

THE GROVE M. E. CEMETERY IN 1873

The Daily Local News printed an account of the Grove cemetery as part of the Centennial Celebration of the church in 1873. At that time the church was "The Grove Methodist Episcopal Church" and would have other name changes as the years passed.

The first part of this Daily Local News article described some of the activities and worship services during the celebration of the founding of the church one hundred years earlier. After a lengthy description of the services inside the church, the author of the account told of his tour of the church graveyard.

This portion of the account of the tour begins: "At the close of the church session we were kindly shown through the large graveyard adjoining the church by Jos. Hill, Esq., and another brother whose name we failed to learn."

"In this sacred enclosure is presented unwritten volumes of interest, which, as the visitor stands and communes with the silent sleepers around him, the lines dedicated by [Thomas] Gray to the country churchyard present their full force of meaning and beauty, and give ample proof that their author was no less inspired than many who arose to higher places in the annals of poetry."

"There in this little country city of the dead, we found one gravestone bearing the following inscription:

L.
R. G.
1776

This is the oldest grave in the yard bearing any intelligible date, and the rude stone is supposed to mark the resting place of one Lewis R. Gray"

[Historians' Note: In 1946 Howard N. Reeves, Jr., author of "*Methodism: IN AND AROUND WEST CHESTER*" identified the oldest Grove tombstone as the one 'marked 1776. It is of limestone with the initials G. L. cut upon it' but did not identify the deceased.]

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"Near by, a long row of stones, some of them bearing evidence of the tooth of Time, mark the graves of the Boyer family, which name was termed Byers in earlier years, and these grave tablets show when the change took place—modernizing the name of Byers to that of Boyer."

"Here, too, we find the tomb of George Hoffman, the founder of the Grove Church.

[Historians' Note: Mary Eve Hoffman, wife of George, is buried beside him. Their inscriptions given by Howard Reeves in his book, mentioned in a previous paragraph, are as follows:

"In Memory of George Hoffman
Who departed his life the 30 day of December 1820
And was one of the founders of this meeting house."

and

"In Memory of Mary Eve Hoffman
Wife of George Hoffman
November 10, 1821"]

The newspaper article continues: "A little further on we came to that of Dr. Jacob Ehrenzeller, showing that he departed this life July 18, 1838, aged 81 years. Underneath a lengthy inscription is shown, and we copy into our note book, as follows: 'At an early age he served in the War of Independence as Assistant Surgeon, after which he engaged in private practice, in which he continued with assiduity to near the close of a long life. The most of this time was spent among the people of this vicinity, whose confidence he eminently enjoyed, and, many of whom, surviving his death, can bear testimony to his skill as a physician, his fidelity as a patriot, and his worth as a man.'

"The grave of Wesley Patton, aged 13 years, was also pointed out, and which brought back to us the vivid remembrance of the little boy who fell a victim to the murderer, Jabez Boyd in 1845"

This newspaper account of the Grove W. E. Cemetery in 1873 will be continued in the May Monthly Newsletter

Betty and Ivan Lichty, Church Historians

THE GROVE M. E. CEMETERY IN 1873, Part II

Last month we began a description of a tour of the Grove M.E. Church Cemetery, as written in a newspaper article in 1873. The name of the writer is unknown but it is clear from the content of his article that he was not a member of the church.

“In another part of these hallowed grounds we read in marble memory the name of Milton Earley and, as we looked upon this stone, our thoughts reverted to years ago when his voice led the West Chester M.E. Church Choir, many of whom since have passed away. Another stone, blackened by the rage of many storms, tells the story of how Rev. Matthew McGee died in 1794, and that there beneath repose his ashes.”

[Historians’ Notes: Reeves in “Methodism: IN AND AROUND WEST CHESTER”, notes that Matthew Magee was admitted to the Conference on trial in 1794, states that he died of malignant fever. and gives his inscription on his tombstone:

“Long did he walk in wisdom’s shining ways,
A pattern of sweet innocence and grace,
A faithful preacher of the holy word,—
An humble follower of his gracious Lord.”

Rev. McGee’s death is recorded in “History of Chester County, Pennsylvania” by J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope, 1881” with this statement: “McGee died of malignant fever (the yellow fever.)”]

“The churchyard has twice been enlarged, and in the old part we are told the graves are so thickly located as to make it impossible to dig without disinterring bones, and thus it became necessary to make the first enlargement in 1850.”

“Speedily the new addition was filled, and it soon became evident that the grounds must be further extended, which was duly accomplished some five or six years ago, and already this part is well besprinkled with graves, bearing evidence of the rapid strides of death in that community.”

“The last named addition is handsomely laid out into lots and walks, with a beautiful center plot, and which will present a very credible appearance when the walks have been graveled and trees planted to adorn the plots”

“Here we took the main avenue leading out of the graveyard, and a few minutes more were rattling over the country road, filled with the recollections of our visit and hungry from the thoughts of dinner awaiting us at home.”

“The centenary exercises will resume on Tuesday next at this church, continuing until Friday evening, with three services each day. A number of ministers will be present from afar, and the attendance will most likely be large and the exercises of a very interesting historical character.”



Historians’ Note: The underlined words in the two paragraphs in this account, especially the emphasis on lots, lead us to believe that when the Grove cemetery was first established, the deceased were buried as they are in cemeteries we have visited in Europe—that is, the dead are buried in chronological order, not in family plots.

Some groups continued this practice of chronological burials in this country. When we visited the Amana Colonies, we were directed to the cemetery to see the manner in which the burials were arranged.

Our friends in Europe tell us that deceased members of a family are buried for a period of 25 years after which their remains are recovered and the grave and tombstone are “recycled”. The family has the option of paying for another 25 years when the first period has expired. Also, if the living spouse wishes to be buried with the first departed, then he or she may pay to reserve the empty space next to the mate.

Betty and Ivan Lichty, Church Historians

THE CEMETERY AT GROVE

In response to our request in the Newsletter for items which pertain to the history of Grove Church, Ralph Ludwig gave us a photocopy of his maternal grandfather's certificate of purchase of a burial lot in the cemetery.

This attractive document is entitled "Certificate of Burial Lots" and reads as follows: "This is to certify that Wilmer Bennett has purchased of the Trustees of the Grove M. E. Church, for the sum of **Ten Dollars**, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, Lot No. 241 in the Grove M. E. Church Grave Yard." and has the signatures of John F. Aldred, Treasurer and James D. Peck, Secretary.

Ralph's grandfather, Wilmer Bennett, was born in 1865 and died in 1929. The first to be buried on this lot was a tiny baby, David, in 1918.

"History of Chester County, Pennsylvania" by J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope, published in 1881, contains a section written by Reverent George W. Lybrand concerning the Methodist Churches in the county. Reverend Lybrand writes that Reverend Matthew Magee was sent to the Chester Circuit in 1794 and died that year.

The inscription on his tombstone reads:

"Rev. Matthew Magee, died Sept., 1794,
in the 33d year of his age."

"Long did he walk in wisdom's sining ways,
A pattern of sweet innocense and grace,
A faithful preacher of the holy word,
An humble follower of his gracious Lord."