

# History of Forest Hill Cemetery

by **Willard McKinstry**

(Transcribed by **Lois and Norwood Barris** at the request of the Fredonia Preservation Society, October, 2007.)

Care for the resting place of the dead is one of the evidences of growing civilization and progressive Christian faith. Neglect of "God's acres" shows a want of refinement and deficiency of veneration for the memory of the departed ones. Hence our laws providing for the care of the hallowed grounds where sleep those who were near and dear to the living. When Forest Hill Cemetery Association was organized, the general law, then recently passed, made the legal guide for the new enterprise. By its provisions, no taxes could be collected on the consecrated premises; no street could be laid out upon it for other than the use of the Association; no creditor could wrest from the afflicted family any portion of the ground set apart for their occupancy; and no trustee could receive one farthing of compensation as trustee for services rendered the Association.

The ground owned by the town, set apart for the burial purposed in the midst of the wilderness was nearly full, and no family interments could be made as such without interfering with others. It became necessary that a new location should be made, and for this purpose a meeting of citizens was called and a paper presented as follows:

"We, the undersigned, hereby agree to associate ourselves together for the purpose of forming a Village Cemetery Association, and we further agree to pay the sum of five dollars (each) for the purposes of said association, subject to the disposal of the Directors, to be chosen agreeably to the statute for the forming such associations, and to be applied in part or whole payment for a lot in said cemetery

## THE ORIGINAL SUBSCRIBERS

**Philip S Cottle**

**F S Edwards**

**H C Frisbee**

**J G Rood**

**A H Walker**

**Lorenzo Morris**

**Geo W Lewis**

**Levi Risley**

**L M Walker**

**J H Havens**

**E M Smith**

**H J Miner**

**Lewis Barmore**

**Roselle Greene**

**David Barrell**

**John Hamilton Jr**

**Geo N Frazine**

**A Z Madison**

**Lucius Tuttle**

**Stephen Snow**

**John M VanKleek**

**H Pemberton**

**S M Clement**

**S Hart**

**F A Redington**

**W McKinstry**

**L Hurlbut**

**Geo Barker**

**Jacob Houghton**

**Wm Risley**

**J R Parker**

**Alford, Stoddard**

**M S Woodford**

**Robert McPherson**

**Edmund Day**

**Chas E Washburn**

**Allen Hinckley**

**L L Pratt**

**Orrin Doolittle**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1954, a meeting of all, or nearly all, of the persons above named, was held at the office of **A Hinckley**, Esq, at which Hon **A H Walker** was called to the chair and **L Hurlbut** appointed Secretary.

On motion of Hon **Jacob Houghton**,

Resolved, that the name by which this association be known and called, be “Forest Hill Cemetery.”

On motion of **H J Miner**, Esq

Resolved, That the number of Trustees of this association be limited to six.

The association then proceeded to elect trustees by ballot, which resulted in the election of the following persons as the first Trustees— **Robert McPherson, Hiram J Miner, Levi Risley, David Barrell, Willard McKinstry, Lucius Hurlbut.**

The said trustees were then classified by lot to serve one, two and three years.

On motion of **David Barrell**

Resolved, That the annual meetings of this association for the election of Trustees, etc, be held the Tuesday following the fourth day of July each year.

On July 22, 1954, at a meeting of the Trustees of Forest Hill Cemetery, the board of officers was organized by the election of the following: Hon **Robert McPherson**, president; **David Barrell**, Vice President; **Hiram J Miner**, Treasurer; **Lucius Hurlbut**, Secretary.

#### PURCHASE OF GROUNDS

At a meeting held August 12<sup>th</sup> 1854, after some negotiation in regard to different lots for the use of the association, as reported by a Committee previously appointed, on motion of **William Risley**, Esq, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the Trustees of “Forest Hill Cemetery” be instructed to purchase Messrs **Day & McPherson’s** lot for two thousand fifty dollars.

