

## Denver's Early Cemeteries

### HISTORY

#### Mount Prospect:

The location for a cemetery was decided upon by William Larimer and William Clancey during the Winter of 1858-1859. The site selected was on Indian land; and, even though the cemetery was staked and ready, they were not granted a charter by the Kansas Territorial Legislature until February 27, 1860. Although enthusiasm for the venture was minimal, acceptance of the proposed cemetery became necessary when a gunfight occurred in the streets of Denver between John Rooker and Jack O'Neill, O'Neill being killed in the process. He was buried on March 30, 1860, becoming the first burial in the new Mount Prospect Cemetery. (Along with other and more colorful sobriquets, local wags called the new cemetery "Jack O'Neill's Ranch.")

During the following years, the cemetery was divided or evolved into three distinct sections: Mount Calvary for the Catholics, the Hebrew Burying and Prayer Ground for the Jewish, and Mount Prospect (or Prospect Hill) for the general population. Reported burials as of May, 1866, were Israelite Section 12, Catholic Section 67, and Prospect Hill 547.

By c 1872, sections were assigned to the Masons, the Odd Fellows, G.A.R., etc. The City even deeded forty acres of land to the Catholic Church, and this portion of the cemetery became known as Mount Calvary and/or Calvary Cemetery.

Finally, in 1872, after all of this time had elapsed, the City of Denver applied to Congress for title to the land, which was granted on November 15, 1873. When the City gained ownership of the land, the name of the cemetery was changed to City Cemetery. After Riverside Cemetery was opened June 1, 1876, burials in the old City Cemetery rapidly diminished.

In 1890 the City applied and was granted permission by Congress to use the land for park purposes. Burials were ordered stopped. In March, 1893, the City arranged for removal of bodies to Riverside Cemetery. Approximately 788 bodies were removed. In August, 1893, the Park Commission gave notice that persons wishing to remove bodies must do so within ninety days and, after that time had expired, no bodies were to be removed as the entire area would be planted to grass. Several thousand bodies remain beneath the sod of Cheesman Park.

#### Mount Calvary:

In 1890, when the City was granted permission to use the land for park purposes and ordered that burials be stopped, the Catholics secured an injunction preventing enforcement of the order against their property. The Catholic Church soon opened a new cemetery named Mount Olivet in the Wheat Ridge area. After that, burials in old Mount Calvary became fewer and farther in between, the last one occurring in 1908. Many burials were removed to the newer Mount Olivet. (The first interment at Mount Olivet was made July 5, 1892, and by 1901 it contained about 1,800 burials.)

#### Emanuel Cemeteries:

The Hebrew Cemetery Association did not hold title to the land in the old Hebrew Burying Ground and, consequently, was not able to prevent its closing. In 1896 the Association purchased a section (called Emanuel) in Riverside Cemetery (6 3/4 acres) for use of the Jewish Community. In 1911 Congregation Emanuel purchased another tract of land for a burial ground (15 acres) within the confines of Fairmount Cemetery (also called Emanuel). By 1923 the Jewish Cemetery Committee reported that removals from the old Burying Ground had been completed.

Riverside Cemetery:

Riverside was established in 1876, the first interment being that of Henry W. Walton on June 1, 1876. As of 1901, there were approximately 18,000 interments in the cemetery.

Fairmount Cemetery:

Fairmount Cemetery was established in 1890, with the first interment occurring on November 19, 1890. By the year 1900, about 9,000 persons had "found their last resting places" there.

Acacia or Masonic Cemetery:

During the summer of 1866, land for a cemetery was purchased by Union Masonic Lodge No. 7, Denver Masonic Lodge No. 5, and Denver Chapter No. 12, Royal Arch Masons. The cemetery was opened and lots sold beginning May of 1867. The southwest quarter of the tract was sold later to the Odd Fellows. Many burials were made there during the following five years. In 1872 sections for the Masons and Odd Fellows were set aside in Mount Prospect. Most of the bodies were probably removed to Mount Prospect Cemetery, although no record has been found of the removal. It is also probable that no more burials were made in Acacia Cemetery after the Masons and Odd Fellows were given sections in the City-owned cemetery. In 1881 the entire tract was sold to George Tritch, who filed a plat under the name of the "Union Addition" to the City of Denver.

For further information, we suggest the following:

Smiley, Jerome C. HISTORY OF DENVER, WITH OUTLINES OF THE EARLIER HISTORY OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN COUNTRY. Denver: Denver Times, Times Sun Publishing Co., 1901.

Halaas, David. FAIRMOUNT & HISTORIC COLORADO. Fairmount Cemetery Assn., 1976.