



# LAKE FOREST CEMETERY

## HISTORY



Barrell Memorial Gate

Text prepared by Marilyn K. Alaimo, Chair  
Lake Forest Cemetery Commission  
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**Lake Forest Cemetery**  
1525 N. Lake Road  
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045  
**(847) 615-4341**

Lake Forest is unique among the North Shore communities in having a large public cemetery. The beauty of the grounds is due to the earnest efforts of the Cemetery Commission members, competent and dedicated staff, inspired artists and architects, cooperative licensees, and appreciative visitors.

The earliest arrangement of an interment can be viewed as a solution of an immediate problem with burial occurring close to where the person met death. In later days, such graves often became long forgotten. Before Lake Forest became a town, interments were made on or near the residences of the family or friends of the deceased. The grave of Robert Fowler, an early landowner and First Ward Alderman, who died in 1863, was uncovered on his former property during excavation for the construction of a water plant in 1934. His remains were transferred to the Lake Forest Cemetery for burial.

The history of burials in Lake Forest followed a pattern similar to that of Chicago, the nearby growing metropolis on the prairie. Community burials began before the Lake Forest Cemetery was established. Michael C. Maguire, the first Lake County Coroner (1837-1839) lived near the north end of the township and the northern boundary of modern-day Lake Forest, on the east side of Green Bay Road near a high point in the topography called Oak Hill or Cemetery Knoll. The interment of settlers possibly began here as early as 1839 with the death of Robert Swanton, but this burial site was abandoned by 1912. John J. Halsey, Lake County historian, referred to the site, "Oak Hill," as "God's acre," a term used to signify burial grounds. The oldest cemetery extant (1840) within current City boundaries is St. Patrick Cemetery on Telegraph Road.

Even before the City of Lake Forest was incorporated, thought was given to creating a public cemetery to serve families moving to this beautiful community on the shore of Lake Michigan. On February 17, 1857, the stockholders of the Lake Forest Association instructed its trustees to "lay out the cemetery grounds in the north portion of the lands belonging to the Lake Forest Association." It was the first public work authorized for the new community.

Following this directive, Almerin Hotchkiss, an engineer and cemetery builder who had been chosen to lay out the village plat, selected a site of approximately 32 acres at the northern edge of town along the bluff, overlooking the lake. Crossed by ravines, the cemetery was on high ground to prevent water contamination and to assure potential citizens that town planners had public health as a major consideration. Ease of

access to the site was evident; a connecting link from north to south in the Village plan was University Avenue, later to be renamed Sheridan Road.

At its northern end, University Avenue turned eastward toward the lake, forming the southern boundary of the cemetery site.

The Forest Cemetery Association was then organized in December 1859 under the general laws of Illinois. In April 1860, the Lake Forest Association Trustees conveyed by deed to the Forest Cemetery Association the land that was set apart for cemetery purposes. Samuel F. Miller, a prominent civil engineer, completed a survey of the site by October 1860. A.M. Hirsch made a plan consisting of a series of sections of burial plots, laid out in different shapes like a floral tapestry in the gardenesque style of landscape design. In keeping with this design concept, trees and shrubs were excluded from burial areas, and seasonal floral displays were prominent at the intersections of internal roadways.

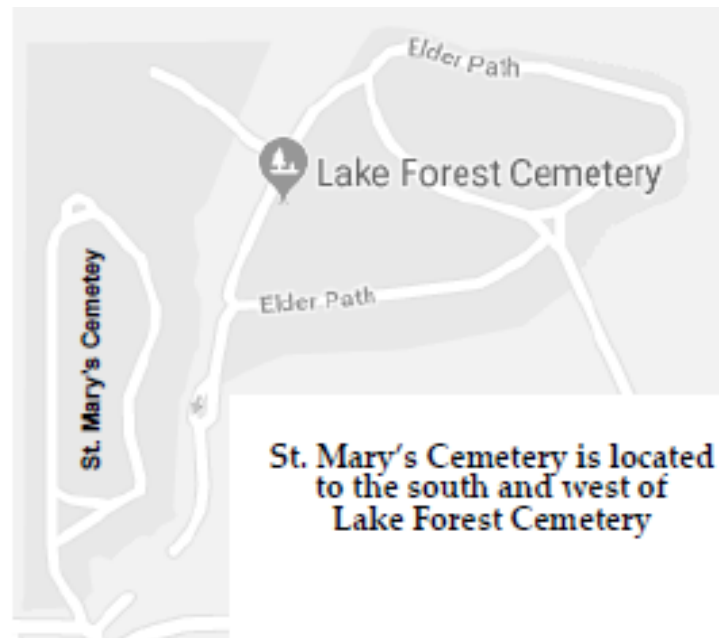


Map of Lake Forest, 1873

from <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org>

Subscriptions were taken up among the project's supporters in order to fund the development of the site. After the subscribers had selected their lots in accordance with the subscription's conditions, the licenses to other lots were then sold.

On July 13, 1863, the Forest Cemetery Association Trustees adopted a resolution to transfer the property to the City of Lake Forest. First called “Evergreen Cemetery” and then “Forest Cemetery,” the property was finally renamed “Lake Forest Cemetery” with the property transfer. Twenty years later, a portion of the site was set aside for the burial of Catholics in order to provide for the needs of this large segment of the population. In March 1883, the City Council deeded approximately 9 acres to the Bishop of Chicago with the requirement that these grounds be maintained permanently by Catholic authorities. This portion, now known as St. Mary’s Cemetery, is managed by the Catholic Cemeteries of Chicago and not under the jurisdiction of the Lake Forest Cemetery Commission.



