

Weeds take over old family plots

By KEN SANDS
Of the Emerald

"Dead End" proclaims the road sign on 25th Avenue next to the Masonic Cemetery and University Street. An old dirt road branches off of 25th and curves uphill toward the Hope Abbey Mausoleum.

The cemetery lies to the left, largely covered by grass and weeds. Tall fir trees shade the family plots. Weathered headstones and the tall grass line the plots. To the passerby, it looks like an ordinary overgrown graveyard. But closer inspection reveals the oldest cemetery in the county, with many of Lane County's most prominent citizens in its mulch.

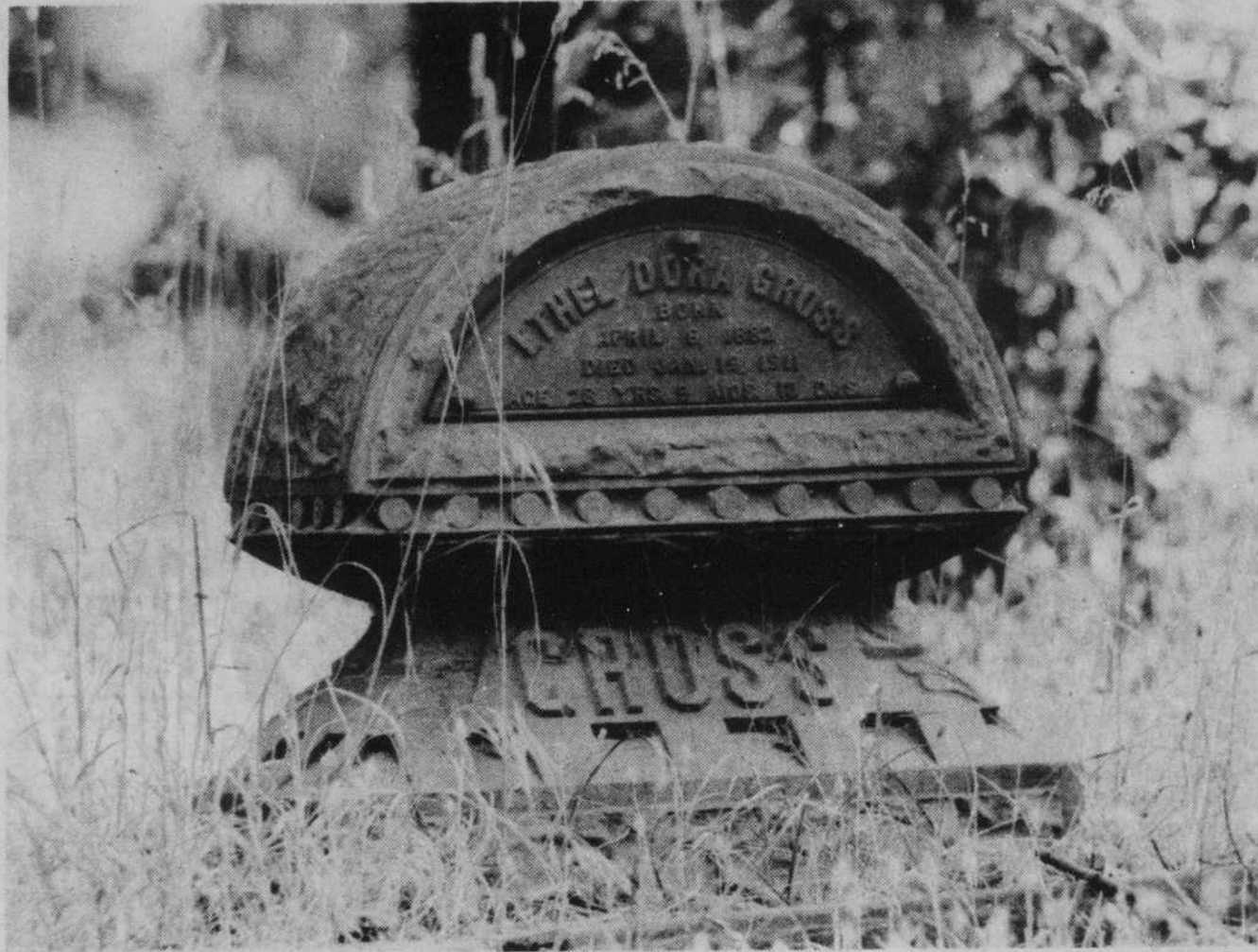
In 1856, the Masons of Eugene formally opened the graveyard. Eugene Skinner, the founder and first resident of Eugene, was buried at the top of the hill in December of 1864. Such notable families as Condon, Hendricks, Spiller, Friendly, Patterson and Chambers have plots somewhere in the 10.1 acres.

