

## HISTORY OF OAK HILL CEMETERY

The Pioneer Cemetery on the hill west of town was the first cemetery of the city of Lawrence. Since it is now on state-owned property, and is part of the Kansas University grounds, it is no longer a city cemetery. Pioneer Cemetery will be included in Volume Two. Some private burials and many victims of Quantrill's raid were first interred in Pioneer Cemetery, but later moved into Oak Hill. Those names are included in this volume.

Oak Hill Cemetery is owned by the city of Lawrence. It's address is 1605 Oak Hill. Following is a legal description:

Section 32, Township 12 South, Range 20 East, SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , Also Beginning at Iron Pin in E Line of & 46 ft. S of NE Corner SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of SW $\frac{1}{4}$  32-12-20, Th W 168 Ft. to Iron Pin, th S parallel with said E Line 761.5 ft. to Iron Pin to N Line Oakhill Ave, Th S 78° 56'E on said line Oakhill Avenue 171.25 ft. to Iron Pin in E line of Quarter Section, Th N 793.75 ft. on said line to point of beginning, Also beginning at SE Corner SW $\frac{1}{4}$  32-12-20, Th N 409 ft. to S line of Cemetery Road, along S line of said Road in Wly direction 207 ft. to a stake, Th S 448 ft, Th E 203  $\frac{3}{4}$  ft to point of beginning, containing 45 Acres all in the City of Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas. Also: Beginning 38 rods East of the NW corner of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 32, Township 12 South, Range 20 East, then South 80 rods, then East 22 rods, then North 36 rods to the South boundary of the Right-of-Way heretofore granted to the St. Louis, Lawrence & Denver RR (now the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Co.), then along the South boundary of said Right-of-Way of said Railway Co. to a point 12 feet East of the first mentioned North & South line, then North to the North line of said SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 32, Township 12 South, Range 20 East, then West 12 feet to the point of beginning, containing 5.9 Acres of land more or less in Douglas County, Kansas.

The principle burying ground for the historic city of Lawrence is Oak Hill Cemetery. On the fifth day of January, 1865, the ground now known as Oak Hill Cemetery was purchased by a committee of the city council from Thomas Sternbaugh, and deeded to the city of Lawrence. The cost was seventy-five dollars per acre.

Three sections were platted out first, and five were added later. Lots were appraised and enough sold in one afternoon at auction to pay for the land. William Miller bought the first lot, paying one hundred dollars for it. On November 15, 1865, the mayor appointed a committee consisting of councilmen Kimball, R.L. Frazer and Holland Wheeler to draft an ordinance on rules and regulations for the government of the cemetery. The committee made their report April 4, 1866, and the report was adopted, at which time the mayor appointed the first cemetery committee, consisting of councilmen Kimball, R.W. Sparr and John Watts. At a meeting of the city council January 1, 1868, it was given the name Oak Hill as it was covered with young oaks in their natural uncultivated state.

Leo Wiltz was employed to survey and plat the grounds for cemetery use. Mr. Wiltz was a perfect master of his work. For two years he was head gardener for the Emperor of Germany, and among other works he was appointed by the Emperor of Russia to plan and perfect a beautiful park near Moscow. Most of his work in America had been done near Cincinnati, and was all fine work. He considered the cemetery site a place of great natural prospects, one of the best, in fact, he had seen in all the west. On the grounds there were fourteen varieties of the oak tree. These oaks were to a great extent grouped off by Mr. Wiltz, so as to secure the very best effect.

Ex-Mayor Grovenor, who was for six years superintendent of our city cemeteries, carefully managed the cemetery fund which stood in 1876 at about six thousand dollars and was safely invested. The burials at this time numbered about fifteen hundred. The average price for lots were twelve and one half cents per square foot, six hundred feet (usually) to the lot. They felt the grounds were large enough to provide room for fifty or seventy-five years to come.

At the time Mr. Wiltz planned for improvements the cemetery could be entered through a south gate. After entering the grounds, and slightly to the right, one would have been at the wide-apart heads of two ravines leading towards the Potter's Field in the northeastern corner of the grounds and would have been compelled to reach this field by following the extreme eastern fence. But according to Mr. Wiltz's design two rustic bridges were to be built between the two ravines to the point of their junction. They were to be sixteen feet in width, one leading to the right into Potter's Field, the other to the left into a newly graded carriage-way which skirted the northern boundary of the grounds. Mr. Wiltz felt that the Potter's Field was about the best portion of the whole cemetery. (It slopes from the eastern line towards the west, down to the edge of the now non-existent ravine.) Several groups of trees and shrubbery in this field were exquisitely beautiful. According to Mr. Wiltz, cemeteries should almost be as much a place for the living as for the dead. "We should seek to make the cemetery a place not entirely of sadness and of gloom, but a place where the living may repair with pleasure."

