

LOCAL CEMETERIES

The death rate among our earliest settlers was quite high. Young children (and often their mothers) died at a rate many times our own. In the pre-Revolutionary War era there were few churches with cemeteries. Most people were buried in what would become known as family cemeteries. Relatively few of that type of cemetery have survived.

Cemeteries on the grounds of churches have a better rate but not all of those have survived either. Eventually there would be town cemeteries. The largest cemetery in this area with stones older than a century is Rock Hill's Laurelwood Cemetery with its 20 and 1/2 acres in the heart of Rock Hill.

First, the city purchased 6 acres from Mrs. Anne Hutchison White in 1872. In 1894 A. H. Wilson sold an additional 6 acres. The city government sold lots with no provision for care, simply leaving care of the graves in the hands of the owners. Over time many of the grave sites were neglected as the owners moved away or the family line literally "died out."

In 1914 J. H. Witherspoon sold the city an additional 8 and 1/2 acres. Part of the Witherspoon tract was set aside as a "potters field," that is, a section for the destitute who could not afford to buy a lot.

The city commissioners by this time realized that policies and rules should be made about the care of the cemetery. They made a lengthy list of rules and regulations.

On the first and second tracts the city would clean up but in order to maintain the graves properly they decided to remove all fences and hedges from around lots and remove all footstones so that lawn mowers could operate.

No monuments would be allowed on any lots that were less than 280 sq. feet. No dogs or firearms were permitted inside the cemetery.

Prices for grave sites were established. In 1914 the charge was \$1.50 for a grave for a child under 6 and \$3.00 for any age 12 and over. To transfer a body from one grave to another cost \$10.00. Fifty per cent was added to the price for any cemetery work done on Sunday.

Eventually there was no more space in Laurelwood or downtown. City cemeteries had to move to the fringes or "country" in order to buy necessary acreage.

The circumstances of location of cemeteries varies from town to town. In Lancaster an old Presbyterian church long ago lost its congregation but its cemetery still survives with the oldest legible stone dated 1836. In it are buried 2 veterans of the War of 1812, 5 veterans of the Florida Seminole War, 2 veterans of the Mexican War and 53 veterans of the Civil War, including 2 veterans of the Union Army.

Rose Hill Cemetery in York has an unusual history. Quite old, dating back to the 1830s, the Liberty Street cemetery, like Laurelwood was, in time, subject to neglect. There were some sections with beautiful flowers and other areas not kept up. In the late 1870s or early 1880s private individuals formed the Yorkville

Cemetery Association. They bought more land and built a fence around Rose Hill. There was some improvement but not as much as some would have liked.

According to the Yorkville Enquirer, ca. 1907, the Ladies Auxiliary Association was organized and began, with limited resources, to improve the appearance of the cemetery.

By May 1912 the newspaper could report that while all of the directors of the Yorkville Cemetery Association were men, it was the Ladies Auxiliary that had planted the choicest flower seeds and put out rare bulbs and cuttings. "There are few flower gardens about here now that can show roses in greater variety . . . than Rose Hill."