

Oak Leaves

Oak Hill Cemetery Association

1705 Mt. Vernon Rd. S. E. • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52403

Oak Hill Cemetery is non-profit lot owner association dedicated to preserving the heritage of Linn County, Iowa.

The Landscape of Oak Hill Cemetery

A Brief History of the Cemetery

The beginning of Oak Hill Cemetery dates from an ordinance of August 23, 1853. The ordinance enacted that “the proposition made by Gabriel Carpenter in respect to ten acres of land for purposes of graveyard be filed and accepted.”

Appearing in the Cedar Rapids Democrat dated Tuesday October 7, 1856 the announcement reads as follows:

OAK HILL CEMETERY: The grounds of this cemetery are now arranged and prepared for reception of the bodies buried in the old grave yard. Messrs. Carpenter and Smith, who were to remove them, hereby wish to notify those who have friends buried in the old yard, that if they desire to superintend the removal themselves, they will have to do so soon, as their obligation requires them to perform the act at once. They hope that no delay will be made by those interested in this matter.

The newspaper item above describes *Blocks 1 through 60* on the top of the hill which was an exact duplicate of the layout of the old Village cemetery (located 8th Street and 5th Avenue SE). This is the only area of the cemetery where lots are laid out true to the compass directions.

The Expansion of the Cemetery

September/October 1868 plans for the Incorporation of the Oak Hill Cemetery Company, with Articles of Incorporation, By-laws, Duties of Officers, Forms of Subscription and Selection of Committees were set in motion. The Board of Directors took control of the Cemetery, and began to lay out suitable lots between the “Old Cemetery” and Mount Vernon Road, with new fencing and replacement fencing on the East, West and South side of the cemetery.

On the motion of George Greene, the subscription committee was instructed to make the additional purchase of land, not to exceed 50 Acres, and said committee be empowered to carry out all arrangements by John Weare as agent of the Company.

Shares of stock in the Oak Hill Cemetery Company were sold to raise the capital needed for this expansion.

In October 1869, the Grounds Committee reported the titles for about 37 acres of land had been perfected. They had employed a landscape engineer from Chicago, Mr. Horace W. S. Cleveland “to lay off and plot a portion of these lands”. This portion contains 216 lots and “ample amount has been reserved therein for streets and ornamental purposes”.

We believe the Railroad connection is how John Weare became acquainted with his work, but cannot confirm that at this time.

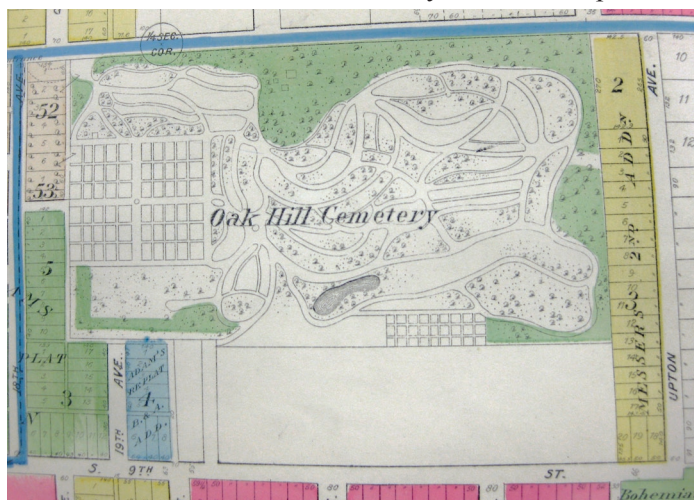


The Lake at Oak Hill Cemetery

February 1880, Motion was made by John F. Ely to employ H. W. S. Cleveland to plot as much additional ground as the committee may deem best. One thousand dollars was appropriated for “grading and macadamizing the streets in the cemetery” and the grounds committee should advertise for proposals do the work

The Map and the Announcement of the Lake

This map found in an Atlas dated 1907 may have been the vision of Horace Cleveland. The map most likely pre-dates 1907 as it appears to have lines drawn for Wards and Precincts. (*Cedar Rapids adopted a Commission Form of City Government by 1907*) Notice the area where the entrance wall and shelter house stands, is still plotted for a residential area, the location of the entrances is not current, and the southern area of the cemetery is not developed.