Water was installed in 1898 through the efforts of councilman F.W. Reed who raised by subscription over two thousand dollars, with which he had water mains carried to the cemetery and two hydrants were put in each of the eight sections. A water franchise compelled the water company to furnish water free to all parks and cemeteries. (There are about eighteen water hydrants at this time.) In later years ten more sections were added.

Oak Hill has had many sextons-caretakers-custodians through the years who have cared for the beautiful grounds and tended their duties with great devotion. They greeted the bereaved families of the departed and gave willing help to the ministers and morticians, and with the placement of markers by locating graves for them.

By 1898 there had been over six thousand burials in this cemetery (we now estimate there to be nearly twenty thousand burials). An accurate count cannot be made due to unmarked graves that possibly were not recorded.

At one time there was a barn in the southwest corner of the cemetery and the city had permitted a stable to be built. The disgust of the citizens over this matter was plain in a 1936 "Letter to the Editor" in the Lawrence Journal World. "...Someone, or a committee, or the council itself has permitted a horse stable to be built just across the driveway from two of the oldest sections in the cemetery...There is no place within the confines of Oak Hill for a stable, a horse or cow barn, pig pens or sheep sheds. If there must be one let it be a proper distance from any of the used portion of the cemetery, that plot which holds all that was mortal, of the great, the small, the good, the bad, but nevertheless, our loved ones."

The barn and stables have been gone for many years. The two story house on the grounds that had been home for the caretakers through the years was sold to Carl Perkins in 1945 and moved to Eudora. Ed. Smith was caretaker at that time. Mr. Smith served the community as custodian for the next twenty years, retiring in 1965. The appointment of Clarence L. Mier as cemetery supervisor for Lawrence city cemeteries was announced in October, 1965. Mr. Mier, with the help of his wife, tended his duties with great care until his passing in March 1972. Vivian Mier continued on as supervisor and remained in that position until her retirement in June, 1986. The present supervisor is Don Shaw.

No known list exists of past caretakers, but those whose name we do know are: (Dates are known years, possibly not all of the years they might have served.)

Thomas B. Snedeger	- 1875-76
Robert S. McFarland	- 1886-1905
A.E. Tweed	- 1907-1911
Herbert Reed	- 1913-1919

The first recorded burial in Oak Hill was Amanda O. Marcy. She was born August 22, 1841, and died November 8, 1860. The date of interment was November 10, 1860. She was buried in section one, grave one.

Note: This date is about five years before Oak Hill was bought and deeded for the cemetery. It is most probable that there were burials "on this hill east of town" before the proposed cemetery became a reality, and it could have been recorded later.

Others believe that Dozier Cavender Gill was the first person to be buried in Oak Hill. According to his family "his death occurred April 3, 1865. His sons made application for a burial permit in Pioneer Cemetery on West Hill, but were informed that the books were closed and further burials were to be made on the hill east of town (Oak Hill). The new cemetery had not yet been opened and no one had the authority to issue permits. They were without a sexton or gravediggers, and the snow was knee deep, the weather was bitter cold. The sorrowing family members were finally allowed to bury Mr. Gill. According to his family the grave was located in the extreme northeast section of the cemetery and was marked with an old-fashioned white marble slab.

## HISTORY OF OAK HILL CEMETERY-cont.

Many brave pioneers and notable men and women are buried in Oak Hill Cemetery. The list below is only an example, there are many more.

Charles Robinson - First Governor of Kansas

James H. Lane - First United States Senator from Kansas

Roscoe Stubbs - Governor

Colonel James Blood - First Mayor of Lawrence

John P. Usher - Lincoln's Secretary of Interior

Josiah Miller - member of First State Senate. In 1861, as chairman of the Judiciary Committee, suggested the motto on the State Seal "Ad Astra Per Aspera"

Solon O. Thacher - Chairman, Constitutional Convention - drafted the Constitution of Kansas which barred slavery.

J. S. Emery - First United States Attorney

Wilson Shannon - Territorial Governor 1855-56

John Speer - Editor of the Kansas Tribune 1854-1857

Rev. Richard Cordley - Minister and author

George Barker - State Senator

Dudley C. Haskell - American Congressman and founder of Haskell Institute

John G. Haskell - Among other buildings, designed the Kansas State Capitol building in Topeka

Jabez B. and Elizabeth M. Watkins - Benefactors of Lawrence and the University of Kansas

Alfred H. Bromelsick - Benefactor of the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and the Douglas County 4-H

Lucy Hobbs Taylor - First woman dentist in Kansas

Clare M. and Vivian Patee - Started the first "picture show" west of the Mississippi

Edward P. Fitch - Started the first school in Lawrence, January 16, 1855