

TEMPO

SPOTLIGHT

A Page in History Life traces its record in stones of hilltop cemetery

This monthly feature, called "A Page in History," will serve to remind us of our friends and neighbors, now some 12,000 strong, more than the living population of the town, who lie in Sewickley Cemetery.

For almost 150 years, this hilltop site of repose has fulfilled the needs of the community, and it will do so long into the future.

"A Page in History" will chronicle some of the most distinguished and interesting former citizens 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 explore the early history of Sewickley and the formation of the cemetery.

In the early 1800s Sewickley was quiet and sparsely settled. At that time, all burials took place in either private family plots such as the one at "Newington" near Little Sewickley Creek, or one of the two public burying grounds.

The older of the two cemeteries was created around 1800 as the population of Sewickley began to grow.

Prior to this growth, Division Street of today was merely a lane laid out on a north-south survey line of 1785 that divided two large farms. As the town grew, both of these farmers donated land at the bottom of Division Lane near the Ohio River to serve as a cemetery.

The total size of the land donated by both farmers was a modest half acre, but it did create the town's first public cemetery. The area came to be known as Graveyard Lane, and today this site is occupied by the Quaker Valley Middle School football field on Graham Street.

The other cemetery available to the citizens was located behind the gothic style brick Presbyterian Church that was first occupied in 1841. This small cemetery sat on the north side of Beaver Road, across from the present sanctuary.

In 1859, 22 acres on the hill above Sewickley were purchased for a cemetery for the Rev. Robert Hopkins, who at that time owned much of the land east of Division Street.

The individual most responsible for the founding of the new Sewickley Cemetery was the Honorable David Nye White, editor of the Pittsburgh "Daily Gazette," who was also known as the "Father of the Republican Party."

After considerable work and expense for grading and creating roadways, the cemetery was ready to open in the fall of 1860. Although the official opening ceremony took place on Nov. 1, 1860, the first interment took place several days earlier on Oct. 12, 1860, due to the untimely death of Liddie Cox Fundenberg, wife of Dr. Walter F. Fundenberg.

Mrs. Fundenberg died of puerperal fever which resulted from complications arising from the delivery of her new baby. Liddie Cox Fundenberg was laid to rest at the very crest of Section A high above the Village below. Her weathered headstone still marks her grave, and commemorates the cemetery's first burial.

As the new cemetery grew, the older cemeteries fell into a state of neglect and disrepair, prompting many families to transfer their dearly beloved from those neglected sites to the new cemetery.

Noteworthy among the reburials from Graveyard Lane are John and Esther Waggoner now at rest in Section A.

Esther's head stone with a death date of 1810 was the oldest stone in the old cemetery, and the transfer of that stone along with the bodies makes her stone the oldest stone in the current cemetery. Although her stone is deteriorating with age, the death date and most lettering is still visible when viewed with the sun at the correct angle.

The Presbyterian graveyard, like the Graveyard Lane cemetery was no



longer used for burials, and removals to the new cemetery occurred from time to time.

Significant among those removed from the Presbyterian cemetery was Mary Olver, founder of the Edgeworth Female Seminary, and staunch supporter of the Presbyterian Church. Mary Olver was originally buried in the Presbyterian Cemetery in 1842, but eventually she and her husband were removed to the plot of George H. Starrs in Section B of the new cemetery.

To hasten the transfer of bodies to the new cemetery, the Pennsylvania Legislature passed Act 494 in 1867.

It reads in part: "Be it enacted that it shall not be lawful to make interments in the old burial grounds, and after the removal of the bodies therein, as provided for in this act, the same shall be vacated as burial grounds, and forever thereafter, to cease to be used for burial purposes...."

"It shall be lawful for the Sewickley

borough council to purchase, for the special purpose, a suitable lot, or lots, in the new cemetery, and remove the bodies and remains from the said old burial grounds, and have them decently interred in the said cemetery, and they shall also remove and set up in a proper manner, over the new graves, in said cemetery, all monuments, or tombstones, now erected over the old graves...."

After the passage of this act, removal of the remaining bodies at the Graveyard Lane cemetery took place in 1868. Of the 287 bodies, many of which were unknown, 276 went to the new cemetery, and the other 11 were transferred elsewhere. These bodies brought up from Graveyard Lane now lie in Lot 44 in Section C under a common stone.

In 1876, burials still remaining in the Presbyterian graveyard, 27 are listed, were removed to Sewickley Cemetery. They lie in Lot 50 of Section C, beside the lot used for the Graveyard Lane removals.

The stone of Hester Meiriman who died in 1854 is the only remaining original stone that can still be seen at this site. In 1926 eight more graves were unearthed during excavation at the new (now middle) school, and the remains reburied with the others in Section C.

With the removal of all previous burials to the new cemetery the transition from burying within the village to making all burials at the hilltop cemetery was complete.

Such are the Sewickley Cemetery's beginnings.