

OAK HILL CEMETERY

Excelsior Boulevard and Maclynn Road, Excelsior, MN

OAK HILL HISTORY

It is possible that this land has been used as a burial ground since the first settlers arrived in 1853, but the first recorded burial at Oak Hill Cemetery was that of Mr. Theodore Pease in 1855, whose grave can still be visited today. The cemetery land, with its oak-topped peak and beautiful views of St. Alban's Bay, was originally privately owned. Additions were made on the east side in 1918, and a low flat area was added on the west side in 1944, which now contains the Soldiers' Monument. A Potter's Field was located along the north side and on the southwest end. The vault on the west side was once used to hold remains for burial in the winter until the frozen ground could be excavated.

Oak Hill Cemetery Association was organized in 1906 funded by private pledges. In 1913 the Ladies Cemetery Improvement Association reorganized and met twice a year to send out pledge cards, employ a sexton (groundskeeper), purchase plants and fund improvements. Their annual budget ranged from \$101.25-\$235.75. In 1937 lot owners were assessed \$1.00 per year for cemetery upkeep. Excelsior Village assumed ownership in 1956 at the request of the Cemetery Association and the city of Excelsior maintains the cemetery today.

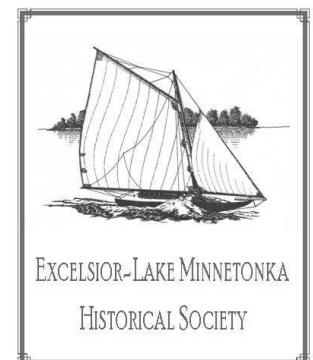
MEMORIAL DAY IN EXCELSIOR

Memorial Day (originally called Decoration Day) became a national holiday on May 30, 1868 and has a long history in Excelsior. The photo on this page shows the Grand Army of the Republic veterans in their Civil War uniforms with residents in front of the storefronts on the west side of Water Street after the Memorial Day parade around 1892. In 1903 a procession walked from the town hall to the cemetery for a Memorial Day commemoration ceremony "where fitting exercises were conducted, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was given in an appropriate manner, and the column returned to the Town Hall, where an interesting program was rendered."

In the early days of this observance the Frank Halstead Post #57 of the GAR was in charge of events; and by 1931 the Clarence Clofer American Legion Post #259 had taken them on. For many years Post #259 has organized a gathering at Excelsior Elementary School, followed by a parade down Water Street including uniformed units of all military orders from all wars, ladies groups and auxiliaries, youth groups, police and firefighters, and Minnetonka High School musicians. Onlookers then join the nearly mile long march to the cemetery where military salutes and ceremonies are held at the Soldiers' Monument. In 1962, this monument and the flag pole were moved from the steep peak of Oak Hill to their current location on the flat west grounds out of concern for the parade participants' safety.



Learn more about Oak Hill Cemetery and those interred there at the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Archives in the lower level of the old Excelsior Public School building, 261 School Avenue, Excelsior, open Wednesdays and the first Saturday of the month from 10:00-1:00 p.m. For more information: info@elmhs.org, (952) 221-4766 or visit www.elmhs.org.



SOME NOTABLE GRAVESITES

#1—SILAS SEAMANS (1823-1882): A Civil War veteran and early settler from Rhode Island, he homesteaded in the Minnewashta area. His party of pioneers gave Purgatory Creek its name after a hellish journey through swamplands to reach Minnewashta.



#2—REVEREND CHARLES GALPIN (1812-1872): He arrived in 1853 and served as the area's first minister, founding the First Congregational Church of Excelsior. He also served as postmaster, steamboat captain, town trustee, teacher, and founded a short-lived college in Excelsior. Galpin Lake is named for him.



#3—THE BURTON FAMILY: Hazen James Burton (1847-1931) and family came to Excelsior in 1883 and spent their summers in a cottage built for them by early settler Robert McGrath, returning to Boston each winter. Arthur Dyer built the revolutionary sailboat *Onawa* for Mr. Burton, which can be seen at the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society Museum. The Burtons eventually left Boston, and settled year-round in Deephaven. The family's headstones provide a wealth of information about their lives.



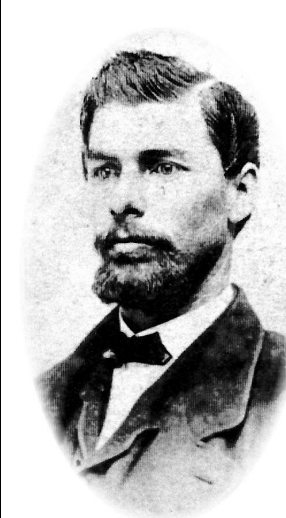
#4—JAMES HERVEY CLARK (1830-1905): A Lieutenant in the Civil War, he built a home on Water Street in 1858 which was used as an early hotel. It still stands today as the Birdhouse Inn. Filled with wanderlust, Clark traveled from New York to the gold fields of California several times, and to Florida in 1891. He served two terms in the state house of representatives and held many municipal posts in Excelsior.



