

1890 Cemetery Board First Park Unit

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The report today is the third in the series on the activities of the various divisions of the Park's Recreation Department. The first two took up the Park and the Recreation, and told of their early history and the part they play in the development of Muskogee. "The city". This remaining report tells about the Cemetery and the School Ground Divisions. These are the oldest and the youngest of the departments functions.

Early day records show that in the latter part of 1890, the Town Fathers appointed a cemetery board, hired a superintendent and established rules of operation for a cemetery. The original cemetery was located at the present site of Jackson Park on the corner of Sixth and Fondulac across from the present school administration building. The new cemetery was located East of Muskogee along York Street. The city purchase this site of 80 acres from the Creek Nation. Even before the cemetery was laid out the graves from the old cemetery were moved to a hilltop site along the East boundary. Many of these graves are now unmarked.

The oldest burial in the cemetery is of Lizzie Nevins 1818-1967. Grant Foreman in his book on Muskogee tells of a Nevins family that ran the old ferry boat across the Arkansas near the present port site.

A great deal of Muskogee history is represented at Greenhill. The obelisk was erected for the first governor of the State, C.N. Haskell governor from 1907 to 1911. The first and twice Mayor of Muskogee, an Irishman born in Ireland in 1843 named Patrick Joseph Byrne. Alice Robertson first U.S. Congresswoman from Oklahoma, Alex Posey the Creek educator and poet – besides many others important in the early Muskogee history are buried here.

Greenhill, as the new cemetery was named, was laid out in four sections. At the left of the entrance is the catholic section known as the Saint Joseph Catholic cemetery. At the rear Southeast corner off Riverside Street is the Jewish family part known as the Beth Ahaba section. In the rear Northeast section is an area originally set aside for colored burial. This section has not been used for many years. All colored burials are now made wherever the family desires to make purchases. Also, there is a V.F.W. and an American Legion area. All other areas in the cemetery are available for burial by the citizens of Muskogee.

Greenhill Cemetery is a perpetual care cemetery operated under State law and a code of regulations by the City Council. Twenty-five per cent of all income received from sale of lots is placed in a perpetual care fund, the interest from which can be used for the continued maintenance of this cemetery.

This assures the maintenance of the cemetery long after the last lot has been sold and the last interment made. At the present time the city has invested over \$200,000 in this fund.

Ray Ward is the present superintendent and he has under his supervision five full time men to do all the maintenance and care of this facility. This same property required 12 men to maintain 25 years ago. Mechanization of operation has permitted this manpower reduction through the years.

In 1966, a contract was signed between the Muskogee Independent School District and the Park-Recreation Department for the grounds care of all properties of the school district to be assumed by the City Park Department. This would include the planning, landscaping, mowing, trimming, planting and care of all landscape materials, flowers, shrubs and trees.

This contract now covers all 25 of the school district properties. Park Department employes maintain the school properties along with the regular rounds of park sites, throughout the city, on a weekly basis.

The maintenance, care and beautification of school grounds is an important part of the overall city beautification program. Co-operative effort in this endeavor has been playing dividends in better looking facilities for all citizens to use and enjoy.

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