



Rose Hill Cemetery History



Rose Hill Cemetery consists of 29.3 acres overlooking the City of Spearfish as well as the mouth of beautiful Spearfish Canyon. The City of Spearfish Staff take great pride in the work they do by providing a special place for family and friends to remember their loved ones. The cemetery is a place where everyone can connect with their ancestors, reflect on the many community founders, meditate or spend time walking through the cemetery. Rose Hill Cemetery was named after Rosa Driskill (B-8-8-1). Rosa and a few of her friends decided that Spearfish Cemetery deserved some much needed attention, so these ladies spent many hours trying to dress up the appearance of the cemetery. Since Rosa spearheaded much of the grounds maintenance and was well thought of in the community, that after her death her friends thought it would only be fitting to rename the Spearfish Cemetery, Rose Hill Cemetery.



The first burial (November 16, 1876) was that of Levi Blizzard (B-8-40-2). For many years people thought he was possibly an unnamed man who reportedly died in a blizzard in 1876 and was found with only his Levi's on. Later information indicated that Levi Blizzard (B-8-40-2) was in fact his name and he supposedly came into the Black Hills

region around 1876 as a prospector in the Tinton area. Around Sept. 1876, he came down out of the hills from prospecting and camped in the town stockade. Blizzard was given a job to watch over horse herds corralled around the base of Lookout Mountain to prevent horse theft by Indians. He was a young man that reportedly came from the east to make his fortune in gold and died after a short bout of pneumonia. Levi Blizzard's current sandstone headstone was placed by Joseph Wells (B-8-58-1) in 1914. Mr. Wells lived in the Higgins Gulch area and was a member of the Oddfellow Lodge, a very prominent organization in the area at that time. Levi was said to have been also a member of the Oddfellows. Local historians believe this explains why mysterious bouquets of flowers show up unnoticed on Levi Blizzard's grave over the Memorial Day holiday or perhaps it's something we can't explain.

Various epidemics from 1898 to 1904 and an influenza pandemic coupled with WWI in 1918 killed many people. Due to a lack of money for undertaking and proper burials, burials were made by their families at night and the graves were not marked, therefore, there are many unknown burials in the two older sections (A and B).

William Ernest Lown (A-19-62-3) was President of the Spearfish Cemetery Association in the 1940's. Lown received no pay and oversaw the Cemetery as his civic duty. Lown hired Walter Cook (B-5-17-3) in 1942 to take care of the grounds. Owners of the lots paid \$2.00 - \$5.00 per lot (8 spaces) annually for yearly Annual Care (AC). Cook received the AC money to mow and water the spaces. Supposedly only the lots with paid AC were mowed and watered while the unpaid were not taken care of. Cook dug most of the graves by hand for \$8.00 per grave, later raised to \$10.00 per grave. If the graves could not be dug by hand due to rock, Cook would hire someone to open them by blasting with dynamite. Cook was the caretaker for 20 years, and died at the age of 47 of cancer. Lown hired several different caretakers over the next couple years.

In the late 50's, Lown was requested to provide the owners of spaces with a deed, because people were not sure which spaces they owned. In 1963, as Mr. Lown got older, problems with the records and funding resulted in the City of Spearfish deciding to take over the responsibility of administering the Cemetery. City Employee Ike Smith (C-25-27-4) was assigned to take care of the Cemetery and Ray Fidler (D-28-2-8), the only Funeral Director in the City at the time, sold cemetery spaces and staked the graves. Monies Mr. Fidler collected and all burial records were turned over to the City. Perpetual Care (PC) was developed instead of AC, and (PC) was paid only once, instead of yearly. Cost of a space at that time was \$35.00 for PC and \$15.00 for the space. Because of the change from AC to PC, PC is not paid on many spaces. The City continually tries to collect PC due, but all spaces at the Cemetery are taken care of.

The Spearfish Women's Club assisted the City in trying to straighten out the records. They worked almost every day for several months sending letters and trying to get the records updated. In 1979, because of continual problems with records the City Council developed the Cemetery Board, an advisory board to the City Council. In the mid 1980's, two members of the Board, Dena Cook and George Dobesh (C-24-16-2),

spent many hours by physically going through the Cemetery and updating the records according to headstones and past records.

Florence Brady (Rose Garden A-1-1), a lifelong member of Beta Sigma Phi, loved yellow roses. While traveling in Europe in the late 1970's, Florence was impressed by the rose gardens and thought such a rose garden would be a good addition for Rose Hill Cemetery. Florence presented the idea to then Mayor Wilbur Tretheway (D-30-81-2). Although increasingly ill, Florence was able to see the design and site location prior to her death in April of 1985. With the design done by her husband Fred Brady (Rose Garden A-1-1), more than 300 donations, and with city labor and equipment the Rose Garden was constructed and dedicated in August of 1989. The Rose Garden provides room for 300 cremain burials and an ash spreading area. Plans are currently underway to expand the Rose Garden to provide burials for many years to come.

In 1986, the Carlson-Jolly Funeral Home started in Spearfish. With two funeral homes in the community, the City felt it was time to take complete control of the staking of graves and the recording of burials. The City assigned Bonnie Klunder as Cemetery Sexton 1988-2009 and currently Karla Weber from 2009 to present day. Cemetery Foremen over the years have been: F. Polnicky, Herb Michaels, Bob Foster, Mary Holsti-Cramer, Brian Meyer, Craig Nichols, Justin Reimer, Clark Hoyt, Don Hill and currently Cole Anderson.

The cemetery currently has 9,400 spaces with more than 5,400 total burials and averages 45-60 burials per year. There is a Catholic Section, a Rose Garden for burial and spreading of cremains, and two infant burial areas. Each space is described with a block, section, lot, and space #. The original map of the Cemetery is dated 1915. The City has since computerized the map so that names of the owners and burials are updated on the map as they are occur.

**Question: Is there another Spearfish Cemetery in the Mountain Plains area? The City of Spearfish map in the phone book says there is, but local historian Linfred Schuttler doesn't think so. Linfred explained that there was a lot of rock mining in the area, so creating a cemetery there would prove to be quite difficult. He also mentioned that if you ever did find bones up there, it would probably be because there used to be a butcher shop up there.*

Note: History/Information is correct/accurate to the best of our knowledge; any inaccuracies were unintended and will be corrected when noted!

IN RECENT YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A GREAT DEAL OF VANDALISM TO CEMETERIES IN THE NORTHERN HILLS, INCLUDING THIS ONE; IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ON ANY STOLEN OR VANDALIZED HEADSTONES, PLEASE CONTACT LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE SOCIETY OF BLACK HILLS PIONEERS (SBHP)

The Society of Black Hills Pioneers

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(REWARD MAY BE AVAILABLE!)