

History

Mt. Pleasant Cemetery was organized November 24, 1873, four years after the first observation of Memorial Day in 1869. It is the oldest active Cemetery in Sioux Falls.

Mt. Pleasant was organized in Allen's Hall, a second floor meeting room in a building on the northeast corner of 8th St. and Phillips Avenue when Sioux Falls population was about 150. The incorporation papers look like a "whos who" of the city. Those signing were: Edwin Sharp, Dr. Joseph Roberts. Dr. Josiah L. Phillips, Nye E. Phillips, Col. Thomas H. Brown, Charles Kent Howard, Charles W. McDonald, William H. Corson, A. T. Fleetwood, True M. Dennis, Charles J. Hadley, Richard H. Booth, V. J. South, H. W. Lewis, Edwin A. Sherman, B. F. Campbell, S. B. Culbertson, Francis D. Cowels, J. A. Palmer, William Van Eps, Cyrus Walts, and B. F. Roderick. After the incorporation the group chose the name and elected Dr. Roberts chairman and later the board's first president. Francis D. Cowles was elected secretary. The group found 32 people who would pay \$10 for a cemetery plot, collected as much of the money from them as possible and declared they were in the Cemetery business.

By January of 1874 they needed to find land and they tried to buy W. H. Corson's 20 acres in Sioux Falls Township but he wanted too much money. Finally, on August 3, 1874 they received a letter from A. F. Wood of Yankton, Dakota Territory of land he had platted with blocks, lots, and streets bearing names like Chestnut, Lincoln, and Grant Avenues and streets numbering two to eleven from north to south and these are the streets one sees upon first entering the Cemetery gates. George Hyde was employed to act as both salesman and sexton. Burial Lots (ten spaces) were raised to \$12 with the \$2 going to Mr. Hyde if he collected the price at the time of sale. Dr. Roberts was succeeded by E. A. Sherman who found little to do in those early years but find a buyer for the Cemetery's hay crop and buy good fence posts to keep the cows out. The treasurer and sexton changed often. By the turn of the century the Cemetery was graded, water had been piped in, hundreds of trees had been set out and shrubs and flowers planted. In 1902 a large addition of land to the south was purchased requiring the board to take out a mortgage of \$7000. This purchase was joined by a gift of land to the west by Inez Van Eps which was named "Sunset Slope". Even a "watercloset" was built for the comfort of the visitor. At this time the Cemetery was comprised of nearly 150 acres extending south to the river and 18th Street.

A maintenance garage was built, and by 1920 a truck was donated by Dennis McKinney for the custodians to use. Large quartzite gate posts were erected at the Cemetery entrance as a gift of Inez Van Eps in 1922. Inside the gateway the Glidden Memorial Chapel was built in 1924 with a \$13,000 bequest of Josephine Glidden in memory of her husband Daniel, an early member of the board.

Through the years the Cemetery blossomed or faded depending upon the weather, the economics of the times and the abilities of the sexton hired. It was in 1937 that J. B. Allen, a nephew of Dennis McKinney and a wizard at minutes and bookkeeping came on the board. He found at once that the Cemetery had never been legally incorporated and had the matter taken care of by 1938. Jay B. stayed on the board for 26 years and his books are still a work of art.

During the following years the Cemetery fell into a sad state of disrepair. Burial spaces were sold by the sexton for what he thought the family could afford. The grass grew tall and the money grew short. In 1958 the board made arrangements with the State of South Dakota to begin selling off a portion of land comprising the south part of the Cemetery. These funds helped pay off debts and have helped pay for the upkeep of the older portions of the Cemetery never covered by perpetual care. It had been the custom in the 1920's to bill lot owners \$3.00 per year for upkeep of their spaces.

The present Cemetery is comprised of about 52 acres, nearly 100 have been lost over the decades to development. Although present burials number nearly 20,000 the Cemetery still retains about 40% of burial space remaining. Major efforts have been put in place in the last few years to bring the Cemetery back to its place of prominence in the community. These efforts will not occur overnight but will be slow and gradual in their implementation. A new section has recently been opened and the Chapel has been repaired and updated. As a reflection of the history of Sioux Falls from its beginning Mt. Pleasant will continue to keep pace with Sioux Falls into its future with new and innovative ideas for the coming generations.