

Saved from Obscurity

The Story of Pleasant Hill Cemetery
– Eden Prairie, Minnesota

Nestled in the southwest corner of Eden Prairie, Minnesota, is a heritage site known as the Pleasant Hill Cemetery. This small patch of land just off the Pioneer Trail overlooks the valley of Purgatory Creek and forms a natural terrace. It was originally purchased in 1885, and shortly thereafter, it was platted as a pioneer cemetery with 96 lots.

At that time, the Rural Cemetery Movement was gaining popularity across the nation. Isolated family farmstead burials and crowded church graveyards were being cast aside in favor of new, thoughtfully regulated cemeteries with ample walkways, charming nature scenes and embellished landscapes. While this cultural shift bloomed, Eden Prairie grew.

Enduring the Changes

As time wore on and methodology evolved, so did Pleasant Hill Cemetery. Like other cemeteries in the area, it

faced undercapitalization. The status and stability of the community would be apparent in how well-appointed and maintained its cemetery was. In the 1920s, upkeep suffered due to families dying out or moving away. As the 1930s approached, local cemetery boards took over maintenance of their grounds and set up perpetual care trust funds to cover increasing costs.

This change to lawn cemetery methodology is evident at Pleasant Hill Cemetery. Most older cemeteries will have an old and a new section due to this modern approach. New sections were platted with efficiency and capacity in mind. Meanwhile, the remnants of the Rural Cemetery Movement were discarded. In 1966, the Eden Prairie Presbyterian Church, on the south end of the property, was removed and Section II of the cemetery was added. Five years later, land on the east side of the cemetery was purchased for Section III, yet another expansion. Then in 1987, the administration of the

cemetery was handed over to the city of Eden Prairie at the request of the Pleasant Hill Cemetery Association.

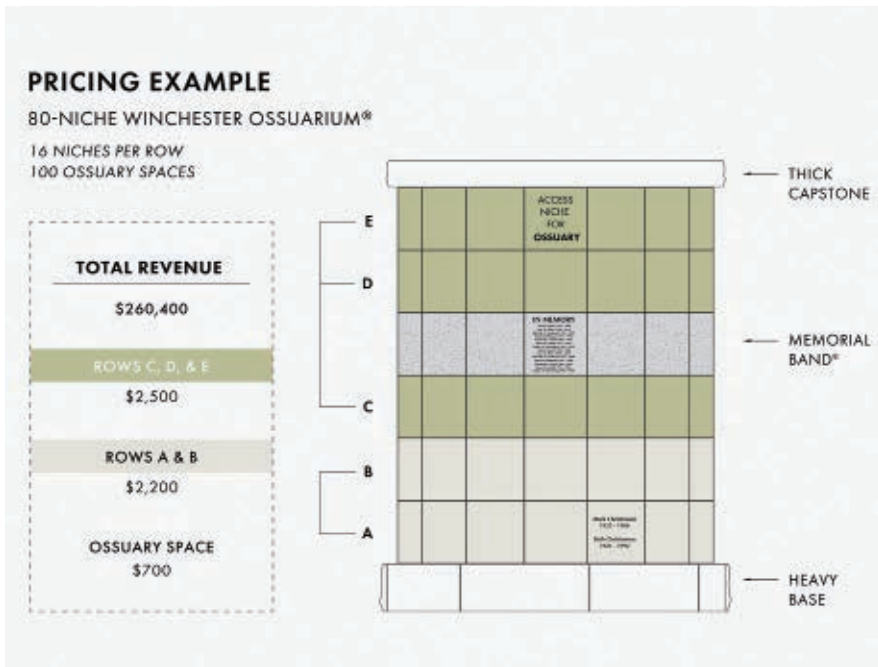
A Cemetery Revitalized

Fast forward to the present day. Overcrowding and land scarcity are clouds looming over many cemeteries. The historical Pleasant Hill Cemetery was no exception. In 2018, the threat of closing it to further burials was imminent for Eden Prairie. Without new revenue to help cover the rising costs of maintenance and operation, the cemetery was at risk of becoming obsolete. With over 125 years of operation, this turn of events would be devastating to the local community.

Fortunately, a plan was made to carry Pleasant Hill Cemetery through its next metamorphosis. To meet the new tradition of cremation and sustain the livelihood of the cemetery, the decision was made to install an Ossuarium from Eickhof Columbaria.



The new memorial garden and Winchester Ossuarium at Pleasant Hill Cemetery.
(Photo courtesy of Eickhof Columbaria)



The resident pricing for niche and ossuary space in the ossuary at Pleasant Hill. Varying the price allows a cemetery to get a higher return on more desirable spaces. (Graphic courtesy of Eickhof Columbaria)

Plans were promptly laid for this memorial, a combination of a columbarium and ossuary, on the last large available space. Although the existing landscape presented elevation and drainage challenges, the team at Eickhof was not deterred.

Chip Cheney, a sales professional at Eickhof Columbaria, recommended the cemetery partner with WSB Engineering, headquartered in Minneapolis, to prepare the site and tackle any landscape challenges before its Ossuary was installed. This proved to be a great pairing thanks to the company's vast experience working with government entities and in-house landscaping divisions. In conjunction with WSB, the stage was set for an inviting and attractive memorial space to take shape.

On June 8, 2020, the highly anticipated 80-niche Winchester Ossuary arrived. It was set into place by a crane at the center of a beautifully curated memorial garden accented with a winding sidewalk

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path and attractive plantings that radiate outward. The monument itself was built in Crookston, Minnesota, by the fabricators at Eickhof Columbaria and delivered by their installation team. Finished in Mahogany granite quarried in Millbank, South Dakota, it is a product of the USA with the craftsmanship and materials to stand the test of time.

Today, the Winchester Ossuarium at Pleasant Hill Cemetery captures the at-need, preneed and larger post-need cremation markets while boosting revenue and modern-day relevancy to an important historical site. On a section of land originally destined to hold only 64 traditional burial plots, the installation of this memorial created 160 traditional urn spaces and approximately 100 ossuary spaces. The new ossuarium provides four times as many interment spaces in the exact same space, thus ensuring the historic cemetery remains relevant well into the future. •



The centerpiece of the new memorial garden at Pleasant Hill Cemetery is the Winchester Ossuarium. (Photo courtesy of Eickhof Columbaria)

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