



Missoula City Cemetery (1884-present)

- **1884-Missoula Valley Improvement Company.** On December 1, 1884 four prominent area businessmen formed a corporation named Missoula Valley Improvement Company. The Certificate for Incorporation said the corporation was established for the purposes of “buying and selling lands and laying out same for cemetery and other purposes.” The corporation was formed with \$10,000 in capital stock divided into two hundred shares valued at \$50 per share. The original document noted the corporation was to exist for twenty years and was to be managed by a four member board of trustees listed as and signed by: Frank H. Woody, William H. H. Dickinson, Dr. Isadore E. Cohn, and Judge Thomas C. Marshall. Dickinson and Cohn soon sold their interests to Frank L. Worden and Andrew B. Hammond. The corporation dissolved in 1901 shortly after selling the cemetery to the city.
- **1884-Railroad land sale.** On December 6, 1884 the Montana Division of Northern Pacific Railroad Company sold a portion of land “lying north of the Right of Way of the Northern Pacific Railroad of S17-T13N-R19W” consisting of “14 acres, more or less” to Frank H. Woody for \$168. (No corporate minutes can be found to specify why this deed of sale was made to Woody instead of the corporation but speculation is simply the timing of incorporation in conjunction with the timing of the land sale.)
- **1884-Woody land sale.** On January 24, 1885 Frank H. and (his wife) Lizzie Woody re-sold the purchased railroad land to Missoula Valley Improvement Company for the original purchase price of \$168.
- **1885-Survey and plat recorded.** Missoula County Surveyor, H. V. Wheeler, was commissioned by Missoula Valley Improvement Company in December 1884 to survey and plat the proposed cemetery land. His official record was filed with Missoula County on January 21, 1885. The plat showed a triangular section of land. The location was stated as approximately three miles northwest of the city center of Missoula in the Montana Territory. The cemetery was listed on the survey as Missoula City Cemetery; however, other references at this time show the name as Missoula Valley Cemetery.
- **Design.** The initial survey plotted the land into block sections. Roads were placed along the outside boundaries with one set at a diagonal angle through the middle of the cemetery. Numerous alleyways were placed in each block. The alleyways were designed to accommodate horse and carriage including some larger square and circular hitching stations. As the cemetery expanded, many of the alleyways were abandoned and separated into additional gravesites. It is believed the cemetery also used those original alleyways for irrigation lines due to pieces of black piping found during some grave preparations.
- **Naming roads and alleyways.** From the inception of the cemetery, roads and alleyways were given a very clear, distinct naming structure.
 - **Virtues.** The original triangular section of cemetery land is bordered by roadways named for the three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. Two perpendicular roadways within this border follow the religious naming convention with Laurel and Rose streets.
 - **Trees.** Roadways laid out from west to east were named after trees. (Beech, Pine, Spruce, etc.)
 - **Flowers.** Alleyways for accessing various cemetery sections laid out north to south were named after flowers. (Daisy, Lilac, Hyacinth, etc.) Over time these alleyways were omitted and used for additional burial sites.
 - **Directional.** By the 1917 plat map a new section of land to the north was surveyed for cemetery purpose. This section was bordered using directional names: South, West, and North. The tree and flower naming convention was still in use at this time, however, the cemetery was evolving in other ways:
 - Graves, roads, and alleyways were eliminated to form a plaza in the original triangular section. Today that plaza is home to a large fountain, columbarium walls, and flower gardens.
 - “Hitching squares” were placed on the plat map designating where visitors were to tie their horses and buggies. By 1925 automobile accommodations were made by eliminating the hitching squares and incorporating large circular roundabouts at various road intersections throughout the cemetery.
- **1901–Garden City Cemetery.** On March 16, 1901 the cemetery land was sold to the City of Missoula for one dollar. The City Council passed Ordinance #109 of acceptance and appointed the first Board of Trustees

to manage the care of the cemetery. An undated letter prior to this transfer required the current cemetery trustees to “raise by public subscription the money necessary to place a permanent supply of water to said cemetery.” Newspaper clippings show this was accomplished in conjunction with the fairgrounds water line. At that time the fairgrounds were located west of the cemetery toward the entrance to the Grant Creek Valley.

- **Board of Trustees.** The City of Missoula appointed six trustees to govern cemetery operations. Those trustees were Samuel Bellew, Harriet Keith, Lizzie Mills, E. A. Winstanley, Lizzie Woody, and Lucinda Worden. (Most of these original trustees forever reside in the cemetery today.) One of the first actions of business taken by this group was to change the cemetery name to better reflect the growth and importance of the city. The cemetery would forevermore be known as Missoula City Cemetery. The Missoula City Cemetery Board of Trustees is the longest active board in the history of the City of Missoula. The City also recognizes Mary Lou Cordis for over 45+ years of service on the Cemetery Board of Trustees. A memorial bench in her honor sits in our new columbarium plaza on North Avenue.
- **1905.** Stone pillars with rod iron gates mark the original cemetery entrance. One pillar is engraved “1905.” No records have yet been found regarding their placement or dedication. The width between the pillars is quite narrow as it was designed for horse and wagon to pass through.
- **Size.** Numerous purchases, exchanges, and donations of land occurred between 1884 and the mid-1950’s. Missoula City Cemetery now consists of approximately 40 acres developed and 40 acres undeveloped land. The cemetery holds over 21,000 interments and memorials. Missoula City Cemetery remains one of the largest cemeteries in the state and is at the forefront in beauty, maintenance, customer service, record automation, and public access to records..
- **Availability.** Missoula City Cemetery offers a variety of graves for casket and/or cremation interments that accommodate a flush or upright monument. An economical option for cremation is a niche in one of our columbarium walls. We also offer a dedicated veteran section for veterans and their spouses, and an area for custom-built mausoleums. Please contact the cemetery office to review all the available options.
- **Services.** Missoula City Cemetery continues to expand service options that keep this historic cemetery relevant, usable, and sustainable for future generations. The public has been highly receptive to the monument cleaning and leveling services implemented in 2018. Watch for other new service projects coming in the near future.
- **History Interpretive Sign Project.** Missoula City Cemetery is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In 2019, The Montana History Foundation awarded Missoula City Cemetery a matching grant to install six interpretive signs along with a cemetery information sign. The interpretive signs were chosen from stories within this guidebook. Missoula City Cemetery hopes to expand this project to include more interpretive signs in the near future.

Missoula City Cemetery belongs to the public and is rich with history of the land, the people, and the development of Missoula.

Researched by Mary Ellen Stubb, Missoula City Cemetery Administrative Manager. Information sources: original land transaction documents, original surveyed plat maps, and historical cemetery documents on file with Missoula City Cemetery, City of Missoula, Missoula County, and the Mike and Maureen Mansfield Library.