

NEER CITY CEMETERY

By MARY McGREGOR COLVIN

In 1888, land for the Neer City Cemetery was set aside by Abe and Laurinda Neer, pioneer owners of the area known as Neer City. Recorded by E. E. Quick, County Clerk, on July 3, 1888, it consisted of one-half acre, fifty-two lots in all. It had been surveyed by Mr. T. W. Crawford in

March of that year.

In 1890 on Dec. 19, the County Clerk recorded the addition of 39 more lots, the area being 208 feet by 72 feet. Mr. A. B. Little was the surveyor of this additional space.

As stated elsewhere, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Nelson added room

Continued below:

for more graves when they assumed the responsibility of caring for the cemetery in 1923.

Neer City was surveyed and plotted for Mr. Neer in 1883 by S. G. Caudle, Notary Public, and recorded by W. H. Conyers, County Clerk, on Aug. 30, 1883. The cemetery is not included in the original map now held by Mr. and Mrs. Dean Neer who live on the location of the pioneer Neer home. A previous report stated that Mr. Neer visualized a great city of the future when he made his plans. All his city lots were sold to local people, including members of the Neer family. For Mr. Neer it was only a dream, but who can say in 1963, with industries buying up nearby waterfront property, building plants and factories, that Mr. Neer's idea may not materialize?

Neer City Cemetery occupies a hilltop over-looking the Columbia which spreads out for miles and miles to the north and south. On a clear day five snow capped mountains can be seen. Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Rainier, Mt. Adams, Mt. Hood, and Mt. Jefferson stand like silent sentinels, adding their majesty to the peace and beauty of the scene. All along the hillside grow fir, cedar, alder, and maple trees, shading May flowers, wild anemones, trilliums, wild currant, spirea, and Indian arrowhead. Clusters of wild strawberries grow in the grass, and wild blackberry vines are everywhere.

Laid out in lots with alleys between and a main road bisecting the area, the cemetery was further clarified and the lots marked with white wooden number boards in

1899 by my father, William S. McGregor, working with Mr. Neer. A few of these white markers may still be seen.

In the 1930's the main road was widened, graded and rocked by Mr. Fritz Anliker and his crew. It winds through a gate at the western entrance to the cemetery making it possible for the modern hearse to bring its precious burden close to its final resting place. In early days a stile was used to enter from the east after one climbed up the steep hillside by trails leading from the main county road.

In fact the only way to reach the cemetery in early days was by way of trails leading up the hillside. Mr. Charles Link usually brought the dead in his wagon from their homes as far up the hill as he could drive the horses. Then the mourners and friends followed the casket, borne up the hill from the road by six stalwart pallbearers. The minister pronounced the committment "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" after which the pallbearers filled in the grave and placed the floral tributes of relatives, friends and neighbors. People stood back a respectful distance from the grave, consoling the bereaved or chatting quietly with one another until this ritual was completed. Then after taking one last look at the now beautifully decorated grave they all went sadly down the hill.

In this day of modern funerals I can never be reconciled to the new fashion of leaving ones loved ones in the care of the mortician who in turn consigns his charge to the oftentimes unconcerned hands

of a sexton or caretaker who fills in the grave, at his leisure even with a bulldozer, as in some larger cemeteries. Much of the peace and graciousness of bygone days has indeed been lost in this area of so called progress.

The Neer City Cemetery became a member of the Rainier Cemetery Association in July of 1958 following a favorable vote of the Goble area on June 30 and a unanimous vote at Rainier on July 8, according to the records of Mrs. Dean Neer, secretary of the Cemetery Planning Committee, composed of Mrs. Neer, Mr. Rudie Anliker, and Mrs. Robert Wence. These people deserve great credit for their untiring efforts. The work of organizations was facilitated by contributions from many interested persons. Perpetual care of the cemetery was at last insured.

Just before this, vandals caused great consternation and sadness by destroying identification markers, overthrowing head stones and valued family tombstones, strewing debris hither and yon and making the work of the new caretakers very difficult. It was the first time in the history of Neer City that such an act of complete irresponsibility had occurred. While the vandals were never caught or punished, surely some day they will realize the gravity of their offence and feel sorry to have caused so much sorrow among the people who had long looked upon the cemetery on the hill as the most peaceful spot on earth, a secure haven for their beloved dead.

Pioneer names on tombstones

at Neer City include Archibald, Bishop, Blake, Bradley, Butts, Blacketer, Bachelor, Clark, Lengacher, Foster, Fowler, Fulton, Giltner, Hunter, Hoesch, Link, Lindsay, Makinster, McGregor, Morton, Morrel, Neer, Nussbaumer, Stehman, Patrick and Pitzenburg are rapidly filling up. Later names included Joe and Hazel Neer Nelson who added more space for graves in 1923 when they lived on their ranch adjoining the cemetery. The Will Jordans sleep here, as do Jerome Parmer, Chet Metcalf and Emanuel Jensen. Jessie McGregor Emerson of Los Angeles came home to Neer City for her last resting place, as did Jennie Foster Bross of Rainier. Then we read, "Cantwell", Daniels, Giles, Pearl, Hallbeck, Barnes, Tracy, Melville, McKinney, Thompson, Morris, Wasser, Miller and Armstrong. In fact, one friend who had lived at Goble for many years remarked to me last Memorial Day, "You know, there are more people I know up here than there are down there, any more;" And it is so!

TO ONE LOST

For you who lie tonight
Incarcerate in earth
Estranged from all delight
And alien to mirth,
I have no word wherewith
To set aside your doom,
To make of death a myth
To light the narrow room.
Where darkness holds you fast
Only my grief I bring
Crying across the past
Upon the eve of spring.

—Ralph Frederick
Cincinnati, Ohio