These citizens (all but eight of whom have since passed away) pledged five dollars each towards raising preliminary funds for the organization and preparation of the ground. The selection of ground was from the estate of **Charles Barker**, whose father donated to the town the village common. The site was a primeval forest, and needed much preparation for cemetery purposes. Hon **Robert McPherson** and **Edmund Day**, Esq, were the commissioners to settle the estate, and Mr **McPherson** saw in it a suitable location for the cemetery, and the commissioners reserved it for that purpose. The nine acres was offered for \$2,050.

#### DEDICATORY SERVICES

The dedicatory services were held in the First Presbyterian church Oct 25<sup>th</sup>, 1855. Rev **C L Hequembourg**, one of the most talented and eloquent young clergymen of Western New York, pronounced an able and appropriate address, and **C S Percival**, Prof of the Fredonia Academy, wrote an ode which was sung on the occasion.

#### SURVEY OF GROUNDS

Mr **Lucius Hurlbut**, an engineer and surveyor, was engaged to plot the ground, and after visiting some of the more modern cemeteries, made an excellent plan for laying out the ground, mapping out sections A, B and C. Mr **Levi Risley**, then a Trustee, took an active part in the work. Some of the large trees had to be removed, and a stump machine from the south part of the county was procured to pull out the stumps, which were in the way of the drives and paths. Most of the lots mapped were with curved lines adapted to the topography of the ground. The surveys and mapping of the ground and preparing the

three sections for occupancy, made an expense of some \$1,500, which added to the \$2,050, to be paid for the ground, made a debt of over \$3,500. The money was borrowed of **H J Miner**, Treasurer, and the notes were endorsed by the Directors, each becoming responsible for the payment. With this debt, the financial condition of the Association was far from being pleasant to the Trustees and their friends. The sales of lots were insufficient for some years to even keep up with the interest. Only sixty burials took place up to 1860—in five years. A meeting was held at the home of the president, to take measures for relief from the embarrassment. A resolution was adopted to raise the price from 10 cents to 15 cents per foot, to take effect in three months. This stimulated increased purchases. At this time an invitation was extended to the people of Dunkirk to purchase lots. Rev Dr **Stillman** was elected a trustee in 1856, and **John S Beggs** in 1860. The sale of lots was increased till the debt began to diminish, and by the time of the purchase of the Fair Grounds in 1870, a surplus was on hand of \$1,710.39.

### FAIR GROUNDS PURCHASED

This increased sale enabled the Association to lay out new sections, and several large lots sold increased the demand for more, till the original nine acres were worked so as to be ready for sale. The adjoining Fair Grounds, often annoying when track racing was going on at the time of burial exercises, and the prospect of the speedy use of all the grounds then owned for burial purposes, suggested the purchase of the Fair Grounds, to be added to the cemetery. It was determined to make a purchase of these grounds. At a meeting of the Association, held February 9, 1870, the proposition was made, and **H J Miner**, Treasurer, proposed to advance \$4,000 for the purpose. Many stock holders of the Fair Grounds sold their shares and agreed to take lots in the cemetery in partial or full payment, till a majority was obtained. A final transfer was made, and thus the cemetery grounds were increased to some twenty-four acres. Col **Barrell**, the Secretary, **Stephen Snow**, who had been elected in 1869, and others, rendered efficient service in this work.

Mr **Walter Scott** was employed to survey and map out the new grounds in accord with the plans made by Mr **Hurlbut**, so as to make the whole grounds complete. A map of the entire grounds was made and engraved, divided in sections and lots, numbering 25 sections and 1,634 lots. Sections have been improved, a new house of the Sexton has been built, and only is the debt all paid, but a surplus of over \$20,000 is accumulated.

Mr **Frazine**, Treasurer, and Mr **Stevens**, Secretary, have so managed the finances that comparatively little loss has been suffered, and the more than \$20,000 in the treasury will provide for the future care when the entire grounds shall have been disposed of.

It appears from the careful report of the Secretary that at the rate of sales of the last seven years, the grounds now plotted will last fourteen years longer, and that portions of the grounds not now plotted are susceptible of such use as will extend the time before the entire area shall be exhausted to fully twenty-five years. In the meantime the fund for the care will increase so that no fear, with careful investments, need be apprehended of lack of ample funds for the care of the grounds.

