

UNION CEMETERY

HISTORICAL SOCIETY



SONNY WELLS MEMORIAL MILITARY WALKING TRAIL

Union Cemetery Historical Society
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A 501C3 Organization



A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNION CEMETERY

In the early 1850s, the towns of Westport and Kansas found themselves in a quandary. The cholera epidemic of 1849 filled the cemeteries of both communities. With expanding boundaries and increasing populations, city leaders started looking for more burial space. In 1857, their search ended when James M. Hunter deeded 49 acres to the Union Cemetery Association. The new cemetery was located between Westport and the town of Kansas and was to be used by both towns, becoming a "union" between the two. That is how Union Cemetery got its name.

When Union Cemetery was dedicated, it was thought that the 49 acres would accommodate all the deceased in Westport and Kansas City for all time. Little did city leaders suspect that Westport and Kansas City would become one community and that Union Cemetery would lie in the midst of a busy metropolitan area.

By 1910, Union Cemetery was showing increasing signs of deterioration. To raise funds for maintenance, the Cemetery Association sold 18 acres at 27th and Main streets. It was later discovered that several members of the association had formed the Evergreen Land Company and had sold the land to themselves, which they later squandered in several land deals. The cemetery association deeded the remaining 27 acres to Kansas City in 1937. The Parks and Recreation department now maintains the grounds.

In August 1889, cemetery records were lost when the sexton's cottage caught fire. This was a major loss because many of the graves were identified by wooden or limestone markers that were destroyed by weather, leaving hundreds of unmarked and undocumented graves. The sexton's cottage was burned again on Halloween night 1985. This time, the cemetery records were kept off site, so none were destroyed. The cottage was rebuilt by the Women in Construction of Kansas City and rededicated in October 1990.

VETERAN MARKER PROJECT

Many veterans buried in Union cemetery rest in un-marked graves, due to sketchy or missing records, having served our country from the Revolutionary War through Viet Nam.

Obtaining government military headstones to honor them is an important objective of the UCHS. We do this by submitting records we find in our sexton's cottage files and other sources to the V. A.

Since 2002 we have researched records for over 120 servicemen. When a search is successful, we send copies of the originals to the V A along with wording for preparation and shipment of the marker to us.

31 markers have been installed since 2002. There is a feeling of accomplishment when the identifying marker is set in place.

Civil War Marker Erected by United States Government

This monument was dedicated on May 30,



1922. The mass grave contains the remains of Confederate soldiers wounded and captured during the battle of Westport. They died as prisoners of war. The bodies were buried in the city cemetery and later removed to Union Cemetery.

ABOUT UNION CEMETERY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HAROLD "SONNY" FRANKLIN WELLS, JR. Sept. 1939 - Mar. 2004

Born and raised near Lincoln, Nebraska, Sonny Wells moved to Kansas City, Kansas in 1966. Sonny and his wife Karen owned and operated Chicken Delight restaurant until 1978 when they moved to Liberty, Missouri. He became a manufacturer's representative, which took him 200 miles in every direction. With his love of history, he quickly learned the Civil War history in and around Kansas City.

Sonny was President of the Civil War Roundtable of Western Missouri from 1992 until 2002. In 1982 he became a Board Member of the Medal of Honor Historical Society and their representative for a 7-state area. He was personally responsible for placing 66 Medal of Honor government stones, holding special ceremonies for each. Previously, these veterans had no mention of their honor on their tombstones and thus their heroism had been forgotten. Often relatives were not aware their ancestors had received this honor. One such veteran is Nathaniel Gwynne, found at marker "O" on Sonny's Memorial Walking Trail.

Sonny made history come alive for hundreds through tours and programs on the Civil War in the Kansas City area and many tours were at Union Cemetery. Sonny was 1 of only 3 recipients to ever receive the "Home Town Hero Award," which was presented by the living Medal of Honor recipients in 1989. At the time of his death, he operated the Civil War Shoppe and Wells Tours.

