



A Walking Tour



UNION CEMETERY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNION CEMETERY

In the early 1850s, the towns of Westport and Kansas found themselves in a quandary. The cholera epidemic of 1849 filled the cemeteries of both communities. With expanding boundaries and increasing populations, city leaders started looking for more burial space. In 1857, their search ended when James M. Hunter decided 49 acres to the Union Cemetery Association. The corporation was organized by a special act of the Missouri General Assembly on Nov. 9, 1857. The new cemetery was located between Westport and the town of Kansas and was to be used by both towns, becoming a "union" between the two. That is how Union Cemetery got its name.

When Union Cemetery was dedicated, it was thought that the 49 acres would accommodate all the deceased in Westport and Kansas City for all time. Little did city leaders suspect that Westport and Kansas City would become one community and that Union Cemetery would lie in the midst of a busy metropolitan area.

By 1910, Union Cemetery was showing increasing signs of deterioration. To raise funds for maintenance, the Cemetery Association sold 18 acres at 27th and Main streets. It was later discovered that several members of the association had formed the Evergreen Land Company and had sold the land to themselves, which they later squandered in several land deals. The cemetery association

dedded the remaining 27 acres to Kansas City in 1937. The Parks and Recreation department now maintains the grounds.

In August 1889, cemetery records were lost when the sexton's cottage caught fire. This was a major loss because many of the graves were identified by wooden or limestone markers that were destroyed by weather, leaving hundreds of unmarked and undocumented graves. The sexton's cottage was burned again on Halloween night 1985. This time, the cemetery records were kept off site, so none were destroyed. The cottage was rebuilt by the Women in Construction of Kansas City and rededicated in October 1990.



Buried in Union Cemetery are some of the most colorful and dynamic characters in this area's history. These men and women not only influenced the future of Kansas City but helped to forge the western expansion of the United States. Missouri's most famous 19th century artist, George Caleb Bingham, is buried in Union Cemetery. When he died in 1879, he shocked everyone by leaving instructions that his body be buried facing south. The custom was to be buried facing east, the direction from which Christ would come on Judgment Day. Bingham told everyone that the Lord would find him no matter which way he faced.

Alexander Majors was an active partner in Russell, Majors and Waddell. In 1857, the freighting firm made Kansas City its headquarters, and Majors was in charge of hauling merchandise and leading settlers across the prairie. The company's biggest claim to fame was the Pony Express, which was started during the Civil War. Its purpose was to get mail to the West and back quickly. The venture lasted only 18 months and cost all three men their fortunes. After the disappointment of the Pony Express, Alexander Majors moved to Nebraska, and made and lost another fortune. He returned to Kansas City and died, penniless, on Jan. 13, 1900.

WHY CARE ABOUT UNION CEMETERY?

Over the years the society's mission has expanded. The UCHS has become a true partner with the Parks and Recreation Department, helping to preserve and protect Union Cemetery by collecting funds to help erect a wrought iron fence around the grounds, repair and re-set monuments and plant trees. The society has also hosted Eagle Scout projects in Union Cemetery which have resulted in a Memorial Garden with walkway being installed, small headstones in several sections of the cemetery being re-set, surveying of much of the grounds and other projects.

The UCHS is a 501c3 membership organization. If you would like to help the society protect and preserve Union Cemetery for future generations please consider becoming a member and/or donating to the UCHS. You will find a membership application and donate button on our website, www.uchskc.org. The UCHS is also on Facebook. Search for Union Cemetery Historical Society Kansas City.

Thank you for visiting. And thank you for your interest in historic Union Cemetery.



New members and volunteers are always welcome! If you can donate time, resources, or provide financial assistance - please call (816) 472-4990.

Union Cemetery Historical Society
227 East 28th Terrace
Kansas City, Mo. 64108
(816) 472-4990 • www.uchskc.com

Cemetery hours: 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Monday through Saturday
Closed Sundays

Society hours: Friday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
and by appointment

A 501c3 organization

ABOUT THE UNION CEMETERY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Union Cemetery Historical Society (UCHS) was organized in 1984 under the guidance of the Kansas City, Missouri Parks and Recreation Department. Its original mission was to collect data about historic Union Cemetery and to gather data about the people buried there. As a result of those efforts, the society published Tombstone Inscriptions in 1986. As stated in the title, the hardbound book lists names and statistics of many of those who rest in the cemetery, including birth and death dates and burial locations. This book has become a vital tool for those who are researching their genealogy.