The first ordinance creating a Cemetery Commission was enacted in June 1881. The ordinance assigns the responsibility for operations and maintenance of the cemetery, including the sale of licenses for burials and management of funds to the Commission.

In the next few years, many changes took place. A revised plat was approved by the City Council in April 4, 1882. It was designed by distinguished architect William Le Baron Jenney, whose works included the initial planning of Chicago’s West Park District (1870-71) and the design of the Home Insurance Building, the first steel frame

construction leading to the skyscraper. He placed the entrance to the cemetery on "Lake Avenue." Opposite the entrance, Jenney laid out a treeless, open field with paths for strolling and large lots around its perimeter to form Section A. Along the southerly border west of the entrance, there were single graves and smaller lots in Section B.

Although there is evidence of burials in the western portion of the cemetery site prior to this time, the first recording of burials in lots began on August 14, 1882 in Section A with the interment of Martha McClanahan.

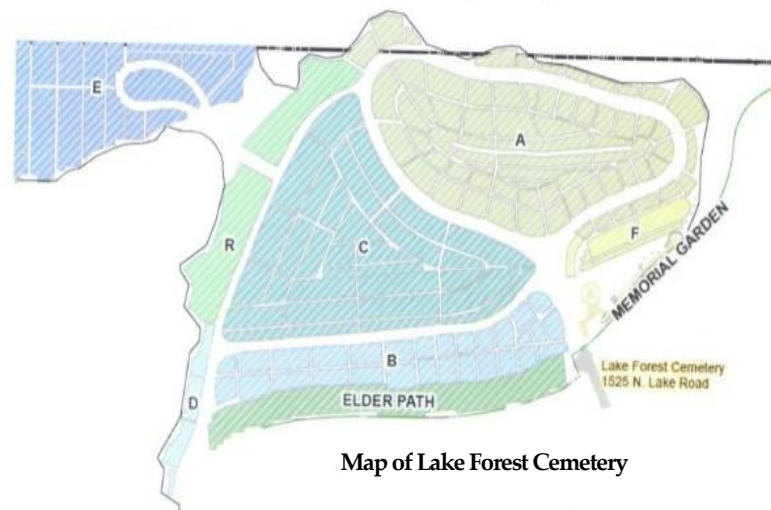


**Martha Elizabeth Simmons McClanahan**

A vault for the temporary storage of bodies was built just east of the entrance by 1883. In August 1892, a revised plat eliminated a road that went from the entrance to a proposed bridge over the north ravine; the triangular island of land, opposite the entrance, replaced a circle of land.

In 1900, Ossian Cole Simonds, the prominent landscape gardener who advocated the design of garden cemeteries and urged the use of native plant material, promoting landscape design of a Midwestern character, was selected to complete a new design of the cemetery. Simonds, the forerunner of the Prairie style of landscape gardening, continued the landscape tradition of Adolph Strauch in cemetery design by eliminating fences, creating vistas, and by directing views of the pastoral landscape. A City Council ordinance approved the changes on June 3, 1901. The integrity of Simonds' general

concept for a pastoral landscape has been upheld in subsequent plat revisions and decisions of the Commission.



The Barrell Memorial Gate, a lasting memorial to Grace and Finley Barrell's only son who drowned in the Illinois River, was built circa 1919. The Gothic style gate of striated limestone, set in an ashlar pattern, was designed by architect James Roy Allen, and the wrought iron gates were created by the renowned artist-blacksmith, Samuel Yellin of Philadelphia.

Private mausoleum construction began on several large lots around 1906, and building continued until 1934 with the completion of the private columbarium by C.F. Childs. Each unique, they range in character from rusticated tombs to refined Greek temples and in such styles as Art Nouveau and Art Deco. Reminiscent of the Estate Era and perhaps singular among cemeteries are the gardens that were allowed by the Commission, if maintained privately.

Some of the finest examples of *memento mori* can be found in Lake Forest Cemetery. These funerary artworks, memorials, and structures are of the highest quality and of rather remarkable variety.

However, the most notable monument is a large granite memorial on the burial place of Sam Dent, the local liveryman who was a well-loved familiar figure in the

community. The citizens of Lake Forest raised a granite tribute to the Civil War veteran and former slave who died in 1890.

Section E, the area west of the intersection ravine, was created in 1942 to provide space for single graves and small lots. The landscape scheme is in the style of a memorial park; only flat markers are permitted in order to permanently maintain an open lawn landscape.

A Gothic style Columbarium Wall, providing for the above ground burial of cremains, was dedicated in June 2000 on the southerly border, just east of the Barrell Memorial Gate. Adjacent to the wall are the Memorial Gardens, a series of intimate garden settings that include a fountain and a pool in the tradition of the Prairie style of landscape gardening. Jacobs/Ryan Associates, landscape architects, designed the gardens. Architect Alan Rosezweig designed both the Columbarium and the medieval style Cemetery Gatehouse, which was constructed at 520 East Spruce Street in order to serve the needs of the public. The Columbarium will extend the viability of the cemetery for many decades to come.



**Columbarium and Memorial Gardens**

