

"The Cemetery Question"

Carroll County Times article for 31 August 1997

By Jay A. Graybeal

When John Fisher of Westminster died in 1863, his estate included extensive real estate holdings, including some which was adjacent to the old burying ground. Originally laid out by founder William Winchester in 1764, the cemetery was also the site of the brick Union Church which served local congregations for many years. The church building, however, was later abandoned as churches grew and built their own buildings. The Westminster Cemetery Company was incorporated by an act of the Legislature in February 1864 with the first stockholders paying ten dollars per share for 30 shares of stock. The first officers were George E. Wampler, President; William Reese, Dr. Jesse L. Warfield, John H. Hoppe, Joseph M. Parke, John K. Longwell and Alfred Troxel, Managers.

Progress, however, was apparently too slow for some residents and the location of the local cemetery became a topic of discussion as the community debated growth. A local resident, who signed his letter to the editor of the The Democratic Advocate as "Citizen", presented an alternative plan in the December 21, 1865 issue of the paper:

"The Cemetery Question-Mr. Editor: Your correspondent "Stockholder" asks, when writing about the Westminster Cemetery, "what has been done?" and the echo of the Cemetery, wandering o'er its barren hill, passing mournfully from one neglected grave to another, and half frightened at its own voice sounding through the deserted church, answering back again but repeats the question, wonderingly, "what has been done?" Nor are Stockholder and Echo the only ones who ask the question and receive no answer. The truth is, little has been done, and the future gives promise of no brighter prospects. But would we be doing justice to the powers that be if we laid the blame entirely on their shoulders? I think not. For all who are interested should bear their share of the blame.-As affairs now stand let us look at them. Stock was sold by which money was raised to purchase the ground and fence it in. More money will be required to improve it, a sufficient quantity of which I do not believe to be on hand. Stockholder says "if money is needed it will be forthcoming," but people will not furnish the money when they see nothing done, and nothing can be done without the money. Thus it remains in status quo. There has been a suggestion made and talked about, but on which I believe no action has been taken which would promote the cause more than anything else; at the same time be a vast deal of advantage to the town. It is this: That the Cemetery Company purchase a new site for the Cemetery outside of the city limits, obtain from the Legislature the proper authority to remove the dead from the old burying ground to their new Cemetery, lay off the whole of the present Cemetery grounds, including the old grave yard, into building lots, extending Church street through to the Manchester road, opening another street through parallel with Main street, thus throwing into the market some of the finest building lots near the town, giving it a chance to grow, by which means enough money will be realized to make the Cemetery an entirely independent institution.

Objections are urged against the present site for the reasons that there are at least four others near enough to be made available, which are far better so far as beauty of location and susceptibility of improvement are concerned. Besides which, located as at present, the Cemetery is a complete bar to improvement in the east end of town, and depreciates in value every building lot with which it comes in contact. Suppose the company had authority to remove the dead from the old burying ground, as proposed, (and most of the dead will be removed even if they do not change the location,) and were to purchase six acres, which would be amply sufficient for fifty years to come, and were then to lay off the

land as suggested above, let us see what would be the result.-After striking off the streets and alleys we can have, by calculation, forty-four building lots to be sold at the discretion of the company, and placing them at the low figure of two hundred dollars a lot, would amount to eight thousand eight hundred dollars. The handsomest site near town can be bought for this purpose for about eight hundred dollars, and after striking off one thousand dollars for the removal of the dead, thus taking that expense off relatives and friends, there remains the round sum of seven thousand dollars to beautify and adorn this "City of the Dead." The company would then be able to put the lots in the Cemetery down to so low a figure that even the poorest citizen could obtain a resting place for his friends.

It may be said that two hundred dollars for the building lots is too high a figure but when some persons speak of giving five hundred if they should come into the market, and other talk of building there if they can obtain the lots, I think my calculation not far wrong.

I hope the people will move in this matter by the time the Legislature meets, as it is a question material to the interests of our town.

CITIZEN."

Although Citizen's plan was not adopted, he may have spurred a resolution of the cemetery question. The Cemetery Company chose not to relocate, expanded the grounds and continues to manage the City's largest cemetery.

Photo caption: The Union Church, built in the center of the early part of the Westminster Cemetery, served as the place of worship for residents but was long abandoned when photographed at the turn of the century. The building was demolished in 1892. Historical Society of Carroll County collection from the estate of Walter H. Davis, 1967.