The UCHS also published a series of ten pamphlets containing obituaries and biographical sketches collected from old newspapers. In many cases these obituaries and/or death notices are the only record of an individual buried in Union Cemetery.

In 2014 the UCHS published "Kansas City's Historic Union Cemetery, Lessons for Future from the Garden of Time," containing entertaining and historical information about Union Cemetery written by many of Kansas City's notable citizens and beautiful images of the cemetery provided by Bruce Mathews. This welcome addition to any library or coffee table is available for sale at the cemetery's Sexton's cottage or online at Amazon.com.

The cemetery's burial files, located at the Sexton's cottage, provide a wealth of genealogical and biographical information collected over the years by UCHS members or donated by visitors to Union Cemetery.

There are few places in Kansas City so rich in the city’s early-day history as Union Cemetery. On May 19, 1857, James M. Hunter deeded to the Union Cemetery Association 49 acres of land to be used as a cemetery. The location was, at that time, halfway between the township of Westport and the town of Kansas, hence the name “Union.” When the cemetery was established, its 49 acres were expected to provide the burial space for both communities for all time.

Approximately 55,000 lie buried here. Artists, statesmen, missionaries, traders, explorers, farmers, pioneer women and veterans from the Revolution to the Vietnam War rest here. Cholera victims by the score are interred here as are many children who did not live long after birth.

This self-guided walking tour begins at the site of the sexton’s cottage. The graves are numbered to correspond to the numbers on the map.

1. WILLIAM GEBHARDT is buried in a plot owned by the German Hospital of Kansas City, now Research Hospital, which originally stood at 23rd and Holmes. The inscription on the tombstone reads: “Friend and benefactor of the German Hospital, Kansas City, Missouri.”

2. NATHANIEL GWYNNE is one of the youngest ever to be awarded the Medal of Honor, being only 15 years and 25 days old on the day he rode across the battlefield at Petersburg, Va., to rescue the Colors from Confederate captors. Since he was merely a camp boy, the Army doctors would not treat him. Papers were found which showed he had enlisted the day before. His injuries, a severed arm and two bullets in his right leg, then were treated, and he was given a medical discharge with full benefits. He settled in Memphis, Mo., and later moved to Kansas City, where he sold real estate and also became a lawyer. Elected to the Missouri House in 1879, he sponsored the Veterans’ Benefits bill. As chaplain of the Farrago G.A.R. Post in Kansas City, he held the honorary rank of captain. He died in January 1883 at age 33 and was buried with full military honors. The Medal of Honor marker was placed at the gravesite in 1986 by the Medal of Honor Historical Society.

3. M.D. WOOD was the Western Union superintendent. It was through him that newsmen made arrangements for the Associated Press and other wire news services. Wood was the jailer for Lawrence, Kan., when William Quantrill raided that community during the Civil War. He locked himself in the jail for safety, but one of Quantrill’s raiders found him there and threatened to burn the building down if he didn’t come out. He stayed, and nothing happened.

4. JOHN TAYLOR left England Jan. 8, 1856, landing in New Orleans. He first went to Illinois and thence to Kansas City on April 1, 1857. He joined Colonel Van Horn’s 13th Corps, defending Lexington, Mo., in the Battle of Lexington in September 1861. Taylor was captured, disarmed, and his shoes confiscated. After swearing an oath to never again take up arms against the Confederacy, he was paroled and sent home. He broke his vow, however, and rejoined the Union army to defend Kansas City during General Sterling Price’s Raid. Four years after the war, he was elected president of the Kansas City city council.

5. THOMAS A. SMART was one of the earliest and most enthusiastic supporters of the thriving town at the bend of the Missouri River. Ninth and Twelfth Streets bound his farm, from Main to Harrison. He was a successful businessman and a judge in Jackson County court. His first wife, Harriet Louise Thompson Smart, died May 6, 1849, of cholera. They had nine children. His second wife, Mary Jane Latimer, died July 13, 1892. Thomas Smart died in 1879.

