

Chapter 4: Hazelwood Cemetery

A

repository of Grinnell history lies in Hazelwood Cemetery, over 8,000 strong, ordinary folk and some famous.

A walk through the cemetery with Robert D. Smith of Grinnell's Smith Funeral Home, tells tales of many of these folk.

A hilltop site southwest of its earliest dwellings became Grinnell's cemetery when J.B. Grinnell donated 13 acres in 1854, the year he established the town. A hazelbrush thicket on the site gave it its name, Hazelwood. Otherwise, it was a barren and treeless area.

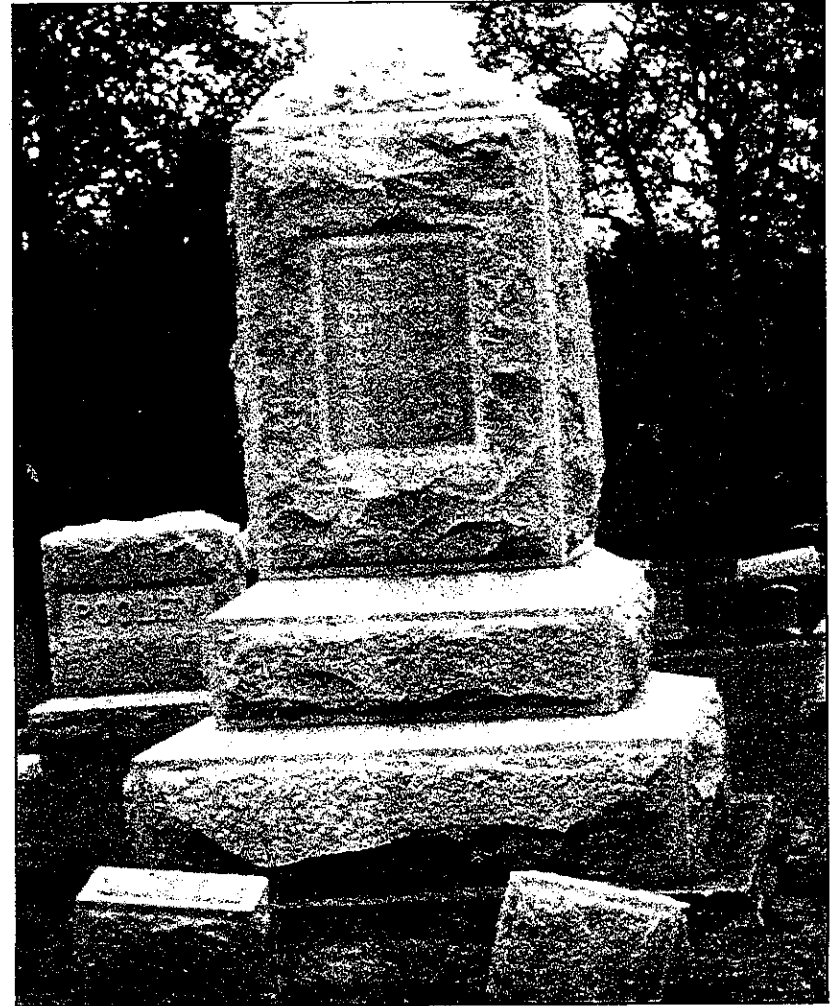
True to his foresight in establishing the town at the highest point between two rivers at a location destined to bring railroads, Grinnell chose another high point for the cemetery, one with a beautiful view across to the developing city. Families took plots in the cemetery and the highest spot on the hilltop is occupied by none other than the Grinnell family plot.

Within two years of the founding of the cemetery, in 1856, Catherine Grinnell, 3 1/2, daughter of J. B. and Julia Grinnell, was buried in the family plot and a year later, in 1857, George Chapin Grinnell, 2, son of the Grinnells, was laid to rest in the plot. Thirteen Grinnells in all are buried at Hazelwood.

Devastated by prairie fire

A sweeping prairie fire devastated the area not long after it was established but from the beginning, the cemetery was a cooperative project as trees and flowers were planted by individuals. "The prairie was not a congenial home for timber trees," reports E.S. Bartlett, a deacon of the Congregational Church, in a 1914 history of Grinnell's early days. "My brother and I went to Montezuma in 1858 and brought back a hayrack load of locust trees from the Wilson grove. I raised a grove of maples on my farm from seed gathered at the Skunk River and most of the maples at Hazelwood are from that grove."

