

NEWS

# Wadena Cemetery cannon has interesting history

(Editor's note, the following is a brief cemetery history from the Wadena Pioneer Journal files, the Wadena County Historical Society files and Harald Boen articles, compiled by historian Bob Zosel.)...

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Everyone knows the location of the two Wadena cemeteries but may not know how they arrived at their present state.

In 1877, during the smallpox epidemic, several of the town fathers realized that the bodies of the smallpox victims could never be moved and that a burial ground would have to be provided. They purchased what is now designated the original section of the city cemetery. They purchased an area of high ground with many large spruce trees from the Peake family. The present day cemetery consists of the original section, Migge's first and second addition and a new section.

The first burial was a small pox victim in July 1877. It was noted that any stones with an earlier date were graves removed from family homesteads and reburied.

The diphtheria epidemic of 1883 precipitated the formation of Calvary cemetery, the Catholic cemetery. This cemetery was originally in Compton Township, Otter Tail County. However, in 1884 a Catholic church was built in Wadena adjacent to the present Calvary cemetery. Some of the bodies were exhumed from the country church yard and

reburied in Wadena. However, not all were moved and today a small cemetery in Compton Township has been cared for and maintained by a local 4-H club.

In 1883, upon the death of Louie Tabery, in the diphtheria epidemic, a brother of Mrs. Theodore Lorentz, Sr., his father determined that he be buried in Wadena. A man named Nesselbeck donated an acre of land and an additional acre was purchased for \$40.

Thus the two cemeteries were started but, unfortunately, they were sadly neglected for several years. In the early 1890s, a group of Wadena women, distressed by the condition of the cemetery, decided to do something. A group of high school cooking club girls held a benefit supper which netted \$100. This money was put on deposit at a local bank and by the time the Wadena Cemetery Association was reorganized in 1898 it had grown to \$181.97. A hundred dollars of this was used to make a down payment on the first Migge addition.

W. R. Baumbach was in charge of clearing the ground, but through neglect the brush and roots were so thick that the whole cemetery was plowed and reseeded.

Money was raised through a variety of ways. Each spring the women took their lunch to the cemetery, for what was called dandelion day, when they dug weeds from the new grass. The first lawn mower was purchased in 1902.

From 1898 to 1913, the Ladies Auxiliary worked and functioned as a separate group but in 1913 they consolidated with the men working as a unit.

At first the only entrance to the cemetery was on the west side. Later people began entering on the east through a low swampy area. A creek ran across the road and every spring the horses drawing the hearse would sink up to their bellies in the mud.

The Catholic and Wadena cemetery associations went before the council in 1919 asking that something be done to remedy the situation. Within the next 10 years, the Associations along with the American Legion had widened the road, bridged the creek and made it an all-weather road.

In 1926, the American Legion set out 65 elm trees along the boulevard and established the triangle park on Franklin Drive as we know it today.

Originally the method of financing was a charge of \$2 per year, assessed per lot, but, unfortunately, many people did not respond. In 1913, a perpetual care fund was established with a payment of \$50 per lot asked. Again, many did not respond. In 1918, the \$50 was added to the price of the lot guaranteeing care in the future.

In 1932, they had about \$7,000 in the Merchant's bank when it failed and suffered a severe loss. Financing was always a problem helped only by the generosity of members.

In 1928, the officers of the association were Emerson T. Carroll, president, Albert Lehmann, vice president, Ruby Haughey, secretary, and Mrs. F. B. Coon, treasurer. O. N. Grow was hired as caretaker at a salary of 35 cents per hour.

Later what was known as Migge's second addition was purchased and still later 35 acres were purchased just west of the balance of the cemetery and which has been platted and is now labeled New Addition.

In 1950, Leslie Nyberg came on the cemetery board and in 1954 became president of the association. He realized that doing business in the same old way was not sufficient and reorganized the association on a business-like basis which is the same method in force today.

The Catholic cemetery also purchased land west of the south portion of the cemetery but have not needed this extra space yet.

In 1947, the Catholic association joined in sponsoring the erection of a fire proof mausoleum. In 1950, the village passed a resolution to make a half mill levy for cemetery purposes.

In later years, a chain link fence has been installed around both cemeteries which is very helpful but, unfortunately, every so often acts of vandalism occur. The latest distressing event is the stealing of flowers from graves.

Betty Beach was appointed secretary to succeed Ruby Haughey at a salary of \$75 per year. She in turn was succeeded by Mrs. Elmira Maxon, Mrs. Pauline Blair and by the current secretary Karen Priebe.

Priebe keeps track of all lot purchases and burials and maintains all necessary records. Prices of lots have increased greatly over the years as has everything else.

The present president of the Association is Warren Gaslin, long-time Wadena post master.

Originally the cannon that we all know of was located in Migge's first addition in an area which was originally for Grand Army of the Republic burials (Civil War veterans.)

However, many people were concerned because as the Memorial Day crowds increased, the ceremony around the cannon entailed people standing on graves. Thus some years ago the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion formed a committee, headed by Charles Sartell, to move this into an unoccupied area near the Mausoleum. This move was accomplished with a Memorial Wall of beautiful stone work partially surrounding the cannon. Sartell's work was magnificent.

The cannon was donated by the U.S. government in 1898. This was accomplished through the efforts of a Minnesota congressman named Paige Morris. The cannon which weighed 7,630 pounds was transported to Wadena by the generosity of James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern Railroad. Rocks for the base when it was originally placed were furnished by an Oak Valley farmer named Artemus Packard. It also included 40 rounds of ammunition which has long since disappeared.

Some years ago I became interested in the history of the old cannon and after quite a bit of searching I located a gentleman at Carlisle, Penn., who does nothing but keep track of Civil War cannons.

He advised that the cannon was one of a lot of 311 made in 1832 in Georgetown, D.C. It was known as a 32 pounder and made at a cost of \$453.22. Originally it was a smooth bore cannon but some time later was rifled for greater accuracy. He said that it had nine riflings so was rifled by the Confederate government as they used an odd number of riflings and the North used even numbers.

I later found that this gun was one of three mounted in the Charleston, S.C., Harbor at Fort Wagner. Of the three, one exploded and the other two were sent -- one to Wadena and the other to Park Rapids. However, I have never been able to find any record of the one at Park Rapids and can only assume that it was turned in for scrap during World War II in one of the numerous scrap drives.

In 2007, there are 631 veterans of all wars buried in the Catholic and city cemeteries. Each Memorial Day, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion decorate all veterans' graves. The VFW has established a line of flags along the entrance drive and all in all it makes a beautiful sight.

The last count shows a total of burials at 5,828 with 4,155 in the city cemetery and 1,673 in Calvary.

The cemetery is well maintained and is something that everyone should be very proud of.