

City of Carroll and Its Cemetery

Carroll, Iowa

By Gretchen Triplett

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Much has been written about the history of Carroll by devoted loving citizens. Except for the cemetery. This is noteworthy because it is an exceptional cemetery, one of uncommon beauty and tranquility. Certainly one of Iowa's most beautiful.

Perhaps more importantly for us oldtimers, it is one of the few landmarks in Carroll from mid-20th century. New schools have been built, and churches, hotels and power plants torn down. Probably most shocking was the loss of the old courthouse that was torn down in the late 1950s, even to leveling the site! The business district itself succumbed to the Urban Renewal Project in the early 1960s. No more Jung's Bakery or Candy Kitchen. All in the name of progress.

Thus, for many who called Carroll their home in their formative years, the only recognizable landmarks today would be the Carroll Cemetery. Yes, the cemetery! And what a Beauty she is! Surrounded by an extraordinary 'fence' that is actually a stone wall topped with a black wrought iron fence. Visitors enter through stunning gates, wind by an imposing rostrum and dais dominating a Civil War monument in the shape of an obelisk celebrating local veterans and eight handsome monuments set in a semi-circle. Then, to the south over the hill, is an American Legion monument with the American eagle, all constructed of beautiful large Iowa stone.

At the entrance imbedded in the east main entrance pillar, a discrete bronze plaque -- 'WPA 1936'. What did it mean, and why was this cemetery especially dignified, majestic, and serene? How did it come to be so special?

Early Times

Carroll City, its original name, incorporated in 1869. By the early 1870s, a cemetery area would have been designated by the city. The courthouse and business district were located north of the railroad. The cemetery lay to the southeast, south of the railroad, and, according to City Council minutes, was maintained by the local chapter of the Odd Fellows Society and a half-time city employee. That's about all that is mentioned. No records have been kept by the cemetery, there are only City Council minutes to enlighten the curious.

Postcards From Carroll, by local Carroll historian James F. Kerwin, pictures 1920s-era postcards of Carroll's lovely large homes and wide streets. But no paving, no curb, no gutters. Even photos of Hwy 30, a major east/west trucking route, show it was a dirt road in the 1920s. Dusty in summer, and unbearable winters, mired up to the hubcaps in mud was the norm. It

was finally paved about the time the Stock Market crashed. Major highways in Iowa were paved in places, but not others.

The 1920s had witnessed unprecedented economic boom, followed by a downspin with the Crash of '29. Nobody knew much how to correct the economic disaster, paving the way for a new administration.

With the election of Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 came a series of aggressive measures, collectively known as the New Deal, under provisions of the National Recovery Act, designed to stimulate the economy. Unemployment bottomed out at 25.4 percent, about the same time Roosevelt took office on March 4, 1933. Although unemployment had peaked, it was still at nearly 15 percent by 1940. Takes a long time for things to stabilize.

Help Is On the Way

The hugely successful Civilian Conservation Commission (CCC) began in 1933. The Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of April 1935 (ERA), intended to create public jobs for the unemployed, was followed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) on May 6, 1935. Local governments, to provide manpower, applied for WPA projects, with 'materials, tools and supervisions' to come from the federal government. The WPA under the direction of (Iowan) Harry L. Hopkins lasted seven years and created millions of jobs for those who could work. This project built Hoover Dam, Golden Gate Bridge, national and state park amenities still in evidence today.

Iowa's five WPA districts gave employment to some 250,000 men. Carroll County was in the Southwest District, with headquarters in Council Bluffs.

Carroll applied to improve the streets and parks, which included Graham Park and the cemetery. In March 1933, the Carroll City Council made application to the County Emergency Relief Committee for 'Emergency Relief Funds made available by the Governor from the funds of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to be paid in the form of relief orders on worthwhile projects.' This is the first mention of relief projects in Carroll City Council minutes (Resolution 607). The work continued through 1940, according to Council minutes.

In July of that same year, 'adjacent and south of the present City Cemetery' an additional ten acres from the Adam Reis estate were acquired, at \$350 per acre. This was an apple orchard. The Catholic cemetery, Mount Olivet, was directly on the other side of this orchard. The two cemetery combined in 1970 and entire jurisdiction was given to the City.

Other Local Projects

Carroll County residents might be interested to learn that Council minutes state that in December 1933, \$1000 was voted to the Swan Lake Project, a Civilian Conservation Corps Project originating out of the Camp at Lake View. This camp had run out of work in late summer of 1933 and workers were transported daily to this new project. In 1938, twelve men were hired for \$557 to plant trees at Swan Lake (WPA), a very popular state park today.

About the same time, Hwy. 71 overpass was built, crossing over Hwy. 30 both federal highways and heavily used before the days of interstate travel. Some sixty years later, the

overpass was dismantled. An overpass over Chicago & Northwestern Railroad and the Chicago Great Western Railroad was built at the same time.

WPA records are located at the National Archives and Records Administration, www.nara.gov, on microfilm, available from the Seattle office. Along with minutes of the Council minutes, the Cemetery Beautification Project as it was called, began to come to life.

The project was bid and completed for \$103,904, according to records. A man-year of common labor was \$672.36.

