

Oak Grove Cemetery

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This area was used as a burial ground as far back as about 1856 but did not become a recognized cemetery until the mid-1870s. In 1875 Montague township voted to spend \$300 for the cemetery. The land was purchased from Henry Staples. In October 1877 arrangements were made to layout and fence the cemetery grounds in a proper shape. It was officially surveyed and plotted out in 1878.

In November 1877 it was given the name Oak Grove Cemetery. Before that time, it appears it was simply referred to as the Montague Cemetery.

The oldest headstone in the cemetery dates back to 1856 and is for a young boy named Frank Murden. According to the information on the stone, he was the son of B.F. and G. A. Murden and was five years 6 months 14 days old at his passing on 5 May 1856. By calculating his age at the time of his death, it indicates that he was born 20 October 1850. According to records, however, his father did not purchase the plot until 1878.

A search of B. F. and G.A. Murden revealed that they were Benjamin Franklin Murden and his wife Gertrude Ann (ne Solomon) Murden. Benjamin was born in New York around 1818. His wife Gertrude

was born around 1826 also in New York. They were married in Middlesex, New Jersey on 16 December 1846. His occupation was listed as a minister. They would have six children during their marriage.

The 1850 Census shows them living in New York with a 2-year-old daughter Mary S (1848-1927). They were not found in the 1860 Census. By 1870 they were living in Canton, Wayne, MI with their other three children: William (1853-77), Henry (1855-) and Anna (1859-78). By 1871, they had made their way to Montague.

B. F. was the first minister to move into the new Ferry Presbyterian Church parsonage, both of which were completed by May 1875.

In February 1877 his son William died at the age of 22. A news item reported that Rev. Murden had purchased a monument for him from the Muskegon Marble company for \$100, from which the company deducted \$25. Oddly, there is no monument in Oak Grove for William or any record of him.

A daughter Anna reportedly died in Montague on 3 March 1878. His wife Gertrude died on 21 December 1888 following a brief illness. After the funeral, a large group of family friends followed the remains to their last resting place, which is unknown.

Benjamin died in Montague 14 April 1891, but his burial location is also unknown. In his obituary it stated that his family consisted of the wife and six children, all of whom were dead, except his oldest daughter Mary S. Chaffee survived him and was living in Pontiac. She died in 1927 and is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Pontiac. A check of that cemetery did not reveal any other Murden family members being buried there.

Several other old headstones In Oak Grove include that of John Easterling who was born 4 Dec 1842 and died 6 Jun 1864 at the age of 22 years when he was killed during the Civil War at the Battle of Lake Chicot, Arkansas.

Another old headstone belongs to John Herren who died in 1864 at the age of 37 years, while in Andersonville Prison during the Civil War. Some records seem to indicate he died on 3 July, while his headstone indicates he died on August 28, 1864.

It is the final resting place of Job Sargent (1794-1882) who was a Veteran of the War of 1812.

In May 1910, all interested members of the Cemetery Association met at the home of Mrs. G. H. Mason and an election of officers was held, with the following elected: Mrs. Ella Hawks, President; Mrs. G. H. Mason, Vice President; Mrs. S. A. Gritzner, Secretary; Mrs. Annamae Grow, Treasurer.

In August 1910 the ladies of the Cemetery Improvement Association met with the Town Board and submitted their plans and specifications for the improvement of the cemetery and asked for an appropriation to assist in defraying the expenses. The Town Board voted for \$100 to be turned over to the Association. The improvements were along a practical line. A gasoline engine and force pump were to be installed. A pavilion on the grounds was used for the pump house. The grounds were then piped, and water provided for sprinkling.

An auction sale was announced in the paper in September 1910 with proceeds going to the Cemetery Association. Through the generosity of a public-spirited citizen many fine items were going to be put up for action at the Montague Opera House on October 1. Some of the items were: 6 upholstered chairs, 5

rockers, 2 fine couches, 2 small tables, a bookcase, a dining table, a china cupboard, 2 Buffalo robes, barrel churn, and other items too numerous to mention.

Although Auctioneer W. E. Osmun had one of the slowest and unresponsive bidding crowds in his experience on the auction block, everything was sold out. The great surprise came when the proceeds were counted and found to total nearly \$150. The articles sold were donated to the Montague Cemetery Association by Mrs. A. W. Dowling. The proceeds will assist them in carrying out their contemplated improvements at the cemetery.

In November 1910 a letter of explanation was printed in the paper advising that the Association had paid for 2,123 feet of pipe for carrying water from whatever source is decided on. Some suggested extending the water main from the village. Others advised the use of a gasoline engine. During the winter months the ladies were going to continue to investigate and decide which way was best.

In April 1911, the officers from the previous year (1910) carried over for this year. Dues for the coming year will be \$.50.

