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Cemetery History of Early Chicago

Early burying grounds (prior to 1835) were located at Fort Dearborn and along the river. In 1835, two regular cemeteries were established near Lake Michigan, at the edges of town. One was located at Chicago Avenue and the other at Twelfth Street.



Rosehill Cemetery Entrance, Chicago, Illinois (founded 1859)

In 1843, a cemetery complex began on the Green Bay beach ridge (now North Clark Street) at North Avenue and slowly extended north with the 60-acre City Cemetery and south with the smaller Catholic Cemetery. A Jewish Burial Society bought six-sevenths of an acre in City Cemetery in 1846. Four years later, the city added 12 acres to its cemetery by purchasing the adjacent estate of Jacob Milleman, a victim of cholera.

Citing the proximity of the burial grounds to the city's water supply as hazardous to public health, Chicago's sanitary superintendent, physician John Rauch, requested the



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abandonment of the city cemetery as early as 1858. Burials, however, continued until 1866, when Chicago lost a lawsuit filed by the Milleman heirs, who claimed \$75,000 (\$1,225,285 today) was owed to them as a result of the mistake-ridden sale of 1850. The city chose to move the bodies to private cemeteries located outside of the city limits and return the land to the heirs.

The Great Removal began. City Cemetery bodies were wagoned to Graceland, Oakwoods, Rosehill, and Wunder's cemeteries. The Roman Catholic choices were Calvary in Evanston and St. Boniface in Chicago. Jews had moved their burial ground to Belmont and Clark in 1856.



Built in 1858 for Ira Couch, costing of \$7,000 (\$193,484 today), at the south end of Lincoln Park. The other above-ground tombs were removed and all other bodies were re-interred shortly after the cemetery was closed in the 1860s, but for unknown reasons the Couch mausoleum remained.

Chicago city government attempted to prohibit any new burials within the city throughout the late nineteenth century. Yet, as the city annexed additional land, it found itself



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contending with existing cemeteries inside its limits. Graceland, for instance, was situated two miles north of the city until the great annexation of 1889. The state of Illinois protected these private cemeteries from city bans on burials. Still, Chicago was able to exercise some control over their extension by passing an ordinance in 1931 that made it unlawful for cemeteries to expand or change their boundaries without a special permit. "

By the town authorities of Chicago in 1835 two cemeteries one on the North side and one on the Southside were laid out. The North side cemetery was used by the Protestants, while the Southside cemetery became the first Catholic burying ground in the city.

No interments were made in the South side grounds after 1842. About 1847, the city authorities re-interred the bodies from the burial grounds in the Lincoln Park tract, known as Chicago Cemetery. The Chicago Cemetery tract contained altogether three thousand one hundred and thirty six burial lots, and was designated under the old survey, as the "Milliman" tract. By a decision of the Illinois Supreme Court, the city lost the title to the Milliman tract and the Common Counsel, in 1865, ordered the vacation of the tract, authorizing lot owners to exchange their lots for lots in any of the new cemeteries, of equal size and of their own selection Graceland, Rosehill, and Oakwoods had, by this date been established.

When the time allowed (two years) the city to vacate the tract, had expired, a special committee, appointed by the Common Counsel, consisting of Aldermen Woodard, Wicker, and Lawson, made the selection for about two hundred lot-owners who had not made any selection and could not be found. The committee selected lots, of equal size and in the best obtainable location, in that part of Oakwoods known as the "Third Division, Section B" where the bodies were re-interred in precisely the same order as they had been in the Chicago Cemetery. The city holds the title to the whole tract purchased in Oakwoods, and any of the owners of the so exchanged were given the privilege of obtaining a deed to the new lot upon execution of a release of the old one. After several years of litigation, the portion of the old Chicago Cemetery included in the present limits of Lincoln Park passed under the control of the park commissioners. Joseph H. Ernst, of No. 271 North Avenue, was the sexton of the Chicago Cemetery for a number of years and had charge of the exhumation of the bodies.

NINETEENTH CENTURY CHICAGO CEMETERIES

Union Ridge Cemetery was founded in 1838. Originally located in Norwood Park Township (annexed to the city of Chicago in 1893), the cemetery was founded by resident farmers of the area. Henry Smith, an early Cook County settler, donated a small corner of his land to serve as the cemetery. Smith died in 1841, and was the first



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person to be buried in the cemetery. The cemetery originally did not have an official name; it was referred to merely as "The Cemetery" or "Smith's Ridge". After the Civil War, about 67 veterans were buried there, and it came to be known as "Union Ridge Cemetery".

