



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.

RELOCATION OF THE OLD VILLAGE CEMETERY

Development of Cedar Rapids began as early as 1841-1842 with a dam on the river and a grain mill along the river, and soon extended to the area of the 4th Street railroad tracks. As the town grew, burials were made in the Village Cemetery also known as Washington Cemetery located in the block now known as 8th Street and 5th Avenue SE. It was taken for granted that no one would question the use of the land as a cemetery even if there was no legal claim to the property. Development would soon to overtake this peaceful country setting. The Higley Family had purchased the land on which this cemetery was located as part of a much larger parcel of land and arrangements were made to relocate the bodies buried there to the newly organized Oak Hill Cemetery.

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

OAKHILL 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 preform the act at once. They hope that no delay will be made by those interested in this matter.

If you do the math, about ten years of burials had to be relocated. Except for the announcement of Carpenter and Smith were to remove them, we are not certain who else may have been involved with the arrangements of the move, but Blocks 1 though 60 on the top of the hill in Oak Hill Cemetery are an exact duplicate of the layout of the old Village Cemetery.



The photo above, taken in the Spring of 2008 shows the buildings now located on the land once used for the old Village or Washington Cemetery.

There is a defined structure of blocks, walkways and service areas, that lead us to believe that someone with the survey experience of Judge Greene, was involved. The known bodies were removed and relocated exactly as they appeared in the old cemetery. It has been said that years later, building projects may have still encountered human remains.

The earliest references to Oak Hill Cemetery at the present location was an ordinance dated August 23, 1853 on a tract of land considered to be out in the country. The property was developed by Gabriel Carpenter and Freeman Smith. In the early years it operated as a for-profit cemetery. At this time Mr. Carpenter had given the city an adjoining tract of land to be used as "free ground" for burial of the poor, and those who chose not to purchase a lot in Oak Hill Cemetery. By the fall of 1868 an announcement appeared in the Cedar Rapids Times of the incorporation under the title Oak Hill Cemetery Association as a non-profit organization.

Later, other pioneer families including city founder Judge George Greene, and developer Nicholas B. Brown who built the first mill in the area and others arranged for family lots in this section of the cemetery.



1854 Cemetery Location as developed by Carpenter before the 1868 expansion

