History Of North Union Cemetery

1865 – 2009

425 N. 800 W

Ervin Twp., Howard Co.

Kokomo, Indiana

by

Max L. Wilson

North Union Cemetery

[An Accounting]

In northwestern Howard County, within Ervin Township, and along the north bank of Little Deer Creek lies a community cemetery known these days as North Union Cemetery.

Located approximately at the intersection of Howard County road 800 West and 425 North, it is the burial site for an estimated 871 persons who have died since early in 1864.

In the intervening years, the land has been designated by many names – Union, Boswell, Bethel, Kappa, Salmons, and today North Union Cemetery.

The first Gravestone bears the year 1864 and the ground beneath it enfolds what remains of a child. He or she wasn't supposed to be there, so the story goes; the child was to be buried in South Union Cemetery (a few miles away), but winter made the roads to those grounds impassable.

The First burial site at North Union Cemetery was on a gently rising hill, overlooking Little Deer Creek.

Part of the early part of the cemetery is made up of a plot of ground obtained for $20 on 8 February 1865 from James and Rachel Boswell. It was sold to William Griffith, Ralph French, and Alexander Robison, trustees for the burial ground at the time.

Unfortunately, the deed contains a poor description, making it impossible to determine the acreage. It was not recorded at the time and thus is included in an 1877 purchase.

The 1877 purchase (considered to be the first recorded deed for the cemetery) was between owners John M. Wilson and Ralph French, and trustees John Heinmiller, George Salmons, W. T. Merrell, and William Heinmiller. The land, located along the south side of the present cemetery, involved the exchange of $30. It included a strip of land one rod wide and 23 rods long as an access strip, on lane, from the county road to the cemetery.

It appears that this purchase was on 1.72 acres. Thus, it remained the total size of the cemetery until 1927 when Ellen Salmons sold 1.25 acres ofr $125 and John Tatem sold 0.28 of an acre for $50. This enlarged the cemetery sufficiently to bring it to the public road.

In 2001, Max Wilson and Tom Wilson donated one acre along the north side of the cemetery, which will be developed and used as needed.

As the result of a recent survey the total acreage of the cemetery has increased to 4.25 acres, correcting the 1877 and 1927 surveys, and revealing that the acreage is larger than originally thought.

Annual Memorial Day services once were held on the first Sunday in June. On one such day in 1903 it is recorded that Albert Kirkpatrick was the speaker. These services continued until 1966.

Speakers once expounded from a wooden stand in the northwest corner of the cemetery. It was built in 1927 for an expenditure of $162.70 to Galveston Lumber Company. That was the same year that $101.66 was paid to Kokomo Steel and Wire for the wire fence and gate along the road.

In later years speakers used a farm wagon in place of the stand which probably had given in to the elements. Some of those speaking at the annual event

included Governor Henry F. Shricker, Col. W. H. Unversaw, Rev. Frank Stafford, Rev. Jesse Phillips, and David Shields.

The Memorial Day ceremonies were a fund-raiser for the cemetery with a hat always being passed. In later years as attendance dwindled those seeking donations moved to the entrance. Then the ceremonies were ended.

North Union Cemetery was not incorporated under Indiana laws until 13 November 1942. Signers of the incorporation papers were O. J. Wilson, Walter Diller, and M. G. Wilson. Incorporators included O. J. Wilson, Guy Wilson, M. G. Wilson, C. C. Merrell, Erwin Merrell, O. B. Merrell, Myron Gannon, William Pohlman, George Pohlman, John Kerkhoff, and Walter Diller.

The cemetery did not have the money to pay for the incorporation expenses, so various people loaned money to the cemetery. A note was signed and interest was paid. In 1945 a motion was made and passed to let the notes be applied toward purchase of a burial lot.

There are only minutes for the cemetery corporation since 1925, perhaps because prior minutes were never kept or were destroyed by a fire at the residence of M. G. Wilson, who was an officer for 30 years. The plat book of burial lots at the south side of the cemetery also may have been lost in that fire.

[However, recently a secretary's book has surfaced which casts doubt on the fire theory.]

There is one meeting a year at which officers are elected, and such business that is necessary to maintain and operate the cemetery is conducted.

Over the years several people have donated to the betterment of the cemetery. They have not only served as officers but also donated their time and labor to help maintain the grounds.

Today, there are descendents of the original founders of North Union Cemetery still active as officers and supporters. Some names of the families who

have several members buried at this cemetery are: Baldwin, Collins, Depka, French, Garbert, Gordon, Haworth, Heinmiller, Hinders, Jackson, Johnson, Kerkhoff, Malaby, Marquand, McCoy, Merrell, Pohlman, Prather, Price, Salmons, Stafford, Wilson, and Woolley, to name a few.

According to minutes, there were years when the cemetery ended the year financially in the "red" bout only by small amounts. Several years, the officers and trustees made donations to cover the shortfall.

Following are excerpts from some years:

1925 – A motion passed that the sexton be paid $5 for digging a grave, which was to be paid by friends of the deceased. The family and friends also had the privilege of digging the grave.

1926 – Deficit for the year was $7.61. The checkbook balance was $4.39.