The Depth of the Depression Times

In 1935, the Social Security Act was passed. A first-class stamp was two cents. Beer in cans was introduced. One-third of farmers received U.S. Treasury allotment checks for not growing food or crops. A trip to the dentist cost \$2.36. Farm labor paid an average of \$3.24 per hour, building trades paid \$1026 annually, federal military received \$1154 per year, state and local government workers received an average of \$1361 per year, and public school teachers were paid \$1293 annually. A loaf of white bread cost 5.2 cents, cheese was 28.6 cents per pound, eggs were 35.6 cents per dozen, chicken cost 30 cents per pound. And a pound of coffee was 24 cents. You could purchase a cast iron stove from Sears Roebuck for \$29.85 in 1938. AT&T stock was selling for 105-3/8 per share, with an annual dividend of \$9; General Electric stock was 22-1/8 with sixty cents annual dividend, and General Motors shares were selling at 34-1/8 with \$1 annual dividend.

Home values in 1935 were \$4500, compared to the dollar value in 2002 of \$47,000.

Thirty-eight percent of families had an average annual income of less than \$1,000 in 1936.

The Dow Jones high in 1935 was 144, low was 96, with inflation running +1.0 percent.

Council minutes of December 1933 state, 'Moved that the Cemetery Committee act in conjunction with the Odd Fellows Committee, relative to engaging a man to landscaping and platting of same.' Thus, on January 3, 1934, an exact plan was presented to the Council by Ray Wyrick, a Des Moines landscape engineer and consultant, in connection with the development of the cemetery and its addition. He outlined a 7-step proposal including preparation of a Trial Design, planting list, specifications and supervision, and eventual 'modernizing rules and regulations to bring the Cemetery to the position where it can become self-supporting permanently within five years.' It was a very complete proposal, even reading it in 2009. Wyrick would be extremely pleased if he could visit the cemetery today. He was hired by the City of Carroll at a salary of \$940 over five years.

Wow!

In 1934, 'in regard to continuation of the work in progress at the Cemetery ... that it would be necessary to send in a new application, ... covering 7,000 hours of work, 3500 to 4000 hours of which had already been consumed, ... to continue just as long as possible.' At this time, cemetery lots sold for thirty dollars plus one hundred dollars for perpetual care, for each lot. Later, upon completion of the project, new rules and regulations were enacted.

Council minutes note payments to local businesses for the purchase of gravel, hauling, rock,

cement, dirt and labor. Those lovely iron cemetery gates, according to records, came from Gate City Iron Works in Des Moines with 1,000# pig lead supplied by Globe Machinery & Supply. Farmers Grain & Lumber Co was paid \$405.55 for gravel and tile for the Cemetery on March 6, 1939. Rose Hill Nursery of Panora supplied trees and shrubbery, in spring 1939, and again in March 1940.

Improvements in Carroll included sewer, streets, roads, curb and gutter, and street markers (made of concrete by National Youth Administration workers, youth 17-25, an idea of Eleanor Roosevelt). Even the first street light was installed (1935). Prior to that, Boy Scouts helped people cross Hwy 30 at the business district.

Although applications refer to the 'rock fence', there is little other information stated. A special session of the Carroll City Council meeting on January 23, 1937, Mr. Wyrick was present, Mr. Rohden, who is head of the WPA, Mr. (W. H.) Light who is in charge of the cemetery, and Mr. Frank Walz, who is foreman of the work that has been in progress at the cemetery, to discuss the work of building the fence at the new cemetery, as outlined in the project proposal dated August 27, 1935. Mayor A. N. Neu stated that it was his desire that the fence be built.' After lengthy discussion, the Council 'agreed to continue the project, and that the City Engineer be instructed to start immediately with the installation of the rock fence as designed in Mr. Wyrick's plans.'

The Carroll Daily Times Herald newspaper periodically announced release of local funding meaning work was available. Pay was usually 32 cents per hour, and they worked 44 hours per month, for which \$14.08 was received. Counties with towns and dollar amounts were noted.

The dedication took place Memorial Day, May 30, 1936. Only one photograph and article were located in the Carroll Herald. A surviving Civil War widow was honored.

It seems unusual that Carroll had the foresight to include its cemetery in making improvements through the WPA, but points to the pride of the community even then. The same improvements such as the rock pillar entrances were also made at Graham Park.

Photographs (five) of the Cemetery Project were located in Iowa State University Special Collections, where over 1200 photos of all State of Iowa WPA projects are on file.

The Cemetery Today

Citizen interest resulted in the erection of appropriate monuments honoring veterans of the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War, Prisoners of War and Missing in Action in 1990 and 1991. Their design reflects the original rock design of the cemetery, lending symmetry.

Well-tended lawns and stunning flower beds complementing the cemetery is carried on today by Sexton John Snyder, who takes great pride in the appearance of the cemetery. In 2003, when the City Council twice refused needed restoration funding for the crumbling rock wall, Snyder initiated a local drive among caring citizens to raise money for the repairs. Today it is ready to stand strong for a long time yet.

Do take time to visit the Carroll Cemetery if you are near Carroll. Turn south off Hwy 30 on Grant Road on the east edge of the town.

Note: The author grew up in Carroll and graduated from Carroll High School in 1955.