

## **A Brief History of Cemeteries**

Cemeteries are nearly universal, appearing in virtually every culture throughout time. Even the earliest nomadic cultures built permanent “dwellings” for their dead. Burial sites became places where the living could return to visit their ancestors. Because the deceased cannot actively participate in the ceremony, burial customs are more for the living as are the monuments and memorials we build. Monuments and the inscriptions on them demonstrate respect, love for the deceased, reassurance of an afterlife, a permanent display of religious views and sentiments, and the status of the family. Cemeteries contain detailed documentation of history in every stone.

In the early days of western civilization, laws required burials take place outside the city limits. As Christianity took hold, people began to bury their dead in or under religious buildings. By 752 A.D., churchyards were added as a suitable place for burials. Definite boundaries marked the consecrated area for burials. This area required perpetual care, and signaled the emergence of the modern cemetery.

Churchyard burials became impractical in the overcrowded, unsanitary conditions of the nineteenth century. A new idea, a freestanding area outside the churchyard, allowed for different types of cemeteries: private (for profit), public (tax supported), religious (Catholic, Jewish, etc.), and military.

In the early 1800s, a Parisian trend established the construction of garden cemeteries landscaped with pathways, rustic vistas, and winding avenues. Monuments went from ghoulish figures and horrific depictions of Judgment Day to the sculptures and nature scenes loved by the Victorians. Even the term “cemetery” (place of repose) connotes a transition to a place of rest rather than a place of feared retribution.

### ***In the United States***

Burial customs in the United States evolved with the development of the country often reflecting the multicultural heritage of early settlers. In colonial times, the dead were buried under their churches as in Europe, then, in churchyards for congregational members. Settlers designated family plots on their homesteads. Towns operated Potter’s fields, at the city limits, for the indigent or strangers to the community. Churchyard cemeteries became a popular place to picnic and take walks between church services. By the nineteenth century, Americans also adopted freestanding cemeteries. Later, a movement grew to move cemeteries to the outskirts of the city, opening up valuable city land for businesses or private residences.

The Victorian era of extravagance led to the building of family monuments: huge, artistic, personalized carvings imbedded with ornamentation encoded in the symbolic “language” of

cemetery art. Sculptors began producing huge monuments that only the wealthy could afford, eulogizing and providing eternal life for the dead, if only in stone.

Modern day cemeteries are often memorial parks with flat grave markers that do not stand in the way of lawn cutting equipment, allowing for easy care of the park. The artistry expressing the lives of individuals that once filled American cemeteries has been supplanted by the uniformity of mass culture. The efforts we put forth in our program help reintroduce the public to the fascinating history of our community, creating a greater interest in the preservation and restoration of many other cemeteries in the region.

### **Attitudes toward death in the United States, 1832-1940**

Death, natural or otherwise, was omnipresent for the early settlers of McLean County. Disease, epidemics, accidents, and childbirth were responsible for many premature deaths. Illness, suffering, death, and mourning all took place at home. Family members prepared the body while others sought cabinetmakers to build a coffin. Funerals and burials were simple and often hurried in cases of disease or warm weather.

Mass production of coffins started in the 1850s. Some cabinetmakers became dealers, slowly evolving into undertakers. These new undertakers also handled the laying out of the body. Death began edging away from “hands-on” family involvement. By the 1940s, the grim details of death had been moved as far from everyday experience as possible.

## **A History of Evergreen Memorial Cemetery**

### **Old City Cemetery**

Evergreen Memorial Cemetery is actually two different cemeteries—Bloomington Cemetery and just to the north, the Old City Cemetery. We’ll point out the division between the two cemeteries during training exercises.

No one knows precisely when the Old City Cemetery opened. According to some sources, the first burial was a child of a man named John Kimler and was on the piece of ground later to become the cemetery. Mr. Kimler gave permission to his neighbors and friends to bury loved ones there as well. It became known as “Kimler’s burying ground” long before the town took any steps toward owning it.

The first mention made of a city burying ground dates to March 10, 1851. At that time, Messrs. B. H. Coffey and I. N. Ward were appointed to confer with the owners of the graveyard. They were to offer the owners \$50 for the old ground and \$25 for one acre south of it, and to procure

the deeds for the city. The price paid for this piece of ground was \$103.70 and J. Ramsey received the money.

The original purchase of two acres lies 140 feet directly east from the Wood Street-Hardin Street entrance to the cemetery and extends north almost to the railroad tracks. It was never subdivided into lots; people selected spots and buried their dead any place, without lots or title deeds.

During the ensuing years, the city purchased land to expand the cemetery. With the exception of the original old burying ground, it has been platted and subdivided into lots. This grid formation is in direct contrast to the winding avenues of the neighboring Bloomington Cemetery.

