

Cemetery

The University's friend and neighbor

cemetery for classes. Johannessen says he sent an introductory geography class into the graveyard, "to realize the problems of recording the distribution of vegetation."

In addition, the cemetery's tall firs, oak trees, holly bushes and shrubs combine to provide an unusually dense patch of greenery for a city, a patch that provides a good bird habitat, Murphy says.

People attracted to the cemetery by its abundant plant life can thank one of the graveyard's residents.

According to a report on file in the University archives, a Eugene nurseryman, Captain W.S. Moon, planted "numerous species of imported trees and shrubs" in the cemetery in an attempt to improve its appearance.

Moon, a veteran of the Spanish-American war, now lies at rest in a special section of the graveyard that was added after 1898 and is devoted to those war veterans.

Ironically, Moon's contribution of plants that was intended to enhance the cemetery has actually combined with other factors to produce a century-old controversy that was last spotlighted in 1970.

The radical differences in size and shape of the tombstones and monuments, the irregular shape of the terrain, and Moon's aesthetic eye that led him to plant in a less-than-orderly fashion have made the cemetery difficult to maintain.

Most of the work must be done by hand and that has presented problems, particularly in recent history, according to the archive's report. Ben Dorris, who was president of the Odd Fellows Cemetery Association from 1947 to 1954, once said, "When we lost the last man that could use a scythe we had to quit all that work around in there."

But it has not been just in recent years that the cemetery has been criticized for its wild-like growth and poor upkeep. According to the report in the archives, in 1884 the University



Overgrown plots and the haphazard planting of varied flora have contributed to the controversy that has historically surrounded the Pioneer Cemetery.

referred to it as "an eyesore and solely of nuisance value" and "considered plans for its removal."

Part of the problem of maintenance centers on who is responsible for ensuring that the area does not become a veritable jungle.

Originally, the lot owners were charged with caring for the cemetery, and no provision was made for maintenance should they falter. Lifestyles being what they were in the 19th century, such an arrangement seemed perfectly normal. After all, if the person who owned the plot died and was buried, certainly his or her survivors would maintain the site.

However, as times changed and families spread out, the situation became as it now is: a graveyard wherein many of the occupants are responsible for

their gravesite's upkeep.

Actually, a modicum of maintenance is performed by an association formed by the lot owners. The group, which was titled the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Association when it broke away from the Odd Fellows in 1956, contributes to mowing and weeding the cemetery up to four times a year but purposely avoids the well-trimmed look of modern burial sites.

Meanwhile, the Pioneer Memorial Park Association, the second such organization to have that name, owns the streets and alleys and acts as trustee, authorizing and recording all burials.

The two associations, under one name or another, have figured prominently in several power struggles throughout this century. Control and use of the

land has been a controversial and legal hot potato, and the present status has been in effect since an Oregon State Supreme Court ruling in July of 1961.

That ruling was a reversal of a lower court's decision and just part of the courtroom activity concerning the cemetery, and was hardly the end of the struggle for ownership of the graveyard.

Apparently, the University has spent a great deal of time and effort attempting to gain possession of the cemetery for purposes of expansion. Three legislative bills, in 1959, 1961, and 1969, have been introduced in the Oregon legislature calling for condemnation of the cemetery and its takeover by the University.

Also, the Eugene Pioneer

Cemetery Association charged the Pioneer Memorial Park Association of having been founded with the purpose of ensuring the University would obtain title to the property and subsequently destroy it as a burial ground. In June of 1960, the court found those claims to be valid.

According to newspaper accounts of the events surrounding each attempted takeover, there have been several proposals for what the University could do with the land. Perhaps the most intriguing suggestion was offered by State Rep. Ed Elder.

He suggested a raised complex, sitting as if on stilts, above the cemetery. The graveyard would remain intact with buildings accessible by connecting walkways.

University efforts to obtain the land were sparked by a fear of running out of space. Following World War II, the University's enrollment grew so rapidly it appeared it would exceed the facilities.

Some projections called for enrollment to eventually approach 30,000, and benefactors of the University began scrambling. However, the frantic search for space was reduced as enrollment leveled and it does not appear the University will serve that many students.

The leveling-off of enrollment coupled with public outcry over losing the cemetery apparently has tempered the University's desire for the land.

In February of 1970, University Pres. Robert Clark said, "I shall not make any effort to acquire the property for the University during my tenure."

Such sentiments prevail today, says Muriel K. Jackson, assistant to the vice president of administration. "I believe the matter was set to rest at that time (1970)," she says, and "the cemetery is considered a close friend of the University."

The University should feel honored to have such a strong and versatile friend.

Story and photos by Jim Moore

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