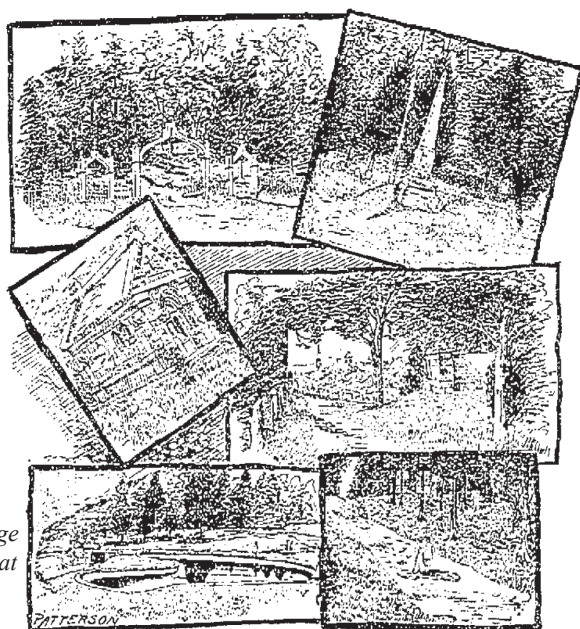


The Evening Gazette May 7, 1883

Oak Hill is out again with its lovely suit of green, and the picture presented by nature was never prettier at this season of the year than now. The grass is thick and healthy, and the trees are putting forth their leaves and foliage abundantly. The walks are in splendid condition, and the sexton, Mr. S. B. Card, is rapidly pushing the work of sodding, trimming and generally caring for the grounds, and graves.

The new artificial lake is completed, and the water, which is to come from a spring in the hill about a quarter of mile south of the cemetery, will be turned on within a few days.

The Evening Gazette May 30, 1893:



The only known image of the lake at this time.

From the Stockholder Meeting notes January 30th 1884: Chairman of the Committee on Grounds, W. W. Higley made a report showing what had been done on the grounds in the fiscal year and recommended the bottom of the lake be cemented to prevent seepage.

From the Special Meeting of the Directors notes dated May 2nd 1896: John S. Ely, Chairman recommended the Lake to be removed, tile drains for storm water be put in between the bridges with lateral drains for low ground, and spaces be platted for lots and ornamental grounds.

The Cedar Rapids Gazette: Sunday July 14, 1991

The “castle in the sky” became “Pleasant Hill,” the great Stone City stone house and Armstrong estate that last year was named to the National Register of Historic Places. Wood discovered that Stone City stones edging a pond at Oak Hill cemetery were being crushed for gravel, so he quickly suggested the Armstrongs buy other gravel and trade it with the cemetery for the stones. They did, and with those, he designed the garden seat and front gate curbs.



Horace William Shaler Cleveland - Landscape Architect

Born in Massachusetts, he was educated in a Unitarian Universalist School which emphasized frequent excursions for direct observation and study of nature through drawing and map making. Later he would study civil engineering and be employed as a railroad surveyor in Illinois.

1855 as a partner of Robert Copeland he designed Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord Massachusetts.

1869 moved to Chicago, where he designed Highland Park, and helped design the rebuilt South Park in 1872 after the Chicago fire. He wrote several publications on landscaping including *A Few Words on the Arrangement of Rural Cemeteries* in 1881. Because his records were destroyed in the Chicago Fire, we can only assume the 1869 layout may have been his first Midwest cemetery.

Graceland Cemetery in Chicago was designed by O. C. Simonds and H. W. S. Cleveland.

Ossian Cole Simonds - Landscape Designer

O. C. Simonds is considered the person responsible for beauty of Graceland Cemetery in Chicago serving as the Cemetery's Superintendent and Chief Landscape Architect from 1881 to 1898. Shortly after arriving at Brucemore, Irene Douglas hired O. C. Simonds to develop a plan for its grounds. Only a few pieces of original blueprints exist for Oak Hill Cemetery, but the name O. C. Simonds appears on some that have dates in the early 1900's.