Sonny Wells' most used quote, which is engraved on his tombstone reads:

"Poor is a Nation that has no Heroes,
Shameful is a Nation that has them and forgets.
LET US NOT FORGET"



The Union Cemetery Historical Society was organized in 1984 under the guidance of the Kansas City, Missouri, Parks and Recreation Department. Its purpose is to collect data about historic Union Cemetery and to gather biographical data about the people buried there. Due to those efforts, the society published *Tombstone Inscriptions* in 1986. As stated in the title, this hardbound book lists many of the people buried in the cemetery.

The Society also published a series of 10 pamphlets containing collections of obituaries and biographical sketches gathered mostly from microfilm copies of old newspapers. In some cases, these obituaries and/or death notices are the only record we have of an individual being buried in Union Cemetery. *Tombstone Inscriptions* and the pamphlets are available for sale in the sexton's cottage.



The files in the cottage provide rapid access to the cemetery burials. They contain a wealth of genealogical and biographical information collected by members and/or donated by visitors.

The UCHS also publishes a quarterly newsletter for its members. *The Epitaph* keeps members informed about Union Cemetery and UCHS's efforts to keep it an historical treasure for future generations.

The sexton's cottage is open Wednesday from 9 to 11 a.m. and on Friday from 1 to 3 p.m.

A. **Baker, John F.** 1816 - 1885, Mexican War: John Baker came to Kansas City in 1868 and established his feed and implement business at 417 Walnut, a business he operated until his death. He established a public scales on Market Square. Among the farming communities of the adjoining counties he became a popular merchant. He was a devoted husband and father and was survived by a wife and three children. His funeral, conducted under the auspices of the Masonic order, was one of the largest in Kansas City up to that date.

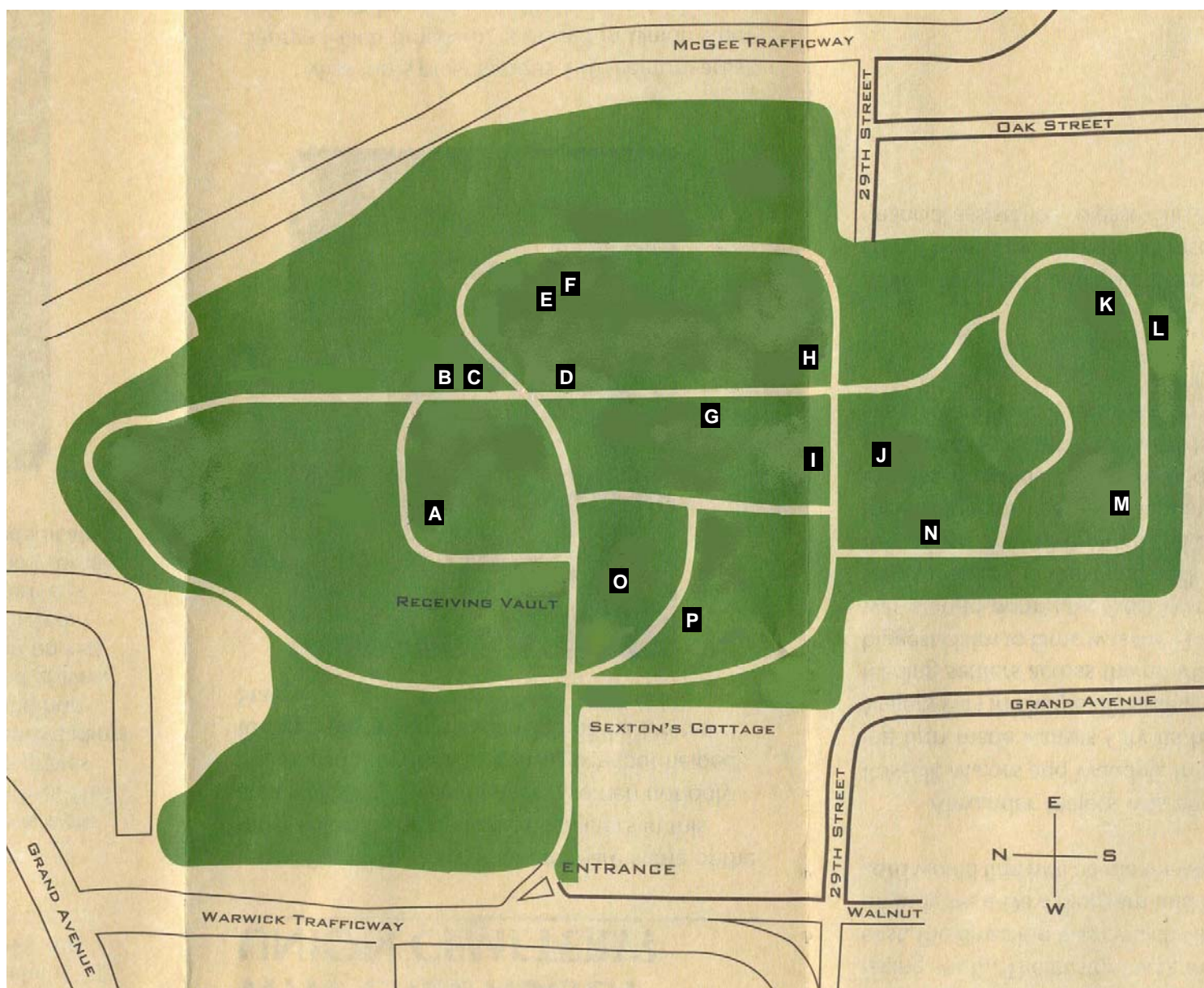
B. **Campbell, John** 1820 - 1900, Mexican War: Born in Ireland, he originally emigrated to St. Louis. He outfitted John Fremont's "path finding" expedition in 1844 and accompanied Fremont part of the way. He was a member of Laclede's Rangers in the Mexican War, and after the war, undertook a trading expedition on the Missouri River to Montana. Campbell was one of the 14 original purchasers of the 257-acre Prudhomme estate, the original town site of Kansas City. He platted "John Campbell's First Addition," one of the first housing developments in the city. Campbell Street was named for him and Charlotte Street for his wife. His former residence at Third and Campbell Streets, overlooking the Missouri River, was a social center of the city.