The Jewish Congregations had a cemetery five miles north of the city, on the Green Bay Road (now North Clark Street). They formerly had a plat of ground in the Chicago Cemetery. The Hebrew Benevolent Society established a burial-ground here in 1855. The grounds are high and overlook the lake, and contain a number of fine monuments. Sinai and Zion congregations also had an extensive plat reserved at Rosehill.

Rosehill Cemetery Company was chartered February 11, 1859.

Wunder's Cemetery was a German cemetery was laid out, near Waldheim, in 1859, at which time it consisted of four and a half acres. It was called "Wunder's" Cemetery, in honor of Henry Wunder, a noted German Lutheran divine. In 1866 it was increased to fourteen and a half acres.

Graceland Cemetery was founded in 1861, by Thomas B. Bryan, who purchased eighty acres of land, five and a half miles from the center of the city, on rising ridges near the lake shore.

Oakwoods Cemetery lies three and a half miles due south of the city limits. It is reached by the boulevard drives through the North Park, and Illinois Central Hyde Park trains stop at 67th Street, from whence a broad walk leads to the cemetery entrances. The cemetery was laid out in 1864.

Forest Home Cemetery lies on the banks of the Desplaines River, four and a half miles west of Chicago, on Madison Street and was founded in 1876.

Waldheim Cemetery is directly opposite Forest Home Cemetery, to the south, and lying between Harrison and Twelfth streets, on the Desplaines River. It is owned by a corporation re-organized in 1881 under the law of 1879.

St. Boniface, a German Catholic Cemetery, consisting of about thirty acres, is located on the Green Bay Road, three and a half miles north of the city (now North Clark Street).

Calvary Cemetery was the favorite burial place of the Irish Catholic Churches. It lies nine miles north of the city near Evanston. It was consecrated shortly after the opening



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of Graceland Cemetery in 1861, although prior to this some of the bodies taken from the consecrated ground in the old Chicago Cemetery were re-interred here.

The early places, say up to the late 1840s, have been abandoned, and the deposits all removed to the newer grounds provided by the several cemetery associations of the city.

By 1893 these were the cemeteries listed for Chicago in guide-books and directories. The cemeteries are mentioned under their proper names:

- Anshe Maariv 'Jewish' Cemetery. (N. Clark St. and Belmont Ave.)
- Austro-Hungarian, [Waldhelm] Cemetery. (10 miles west of City Hall)
- Beth Hamedrash 'Jewish' [Oakwoods] Cemetery. (67th St. and Cottage Grove Ave.)
- B'nai Abraham 'Jewish' Cemetery. (Near Waldhelm)
- B'nai Shalom 'Jewish' Cemetery. (N. Clark St. and Graceland Ave.)
- Bohemian National Cemetery. (Peterson and Crawford)
- Calvary Cemetery. (9 miles north of City Hall)
- Cemetery of the Congregation of the North Side. [Waldhelm]
- Chebra Gemilath Chasadino Ubikar Cholim Cemetery. (N. Clark St. near Graceland Cemetery)
- Concordia. Cemetery. (Near Forest Home Cemetery)
- Forest Home Cemetery. (Madison St., on the bank of the DesPlaines River - 4.5 miles from the city)
- Free Sons of Israel 'Jewish' Cemetery. [Waldhelm]
- German Lutheran Cemetery. (N. Clark St. and Graceland Ave.)
- Graceland Cemetery. (Clark St. and Irving Park Road)
- Hebrew Benevolent Society Cemetery. (Near Graceland Cemetery)
- Moses Montefiore 'Jewish' Cemetery. [Waldhelm]
- Mount Greenwood Cemetery. (California Ave. and 111th St.)
- Mount Hope Cemetery. (California Ave. and 115th St.)
- Mount Olivet Cemetery. (California Ave. and 111th St.)
- Oakwoods Cemetery. (67th St. and Cottage Grove Ave.)
- O'Haney Emunah 'Jewish' Cemetery. [Waldhelm]
- O'Haney Shalom 'Jewish' Cemetery. {Unknown}
- Rosehill Cemetery. (Peterson and Ravenswood Aves.)
- Sinai Congregational 'Jewish' Cemetery. {Unknown}
- St. Boniface Cemetery. (N. Clark St. and Lawrence Ave.)
- Waldheim 'Jewish' Cemetery. (Roosevelt Rd., on the bank of the DesPlaines River - 4.5 miles from the city)
- Union Ridge Cemetery (Higgins and Talcott Aves.)
- Wunder's Cemetery. (Roosevelt Rd., on the bank of the DesPlaines River - 4.5 miles from the city)
- Zion Congregation Cemetery. (Peterson and Ravenswood Aves.)