

The History of the Barn

Younger visitors to Oak Hill Cemetery do not remember a time when there was not an entrance into the cemetery from 19th Street, and yet the entrance has existed only since the 1970's.

The cemetery has seen many changes in our lifetime and will no doubt see many more. Change is inevitable.

Since 1854 Oak Hill Cemetery has adapted to changes in burial traditions, and customs. The cemetery built and removed a receiving vault, and a lake. The entrances and boundaries have been added and changed.

Over the years, there have been many discussions by many different members of the Board of Directors of the Oak Hill Cemetery Association. What should the role of this building be, and what is the future of the structure?

The conversation is not new, but as the years have passed, the deferred maintenance on a structure used only for storage, in an area of the cemetery that makes the addition of utilities challenging at best has taken several turns.

This is a description of the barn as it reads in the nomination:

The other contributing building is the barn built in the late nineteenth century and located in the northeast corner of the cemetery along the east boundary line. This barn may have been originally built for a residential property that fronted 19th Street to the east of the cemetery and was later incorporated into the cemetery boundary. However, there are two references to barns in the cemetery board and committee meeting minutes, which suggest that the barn may have been built for cemetery purposes. Specifically, on May 2, 1896, the minutes of a special board meeting made note of "the barns and barnyard to be removed and its space to be cleaned up and sodded down, the present barn to be used (or a new one constructed) to the east of the house or out beyond the orchard, the barn to be used for horses needed and for the tools used about the cemetery and for no other purpose." The house is assumed to be the caretaker's first house, with the location of the orchard currently unknown but probably in the northeast corner of the cemetery property. Another reference in a May 5, 1899 meeting noted that George Douglas had been instructed to "prepare plans for barn and ascertain the cost." The extant building features a jerkinhead or clipped gabled roof, wood and shingle siding, and a cupola on the roof ridge. The roofline has extended rafters ends and a wide roof overhang. Shallow shed-roof overhangs are over the windows and front wood-paneled sliding doors. The hay mow projects out from the façade and is a gabled dormer that pierces the front roofline. In general, this building exhibits the stylistic influence of the Late Victorian Stick style. It remains unknown whether it was one of the barns noted in 1896 or was the new one built in 1899. However, the style of the extant barn suggests a construction date prior to the 1890s.



Oak Hill Cemetery Association

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Photo by Carl Thoresen in Spring 2016

Now for the rest of the story:

In a special meeting later in the year (1896) the recommendation was to remove the barn and the barn yard and the space cleaned up and sodded down. The present barn to be moved or a new one constructed east of the house, beyond the orchard, for horses needed and for tools used about the cemetery and for no other purpose. The outhouse around the residence to be taken away and the space cleaned up.

In 1899 the minutes read the Committee on Grounds was to produce plans for a barn and ascertain costs for the same.

The Trustees and Committee on Grounds included Charles Weare, Lawson Daniels, John S. Ely, George B and Walter Douglas, Wellington and Mortimer Higley C. G. Greene and J. M. Dinwiddle.

Over the years, plans have been suggested and deferred.

In the early 1930's, Oak Hill Cemetery acquired the property where the 19th Street entrance was later developed. At the time of purchase it was suggested the service yard and barn be relocated to this site, putting it a short distance outside the cemetery proper.

In 1936 the Board of Directors discussed the matter of fencing the newly acquired lot and of moving the barn from its present location to the rear of this lot. It was the consensus of the Board that these improvements were not urgent. No action was taken.

In February of 1936 the horse was found dead in the stall. A change was effected by the purchase of a truck with the trade in of the one-horse wagon. Moving the barn was again deferred.

In July 1938, the Board discussed the fencing in of the lot fronting 19th Street and of the erection thereon of an appropriate garage for the cemetery's equipment in lieu of the barn on the cemetery grounds which had been in use since 1915 and whose location is detrimental to lot developments in that portion of the cemetery. The secretary (John M. Ely) was instructed to see if an arrangement could not be made to move the barn to the front of the 19th street lot to be remodeled as a dwelling and sold, leaving the rear of the lot as sufficient for the proposed new garage and service building. (Remember the business office of the Oak Hill Cemetery Association was conducted from the downtown office of John Ely)

In December of 1939 the item under proposed improvements read: In keeping with the proper development of the cemetery your Secretary recommends that the present barn be eliminated and that a Service Building of cement block and tile construction be erected on the Nineteenth Street vacant lot which was purchased several years ago with such purpose in mind. A large percentage of the lot-owning families and others who enter the cemetery, approach from Northeasterly points. To better serve this portion of the public there should be an appropriate entrance drive and gateway constructed on Mount Vernon Avenue, preferably opposite Eighteenth Street. The present narrow and unattractive entrance just west of the tool house could then be eliminated.

All entries about the General Upkeep of the Cemetery from this year forward involved the Effects of WW II upon the Cemetery and there was no mention of the barn or proposed improvements from this date forward.

The barn would eventually become a storage area for unused items.

In 2006 a series of photos were taken inside the barn as well as of the exterior to document the craftsmanship and construction of the structure for future generations.

These images will remain, no matter what happens to the building in the future. All photos are courtesy of Carl Thoresen



