C. **Gillis, William** 1797 - 1869, Indian & Mexican Wars: William Gillis saw military service in the Indian Wars under William Henry Harrison. By 1830 Gillis came to Kansas City from Cincinnati where he had become wealthy building homes. He entered the Indian trade and amassed an even greater fortune and by 1833 owned more than 1,000 acres including much farm land in the East Bottoms. He also was one of the original purchasers of the town site of Kansas City. During the gold rush to California in 1849 and 1850, Mr. Gillis and Dr. Benoist Troost built the famous Gillis House Hotel on the levee. His niece built the Gillis Opera House whose revenues supported the Gillis Orphans Home, a modern survivor of which is on Wornall Road at about 81st Street.

D. **Chick, William Miles** 1794 - 1847, War of 1812: Born in Virginia, Chick was a Virginia Militia Private in the Army during the War of 1812. Chick came to Westport in 1837 and operated a general store. He was also second Postmaster in Westport. He then moved to the Town of Kansas (present day Kansas City) where he built and operated a warehouse. By 1843, he had established himself as a fur trader. He became the first Postmaster of Kansas City in 1845. In 1847, William Miles Chick died of pneumonia.

E. **Bingham, George Caleb** 1811 - 1879, Civil War: Missouri's most famous 19th century artist, politician and orator. He was born in Virginia and grew up in Franklin, Mo., on the banks of the Missouri River. He had no formal schooling but was taught by his mother. He was a Captain in the Union Army during the Civil War and was appointed treasurer of Missouri's provisional Union government. He moved to Independence in 1864 and to Kansas City in 1870. His well-known painting of Union General Ewing's Order No. 11 expresses his outrage at the death and destruction that order produced when Confederate sympathizers were driven from Jackson County. His first wife was Elizabeth Hutchison, who died of tuberculosis. His second wife was Elizabeth Thomas. In 1878, Bingham married Martha A. (Mattie) Lykins, who survived him.

F. **McCoy, Spencer Cone** 1844 - 1863, Civil War (Conf.): The only son of John and Virginia McCoy, he was a student at the Virginia Military Institute when he joined the Confederate forces. He died in the Battle of Springfield in January 1863. His body was recognized by a Union officer who would not



let him be buried in a common grave but buried him separately and marked the grave. In the spring, the family took a wagon to the site, retrieved the body and brought it back to Kansas City to be buried in Union Cemetery.

