

Grave changes: Columbarium comes to Wadena cemetery

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A crew from Fergus Falls Monument and Korby Contracting of Fergus Falls set a columbarium into place at the Wadena Cemetery Monday, Oct. 22. The new structure is weather proof and has 36 niches on each side, each able to hold up to two urns. Michael Johnson/Pioneer Journal

By mjohnson

October 26, 2018 10:02 AM

As more Americans choose cremation, a local cemetery chose to offer a place for the public to securely keep and view loved one's cremains.

That place is called a columbarium and is often in the form of a room, building or wall structure that contains niches where the urns can be kept.

According to Sam Goddard, president of the Wadena Cemetery Association, the decision to add the columbarium came as it becomes clear, space is getting tighter on the grounds and the expense of a traditional burial is out of reach for some.

"The cemetery is filling up rapidly," Goddard said.

The columbarium has 72 compartments and will be maintained by the cemetery association. For a \$950 fee, you can get a compartment, which includes the cost of engraving (name, birth and death dates) and regular maintenance. That is cheaper than the cost of a gravesite, which is about \$1,700 and up, according to Goddard.

Goddard said the structure comes from Fergus Falls Monument. The structure was set in place Monday morning using a crane from Korby Contracting of Fergus Falls. The structures are growing in popularity as one crew member said they had installed three in the last two weeks in the state.

The granite structure weighs in around 6 tons, has 36 compartments per side, for a total of 72 niches. It also cost about \$28,000, according to Goddard. Niches can have up to two urns per niche, potentially creating a space for 144 people on a spot about the size of two or three gravesites. Funds from the columbarium help the cemetery association maintain the cemetery grounds.

The placing of the columbarium went smoothly and the most exciting part came when four cold balls of glue were taken from a styrofoam box. The balls were placed under each corner of the columbarium and were solid enough to allow the crew to pull the straps out from under the structure before they were squeezed under the weight of the granite. This took a quick release of the crane support and a fast pull of the straps by crew members. Within a moment, the columbarium was settled in place for good. Its final resting place will now provide a resting place for many people, for many years.

Cremation trends

Cremation has become the new normal in this country. Last year, cremation surpassed traditional burial for the first time in the United States, according to a study shared by AARP. In 1970, just 5 percent of people opted for cremation. This year, about 55 percent of those who die will be cremated, says the Cremation Association of North America, and by 2030, that number is predicted to rise to 71 percent. The main reason people are being burned instead of embalmed? Cremation is a lot cheaper, costing a third as much as a regular burial.

Water Cremation

The next wave in cremation is a process called alkaline hydrolysis, a.k.a. liquefying a body. It works by putting a corpse in a vat of solution that dissolves everything but the bones, which are crushed into ashes and returned to the family. It's a more eco-friendly process than flame cremation, which AARP said is like taking a 600-mile drive. Alkaline hydrolysis is legal in 15 states, and so new that there aren't statistics available for how many people are choosing it. It's comparable in cost to a regular cremation.

Green Burial

This trend of the 21st century is straight out of the 19th century: Green burials, in which an unembalmed corpse is placed into a biodegradable container and buried directly in the ground. Nature does the rest. Its growing popularity is driven by concern about the environmental impact of burying corpses pumped with toxic embalming fluids, and a desire to cut the amount of natural resources used in traditional burials. Green burial is better for the budget, too, costing less than half as much as a traditional funeral. "It's a return to the simple funeral customs that used to be common," says Kate Kalanick, executive director of the board of the Green Burial Council. The GBC doesn't keep stats on how many green burials are happening in the U.S., but Kalanick says they've seen their list of green burial providers grow from just one when they launched in 2005 to more than 400 this year.

Cremains Creativity

Ashes to ashes, dust to - shotgun shells? A British company will press cremains into a vinyl record with a custom song. Your local tattoo artist can mix them into tattoo ink and give you a custom tat in their honor. And an Alabama company will put them into the ammo of your choice so you can blast them to the afterlife in a one-gun salute, according to AARP.



1/2: A crane sets the columbarium in place on a concrete pad while three men line it up Monday, Oct. 22 in the Wadena Cemetery. Michael Johnson/Pioneer Journal