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Indiana Ghost Trackers Indy Chapter

CROWN HILL

By: Rick Hinton

In 1863 Indianapolis had a situation. The Civil War was in full swing across the Eastern and Southern stretches of the nation, and Indianapolis had a problem with its dead. City Cemetery (later known as Green lawn), created on a back lot of the original town plat seven blocks southwest of Monument Circle, had become a public disgrace. The 38 year old graveyard had become cramped, fallen into disrepair and held limited acreage for future expansion. Something needed to be done. The situation demanded a rural cemetery be established outside of the city.

John Chislett, superintendent of Allegheny Cemetery in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was commissioned

to resolve the problem. Chislett, along with James Blake, Calvin Fletcher and Gen. Thomas Morris were appointed to find a suitable piece of property for the future cemetery and promptly secure its purchase. The committee locked in on the perfect site—a common picnic ground of the townspeople, 2.8 miles northwest of downtown, known as the Martin Williams Farm. Along with this farmstead and adjoining properties 240 acres were purchased for a combined cost of \$51,000. Frederick W. Chislett (John's son), a landscape architect, was then hired as the first superintendent. His task was to design and nurture the development of the infant cemetery. He moved his family into a cabin on the southern approach of the grounds and remained in his position until his death in 1899. (Continued page 2...)

IGT Annual Banquet Information

The Indiana Ghost Trackers annual banquet is fast approaching.

Date; Nov. 14, 2009

Location; Walnut Creek Apts. Kokomo, IN

Directions will follow at a later date.

Cost; \$25 per person

BYOB! First keg is on us.

Doors will open at 5:30 pm. Food will be served at

6:30. Awards at 7:15. Skit competition will be at 8:00. Puking drunk by 10:30.

We will have karaoke and music.

Please check the forums under banquet communication for further details.

Indy Chapter will be doing a skit to compete to win a NICE basket of equipment. Please let Angie know if you would like to help with skit.

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CROWN HILL CONTINUED....

Dedication ceremonies for the new cemetery were held June 1, 1864 with Lucy Ann Seaton having the honor as the first burial the very next day. Lucy, the wife of Capt. John L. Seaton, died of consumption, or as we now designate- tuberculosis.

The highest hill in the cemetery rises to an elevation of 860 feet above sea level: the highest point in Marion County. Throughout the last 150 years the hill has known many names—Sand Hill, Strawberry Hill (due to the strawberry bushes that blanketed its summit), Dorsey's Knob, Mt. McCormick and William's Hill. Frederick Chislett stated ... "it was the crowning summit in the county" and gave its present name—**The Crown Hill**. James Whitcomb Riley visited this overview often and one might speculate that the view had a hand in inspiring his writing. After Riley's death the summit was offered and he was buried there.

Three miles of brick and wrought iron fence enclose a premier Victorian era park like setting with burial sections that place an emphasis on either old world or modern attitudes on how best to remember and memorialize the dead. Symbolism is diverse in the many varieties of monuments, statues and mausoleums which range from Romanesque, Neo-Classical and Art Deco style. Even in death there is diversity among the residents of Crown Hill. Buried next to one another could be the richest of the rich, the poorest of the poor and all those in-between. Twenty-five miles of paved road wind through the now 555 acre cemetery (the last land acquisition happening in 1911). Next To Eagle Creek Park Crown Hill has the distinction of being the largest refuge for animals in the city. Over 100 varieties of trees stand silent sentry over the grounds. Crown Hill is dramatic in the aspect that the grounds alone equal the acreage of all other Marion County cemeteries combined. Business is

booming. There are 1,200 to 1,500 (roughly 4 a day) burials yearly with over 190,000 total thus far. Crown Hill had the honor of being listed on The National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

Two landmark structures distinguish the by-gone days appeal in which Crown Hill seems to emit. The **Gothic Chapel**, originally referred to as the "Gothic Vault", was constructed in 1875 for the sole purpose of temporarily entombing remains when burial was delayed for whatever reason. It could hold 96 bodies if necessary. Although not intended for long term storage, James Whitcomb Riley slumbered in the vault after his death in the summer of 1916 for 18 months until his burial on the Crown in October of 1917. Today, a restored Gothic Chapel is used for funerals, Crown Hill Society lectures and historical tours.

The **Gothic Victorian Gate**, built in 1886, is fashioned around revival limestone portals with a matching gatehouse at its base. It was used for many years as the cemetery's main entrance at 34th Street and Boulevard Place. The **Waiting Station** is a red brick Victorian styled building located just inside the gate.

Crown Hill Cemetery has a distinguished list of residents including:

Lyman S. Ayres	Colonel Eli Lilly
Ovid Butler	Robert Irsay
Julia Carson	Mozel Sanders
John Dillinger	Thomas Taggart
Richard Jordan Gatling	Booth Tarkington
Benjamin Harrison	Bernard Vonnegut
Three Vice Presidents of the United States	
Eleven Indiana Governors	
Fourteen United States Senators	
Fourteen Indianapolis Mayors	
Sixteen Civil War Generals	

The Civil War continued to march along its

deadly campaign when Crown Hill opened for business in 1864. Just a little south of the cemetery at the site of the old fairgrounds (22nd Street between Central and Delaware) the recently established Camp Morton housed Confederate prisoners of war. Many of these southerners died of battle injuries or sickness that was inadequately treated. They were transported to City Cemetery, buried and soon forgotten. However, the story doesn't end there. The **Confederate Burial Mound** on the north side of section 32 was founded in Crown Hill in 1931 as the final resting place for these 1,616 Confederate soldiers. The old City Cemetery had been re-zoned for industrial use and the bodies were soon moved. A 2 year project to identify these remains was undertaken by Indianapolis police officers Stephen Staletovich and Wayne Sharp, with assistance from the Crown Hill Society. Section 32 is marked by a white chain that encircles 10 bronze plaques mounted on granite bases bearing the names of these southern gentlemen who died at Camp Morton.

