates for president and vice president of the United States.

John C. Fremont was nominated to run against James Buchanan in 1856,



DAVID WHITE'S monument stands tall among Sewickley Cemetery's ancient markers.

but Buchanan prevailed.

It was a bruising election, and it proved to be too much of a strain for White. He sold his interest in the Gazette to S. Riddle and Co. and left Pittsburgh for the rural pleasures of Sewickley. Although he intended to retire, the town would benefit from his continuing activity until his death in 1888.

The Republican Party of the U.S. was born in Pittsburgh, and the father of the Party was David White. That party proved to be attractive to Abraham Lincoln and he carried its banner to victory in the 1860 presidential election, with momentous consequences: a civil war, and with victory, a Republican preeminence for the rest of the century.

The Whites lived at 225 Broad St., which is today where the parking lot of St. James Church is located. After the death of Mrs. White in 1899, the house continued as a private residence until the Masonic Society bought it in 1923, and it then became for many years the Dorian Club. Its final use was as a residence for Catholic teachers. It was torn down in the early 1960s.

White was called "Deacon" by everyone, suggesting he was a man of

solemn demeanor. He was a wise man and could turn a phrase, the result of his work as an editor. His devotion to the cemetery and his good sense are evident in the following quotations.

The reasons for building Sewickley Cemetery: "There is an absolute necessity to Sewickley Cemetery, and the comfort and consolation it affords to our citizens who are called upon to provide a place where they can respectfully and safely inter the loved ones they have lost."

The focus cemetery plots provide for families: "Whatever tends to create and keep up a proper family pride is to be commended. Many a young person is saved from self-destruction, by the restraints of early training in a well-ordered family, crowded with recollections and mementos of a respectable ancestry. It is of no small value to young persons to know that they have descended from honorable and virtuous progenitors."

The power of the Civil War memorial Fame: "The heroic statue of Fame is not only happy in its conception, but brilliant in execution. The more it is studied, the more it will be admired. Here the children of our lovely valley, amid these sylvan scenes and magnificent prospects, while they stimulate their patriotism, can educate their eyes and their taste, and have aroused within them a love of the beautiful in nature and art."

Appreciating the beauty of Sewickley Cemetery: "Here on this mountain top, amidst these grand surroundings, we prepare our last, silent, resting-place. Here friends gather, on beautiful summer days, with flowers and garlands, to deck the graves of their beloved; and the scene is so invigorating, that grief itself is chastened, and the thought is insensibly turned to that fair land watered by the river of life, and to the trees on its banks, whose leaves are for the healing of nations."

A large monument in Section B marks where White now rests.

Nearly is the grave of his second son, Albert James White. Albert was mustered into Co. A of the 38th Regiment, also known as the 9th Pa. Reserves, Aug. 28, 1861, only to be discharged with a surgeon's certificate on Oct. 4, 1861. The 18 year old died of disease at the family home six months later on April 25, 1862.

The epitaph on his stone, written by a heartbroken father, reads in part, "His end was warm, peaceful, triumphant."