6. ELIZABETH SEXTON FERGUSON was a very young heroine of the War of 1812. She was born in Kentucky in 1801 and assisted her mother in molding bullets for American soldiers.

7. SAMUEL BUCHER, city marshal of the city of Westport, was shot at his home by Wes Gossard, a telegraph operator at the Coates House. Gossard had been injured in an altercation with Bucher two weeks before.

8. JAMES S. CALHOUN, New Mexico’s first territorial governor, died on the Santa Fe Trail somewhere between Council Grove, Kan., and the Missouri border on June 30, 1852. He was buried in the old town of Kansas cemetery. His remains were moved to Union Cemetery in the 1870s. A New Mexico historical group installed a marker in 1994.

9. FRANK BARNUM died at age 44. His tombstone reads: “Murdered at Brownsville, Missouri. October 6, 1876.” Barnum was an old-time newspaperman. He was the business manager of Kansas City’s second afternoon newspaper, The Evening Star. Barnum’s body was found in a pool near Brownsville. The mystery of his death was never solved, although some called it a suicide.

10. ALEXANDER MAJORS was one of Kansas City’s most famous residents. He was an active partner in the Russell, Majors and Waddell freighting firm. Most of the goods shipped over the Santa Fe Trail were shipped in Russell, Majors and Waddell wagons. In 1850, Russell bought a tract of land south of the city to use as a base of operations. At the height of the freighting business, hundreds of wagons and thousands of oxen were kept at this location. In 1860, Russell, Majors and Waddell started the Pony Express, perhaps the most famous endeavor in the history of the West, to help get news of the Civil War quickly to California. The “Pony” was in business only 18 months, bankrupting the company. Majors’ former headquarters at 82nd and State Line is now a museum..

11. MICHAEL DIVELY was an early merchant in Kansas City and was the first president of the First National Bank.

He was a city council member and acting mayor in 1863. He represented Missouri at the Vienna Exposition in 1873.

12. JOHN CAMPBELL was born in Ireland and originally emigrated to St. Louis. He outfitted John Fremont’s “path finding” expedition in 1844 and accompanied Fremont part of the way. He was a member of Laclède’s Rangers in the Mexican War, and after the war, undertook a trading expedition on the Missouri River to Montana. Campbell was one of the 14 original purchasers of the 257-acre Prudhomme estate, the original town site of Kansas City. He platted “John Campbell’s First Addition,” one of the first housing developments in the city. Campbell Street was named for him and Charlotte Street for his wife. His former residence at Third and Campbell Streets, overlooking the Missouri River, was a social center of the city.

13. WILLIAM GILLISS came to Kansas City from Cincinnati where he had become wealthy building homes. He entered the Indian trade and amassed an even greater fortune. In 1849-50, he and his niece’s husband, Dr. Benoist Troost, built the Gilliss House, a hotel on the river levee. It became one of the most popular places to stay, recording 27,000 guests in 1857. He continued to build his fortune through land-buying activities and married the daughter of an Indian chief. They had a daughter, Nancy, and later lived in the Gilliss Mansion home at 28th and Holly.

14. EDWARD T. PEERY was a missionary and Methodist circuit rider at the Shawnee Indian Mission. He was one of the original trustees of Union Cemetery.

15. CIVIL WAR DEAD MARKER ERECTED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT: This grave contains the remains of Confederate soldiers captured during the Battle of Westport. They died as prisoners of war.

16. REBECCA LITTLER METCALFE was born in Winchester, Virginia, July 4, 1776, the day the Declaration of Independence was signed. She came to Kansas City by steamboat with two daughters and their families in 1855. She died in 1861, the year the Civil War began.

17. WILLIAM MILES CHICK was the first postmaster of Kansas City. A veteran of the War of 1812, Chick came to Westport in 1837 and operated a general store. In 1843, he established himself as a fur trader in Kansas City. He died of pneumonia in 1847.