The **National Cemetery** is a 1.4 acre arc shaped section lying on the slope behind the Gothic Chapel. In 1866 federal authorities requested that a portion of Crown Hill be set aside for Civil War interments. Initially 707 Union soldiers were transferred from City Cemetery and reburied. Presently there are 2,135 soldiers representing every war that the United States has participated in buried in this area.

Section 37, also named **Community Hill**, is a partially shaded sloped hill with an unusual absence of grave stones. Crown Hill has long donated burial space for orphans and impoverished children. Community Hill became the final destination for 699 abandoned orphans from 4 community agencies—including The Children's Guardian Home in Irvington. Many of the children, while in the care of these agencies, fell victim to disease, maltreatment or even starvation. Section 37 was the receiving ground for these

young bodies from 1892 to 1980, without fanfare or grave stones to mark their passage. If it weren't for the efforts of an IUPUI student these children might have remained forever nameless and forgotten. Anna Sturgeon spent countless hours tearing into old cemetery records before making the startling discovery of 699 burials—more than half being boys. A 5 ton "Hearts Remembered Memorial" was unveiled in June of 2006. Engraved with the names of the children from Sturgeons tireless research it finally gives the recognition and respect to these forgotten children.

I have a love/hate relationship with paranormal investigations in cemeteries. On the one hand there is no living resident you are helping in a graveyard; no one to give validation for their experience, no one to provide support and encouragement. On the other, cemeteries can be a great training ground for new investigators to work with equipment and procedure. And there is always the historical factor. A major reason I am involved in paranormal investigation is getting that time-slice of history ... experiencing a piece of the past, whether sound or form. Some feel that cemeteries are a portal of sorts. Some feel that these "cemetery ghosts" hang around to keep watch over their physical bodies. Some have unresolved issues connected with the graveyard or area itself. I don't have those answers. I do know that nobody ever died in a graveyard (well, maybe a few). One could ponder on why some spirits would choose to remain in cemeteries (loners?) and why some seem to enjoy inter-mingling with the living (a people person?).

Crown Hill does have its stories. Now, I have not heard of the ghost of John Dillinger wringing his hands in anguish as he strolls about his

Visit us on the Web
www.indianaghosts.org

Want free tickets to the 2009 Chicago Ghost Conference?

Looking for IGT members to volunteer their time helping to work the 2009 Chicago Ghost Conference co-hosted by The Indiana Ghost trackers & Chicago Haunted Tours!

Duties include: taking tickets, assisting event attendees & helping the people running the event with issues that may arise.

You will be expected to be there the entire time on Saturday, and on Friday night if possible. You will work two to three 2&3 hour shifts (rotating 1 shift on 1 shift off, etc), so you will have time to enjoy some of the event speakers as well & not be working the whole time.

In exchange you will be given a free 2 day pass into the event & a free t-shirt & possibly some other perks!

Anybody interested should e-mail me ASAP at: ghosttoast68@yahoo.com

Please include your contact information.

**You will be responsible for your own transportation & lodging.*

THANKS!

Troy

final home in Section 44, Lot 94. And there have been no sightings of James Whitcomb Riley standing on the crest of the Crown, silhouetted against the city skyline, eternally searching for his favorite tavern. The stories do seem to fall into the common thread of folklore and are counterparts of other American city cemeteries:

A young woman carrying a child is locked into the cemetery at night. She wanders the fence along 38th Street at night crying out for help.

The cemetery night watchman was making the rounds with his dog. The dog suddenly steps off of the path as if to let someone pass. At the same time the watchman feels a warm breeze blow by. The dog returns to the path and resumes his rounds.

A strange mist appears in photos of the gravestone of General and former Indiana Senator Abel D Streight.

Caleb B Smith's sandstone Egyptian style mausoleum. This was the first private mausoleum built at Crown Hill. Smith was Abraham Lincoln's first Indiana presidential cabinet member, Secretary of Interior and personal friend. He was never entombed in the mausoleum. Myths circulated that his body was stolen on the way to the cemetery, or that his wife had him secretly buried in the

City Cemetery in Connersville. Entombed in the mausoleum are Smith's 2 children and his wife. Following her death in 1878 the mausoleum was sealed. There is also a myth regarding the mausoleum's fire-blackened appearance. It is told that the black community kept a vigil of fires surrounding it to keep the spirit of a Lincoln assassination conspirator from coming out and haunting the city.

A woman in white looking for a ride outside of Crown Hill on 38th Street. (The Ghostly Hitch-hiker standard with a touch of Resurrection Mary.

The majority of cemeteries do not welcome paranormal investigators with open arms and Crown Hill is no exception. Prepare to do your investigations here in the daylight unless you can secure a special night time tour. Even then, choose your words to your guide carefully. You might get "the look" that speaks volumes from an unprepared cemetery employee.

Crown Hill Cemetery is timeless and as peaceful today as it was over 100 years ago when families chose it as their destination for picnics and frolicking on a hot summer's day. It's a vast playground to explore, relax and reflect on the varied city history. And this time the cemeteries plans point toward the future. Crown Hill will not run out of space for another 200 years.