The May 1912 elections resulted in the following officers: Mrs. A. T. Steward, President; Mrs. Anna Dowling, Vice President; Mrs. S. A. Gritzner, Secretary; Mrs. Emma Mason, Treasurer. These same officers carried over their same duties in May 1913.

In June 1912 Fred Folker resigned as sexton of the cemetery and was replaced by Joseph Smith. This was the first mention of sextons for the cemetery.

Also in 1912, after much thought and careful consideration, the ladies of the Association decided that for this season the water at the cemetery would be free to all those who wish to use it. They wanted everyone to improve the lots under their care and using water as needed will no doubt show that the cemetery can be improved. Those who used the water were encouraged to carefully close the valve after use so as not to drain the tank dry. The sexton will run the engine between the hours of 3 to 5, when the pressure will be better.

A request was made for people to donate extra tulip, hyacinth and narcissus bulbs which would to be used toward beautification of the cemetery. The bulbs were to be planted by Mrs. Hawks.

In April 1914, the following ladies were elected officers of the Association: Mrs. Stewart, President; Mrs. William Wilson, Vice President; Mrs. Hubbard, Secretary; and Mrs. William Hawks, Treasurer.

The 1915 officers elected on April 22 were: Mrs. Annie Dowling, President; Mrs. Hattie Stewart, Vice President; Mrs. Emma Hailey, Secretary; and Mrs. Ella Hawks, Treasurer.

In June 1915 the Montague Cemetery Improvement Association reported on the work that had been done in the cemetery to get it ready before Decoration Day. Men had worked to grub out lilac and sassafras shrubs and other objectionable growths. Leaves were raked up and burned and the debris removed.

In September 1915, The Montague Cemetery Improvement Association asked to have the cooperation of all lot owners in eradicating bunchgrass from the cemetery lots. Those wishing to have the association do the work, at a very moderate cost, were to contact Mrs. Anna W. Dowling with their request.

The May 1917 election of officers took place with the following results: Mrs. A. T. Stewart, President; Mrs. Anna Dowling, Vice President; Mrs. William Hawks, Treasurer; Mrs. G. H. Mason, Secretary.

A meeting was held by the Cemetery Association on April 22, 1920, for the purpose of election of officers, paying of dues, and to discuss plans for the building of the vault. There was no listing of officers elected as in the past, or any information on the vault.

The purpose of a Receiving Vault is to temporarily store dead bodies in winter months when the ground is too frozen to dig a permanent grave in a cemetery.

On 14 October 1920 it was announced in the paper that the building of a Receiving Vault would be started at the cemetery at a cost of \$1,700, with financing by the Ladies Cemetery Improvement Association.

A news article the following week called for additional contributions to be made to meet the expenses of the vault, despite a generous gift from Mrs. Elizabeth Row of Lansing. This explains why her name is the only individual name to appear on the plaque, along with the group name, when it was placed on the building upon its completion in 1920.

It's not known how much her donation was, but we do know who Mrs. Elizabeth Row was. And the connection is with Mrs. Anna Dowling. She was born Anna Wilson (1848-1920) and in 1875 she married George E. Dowling (1839-1896). Anna had an older sister Elizabeth Wilson (1843-1929) and in 1863 she married Samuel H. Row (1840-1909) and they lived in Lansing. As both men were deceased by 1909, that left the sisters single ladies free to visit each other often. Anna seemed very involved in the cemetery project, and I think her sister Elizabeth became interested as well and supported her sister's efforts with a generous gift to the project.

On 22 March 1923 it was reported that Mrs. Marie Moritz died at her home in Maple Grove. Her body was placed in the cemetery vault until a more favorable time for burial.

In April 1926, Mrs. H. P. Rogers' body was placed in the vault at Oak Grove Cemetery, according to information in her obituary. There were certainly others during and after that time as well, but they were not reported in the paper.

A mausoleum was built at Oak Grove Cemetery.

On 19 February 1959 it was announced that final arrangements were recently completed with the Montague City Council, which voted unanimous approval, for the construction of a community mausoleum in Oak Grove Cemetery.

By June the sale of the crypts in the mausoleum were progressing well.

Construction of the mausoleum got underway in mid-September. George Dillabaugh, Mayor of Montague, turned the first shovel of dirt. Gerald Proctor, construction engineer, designed the mausoleum. Keith Construction Co., under the direction of Keith Boltze, local contractor, built it.

The original goal was a 72-crypt mausoleum. Local interest was so high that 36 more crypts were added to the blueprints. The sale of the crypts paid for the construction of the mausoleum. A picture of the newly completed 108-crypt mausoleum appeared in the Montague Observer on 24 December 1959.

In September 2023, fund raising efforts were begun by the City of Montague to secure \$25,000 needed to make significant repairs to the Receiving Vault and provide financial support to preserve the building for the next 100+ years.