18. CHARLES E. KEARNEY left Ireland in 1837 at the age of 17 and joined his brother in Texas. While there, he was in the Texas Rangers and served in the Mexican War. Later he entered the Santa Fe trade, making his headquarters in Independence, Mo. .In 1852, he settled in Westport, residing in the Harris House hotel. In October of that year, he married Josephine Harris. In 1854, he and W. R. Bernard, his brother-in-law, established an outfitting business here. After a visit to Ireland in 1856, he returned to Westport and engaged in real estate development in the West Bottoms. Kearney brought the railroad to the area and was instrumental in the building of the Hannibal Bridge.

19. HATTIE DRISDOM KEARNEY was an 11-year-old girl when she was sold at a slave auction on the levee on Christmas Day in 1855. She was afraid of one of the buyers and pleaded with another man, who she thought was “kindly looking,” to buy her. The kindly buyer was Charles Esmonde Kearney, who, after making the winning bid, set her free. When she told him she had no place to go, he hired her to work for his family. She became housekeeper and nurse to the Kearney children, eventually staying for 80 years, taking care of the grandchildren of the family.

20. JAMES M. HUNTER came to Kansas City in 1829. A few years later, he purchased a large farm at what is now Linwood and Main streets. He owned and operated an outfitting firm at the southwest corner of Westport and Pennsylvania. In 1857, he deeded 49 acres of land for Union Cemetery.

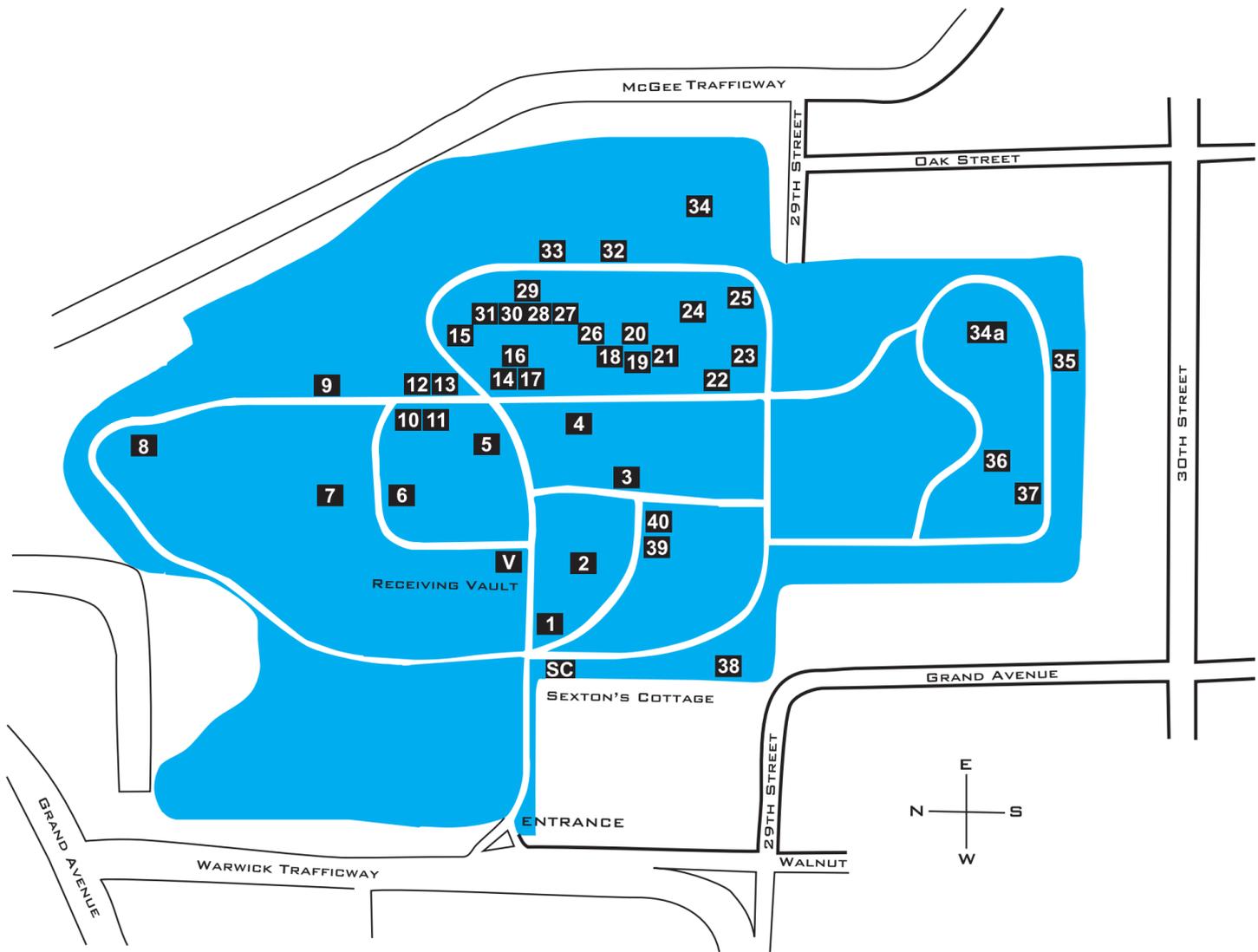
21. NEHEMIAH HOLMES came to Kansas City in 1856 having been successful in the mercantile business in Mississippi. He invested in real estate in this area, became the president of a bank and later developed the first horse railway from Fourth Street to Westport.