#5—ALBERT H. HOPKINS (1838-1905): Civil War veteran, 9th Regiment, Minnesota Infantry, Company B.



#6—EDWARD P. BEEMAN (1828-1891): Civil War veteran, 2nd Regiment, Minnesota Cavalry, Company D.



#7—WILLIAM BRADFORD MORSE (1829-1921): An early settler from Massachusetts who homesteaded Big Island in 1854 (originally called "Morse Island"). He later moved to Excelsior where Morse Avenue is named for him and his home was remodeled into Huber Funeral Home. Five generations of his family are buried in Oak Hill from 1863-1939, (excluding his famous niece, Lizzie Borden.)



#8—EDWIN L. STODDARD (1840-1885): Civil War veteran, 4th Regiment, Minnesota Infantry, Company H.



#9—ROBERT B. MCGRATH (1831-1906): A founder of Excelsior and Civil War veteran (2nd Regiment, Minnesota Cavalry, Q.M. Sgt, Company D.), he built the first house in the village for fellow founder George Bertram in 1853. He held many posts in Excelsior, living here from age 22 until his death at age 75. Much of what we know of Excelsior's early days are a result of his keen memory.



#10—THEODORE O. PEASE (1819-1855): The first recorded burial in Oak Hill Cemetery.



#11—DR. CHARLES HENRY BRUTTON (1836-1902): Born in England, Dr. Brutton came to this country when he was sixteen. He worked his way west from Ohio as a druggist and truss salesman, then entered the 6th Ohio Infantry and eventually became a Major. He was captured and incarcerated in Andersonville Prison from which he escaped by jumping from a second story window, being shot through the knee in the process. He traveled throughout Europe settling in Excelsior from 1890 until his death.



#12—DR. GEORGE LAPAUL (1861-1929): a physician for 36 years, he built the Hotel LaPaul and sanitarium in Excelsior to house his medical offices and "the most modern static and galvanic electric machines anywhere in the country" to provide electrical therapy for his patients.



#13—CLARENCE CLOFER (1895-1919): Killed in a submarine explosion in Key West, Florida, Mr. Clofer was the first WWI casualty whose body was returned to Excelsior. He was given a large military funeral, with the Village paying part of the expenses. American Legion Post 259 is named in his honor.



#14—PETER GIDEON (1820-1899): developer of the "Wealthy" apple, the first cold hardy apple grown in Minnesota. He was an early horticulturist, spiritualist,



temperance man and ardent reformer. His wife Wealthy and grandson Rodney Stapp are buried beside him and his Shorewood home is on the National Historic Register. The misplaced "Mother" headstone in this plot remains a mystery, but it is believed to belong to Evie Drusella Scott Sampson (not a Gideon relative) who is buried well down the hill in Section 2.



#15—WILLIAM B. JONES (1828-1911): Mr. Jones was a store owner in Excelsior for over 30 years beginning in 1860, and served as postmaster for 18 years. In one of Excelsior's most colorful stories, the August 20, 1874 "Minneapolis Tribune" reported that Mr. Jones risked his life to stop a fight between the Congregational minister (Rev. Sheldon armed with a gun) and a would-be liquor dealer (Charles Stout armed with a knife). Mr. Stout lost an ear to a bullet. Rev. Sheldon was stabbed in the stomach, and Mr. Jones was stabbed in the back. All were said to have survived. The next day the paper reported that it had been duped and that none of these events had ever taken place.



#16—MELVILLE P. NOYES (1843-1868): Civil War veteran, 4th Regiment, Minnesota Infantry, Cpl., Company A.



#17—THE BARDWELL FAMILY: At least 29 Bardwells are buried in Oak Hill. The senior member of this Massachusetts family was Selah. Bardwell (1791-1870) whose family homesteaded on Chaska Road. The Bardwells were soldiers, steamboat captains, mayors, hotel owners, undertakers and more.



#18—HARVEY E. SCOTT (1827-1912): a Civil War veteran with the 1st Regiment, Minnesota Infantry, Company E, he homesteaded Woodside on the Upper Lake. He was held in Libby Prison for the last year of the war.



#19—JOHN MURRAY (1811-1883): A Civil War veteran; Murray Hill and Murray Street were named for him. He was a charter member of the Masonic Lodge and owned a variety store in Excelsior.



#20—FREEMAN GILKEY GOULD (1833-1896): A Civil War Sergeant with 2nd Regiment, Minnesota Cavalry, Co. D., he was an early settler of the Minnewashta area and held many municipal posts in Excelsior. A horticulturist, he operated a large greenhouse on the south end of Water Street.

