

Oakhurst Cemetery

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The cemetery property was purchased by the township of Whitehall in 1864. However, there seem to have been several burials in the area as early as the mid-1850s. The oldest grave in the cemetery appears to be that of Lydia (ne Blakeslee) Wiard (1784-1855). She was the wife of Chester Wiard (1792-1877). They came to Whitehall from New York.

A news item written by E.C.E. appeared in the Whitehall Forum in April 1878 and stated: "For the last three years at times the Whitehall burying ground has been a pasture for the town cattle. This morning, April 7th, I drove 25 head of cattle out and shut the gate." The article went on to suggest that someone be appointed whose duty it would be to see to it that all is secure so that cattle cannot run in almost at will. The gates have barely a pretense to being fastened - simply a stick shoved through or between the battens or propped up on the outside. Either some of the cattle from town have the cunning to work those gates open or else someone maliciously opens and leaves them. It was suggested to put iron fastenings and lock with padlock and key.

Complaints about cattle and swine in the cemetery and the dilapidated condition of the fences continued into 1880.

Until the summer of 1881 it was allowed to be overrun with scrub oak and bushes and presented a neglected appearance. But during that year, most of it was cleared up.

In 1882 Oakhurst Cemetery was described as lying east of the town and consisting of about four acres of beautiful undulating land in a square field just across a romantic ravine.

The first mention of the Whitehall Cemetery Association was in April 1906. A meeting was scheduled to be held in Glazier's Hall on Monday, April 16 at 2:00 PM. The object of the Association was to beautify and improve the cemetery. All interested ladies were encouraged to be present and help with the worthy enterprise.

By Memorial Day that year, several new monuments had been placed in the cemetery and the whole grounds were raked. Nearly every grave was covered with flowers by loved ones. In July several large Poplars and some other trees which were hard hit by the winter were removed.

The group held several fund-raisers during 1906. In January they held a dinner; in May they held a handkerchief sale and made over \$60. On June 8 the ladies held a social. The admission was 15 cents and included a musical program, ice cream, sherbet and cake. Everyone was invited.

The officers elected at the April 1, 1907, meeting were: Mrs. C. E. Covell, President; Mrs. Hedges Smith, 1VP; Mrs. Leo Hinman, 2VP; Mrs. J. J. Gee, Sec'y; Mrs. W. D. Springer, Tres.

In August 1907 the ladies of the Cemetery Association met with the Township Supervisor to purpose and investigate a few much-needed improvements. At the time, the west entrance was in very poor condition. They proposed cement steps from the entrance to the top of the hill. They also thought a sluiceway would help to carry the rainwater away from the steps and into the gully, thus saving the hillside. Ole Esterling promised the ladies that if the township made the improvements, he would fill in the fissures in the hillside and sod it free of charge. The township board approved of the improvements. Additionally, twenty-five nicely painted hitching posts were set in different parts of the cemetery so that horses can be tied when inside and there will be no excuse for damage to the grounds.

In 1908 the board fence on the front of the cemetery was put up for sale to the highest bidder. Mrs. F. D. Glazier, Secretary of the Ladies Cemetery Association, posted the notice and received the bids. New fencing at the cemetery was nearing completion. The undertaking on the part of the Ladies resulted in them not having sufficient funds on hand to meet all the expenses. So, in addition to the bids, additional contributions in any amount would be greatly appreciated.

In March 1910 the Ladies were planning further improvements to the cemetery. The possibility of a Receiving Vault was under consideration.

At the Annual meeting of the Ladies Cemetery Association in April 1910 the following officers were elected: Jennie Covell, President; Gertrude Clook, 1 VP; Mrs. Edlund, 2VP; Mrs. Glazier, Sec'y; Josephine Cotes, Treas.

In April 1912, the Ladies' Cemetery Association announced that they were planning to incorporate the society. By doing so, they can accept bequests and gifts to use in keeping up the cemetery and individual lots. It was also mentioned that the construction of a Receiving Vault at the cemetery is planned for this summer.

Officers for the year were: Mrs. C. E. Covell, President; Mrs. John VanKeuren, 1st VP; Mrs. Albert Lindquist, 2nd VP; Mrs. F. D. Glazier, Secretary; Mrs. W. D. Springer, Treasurer.

In March 1913 it was announced that the Ladies would be having a tag day on April 7 to raise money to finish paying for the substantial Receiving Vault which they have placed in the cemetery.

On March 26, 1914, over 400 people witnessed the "Mimix" which was staged by the White Lake Dramatic Club as a benefit for the Ladies Cemetery Association. The production was composed of two parts and entertained the audience for two hours and thirty minutes. The Ladies received about \$55 as their share of the net proceeds. As the Playhouse had not yet been built, the production was held at the Coliseum on Colby Street.

At the annual meeting of the Ladies Cemetery Association in April 1914, the following officers were elected: Mrs. VanKuren, President; Mrs. Jennie Linqvist, 1st VP; Mrs. Seager, 2nd VP; Mrs. Glazer, Secretary; and Mrs. Springer, Treasurer.

In November 1938 the township was considering a new road leading to Oakhurst Cemetery. As the entrance to the cemetery was below the knoll of a hill it was invisible to drivers coming from the east. A tragic accident occurred which took the life of Mrs. Dove M. Klett, a beloved Whitehall teach, was killed at the entrance to the cemetery. Two acres of property owned by W. C. Cotes just east of the cemetery along the township line was purchased and provided the space needed to move the entrance to its present location.

Cemetery repairs were taking place on the vault and tool shed at Oakhurst Cemetery in October 1943. Sexton Henry Zellar was in charge of making the repairs.

A look of distinction was added to the cemetery in August 1974. That's when a 30-foot flagpole was installed on the lawn in front of the vault at the east entrance. The flagpole was given in memory of Dr. Ed. J. Meinhardi (1894-1973) by his wife Ann C. Meinhardi. Ed was the son of Dr. & Mrs. J. D. Meinhardi who came from Germany to Whitehall in 1883 and opened a drugstore and practiced medicine for many years.

In 1992 the City of Whitehall replaced the leaking waterline to Oakhurst Cemetery. Jackson-Merkey of Muskegon installed a new line from the main on Peterson Road. The city then abandoned the leaking plastic line that came from Funnell Field and across the ravine on the east boundary of the cemetery. That line was installed before the water main was installed on Peterson in 1985.

In April 1998 it was reported that the City of Whitehall had acquired about 1,600 sites in the older portions of Oakhurst Cemetery through a two-year period of research and public notification, reclaiming unused and unoccupied sites, thereby extending the life of the cemetery.