*1927 – Trustees were to meet on 22 February 1927 at the cemetery to measure purchased land with the surveyor. Donations were taken to pay for the additional land which was bought. The average donation was $1. Price of the lots was raised from $8 to $10, and a half-lot was raised from $4 to $5.

[See 1967 for approximate lot sizes.]

1932 – A motion was made and passed to appoint a chairman of the finance committee to raise money to provide maintenance for the cemetery.

1933 – A motion passed that the cemetery was not responsible for the expense of digging graves.

1942 – A motion was made and passed that a meeting be called for the purpose of incorporating the North Union Cemetery Association.

1943 – A motion was made and passed that the price of a lot be raised to $35 and that $25 of this amount be placed in a perpetual maintenance fund.

1944 – The price of a separate grave was to be raised to $10. The price of a lot then would be $80.

1945 – A motion was made and passed to number lots on the north side of the drive and then offer them for sale.

1947 – The price a half-lot was raised to $50, thus a full lot would be $100. A motion passed that all help hired by the Association be paid 60 cents per hour.

1954 – M. G. Wilson, who had been secretary from 1925 to 1954, was elected to be president. He was sick at the time and passed away in 1955 at the age of 76. A motion passed that anyone who had advanced money to the Association at the time of incorporation would be allowed credit when buying a grave.

1963 – A motion was passed to mail letters asking for donations for the maintenance fund.

1966 – Memorial Day services were discontinued, but people continued to be at the entrance asking for donations.

1967 – The price of a half-lot was raised to $100 and a full lot to $200. One grave space was priced at $35. A full lot buries eight people, and a half-lot buries four.

[See 1925 for related information.]

1969 – It was voted to increase the maintenance fund to $4000.

1971 – The price of a half-lot was raised to $125 and one gravesite to $50.

1975 – It was voted to increase the maintenance fund to $10,000 and solicit donations by personal contact.

1976 – It was reported that the fund campaign was successful and now has a net maintenance amount of $11,500.

1979 – The price of a single gravesite was raised to $100.

1982 – It was voted to pay $900 a year for mowing the cemetery. [The fee is 2009 is $200 per mowing.]

1987 – A motion was passed that the treasurer should be bonded.

1991 – The maintenance fund has now increased to $32,500.

1994 – The price of a single grave was raised to $125, and the price of opening a grave was set at $40. A letter was sent out asking for donations as interest on our certificate of deposit had fallen and was not raising enough money to pay expenses.

1997 – A motion was passed to raise the perpetual maintenance fee to $150 per gravesite.

2000 – Motion passed to have drawings made for a new sign in the front of the cemetery.

2001 – A design for a new sign was presented by Jonathon Russell and construction was approved. Max Wilson and Tom Wilson donated one acre of land to the North Union Cemetery Association for $1 and cost.

2002 – A thank-you note was to be sent to Caldwell Monuments for engraving the new sign. The new sign is red brick with an engraved limestone insert.

2004 – A motion was passed to have the tombstones south of the circle drive restored. Many stones were broken, illegible, or unsightly. The contract was awarded to Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration of Nashville, Indiana. The work is

to be completed by this fall at a cost of $27,000. A letter was sent out for donations for money to help defray the expense, and a net amount of $9,465 was received.

2007 – The perpetual maintenance fee was raised to $200 per gravesite and the price of a gravesite was raised to $300. The cost of a gravesite at North Union Cemetery is one of the least expensive in the county, as well as in the area.

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Over the years many people have filled the offices of president, secretary, and treasurer for the North Union Cemetery Association:

The office of president has been held by C. C. Merrell, El Gilbert, Guy Wilson, Evart French, Arthur Hartman, Tom Wilson, John Diller, and Kent Wilson.

Serving as secretary have been M. G. Wilson, Kenneth Wilson, Bob Merrell, Jim French, and Tom Wilson.

Serving as treasurer were O. J. Wilson, Fred Erfcamp, William Laag, John Kerkhoff, Erwin Merrell, Walter Diller, Wayne Wilson, and Glen Wilson.

[All of these officers have served since 1925 as we have no secretary minutes before that year.]

The best estimate of graves to this date may be made by consulting the plat book and by counting stones. This reveals 2,104 grave spaces, with an estimated number of 871 persons actually buried at the cemetery, and we have 650 obituaries.

Among the youngest buried here are a few stillborn children, while the oldest person buried is Garmen Mason Rybolt, who died at the age of 104 in 2009.

There are a total of 79 military veterans buried at North Union Cemetery of which 25 served in the Civil War and one was a veteran of the Spanish-American War.

It is interesting to note that there were only three men who held the office of treasurer from 1948 to 2010 for a total of 62 consecutive years.

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To compile this history took a lot of effort by Mary Blangy and an endless amount of time was spent putting the history in letter form by Max Wilson, who is the great-great-nephew of John AM. Wilson, one of the original land owners of the cemetery.

I realize I may have unintentionally made mistakes as some of the data is so old and hard to figure. But I hope to enlighten future generations of some of the happenings at North Union Cemetery.

Written and researched
By Max L. Wilson
1 September 2009

-Edited and supplemental material added
By Fred C. Odiet, 14 & 15 October 2009