### **Bloomington Cemetery**

The Bloomington Cemetery Association was incorporated and organized on February 16, 1857 by Linus Graves as a profit making venture. Linus Graves served as secretary of the Association and supervisor of the burying grounds for forty years. After the death of Graves, his son Arthur J. Graves assumed the same post and continued as manager of the cemetery and the adjoining Maplewood Greenhouse until his death in 1938. The Maplewood Greenhouse, located across the street, provided a constant supply of fresh flowers. It was also used to winter exotic plants such as palms which were planted on graves in warm weather.

The cemetery's original charter provided for 25% of the funds from the sale of plots to be used for improving the cemetery. Perpetual care was not sold with the lots at this time; individuals had to provide it through their estates. As descendants moved away or died, the plots were left unattended. A Perpetual Care Trust Fund was established in 1907 but it was not enough.

By 1955, seeds of neglect had crept into the cemetery. It was a display of dead and broken trees with the tangled growth hiding the graves and cemetery paths. Burial and deed records were incomplete and often it was necessary to probe the ground for unoccupied burial plots. Sales of burial plots declined because of the inferior physical and business conditions of the cemetery.

In a *Pantagraph* article of August 21, 1955 Attorney William J. Bach, great grandson of the founder, reported that the cemetery had not paid its way in many years and a proposal was made to have the cemetery taken over by the city of Bloomington. The city however, owning the nearby City Cemetery, did not want to assume this new burden. For the next ten years, irate citizens found little accomplished in correcting the conditions surrounding the cemetery that held so many great former residents of Bloomington.

In 1958, Mr. Snodgrass, acting superintendent of the cemetery, received the Maplewood Greenhouse operation for his services rendered in the operation of the cemetery.

Conditions had not improved during the years and on May 28, 1962 a delegation of interested citizens showed up at the City Council Chambers seeking city help for cemetery clean-up. They came away with high hopes after receiving a promise of action. During the next year, Mayor Robert McGraw appointed committees to study the matter and a proposal was made for a not-for-profit organization to be responsible for raising funds to maintain the cemetery. Another proposal suggested turning over the cemetery to the city-township, which had the power to levy cemetery taxes. The city itself could not do this. The stockholders agreed to this second proposal, and received the annual interest accruing from the \$80,000 perpetual trust fund, but refused the greenhouse.

At last, it looked as if Bloomington Cemetery Association would be reaping the effects of the Cemetery Care Act, passed in 1948, and the "Public Graveyard Act of 1957," which provided a means for townships to take over cemeteries.

On October 22, 1963 the State of Illinois audit found everything in order in the Bloomington Cemetery Association trust fund, removing the last barrier for the care and maintenance of what became *Evergreen Memorial Cemetery*. (The cemetery had been referred to as "evergreen" as early as 1883 although some objected to this term due to the lack of evergreen trees!) 106 years old, it covered 60 acres and contained 15,182 graves. The Pantagraph progress report on the cemetery on April 12, 1964 read "Cemetery Much Improved Under Township Control."

Many improvements were made in the following years at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. Leaves were cleaned up and trees and shrubs trimmed. The newly sown grass seed gave the cemetery a chance to live up to the name "evergreen." Eagle Scouts restored the Civil War burial section and painted the quarter-mile chain link fence along Lincoln Street.

While work continued to improve conditions at Evergreen, an old problem arose. On Monday night of May 5, 1986 vandals over-turned 35 headstones bringing the total to 200 for the previous two years; more vandalism occurred on September 29, 1990. It is an ongoing issue and very hard to predict. In an effort to prevent further vandalism, Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, McLean County Museum of History, and Illinois Voices Theatre developed the annual Evergreen Cemetery Walk to teach the community about the historical importance of cemeteries and the need to treat them with respect and reverence. Since the inception of the Evergreen Cemetery Walk, instances of vandalism have declined, but do continue. The goals of this program are to bring awareness of this problem to the public's attention and foster respect for community cemeteries in the young people who participate.

The 1995 Heritage Award for Preservation Achievement, presented to Evergreen Cemetery by the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission, stands as a symbol of the community's effort to make Evergreen Memorial Cemetery a place befitting the names that grace the many headstones.

## Monuments, Gravestones, Markers

The Greeks began to erect monuments to the dead in the sixth century B.C. Stones were cut and carved by artisans in a craft tradition passed down from master carver to apprentice. Around the mid-nineteenth century, the development of the sandblasting process helped make mass-production of monuments possible. About this time Bloomington's first two marble works opened, each selling manufactured as well as handcrafted stones. H.J. Higgins & Co., Haldeman and Sons, Moore and Co., and P.A. Stein created monuments for many McLean County families. Families could also order markers through the Ward's and Sears and Roebuck catalogs until the 1940s.

