

CALVARY HILL CEMETERY

By Barbara Mask

There are two locations in Fulton that offer magnificent views: one is the view from the summit on the hill in the south section of the Fulton Township Cemetery and the other is the view from the hill in the north section, named Calvary Hill, where the view is spectacular both looking east and west from anywhere on the slope or its summit. This site also includes the impressive Crucifix.

CALVARY HILL CEMETERY

From 1835 when the first permanent settler arrived here until 1863, Fulton had no burial ground for its Catholic residents so interment was usually made in one in Lyons, Iowa. Transfer across the Mississippi River was by steamboat or the 'ice bridge.' Father John Daly, pastor of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Fulton bought two acres of ground on October 22, 1863, located three miles southeast of Fulton (current site of the land west of the Maple Lane Motel), but it proved to be an impractical site because of the distance. Today, the exact whereabouts of that first cemetery is known to no one. Father Daly purchased the land for \$40 from Mr. O. T. Allen and sold it back to him for the same amount two years later.

THE CEMETERY IN FULTON

On February 25, 1865, at the urging of parishioners, an L-shaped piece of ground on an unpaved road on the north end of Fulton's Main Street, was purchased. It contained 2 ½ acres of land and cost \$100. Preparations for the burial ground were paid by donations of the subscribers. The Cemetery was platted and lots and spaces were sold to members of the parish: six dollars for a single grave and ten dollars for a lot 12 by 16 feet.

In 1884, Father Maurice Stack purchased 13 square rods of ground and had it made suitable for burial. He also planted trees along the driveway and on the north and south sides of the cemetery. Additions were purchased in 1889, 1912, and in 1921, 3.61 acres were purchased from Mrs. Elizabeth Cunningham for a total of eight acres. The permanent drive was built in 1927. This north section of the Fulton Township Cemetery still retains its original name of Calvary Hill, however, it is owned and maintained by the Township since 1966. On the first Sunday of June each year, the Catholic Church holds a 'Cemetery Sunday' service; a long-standing tradition.



The Crucifix, located in Calvary Hill Cemetery, was built in 1885. The initials I.N.R.I. at the top of the Crucifix mean *Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudea*, which is latin for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.



Father Dan Peters, a visiting priest from Sugar Grove, IL, presides at Cemetery Sunday on June 2 in the Calvary Hill Cemetery.

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This year (2013), a visiting priest, Father Dan Peters, of Sugar Grove, Illinois blessed the graves of the dead and comforted the living who were there to honor their loved ones.

THE CRUCIFIX

Attracting and holding one's attention at the Fourth Street entrance is the sixteen-foot white cross with a horizontal beam of proportional length. The life-size metallic (painted white) figure represents Jesus Christ when He was nailed to the cross was erected in 1885 at a cost of \$150. Enhancing the spectacular structure is the setting on a rising slope and the mound at the foot of the cross; insisted upon by Father Stack, who envisioned and directed the project. The site on the steep hill overlooks the river. Terraces, built on the incline, hold many of the early citizens of Fulton—and some more recent residents.

Back when the crucifix was installed on the bare slope, the Journal reported that it was visible from the river and steamboats would slow their speed so passengers could take in the view. Today, the growth of the spruce trees that line the road obscure the view from the river, but not for those of us who drive up or walk the paved roadway to the top of the hill.

RESTORATION OF THE CRUCIFIX

Members of the Fulton-Albany Knights of Columbus completed a restoration of the crucifix on September 18, 2002. Spearheaded by John Bennett, the organization erected scaffolding in order to scrape and paint the cross beams which are 12 inches by 12 inches. The Christ figure, Corpus of Christ, was taken down and sandblasted and repainted by Midwest Collision of Fulton. The Crucifix was rededicated by Father James R. Keenan. (Side Note) Someone reported the body of Christ as stolen during its restoration. Patrick Bennett, one of over 100 relatives of John's who are buried in Calvary Hill, is interred at the highest point of the cemetery. Patrick and his brothers, Martin and John Bennett were early Irish immigrants who were stone masons and attracted to the Fulton bluffs and quarry work. Their most accomplished work of art was the famous Dement House; a four-story limestone structure (1855-1934) which was located on the site of the post office.

A MOST BEAUTIFUL PLACE

It's a tranquil and serene place; that final resting stop for many Fulton residents. With its sunset slope above the river and scenic view of old St. Irenaeus Church, one would be challenged to find a more ideal place for a cemetery. Several families, such as the Chesters, Kummerers and Carol Medema Parker have placed benches at the gravesites of their loved ones so there is an opportunity to pause, reflect and appreciate the view.

THE IRISH COMMUNITY

Back in 1955, the Fulton Journal presented an article on the Calvary Hill Cemetery. To quote:

*"The many lilting Irish names made verses as one walks under the avenue of spruce tree,
for there are:--*

*Flannigan, Flannery, Foley and Egan;
Riordon, Connery, Collins and Keegan;
Mitchell and Murphy, Barry and Nary;
Dorsey and Doody, Taylor and Leary."*

CEMETERY RECORDS

Documentation of all the burials in the Fulton Township Cemetery is available in the Wayne Bastian Memorial Resource Room at the Fulton (Martin House) Museum. The research was completed and recorded by Harvey Geerts, a member of the Fulton Historical Society.

Resources: Fulton Journals; Wayne Bastian articles; Fulton Township Cemetery Records; Immaculate Conception Catholic Church anniversary booklets.

Writer's personal note: *In the summer of 1993, in preparation to walk in the Bix 7 Race, this cemetery hill provided a good training spot. My husband, Bill, and I would walk here 3 times a week and would stop mid-way up (even with the Crucifix) to visit the gravesite of our beloved nephew, Father Matt Vander Bleek, who died the previous summer. Bill would say, "If you have to be here, this is as good as it gets." When he was killed six months later, I knew, for certain, he wanted to be buried here on the sloping hill looking over the river with the St. Irenaeus (which means peace) Church in the background. And some day, this will be my final resting place, too.*

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