YOUR sewickley
A Service of the Sewickley Herald

Published on YourSewickley.com (http://www.yoursewickley.com)

Founded in 1860, Sewickley Cemetery was designed to celebrate life, resurrection

By yoursewickley
Created Apr 1 2010 - 12:00am

For the next several weeks, the Sewickley Herald will print articles about Sewickley Cemetery to acquaint the community with the treasure in its midst and to prepare for a gala celebration Memorial Day weekend, May 29 and 30, as the cemetery marks its 150th anniversary.

Sewickley Cemetery was established in 1860, just before the Civil War, as an enhancement for the new town of Sewickleyville, itself only seven years old since its incorporation in 1853.

The existing graveyards were no longer suitable.

The oldest public graveyard has been established around 1810 to contain casualties from a virulent fever. It was located near the site of Quaker Valley Middle School on today's Graham Street.

The burying ground had fallen into disrepair after 50 years. In addition, there were questions about the ownership of the land, as there was no clear title to the plot, and the large 200 to 250 acre sections of land laid out in the original survey of 1785 were being subdivided and sold.

Another graveyard, only 20 years old, established behind the 1840 Presbyterian Church on Beaver Street, would no longer be used because the Presbyterians were building a new church, the current 1861 edifice on Grant Street, and chose not to have a burying ground there.

The new cemetery on the hill above town, 22 acres purchased for $1,200 from the Rev. Robert Hopkins, who was Sewickleyville's first burgess, was designed to be a garden cemetery in the popular style of the Mount Auburn Cemetery created in 1831 in Cambridge, Mass.

The idea was that, in an embellished landscape and a park-like setting, the harsh view of death and the afterlife symbolized in old graveyards and church burial plots was banished in favor of a joyful resurrection, celebrated in a setting that afforded comfort to the living.

The uplifting hilltop site, looking out over the valley of the ever-flowing Ohio River, perfectly suited that end.

Our cemetery that now has served seven generations, was a labor of love accomplished by 30 gentlemen incorporators, representing a cross section of the antebellum community in

Sewickleyville. The 1860 census enables us to know their professions.

They ranged from "capitalist," the designation for the president of the cemetery board, Griswold E. Warner (1792-1873), to several men styled "gentlemen," along with manufacturers, physicians, lawyers, newspaper editors, a printer, druggist, broker, merchants, educators, farmers, a teamster, stream engineer and a number in the building trades, carpenters, a cabinet maker and a mason.

The entire enterprise--building a road, preparing the land, retiring the debt incurred and cultivating a clientele--was adroitly managed by David White (1805-1888), the first superintendent, who served for 28 years.

White was a retired newspaper editor. An ardent abolitionist who deplored slavery, he had been editor of the Pittsburgh Gazette, founded in 1796, and helped to make history by using the newspaper to propose "a new political party, not the Liberty Party or the Free-Soil Party, but one free from all entangling alliances, the Republican Party."

In 1855, the Pittsburgh Gazette issued calls for a county and state convention, both of which were held, and in 1856, a national convention was held in Pittsburgh, which ultimately resulted in the nomination of John C. Fremont to run for president of the United States against James Buchanan.

Fremont lost, but Abraham Lincoln carried a Republican banner to victory in the next election in 1860, with momentous results, including a bloody Civil War.

The response of the Sewickley Cemetery to the Civil War will be the subject of next month's article.

Source URL:
http://www.yoursewickley.com/sewickleyherald/article/founded-1860-sewickley-cemetery-was-designed-celebrate-life-resurrection