While most monuments were made near quarries, every piece required a certain amount of hand finishing. Placement of large monuments took considerable effort. Horse-drawn wagons transported monument sections to the cemetery. Movers used block and tackles for unloading and setting the stones. To properly place very heavy stones, builders erected a temporary support of wooden blocks, topped with a slab of ice, next to the desired location. The stone was lowered onto the ice and, as the ice melted to the desired level, the slab was slid into place. Monument makers of today use refined, mechanized cutting and polishing equipment, as well as computer-cut stencils. They are set in place with flatbeds and forklifts rather than ice.

### Materials used for Grave Markers

The first grave markers were plain fieldstones or wood. As the stones were difficult to carve, they were used primarily to simply mark the grave site. Wood was easily carved but deteriorated rapidly which is why there are few remaining wood markers in Evergreen (although, documents show that walnut headpieces were being used as late as 1870 in the Old City Cemetery).

**Marble** was the most popular gravestone material in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Easily carved, it could be polished to a high sheen. Its use locally was made possible by rail transportation to Bloomington in 1853. Marble was imported from quarries in Vermont and Europe. Although many beautiful and elaborate tombstones were carved from marble, few retain their previous splendor. Marble is a soft material and it decays rapidly. Over time, inscriptions become grainy and hard to read, particularly in modern environmental conditions. To identify marble tombstones, look for the sparkling crystals in the stone that become visible after the surface polish has deteriorated. If you notice upright tablet stones that are particularly decayed with nearly illegible inscriptions, these stones were probably made of marble or sandstone.

**White Bronze** is an alloy made up of copper, tin, and zinc and its coloring is bluish-gray. White bronze was meant to be a less-expensive alternative to stone, manufactured by the Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut. It was very durable, cheaper than granite, and

could be molded into very intricate designs. It was used primarily during the mid-1870s to 1914 but never gained the popularity the manufacturer had expected.

**Limestone** was a frequent choice for funerary sculpture and gravestones in the nineteenth century and could be obtained locally. It was most commonly gray in color, but between 1895 and 1930 a type of limestone referred to as 'blue-marble' was sold for monuments. It had bluish-gray appearance and was more durable than marble but less so than granite. Signs of decay are obvious on limestone tombstones.

**Granite** became a popular choice for gravestones in the late 1800s. By 1870 granite was quarried in Illinois, but much had to be imported, primarily from Scotland. When the railroads reached the extensive quarries of Barre, Vermont, granite became the most frequently requested stone for monuments. Its durability, varied colors (black, gray, pink, red, and white), ease of engraving, and facility of stain removal make it the most commonly used gravestone today. Virtually any century-old cemetery will contain mostly granite tombstones.

The majority of monuments used in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery are made of imported granite. Nine out of ten light gray stones that you see are from Vermont. Because of the immense weight and size of granite stones, the stones were generally carved into monuments near the quarry. Therefore, it is obvious that no carving of granite monuments took place in Bloomington; however, local companies did engrave lettering and floral designs on them. Below is a list of the granite origins, according to their color:

*Light gray stones:* from Vermont or Georgia

*Black stones:* typically from Pennsylvania, or from Africa or India

*Red stones:* from Wisconsin or Missouri

*Dark brown stones:* from the Dakotas

### **Marker or Monument Types**

Tablet or Slab Headstones: One of the oldest and simplest ways to mark a grave. Early ones were thin, upright rectangles and generally designated one burial. They evolved into the 'slice of bread' look about 1850. Today tablets are wider, often identify two or more graves, and vary in height and cut.

Sarcophagus (pl. sarcophagi): A large, rectangular monument built to resemble an above ground tomb. These were patterned after the tomb of Roman General Scipio.

Ledger: Large, flat marker that covers the entire grave. This is a low version of the sarcophagus.

Column: Free standing reproduction of an architectural column, used alone or as a statue base.

Obelisk: Tall, four sided column, culminating in a point (e.g. The Washington Monument). It was inspired by the type used in ancient Egypt.

Pedestal: Four-sided, flat-topped shorter version of an obelisk, possibly topped with a statue.

Garden Memorial: Bench, chair, urn, sundial, birdbath, etc, used to commemorate a burial.

Mausoleum (pl. mausolea): Cemetery structure erected with space in walls for above ground interment. It has a small chapel-type area for the family's use. Mausolea were inspired by Greek and Roman temples.

Crypt: Structure similar to mausoleum but with no door. Interments are made from the exterior.

