

## **“MEET YOU IN PARADISE”**

*By Frank W. Santucci*

In the 1800's the earliest community of Verona covered a distance of five miles from Sandy Creek to Falling Springs Run Creek. Boundaries were to the South-Sandy Creek; to the North-Falling Springs Run Creek; East-Penn and Plum Townships; and, West- the Allegheny River. Falling Springs Run Creek is located in present day Oakmont Borough originating at the Oakmont Country Club heading towards the railroad tracks and Allegheny River. With the railroad line from Pittsburgh to all points north and the river's locality, the town of Verona became an industrial bulwark. Railroad maintenance shops were established and auxiliary plants soon followed bringing workers and their families to the area. Countless ancillary activities were brought about by this population influx: schools, churches, hotels, law enforcements, and finally – funeral homes and cemeteries.

Early custom of this era was to bury a family member on the family property. Whenever a transient worker passed, a separate burial site became necessary. The logical area for the cemetery was near Verona proper. Verona's initial cemetery was where the present Verona Municipal Building stands today. In 1878 the Allegheny Railroad bought this property to eventually house the first Verona Railroad Station. The upstart railroad company requested families to exhume their relative's remains to a new destination or the railroad company themselves would remove them to a different region. A new cemetery was created in the Second Ward section (currently Oakmont) on Pennsylvania Avenue between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, naming it the "Verona Cemetery." The first person interred in the new cemetery was Joseph Hengg, died October 10, 1880. Entrance portals to the cemetery were etched in stone, "Verona Cemetery." Somehow and somewhere, the inscription changed to, "Oakmont-Verona Cemetery," although today Allegheny County records still lists this hallowed ground as the "Verona Cemetery." Oakmont was incorporated in 1889.

Another Verona Cemetery is the Bright Family Cemetery located on 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Oakmont. In 1823 Michael Bright of Verona purchased 234 acres in the Second Ward of Verona, which is currently Oakmont. There are six Civil War veterans buried there. Records indicate these veterans were Verona residents during the Civil War years, 1861 to 1865.

In the late 1870's Verona passed an ordinance prohibiting the practice of burials on family properties.

In 1866 St. Joseph Roman Catholic Parish built its first church on Church Street, it also started a cemetery next to its wooden structure. Their expanded congregation decided in 1877 a larger Church was needed and a new structure was erected at the corner of Center Avenue and Second Street. Property was also purchased for a new cemetery at the corner of 9<sup>th</sup> Street and North Avenue. Several years later, all remains along with headstones were relocated from the Church Street cemetery to the new St. Joseph Church cemetery via wagons and teams of horses.

Not in the Verona proper area, but nearby, is another cemetery situated at the corners of Poketa, Hulton, Hamil and Shannon Road. The "Old German Lutheran Cemetery" Initiated in 1815, has 141 memorial headstones and is over 200 years old.

About one mile east of the Rosedale Fire Hall on Verona Road is an unnamed small cemetery at the corner of Xavier Drive and Shannon Heights Drive. Most of the twenty-two headstones are surnamed Ritchey with the earliest dated 1804. Therefore I unofficially dub this as the Ritchey Cemetery.

In 2014, not to be outdone by old historical resting grounds, a thirty acre cemetery has made its mark. It is new, but has reverted to some of the old traditional practices. With the world's current awareness of "green" regulations, this new burial site will cater to the accepted practice of nature first. "Penn Forest Natural Burial Park", can be found at the entrance of Penn Hills Park off of Hamil Road on Colorado Street bordered by Verona and Oakmont with one of the boundaries being Plum Creek. Required stipulations are no chemicals in the body and no metal in the casket. As of this date, Penn Forest Natural Burial Park, is exclusively the only "green" cemetery in Pennsylvania.

See you in paradise!

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