22. GEORGE QUEST was born in Philadelphia in 1786 and was a soldier in the War of 1812. He died in Kansas City in 1877 at the age of 92.

23. JOSEPH A. BOGGS was a lieutenant in the Pennsylvania militia in the American Revolutionary War. He died in Westport in 1843 at the age of 93 and was buried in the old Westport cemetery. His remains later were moved to Union Cemetery.

24. JOHN and HENRIETTA SIMPSON HARRIS were the proprietors of Westport’s popular Harris House hotel on the northeast corner of Westport Road and Pennsylvania. John Harris was born in Kentucky in 1795. He arrived in Westport in 1832 by covered wagon and bought the hotel in 1846 from A. B. H. McGee. Henrietta Harris was known for her delicious southern cooking and for her disapproval of dancing. The Harris family home, built in 1855, originally stood on the southwest corner of Westport Road and Main Street. It was moved in 1922 to 40th Street and Baltimore and is now the home of the Westport Historical Society.

25. JOSEPHINE ANDERSON was the 14-year-old sister of “Bloody” Bill Anderson, one of Quantrill’s men. In August 1863, she, her 10- year-old sister and other female relatives of Quantrill’s men were imprisoned in a building at 1409 Grand Ave. that was owned by George Caleb Bingham and rented to the Union Army. On August 13, the building collapsed, killing four of the women. Of the four, only Josephine Anderson is buried in Union Cemetery. A week later on August 21, Quantrill’s men sacked Lawrence, Kan. Order No. 11 was issued shortly thereafter.



26. RICHARD H. NELSON was born in Virginia in 1812. After living in Kentucky and Illinois, he moved to this area in 1854 where he invested extensively in real estate. When he died in 1884, he was considered to be one of the wealthiest men in the area.

27. JOHN CALVIN MCCOY came to this area in 1830 with a surveying party sent by Secretary of War Eaton to establish the boundaries for a large military reservation at that time known as “Cantonment Leavenworth.” He also helped survey various Indian reservations and the Cherokee Strip. He bought some land from Dr. Johnston Lykins and built a store at what is now Westport and Pennsylvania because he believed the site to be a better embarkation point for settlers moving west on the Santa Fe Trail. In February of 1835 he filed the plat for the town of Kansas. When the Civil War broke out, the McCoys and the Campbells (see No. 12) placed all their silver in a trunk and buried it on the Union Cemetery site. McCoy married twice. His first wife was Virginia Chick. His second wife was Elizabeth Woodson Lee McCoy. They were married in 1850. She died in 1896.

28. VIRGINIA CHICK MCCOY was the first wife of John Calvin McCoy and the daughter of William Miles Chick. Their marriage was the first recorded marriage in Westport. They had six children. She died of cholera in 1849 on the Pottawatomie Indian Reservation in the Kansas Territory.