"It may be in the middle of town now, but it's an old country cemetery," says Alice Adams, the unofficial cemetery historian and bookkeeper, "and the plot owners have deeds to the land." Under Oregon Law, no one else can do anything, constructive or destructive, to the land. Most of the cemetery residents have no relatives, so many of the gravesites are overgrown.

Between the plots run eight-foot-wide "alleys" and 10-foot-wide "streets" that are maintained by the Masonic Temple.

"There are three trustees from the lodge taking care of the maintenance," Adams says.

In May 1852, 22-year-old Elizabeth Parsons was the first recorded person buried on the land. She must have recom-



This headstone has escaped the tall grass and the trampling commuters to become part of what could be considered a very historic cemetery.

Emerald Photo

mended the plot highly because the cemetery became a leading corpse hangout. The "Standing Graveyard Committee" of R.W. Underwood, A.A. Smith, and Skinner set the original price for the plots at \$15, but later reduced cost to \$11.

Eugene's mule drawn streetcar system was extended to the cemetery so bodies could be transported easily. With this added corpse convenience, more bodies were attracted to the grounds.

In 1912, the Association of the Owners requested that a mausoleum be built. The Portland Mausoleum Company built the Hope Abbey Mausoleum at the base of the porous hill for \$40,000.

A rare example of formal Egyptian architecture, the mausoleum is listed as one of the Historical Sites and Buildings in Oregon. Once decorated with a copper door and beautiful window grates, the mausoleum was ripped apart for fun and profit. Graffiti now mark the backside of the green building, and the 10-foot-high spire now sports a coat of red paint.

Two small screens on the bottom of the massive doors provide the only light for the crypt in which both Susan Campbell and Prince Lucien Campbell are entombed. Neither vault was ever paid for, and Susan Campbell's vault has no inscription. The bank has yet to reclaim the vaults.

Similarly, the condition of the graveyard has deteriorated as fewer relatives remain to care for the property. The community cleaned the cemetery thoroughly as a bicentennial project two years ago. Since this housekeeping, the graveyard has become more popular. Two weeks ago two people were buried, and the number of burials has increased.

Some consider the landscape inappropriate for their grave, while others like Adams want to be buried there.

"I wouldn't care if trees grew up over my grave, because it's wild and pretty that way," she says.

The streets and alleys are now used to bury people without a fam-

ily plot, and Adams says many people inquire about spaces.

"It's still an active cemetery, and it's not a commercial venture," Adams says.

Many relatives have recently requested that the lodge care for their plots, but the lodge has funds for only 12 sites. So the number of uncared-for lots increases, as the relatives cannot continue maintenance. Adams knows of many families that care for the gravesites, but relatively few receive constant and adequate care.

"It's theirs, and they don't have to do anything to it," she laments.

Vandalism is also a very big problem. Stones are intermittently broken or knocked over, and sometimes stolen. Several stones have turned up as home decorations, while many of the stones have weathered considerably and are impossible to replace.

People in the community use the cemetery as a park. The country atmosphere stuck in the middle of a city provides a relaxing place to have picnics and enjoy corpse company.

But without relatives to keep the plots well groomed, the cemetery will get messy. And the relatives are running out.

"There are people who want to make sure their lots get mowed off, but can't do it themselves," says Adams. When the corpses run out of relatives to act as plot caretakers, they have to put up with some minor indignities.

For example, corpses who spent their entire life cutting their hair are subjected to long grass on their stomachs. When this happens, the corpses are helpless to call a barber.

Adams has no solution to this problem. Until she does, she advises corpses to keep a large supply of relatives in stock.



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