

Introduction

An old cemetery is full of interesting tales. It holds the stories of all the people buried in it — of their struggles and achievements, hopes and dreams, how their lives were shaped and how they shaped others.

An old cemetery also has a tale of its own. It also has known fortune and misfortune, circumstance and coincidence. It, too, has a character shaped over time. It, too, has a story to tell.

Established in 1859, Eugene's Masonic Cemetery is the burial site of two thousand people. It contains 1500 tombstones, 500 family plots, 100 native plant species, and twenty-three different kinds of birds. It also has the Hope Abbey Mausoleum, the largest and best example in Oregon of what architectural historians call the Egyptian Revival style.

Over its 140-year history, the cemetery has been greatly affected by

issues of style and fashion, business, economics, politics, war, and the inevitable passage of time.

Early Days

It started with ideas the settlers brought with them from the East. In 1859, leaders of Eugene Lodge #11 A.F. & A.M. laid out their new cemetery in the fashion of what was then known as the Rural Cemetery Movement — an orderly grid of plots with wide paths for leisurely strolling, and with a square in the center of the site, to be used for public gatherings. The emphasis was upon providing a space where the beauty of nature became a part of the memorial for the dead.

It was generally expected that families would take care of their individual plots, and so no funds were put aside specifically for maintenance. But

as early as 1910, when the cemetery was barely forty years old, a committee met to consider the problems of vandalism and upkeep in the absence of sufficient funds to pay for maintenance. It was the beginning of a continuing theme of inadequate funding related to the Masonic Cemetery, a theme that became well known to many other pioneer cemeteries in Oregon.

In 1912, during the Progressive Era, and probably using Progressive Era arguments, the Portland Mausoleum Company sent representatives to Eugene to persuade Masonic leaders that what their community needed was an up-to-date, technologically advanced, elegantly designed, above-ground mausoleum.

The Masons bought this fashionable new concept. Hope Abbey Mausoleum was built in 1913-14 at a cost of \$40,000 and was celebrated as an outstanding civic achievement.

Crypts sold for \$200 a piece, and were so popular that within ten years nearly all of them were taken. Ten dollars from the sales price of each crypt was to be set aside and placed in an endowment fund for maintenance. Apparently, this fund was to be managed by the Portland Mausoleum Company, with the hope that in time a more permanent organization of crypt owners would assume ownership and responsibility.

In 1926, when nearly all the crypts had been sold but no managing group of crypt owners had been organized, the mausoleum company in Portland closed their account with the Masonic Lodge in Eugene. In 1929, the Portland Mausoleum Company went out of business, having built six

mausoleums in Oregon towns. This brought to an end the speculative practice of building community mausoleums on formulas that — in Eugene at least — did not provide adequate funding for maintenance.

Meanwhile a new style of cemetery had come to Eugene, with the establishment of Rest-Haven Memorial Park. A newspaper advertisement in 1921 described their cemetery as “a place of beauty, with rolling lawns and artificial lakes. It will not be the old conception of a cemetery, but a beautiful park with graves marked by bronze tablets set level with the lawns, the latest development in cemetery projects.”

Dark Times

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, little money was available to pay for the upkeep of the Masonic Cemetery. Burials and sales of plots were down, due to competition from lawn cemeteries such as Rest-Haven. The Masonic Lodge was now also in charge of the mausoleum, but there were almost no crypts left to sell for income. Style and fashion, and the absence of adequate financial planning, now counted heavily against the Masonic Cemetery.

At one point Eugene Lodge #11 gave the cemetery to Lane County. The county soon gave it back. The Masons then made an arrangement with a local funeral home, hoping that sales of remaining spaces would provide enough incentive for the funeral home to assume responsibility for the cemetery. This did not work. Over the years, about a dozen families donated funds



Above: Precast concrete detail from Hope Abbey Mausoleum, built 1913-14.

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for an endowment, but this did not raise enough money to make much difference over the long term in the cemetery's condition.

The early 1940s were dominated by World War II, and community energies were focused in that direction. After the war, families related to those entombed in Hope Abbey Mausoleum formed an association to repair and maintain the building, each member paying dues of one dollar per year. But needed repairs to the failing roof and broken windows were beyond their means. In 1957, all financial resources and responsibility were returned to the Masons.

By the 1960s, the cemetery had become an urban jungle — with rampant overgrowth, fallen tombstones and indecipherable paths. Vandalism to both the cemetery and to Hope Abbey Mausoleum was so extensive — and so frustrating to deal with — that the Masons boarded up its eighty golden glass windows, and closed the massive bronze door to what had once been an impressive building open to the public.

In anticipation of the nation's bicentennial, the Masons, aided by the

Lane County Historical Society, made a concerted two-year effort in the 1970s to repair the cemetery. Other energetic efforts occurred over the years, but were short-lived. All too often the site appeared to be an orphan — vandalized, unloved, and abandoned.

In 1980, both the Masonic Cemetery and Hope Abbey Mausoleum were listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but the condition of the cemetery did not change.

Rejuvenation

The 1990s arrived, with strong notions of cooperation between community groups, and the City of Eugene initiated an effort to find a happier future for this venerable old cemetery. Supported by the Lane County Historical Society, the University of Oregon Historic Preservation Program, the Amazon Neighborhood Association, interested families, and the Masons themselves, a new private non-profit organization was formed in 1994 to take ownership and responsibility for the site. Named the Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association, its goals are to restore, maintain and operate the cemetery and the mausoleum, with emphasis upon providing interpretation of the natural as well as the cultural values of the site. There is strong emphasis upon realistic financial planning and fundraising.

Great progress has been made since 1994 and there is confidence in the future of the site based on a coming together of — what else? — basic trends in contemporary American life. Interest in family history and the larg-

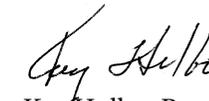
er issues related to regaining a sense of place, along with the need for open space and the desire to retain unique historic buildings in urban neighborhoods, are all forces that buttress this restoration project. Styles in burial sites are changing too — with an emphasis now upon natural landscapes. Happily, history is on our side.

What folks want most to know about the Masonic Cemetery are the stories of the people who are buried there — nearly four hundred before 1900 and about two thousand by 1940. Their numbers include a cross section of early settlers — the leaders, the visionaries and community builders, along with less-celebrated individuals who did their best to maintain themselves and their families. Their stories

all contribute something to the history of early Eugene.

We went looking for great tales to tell and found far more stories than we have room to publish. Clearly, the history of the Masonic Cemetery will have to be an unfolding project, stretching into the future in the form of newsletter accounts, and printed additions to this book.

One final note for readers. Throughout the book, names of individuals buried in the cemetery are placed in bold text, even though we do not have space to tell the story of every person named.



Kay Holbo, President 1994-99
Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association



Right: Lizzie Luckey sewing in her home at 10th and Pearl, undated.

Ninety years after Lizzie Luckey Stewart's death, masses of Snowdrops decorate her grave site each January and February. (See photo on front cover, far left.)