An early mayor, H.G. Little, called upon the citizenry to help improve the premises by building fences after cattle were reported to be overrunning the cemetery grounds. Citizens north of Fourth Avenue were asked to come Monday, May 15, 1871, with teams, wagons, dumpboards, plows, scrapers, shovels and other tools, and those living south of Fourth Avenue



The grave of town founder J.B. Grinnell sits atop the highest point in Hazelwood Cemetery. The cemetery is home to much town history.

were asked to come Tuesday, May 16.

The Grinnell College president, George Magoun, dismissed classes at the college so students could aid in the work and women served refreshments. As not all work was completed by then, a third workday was declared Tuesday, May 23.

Cemetery improved

"By invitation of the mayor we visited the cemetery yesterday," The Poweshiek County Herald reported June 14, 1871. "We were surprised at the great change made in its appearance since the work first commenced."

The first burial in the cemetery, "then a bleak hillside," according to an account by Bartlett, was that of Jane Patterson, a wife and mother who lived three miles west of Grinnell who died suddenly in the night. "I have never forgotten the dreary scene the next morning when I took Mrs. Deacon Ford out to the assistance of the bereaved family. It was a bitter cold windy day and with the wife and mother lying dead on one side of the scantily furnished log cabin and the husband and children at the other side of the one room shivering with quilts hung round their backs trying in vain to keep warm, a more dreary spectacle could hardly be imagined," Bartlett continued.

An epidemic of spotted fever devastated the community in 1862, adding to the census in the cemetery.

Becomes municipal cemetery

In 1872 the cemetery became a municipal cemetery. More trees were ordered to beautify the grounds including New Haven elms, evergreens, native elms, box elder, maples and larch.

After considerable discussion by the city council, a sidewalk to the cemetery was built in 1882.

In 1885 the International Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.), a fraternal order one of whose commitments was to establishing cemeteries, opened a new section of Hazelwood west of the plot established by Mr. Grinnell and the two sections became West Hazelwood and East Hazelwood. West Hazelwood also contains the graves of Civil War veterans, with a six-inch-bore siege cannon used on the Mississippi River campaign of the Battle of Vicksburg and other river battles presented by the Gordon Granger Women's Relief Corps of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) facing northwest in a setting resembling the prow of a boat. Smith recalls marching to the site on past Memorial Days when he was a member of the Cooper Elementary School Drum and Bugle Corps, joining members of the Focht-Tennant Post, Ameri-

can Legion, to honor deceased veterans of the Civil and Spanish American Wars.

In the same year, however, a letter to the editor in The Grinnell Herald spoke with regret about the fact that the cemetery was bordered on "one side by a tannery and on the other by a slaughterhouse."

Town's founder laid to rest

In 1891 the town's founder was laid to rest in his family's plot in the highest point of the cemetery, his coffin carried on the shoulders of his friends west on Second Avenue to Prairie Street and south into the entrance of the cemetery because the streets were too muddy to accommodate a funeral coach.

The section of the cemetery in which he was laid to rest contains monuments with many familiar names associated with dormitories at Grinnell College: Haines, James, Clark, Gates, legendary figures in the history of Grinnell College.

The grave of Ned Delaney, the first black person reported to have come to Grinnell, also is in this section. He arrived here with the Hays family who bought slaves in Maryland to set them free, according to William Deminoff, a Grinnell historian who retired as secretary of Grinnell College. Delaney came with the Hayses to Iowa and when they reached the Iowa border, they reminded him that this was a free state and he was a free man. Delaney chose to remain with the Hays family and when he died he was buried in the Hays family plot with a stone equal to that of other members of the family.

Marble outlawed

Many of the monuments in Hazelwood are made of marble and reveal the ravages of time because of the soft nature of the marble which, although easy to carve, also is easily eroded by the elements, including acid rain. Marble now is outlawed as a monument material and has been replaced by granite, difficult to carve but durable, according to Smith.

Several monuments at Hazelwood, including that of Billy Robinson, pioneer Grinnell aviator, are made from native granite blasted from a source near County Line Road west of Grinnell. Markers for historic sites in the town of Grinnell, including the Long home, also are made from this granite deposited eons ago by glaciers, Smith adds.

