

History of McDivitt Grove Cemetery

One of the most historic sites in Urbandale is the McDivitt Cemetery on Meredith Drive.

William McDivitt came to settle in Webster Township in 1853. When his son, John, died in 1865, the father set apart an acre of his farm land for a cemetery. His wife, Sarah, died and was buried there in 1868. Ground was officially deeded for cemetery purposes in 1870.

In 1875 a Methodist Church was built just west of the cemetery. Lumber from a nearby saw mill was used. The church was the site of much of the community's social life. In it were held weddings, funerals, christenings, and church parties. Summer picnics were held on the grounds.

The furnishings inside were plain, with pews made of walnut. A small coal stove provided some heat for the church in the winter months. In 1878 a fine bell was hung in the church belfry. Services at the church for the primarily Methodist congregation were held with some regularity through 1928.

The Church of the Open Bible leased the church for some time and later purchased most of the pews for a church they were building at 68th Street in Urbandale. The bell was hung in the belfry of the United Church of Christ. The building was bought and lumber salvaged by Eldon Clements in 1950.

Meanwhile the cemetery continued to be operated by Webster Township trustees and maintained by a caretaker who kept burial records; though the existing records of the early days are incomplete. Much of the community's early history is

commemorated in the cemetery. In addition to McDivitt, other names on some of the older stones are Michael, Milligan, Hoskins, Hippee, Witmer, Clements, Olmsted, Parmenter, Stuart, and Flynn.

Some of the monuments are tall and slender with names, dates, and one line epitaphs such as "gone but not forgotten" and "at rest" are still clearly legible. Angels, harps, Bibles, anchors, and clasped hands are carved into some of the stones. Other graves are marked only by limestone rock; and some gravestones are so worn by time and weather, that names and dates are hardly legible.

The entrance at 70th and Meredith was marked by a metal iron sign and iron gates. Gravel drives separated the cemetery into three areas - South, Center, and North.

A record of grave sites was first prepared by DAR in 1932. In 1978 an inventory was prepared as an Eagle Scout project by David Brush, son of Don and Kathryn Brush. A DAR record with an alphabetical listing of family names was later completed in November 1988. The city of Urbandale took over maintenance of the McDivitt Grove Cemetery from the Webster Township trustees in April 1998. The cemetery is about three acres in size. An area west of the entrance drive, where the church once stood, was made available, but by 2002 all additional plots there had been sold.

Because residents expressed that "they've lived in Urbandale their whole lives and they wanted to be buried in Urbandale" another option has been developed. Two columbarium have been installed in the cemetery. They are granite walls each containing 48 niches or recessed compartments designed to hold cremated

remains stored in urns. The space and engraving identifying the deceased first went on sale May 2008 at a cost of \$1,000 each for Urbandale residents. Purchasers must agree to the terms and restrictions set forth by the City of Urbandale. Complete information can be obtained from the Parks and Recreation office at 278-3963 or go the city's website.

Olmsteds in the Cemetery

When you visit a cemetery it's interesting to look at the family names on some of the other stones. Because the Olmsted-Urban House is the home of the Urbandale Historical Society, more information is known about the Olmsted family.

Leander and Charlotte came from New York in the late 1860's to farm in Polk County. They eventually built the current house in 1904. Their son Millard married Olive Stuart and they also lived in the house. Their grave stones are easily visible in the McDivitt Cemetery. They are ancestors of Virginia {Ginny} Olmsted Campbell, a long-time Urbandale resident and Historical Society board member. She has worked with the family's genealogical records and has kept in touch with family members who live out of state, but are still interested in the Olmsted-Urban House.

But there are other family stories represented by Olmsted cemetery markers. Ambrose, Leander's older brother, came to farm in Webster Township in 1871. He and his wife, Sarah, and some of their family members are also buried at McDivitt. Norman Altemeier, an Urbandale resident, is a descendent of this line. There are records of at least 15 Olmsted family members buried at McDivitt.