

## History of the Old Cemetery on the former GCNS Site Part 2

This is the rest of the quote from August 25, 1885 about the old cemetery that was located where the Behring Senior Center now sits. "We know this is a delicate question: it has no relation to politics in the least, and, we might add, is hardly a question of theology. We would suggest that the few remaining bodies in the old cemetery be removed to the beautiful village ground and the old grounds be converted into another beautiful little park like the one south of the railway. That is if there is no legal impediment, or other serious objection to the plan. At any rate it is a shame that the old cemetery should remain in its present condition, a monument of ingratitude and neglect."

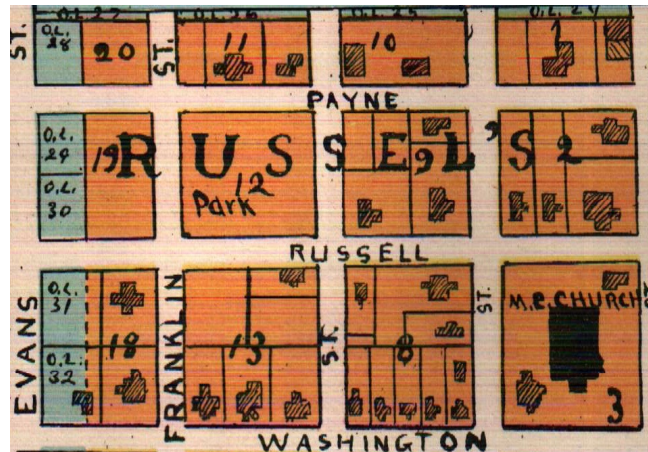
It was another nine years later until a meeting of the Cemetery Association was held on January 10, 1889 to discuss "the propriety of removing the present cemetery grounds." A full attendance of the owners was requested, so that a fair expression of their feelings could be obtained. I did not find a report on how the meeting went.

Another article on July 10 that year asked again, "Why not convert the old cemetery grounds into a beautiful little park for the delight of everybody in the city. A few dilapidated, laid-over, moss-eaten slabs that mark the graves of those long since turned to clay, is all that remains of what was once the consecrated city of the dead. There is no sense of keeping these grounds in their present condition. Next Arbor Day let there be a hundred trees planted therein, and the grounds cleared and leveled in places, - not too much, however; for the uneven places might be made beautiful with ferns and brakes [sic] and rockeries. This could be done without disturbing the mould wherein repose the dozen or so of thirty years ago, which now serve out as the reminders of the neglect or inability of living friends to keep to keep them decent in appearance."

Another article appeared on August 12, 1891 in which the editor thought that the city could "make a handsome park of this naturally beautiful grounds" for \$200 to \$300. He ended by stating, "Everybody is in favor of just such improvements." On the following April 27, the editor included in another column, "Better be made into a pretty park, where the people may gather, and rest in the quiet shade; near nature and God, where children may play, and lovers meet than be left in its present desolate and forsaken condition - like a boy without a mother."

It was another three years again, more than 25 years after the editor first mentioned converting that land, that it was finally reported on June 5, 1895 that, "The City Council has taken the preliminary steps toward converting the old disused cemetery into a beautiful public park." It was resolved by the Common Council on May 26, 1896 "that Lot No. 12, in Russell's Donation, known as the Old Cemetery, be and the same is hereby declared to be converted into a public park, and that all persons interested be notified by publication of this resolution."

The work on that conversion was started before September 9. "The rough, scrubby trees are being cut down and trimmed up. J. D. Mosher is superintending the work. Be careful Jo and not cut down all the big trees." A week later it was reported, "Investigation has developed the fact that there are no remains of the forms of the dead buried in the old cemetery. Time and nature's benign laws have obliterated the mortal part of those dear ones, and no further effort will be made to disturb the soil about them. The surface will be leveled and trees planted, and in time a beautiful park will be where the old cemetery now is, and the spirits of those gone may know that the spot is hallowed by a public blessing."



This scan from the 1902 Atlas of Green County shows that the block where the Behring Senior Center now sits was a park at that time. There was nothing shown in that block again in the 1918 Standard Atlas of Green County. Excavation for the Green County Normal School was begun in this block in June 1921.

A carnival came to Monroe 10 years later, which caused concern from local residents when it was announced that it would be set up at this park. Some of the residents claimed they “have relatives buried there” and protested. The location of the carnival was then changed. The article went on to say, “A large number of the bodies buried in the old cemetery have been removed and taken to other cemeteries and the city a few years ago offered to take up the bodies remaining but relatives objected and a few bodies remain buried there. The block, however, was plowed up and there is nothing to show the location of the graves. It is claimed that in the original transfer when the property was deed [sic] to the city for a cemetery there was a provision giving the city the block for a city park after it ceased to be used for cemetery purposes.”

As most of us know the Green County Normal School was built on this property and opened in September 1922. With the excavation of the ground for this building in June 1921, “Monroe’s Croquet club, composed of men of considerable maturity, has changed its location and is ready to meet the world with the mallet and wooden balls.” The old cemetery grounds had been the rendezvous for a group of retired farmers who gathered on summer afternoons and “sought the shade of the big trees, lighted their pipes, and after exchanging view on current events, the weather and politics, made ready for a game of croquet, their favorite pastime.” The group, which included Everett Peck (82), John Brandt, John Thomas, Robert Kundert, and Ed Zilmer, moved their play to the Market Square lots.

An article on April 10, 1954 said that remains of a body were uncovered during excavation for a \$45,000 addition to the Normal School. Cousins Jeanne and Lawrence Asmus, second and fourth graders at the Normal School then, remembered walking through the furnace room to view the bones in a wooden box before the remains were removed to Greenwood Cemetery. This article also mentions that several remains were discovered at the time of the original construction.