G. **Frauens, Marie** 1902 - 1996: World War II, Lt. Cmdr. USNR Served in U.S. Navy from 1943 - 1983 in New York and Washington. On active duty with the U.S. Navy, Marie compiled and published technical manuals for the Fire-Control Radar Systems of the Navy. Prior to retirement from active commissioned service in the U.S.N., Lt. Comdr. Frauens was assigned to the staff of the U.S. Dept. of Defense in the Office of the Asst. Sec. For Research and Development. She moved back to Kansas City in 1983 where she took an active interest in the preservation of Union Cemetery.

H. **Boggs, Joseph** 1749 - 1843, Revolutionary War (Militia): Joseph Boggs was a Pennsylvania militiaman in the American Revolutionary War. He died in Westport in 1843. His remains were moved to Union Cemetery from the old cemetery in Westport.

I. **Smith, Elliott** 1852 - 1933, Spanish American War: Canadian by birth, Elliot Smith served in the U.S. Navy during the Spanish American War. At the age of 19 he became a trader with the Hudson Bay Company. He came to Kansas City in 1879 at the age of 27. By this time he had become an accomplished dentist. Dr. Smith was the first to introduce gold inlays in Kansas City. He also established a troop of Sea Scouts and helped to organize the Red Cross here.

J. **MacNamara, Michael Henry** 1841 - 1897 - Civil War: First Master Sergeant Company C 9th Massachusetts Infantry. It is rumored, that he may have taken part in the Fenian Rising of 1867 along with many other Civil War veterans. The Fenians invaded Ontario in support of Irish freedom from England

K. **Hall, William Ewing** 1846 - 1900, Civil War: In 1864 Hall graduated from Kemper School in Boonville and joined the Confederate army, enlisting in Shelby's brigade. He served as a private in numerous skirmishes and battles, among them the battle of Westport and the battle of the Blue. After the war he studied law at Louisville, Ky. and Washington University in St. Louis. In 1869 he came to Kansas City to practice Law. He married Emily Porter, granddaughter of the Rev. James Porter. In the 1870's he was elected judge of the Jackson county court.

L. **Ragan, Jacob** 1792 - 1878, War of 1812: Born in Kentucky he served in Menefee's Company, Kentucky militia in the War of 1812. He married Anna Carter and moved to this area in 1837 near the corner of what is now 37th and Holmes. The Ragan farm of 12 acres stretched from 31st to 37th Streets, and from Oak to Holmes. Ragan was an active member of the Town Company of Kansas City.

M. **Payne, David** 1947 - 1994, Vietnam War: Served in the U.S. Army during Vietnam War.

N. **Harris, Charles A.** 1884 - 1935, World War I: Sergeant M. Mech. Sig. Corps. A locally popular baseball pitcher known as "Spot", he served in the Army from July, 1918 to May 1919. He was gassed and never regained his health. He was active in the Schumann-Heink Chapter, Disabled American Veterans and the Kansas City Dugout of Trench-Rats.

O. **Gwynne, Nathaniel McLean** 1849 - 1883, Civil War: Nathaniel Gwynne won the Congressional Medal of Honor at the age of 15 years and 25 days. At the battle of Fort Hill at Petersburg, Va., he was wounded when he rode across the battlefield to rescue the Colors from Confederate captors. Since he was merely a camp boy, the Army doctors at first would not treat him. When papers were found which showed he had enlisted the day before, he was put on the rolls. His injuries, a severed arm and two bullets in his right leg, then were treated, and he was given a medical discharge with full benefits. He settled in Memphis, Mo., and later moved to Kansas City, where he sold real estate and also became a lawyer. Elected to the Missouri House in 1879, he sponsored the Veterans' Benefits bill. He died in January 1883 at age 33 and was buried with full military honors. The Medal of Honor marker was placed at the gravesite in 1986 by the Medal of Honor Historical Society.

P. **West, Albert A.** 1915 - 2004, World War II Bert West was a native Kansas Citian. He attended Northeast High School and Kansas City University. During WWII he flew B26s in the Fifth Air Force in the Pacific Theater. In 1968 he retired from the Air Force as a major.

Information compiled by
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