Near the Grinnell family monument in East Hazelwood stands the marble obelisk of Loyal C. Phelps, 1807-1891, and his wife Juniette, 1813-1897, who reputedly vied with Grinnell for the honor of having the town named for him.

Also in the section is a cast zinc obelisk, the only one in the cemetery, a site of some renown during prohibition days. Legend has it that arrangements to purchase illegal liquor were made in Grinnell where money changed hands but no liquor. The liquor, instead, was obtained by a drive to the site of this obelisk, which had small compartments in which to store flowers which had become convenient exchange points for the illicit beverages.

The compartments since have been welded shut by the Grinnell Police Department.

Cemetery association formed

In 1890 Mayor Little was in Chicago where he learned of a women's group who sponsored the work of developing a cemetery and in 1892 the Grinnell Ladies Cemetery Association was formed with Mrs. Little as one of the officers. The group established a perpetual care fund and developed a record of many contributions to the cemetery, organizing fund-raising projects including entertainments and concerts and taking responsibility for paying for maintenance of the cemetery. It purchased an additional 22 acres of land south of the original tract from Julia Chapin Grinnell and the Grinnell estate for \$600 down and the remainder at 5 percent interest. The area is in reserve for expansion.

In 1900 the Ladies Cemetery Association established a greenhouse on the premises which carried "a nice variety of palms, ferns, fernballs, oxalis and other plants" which were available for purchase. The greenhouse was operated for a time by Roy Bates, who later established Bates Flowers.

Members of the cemetery association also obtained a casket-lowering device to be used on a trial basis.

In 1912 a white stone bridge was constructed on the main entrance drive by the Poweshiek County Board of Supervisors, including O.D. Hall, chairman, J. J. Corrough and I. H. Saunders. In 1918 R.E. Wyrick, a landscape architect, was employed who directed "improvement of the approach to the cemetery; steep banks were cut down and sodded and other changes made to the approach to create one of simple dignity and beauty. The next step will be the building of permanent roadways and a complete revision of West Hazelwood conforming to a 'park plan,' " according to Wyrick.

The cemetery association celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1942, the year in which its charter was renewed, and it continued its oversight until 1955 when it turned the cemetery over to the city of Grinnell, believing it to be possible for it to be cared for more consistently.

Although J.B. Grinnell hoped Hazelwood Cemetery never would be divided into sections according to those who could pay to be buried there and those who could not, a small potters' field exists south of East Hazelwood. Several of the lots in this section later have been reclaimed and marked by family members.

The cemetery also contains a two-part Babyland section, a touching area with tiny monuments decorated with flowers and toys.

Veterans of World War I, World War II, and the Spanish-American, Korean and Vietnam conflicts are buried in a newer section of the cemetery marked by a 75 mm. Japanese field cannon. In this section lies the grave of John Hoover, captured by the Japanese in the Battle of Corregidor, lost at sea when a Japanese ship loaded with American prisoners of war was torpedoed by a United States ship and all aboard perished.

In this section, also, is the family plot of the Hopkins family, where the ashes of Harry L. Hopkins, adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, lost for many years but found unexpectedly on a shelf in a church in New York, were interred in small, appropriate ceremony.

Set in older sections of Hazelwood are two mausoleums, one for the Patton family and one for the Brande family which provided funds for Scoutland southwest of Grinnell for the Boy Scouts and Camp Hawikuh west of Grinnell for Camp Fire.

Hazelwood also has two sections of Calvary Cemetery on its southwest and west sections in a beautifully landscaped park-like setting.

Newest section near entrance

The cemetery's newest section is located in its northeast sector immediately to the east of the entrance drive bordered by a hedge of bridal wreath shrubbery. All sections of the cemetery are thoroughly diagrammed and a cross-referenced listing kept of the more than 8,000 burials which have taken place in the 140 years between 1854 and 1994.

Although the cemetery represents a good bit of the history of Grinnell, it actually is a relatively new cemetery compared to the history of our country, according to Smith, who expects the town ultimately to surround the cemetery.

Many of the original trees in the cemetery have died and Smith is spearheading an effort to have them replaced to continue Hazelwood's park-like ambience with a contribution from Smith Funeral Home, private donations, Trees Forever and Small Business Administration funding and other sources.

October 31, 1994
The Grinnell Herald-Register