

### Shriner Funeral Home - Part 3

Shriner Bros. experimented for a long time to perfect a casket lowering device that was ready for shipment to the United States patent office in November 1910. A drawing of the device would be made there and filed with the application for a patent, which had already been made. "It is the most perfect device of the kind, there being absolutely no chance for a casket to drop, which is the danger in using any of the other machines. The device is controlled by a governor, is fool proof, and the frame can be adjusted to fit any grave and shape itself according to the lay of the ground. Fred Miller is interested in the patent and Shriner Bros. also had the assistance of other local machinists in perfection clutch, which has proven unreliable."

Only six months later, on May 15, 1911, it was announced that the Monroe Burial Device would soon be on the market with the mechanical lowering device weighing only 63 pounds, yet it was capable of lowering and lifting half a ton of weight at the will of the operator. The Holbrook-Armstrong company, Racine, had completed one of the machines. Charles Shriner and Fred Miller returned it to Racine via auto so that additional improvements could be made.

The men received the first of their casket lowering devices that were being manufactured by a Chicago undertaking specialty house in July 1913; they were on the market at the time. "One was purchased for use in the Forest Home cemetery, the largest burial ground in Chicago, as soon as the device was demonstrated." The brothers received a royalty on each device sold.

The device consisted of a rectangular, tube frame that could even be adjusted to fit a double grave. "The mechanism is in one corner and is composed of a worm screw gear controlled by a governor, that regulates the speed or stops the machine. Unlike every other device of the kind on the market, it is absolutely safe. All others have been known to slip and many humiliating accidents have occurred by the use of them." It was impossible for this device to give way, which made the demand greater.

Frank met with an accident during an electrical storm on the morning of September 30, 1912, which had nothing to do with the business. He was walking on 10th Street somewhere west of the square while carrying an umbrella. The steel rod of the umbrella "carried a red hot touch of lightning" to the palm of his hand in which he held the wooden handle. The handle became hot and he felt a burning sensation in his arm that reached to his shoulder. After he arrived home, he found that his palm was "as white as if it had been frost bitten." As his arm warmed up, the "peculiar sensation" in his arm went away.

Charles suggested at the meeting of the city council on May 18, 1915 that lights be placed near the entrance of Greenwood Cemetery and another near the center of the cemetery. He stated to them, "The council may not beware of the fact, but it is not uncommon after we have had a funeral at which there are many and beautiful flowers, for vandals to enter the cemetery at night and carry off the ribbons from the floral pieces. Not infrequently many of the freshest of the flowers are carried off." He felt that the light in the center of the grounds "would keep night prowlers away."

The Shriner brothers were community-minded men. An article in the Monroe Evening Times on May 30, 1903 shared that the Shriner's team of white horses would haul the flowers for the Woman's Relief Corps to Greenwood cemetery in the Memorial Day parade. That team had been a feature in those parades here for 15 years. This would probably be that team's last parade as one of horses had become too old to work and had not had a strap on since the previous Memorial Day.

Charles Shriner also invented the permanent parade cage that was used at the third annual cheese day parade on October 10, 1916. These cages compared favorably with the immense parade wagons carried by the leading circuses of the day. Six of these, which required a full-sized farm wagon, were to be built. Each could be taken down by removing only four bolts. They could be folded up and packed away for future use and were expected to last for years. Both sides of the cages were open so the animals could be seen from either side. Ray Young and Robert Rote, fellow members of the parade committee with Shriner, announced "the four quarters of the globe are being searched at the present time for rare specimens of the animal kingdom which will be on exhibition in the cages during the Third Annual Cheese Day."

Even though the Shriner Brothers were renting the building that housed their business from Harriet Corson in 1920, they purchased the building immediately to the south (now 1022 17th Avenue) on February 9. The building that was purchased from Mary Lichtenwalner for \$10,000 housed the C. E. Miller meat and grocery store at the time.



This photo, another from the collection of Rich Hager, shows the Shriner Brothers' team of white horses that not only pulled the hearse for funerals, but also hauled the flowers for the Woman's Relief Corps to Greenwood cemetery in the Memorial Day parade until 1903.

Lightning struck the building housing the undertaking business on the evening of May 18, 1920. Fortunately, it only caused \$50 of damage. The lightning entered the cornice of the building shortly before 11:00, but was not discovered until an hour later. Jerome Schwaiger smelled smoke and went to the roof of the building where he found that the fire had started beneath the roof. The fire department was called and the chemical company extinguished the fire before it gained much because of the rain. "The wallpaper of the second story was water-soaked but a stock of approximately \$2,000 of caskets stored there was not damaged."

The business remained in the same location on the east side of the square until 1934. Through the years since, there have been a few different owners and some name changes. The business currently operates as the Shriner-Hager-Gohlke Funeral Home at 1455 Mansion Drive.