Cenotaph: a monument erected in memory of a person whose body is buried elsewhere.

## **Cemetery Structures**

Receiving Vault: Before mechanized grave digging, this large structure temporarily housed coffins in extremely cold or wet weather until burials were feasible.

Coping: Low stonework used to delineate family or group plots. Some coping is enhanced with a set of steps and/or lot markers. In the last quarter of the 19th century, it was popular to use a fence around graves but cemetery management generally discouraged this practice as being unsightly and labor-intensive. Coping was considered a good substitute.

Lot Markers: Method of designating lot corners. These markers were often coordinated in style or material with the main monument. Many lot markers have sunk into the ground, as they were not set on foundations.

Special Sections: There are a few areas devoted to individuals with a common experience or interest. Most are for military veterans, but there are two plots in Evergreen for children. One is for the residents of the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Home and the other for infants of the general public.

## **Epitaphs and Cemetery Symbols**

*"Many a tombstone inscription is a grave error."* -Laurence Peter

An epitaph is an inscription upon a grave that says something about the person buried within. It comes from the Greek *epitaphion* (*epi*= upon; *taph*= tomb). The earliest surviving examples of epitaphs are from ancient Egypt, written on sarcophagi and coffins. The ancient Greeks were also known for their expressive and literary epitaphs. Ancient Romans usually recorded only the facts of the person's life and death, or inscribed an admonishment to those who dared disturb the gravesite. Latin was often the language of choice for inscriptions through the nineteenth century. "*Hic jacet*" (here lies) may be seen on many tombstones.

In New England during the 1700s and early 1800s, the Puritans had a serious, gloomy view of death that was express in epitaphs like this:

*As you are now,*

*So once was I;*

*As I am now,*

*So shall you be.*

*So prepare for death*

*and follow me.*

By the mid 1800s into the early 1900s, Victorians sentimentalized death, using epitaphs like:

*Gone but not forgotten*

Or

*Death like an overflowing stream,*

*Sweeps us away, our life is a dream,*

*An empty tale, a moving flower,*

*Cut down and withered in an hour.*

Although most inscriptions were decided upon by a minister or gravestone cutter, some people chose to write their own epitaphs before passing. The tradition of writing humorous epitaphs has existed for centuries, as well as ones with riddles, or puns on a person's name or occupation. In addition, the tradition of extolling the virtues of the deceased is centuries old, causing William Wordsworth to have purportedly remarked, "Where are all the bad people buried?"



## Cemetery Symbolism

As with epitaphs, art on tombstones evolved from fearful images of Judgment Day, such as skulls, gargoyles and the Grim Reaper, to the more peaceful images we see today. Many of the symbols are easily interpreted, either relating to religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, or occupations. Below is a partial list of symbols on stones in Evergreen.

Anchor	Identified with St. Nicholas, patron saint of seamen and a Christian symbol for hope and steadfastness.
Angels	Angels of heaven, accompanying the deceased to heaven.
Bird	From earliest times a symbol of the soul; child's death
Broken columns	Death, life cut short
Candles	Being snuffed out by death's imps
Cherubim	Guardians of a sacred place, servants of god; divine wisdom or justice
Crown	Glory and righteousness
Drapes/ Shrouds	Death and mourning
Empty furniture	Unexpected loss, usually on a child's grave
Eye	Divine wisdom
Flowers	Impermanence
Calla Lilly	Majestic beauty; purity

Morning Glory	Resurrection
Rose	Love
Fruit	Fertility and abundance
Gates	Passageway to heaven; also architectural motifs like portals and arches are symbols of the house of the dead, death as a passage to the unknown, a shrine or temple, a portal through which the soul passes into immortality
Hands	Clasped, showing love and serenity; finger pointing upwards towards heaven
Heart	The soul of triumph over death, symbol of the Trinity; often with wings or being flown to heaven by cupid figures
Lamb	Symbol of Christ; the death of a child
Laurel	Reward, glory
Lion or Dog	Protection of master
Ivy	Immortality
Wheat	Death of an adult, usually an older person
Pyramid	Egyptian influence; recreation, rising sun
Open book	Divine knowledge
Pitcher	Broken - death of an older person

Scales	Equality and justice; weighing the souls of the departed by Archangel Michael
Skull	Raised on a pillar, shows the triumph of death
Sun	Glorified souls; moon, planets, stars - various meanings – heaven as home of the stars and planets
Trees	Death
Dead tree	End of the tree of life; number of limbs cut off could indicate the number of children of the deceased
Oak or oak leaf	Strength
Weeping willow	Sorrow
Upside down torches	The end of life
Urns	Death of an adult