

HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS OF THE OLATHE MEMORIAL CEMETERY

The Olathe Memorial Cemetery at its present location was founded in 1865. When the founding fathers in 1858 laid out the City of Olathe, no provision was made for a cemetery. Since church yards were the traditional burying ground, someone suggested that burials be made in the Church Square. All burials were made there for several years. "Church Square" was bounded by Willie, Prairie, Walnut and Mulberry streets. This location was never used for church purposes, probably because it was so far from the center of town.

An editorial appeared in the Olathe Mirror on January 9, 1864, stating that the Church Square was insufficient for a burial ground and steps should be taken to procure a new location.

At about the same time, Mr. Watts Beckwith joined the Mirror in urging the purchase of a tract of land suitable for a cemetery. He held that the development of the north section of town was being hindered by the presence of the cemetery. Mr. Beckwith claimed prospective home builders would hesitate to locate in the vicinity because of a danger of contamination to their wells. Mr. Beckwith owned the quarter-section joining the townsite on the north and offered to sell the city ten acres in the north-east corner of his farm. No action was taken on this proposal.

In 1865, Mr. Beckwith announced that with or without support of the city, he was setting aside ten acres for cemetery purposes. This is the reason why the first burial in the present cemetery is from the Beckwith family. However, the city was slow to make changes, and it wasn't until the railroad right-of-way cut through Church Square that it was necessary to move the graves to the present location. This accounts for the fact that several stones in the cemetery bear dates earlier than 1865. No trace remains today of Church Square burial plot. After some years the city bought the Beckwith tract, and later additional acreage.

The cemetery has many interesting historical features. In the original section of the cemetery, one can find tombstones marking the graves of early settlers to Olathe. Not far from the Beckwith monument is a shaft marked Algar and Nelson, settlers who came in 1859 by ox-drawn covered wagons. Also near by is a monument marking the Rev. I.C. Beach, Olathe's first minister, and his sons A.D. and Edward, two of Olathe's earliest physicians.

Two Kansas governors are buried in the cemetery. John Pierce St. John was governor for two terms, 1878 and 1880. In 1884, St. John was a candidate for President on the prohibition ticket. St. John received so many votes in New York state that the republican candidate James G. Blaine was defeated and Grover Cleveland was elected.

George H. Hodges was governor for one term in 1912. During Governor Hodges administration the women of Kansas were recognized and placed in key administrative positions throughout the state. Governor Hodges also improved the existing state institutions and built the tuberculosis sanitarium at Norton and the mental hospital at Larned.

Located in the Civil War circle are the soldiers who fought in the war between the states. The statue was a gift to the city from the Olathe chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic in 1893. An 1861 American flag flies at the Civil War circle.

The World War I circle is the resting place for soldiers who have fought in four wars, World War I, II, Korean, and Viet Nam. The statue was donated by the American Legion.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT THE CEMETERY OFFICE, WHICH IS LOCATED DIRECTLY SOUTH OF THE OLD CHAPEL AT 730 N. CHESTNUT STREET.