It is now nearly forty years since these grounds were selected and consecrated to the burial of the dead. There were 1,634 family lots plotted in the 24 sections, of which 1,290 have been sold: 3,278 burials have been made here, of which 465 were transferred from other grounds. Already a larger number than constituted the population of our village, have been laid to rest.

The first president, whose foresight saw the appropriateness of the grounds, and who in mental vision apparently saw the present beauties of this consecrated place, was laid to rest on the lot selected by him, in January, 1860. Rev Dr **Stillman**, the second President, whose best thoughts were given for the improvement of the grounds, and under whose suggestions the funds required were largely obtained, also rests here. The early Secretary and Superintendent, **Allen Hinckley**, who bore the brunt of the responsibility when the burden of debt was the most oppressive, has also passed away. Deacon **Barell**, who succeeded him, and by whose wise management the grounds were freed from debt and the area greatly increased by the purchase of the Fair Grounds, and whose soul seemed to be devoted to the interests of the Association, passed away near the Pacific coast, and his remains were brought here for interment. Three Vice-Presidents—Mr **Frisbee**, Mr **Beggs** and Mr **Finkel**—have found repose in their sepulchral homes and recently the Treasurer, Fr **Frazine**, the first to hold that office when it was made distinct from that of Secretary, was tenderly laid to rest by his associates, in these grounds.

Sad and mournful reflections are associated with these grounds, yet how many are pleasant. Sad are the funeral gatherings, when the remains of loved ones are here consigned “dust to dust,” and yet consoling is the thought that their resting place is made so beautiful, that loving hands and hearts will bring sweet flowers to decorate the hallowed spot, and the care of the Association for all time is pledged to keep green the grass that covers their remains.

When these grounds were consecrated to the burial of the dead, peace prevailed throughout the land. Six years later the roll of the drum was heard, and volunteers were called for by the government to put down a formidable rebellion. By hundreds the young men enlisted from our midst and went to the front and offered their lives in sacrifice for the perpetuation of our nation. One by one the mangled remains of some of the patriotic were brought from the blood-stained battle fields, to rest in these grounds, Here were brought Colonels, Captains, Sergeants and other officers and men, who, with others since fallen by the wayside, make an aggregate of 112 soldiers now resting in this bivouac of the dead. More are to be gathered in, and each year their comrades and friends gather here to commemorate the patriotism of those who imperiled their lives that “a government of the people, by the people and for the people might not perish from the earth.” The choicest flowers of earth are on memorial day strewn upon their graves, and their memory shall ever be kept green, while their patriotism and sacrifices will be held in remembrance to the latest posterity.

Here the aged patriarch, the “mother in Israel,” the man strong in manhood and the bride of his youth, the living maiden and tender infancy and youth, are gathered to their last resting place, and the grim destroyer will gather them in, generation after generation. We who are in charge of this trust, owe it to those who have committed the keeping of these grounds to us, to be faithful to it; we have a responsibility which will outlast this fleeting breath, and generations yet unborn, if we are faithful, will bless our memory and those who have preceded us in the consecration and care of this beautiful Cemetery.

PS Dec 1915— Of the list of thirty-nine Original Subscribers to establish Forest Hill Cemetery, (printed on page one of this history) all are deceased.

Later additions of land: March 22, 1911, the trustees purchased of Mrs **Mary Barker Woodward** a part of the **Barker** estate, containing ten and four one-hundredths acres of land, and on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1914, they purchased of **Catherine M Fagan**, a lot on Newton Street, containing fifty-eight one hundredths of an acre of land, making an addition of ten and sixty-two one hundredths acres of land. This, with the

older part of the cemetery, about twenty-four acres, making in all, making in all about thirty-four and sixty-two one hundredths acres of land.

This gives the Cemetery a long frontage on both Newton and Glisan Streets, and will give the Association land enough for cemetery purposes for a long time to come.

*This history was printed in the 35<sup>th</sup> annual report and catalog of FHCA in 1900. Reportedly, one thousand copies were printed and mailed out to lot owners. The author, **Willard McKinstry**, died at age 84 on Jan 26, 1899. The same 1900 publication carried his photograph and a tribute to the life and service of Mr **McKinstry**. The history was reprinted in the 1915 catalog.*