29. SPENCER CONE MCCOY was the only son of John and Virginia McCoy. Born in 1844, he was a student at the Virginia Military Institute when he joined the Confederate forces. He died at the Battle of Springfield in January 1863. His body was recognized by a Union officer who would not let him be buried in a common grave but buried him separately and marked the grave. In the spring, the family took a wagon to the site, retrieved the body and brought it back to Kansas City to be buried in Union Cemetery.

30. GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM was a prominent artist, politician and orator. He was born in Virginia in 1811 and grew up in Franklin, Mo., on the banks of the Missouri River. He had no formal schooling but was taught by his mother. He was a captain in the Union Army during the Civil War and was appointed treasurer of Missouri’s provisional Union government. He moved to Independence in 1864 and to Kansas City in 1870. His portraits of local people and his genre paintings earned him a prominent position in the history of American art and are among our best sources for understanding Missouri in the mid-19th century. His well-known painting of Union General Ewing’s Order No. 11 expresses his outrage at the death and destruction that order produced when Confederate sympathizers were driven from Jackson County. His first wife was Elizabeth Hutchison, who died of tuberculosis. His second wife was Elizabeth Thomas. In 1878, Bingham married Martha A. (Mattie) Lykins, who survived him.

31. DR. JOHNSTON LYKINS was born in Virginia in 1800. He received his medical education at Transylvania College in Kentucky. He came to this area in 1831, as a medical missionary. About 1836, he bought 16 acres of land from Louis Bartholet. The property extended from the Missouri River to 5th Street and Broadway. He was a real estate developer and president of the Mechanics Bank. His first wife was Delilah McCoy, the sister of John C. McCoy. She died of tuberculosis at a Pottawatomie Indian Reservation in 1844. His second wife was Martha A. (Mattie) Livingston, a cousin of General “Stonewall” Jackson. She married George Caleb Bingham after Lykins died in 1876. A supporter of the Confederacy, Mattie Lykins was forced to leave Jackson County by Order. No. 11. As she was rowed across the river to Clay County, she called to her husband Johnston not to put on damp underwear.

32. THOMAS J. GOFORTH was born in 1804 in Cincinnati. He married Eliza V. Mathews in 1826. They moved to Missouri in 1837 and to Westport in 1853. He originally was a sign painter and later practiced law. He was elected mayor of Westport in 1857 and again in 1859. After the Civil War he was elected four more times as mayor, serving during the 1870’s. He died in 1882.

33. PATTI DEWEESE MOORE was born in Harrodsburg, Ky., in 1834. She married G.W. Moore, a merchant, in Louisville in 1851. They moved to this area in 1860. Mrs. Moore took an active role in the charitable and reformatory institutions of Kansas City. In 1889, she was appointed police matron. In 1893, she was one of the woman commissioners at the World’s Fair in Chicago, Illl.

34. MINA CRAIN was only 18 years old when she was killed during the big Kansas City storm of May 11, 1886. The building at 110 Third Street, where she was working at the Haar Brothers shirt and overall factory, was demolished in the storm.

34a. ELIZABETH DUNCAN PORTER was born in 1750 in Pennsylvania. In 1772-73 she married Samuel Porter. In 1780 the Porters were captured at Martin’s Station (later northern Kentucky) by the British and taken to Detroit. There she gave birth to her third child. In 1782 the Porters were released to their former home in Virginia. After her husband’s death in 1820, Elizabeth moved to Tennessee in 1829 to live with her three sons. In 1833-34 she moved to Jackson County, Mo. with her son, the Reverend James Porter. She died in 1845 at the family home near 27th and Tracy.

35. JACOB RAGAN was born in Kentucky in 1792 and served in Menefee’s Company, Kentucky militia in the War of 1812. He married Anna Carter and moved to this area in 1837. The Ragan farm of 12 acres stretched from 31st to 37th streets, Oak to Holmes. It was purchased for \$1,000. Ragan was one of the original purchasers of the Prudhomme estate.

36. ALLAN B. H. MCGEE was born in Kentucky in 1815. His father, James H. McGee moved his family to Clay County, Mo., in 1826 and to Jackson County a few years later. McGee was an original purchaser of the Prudhomme estate and an overland outfitter in Westport. He was a friend of General John C. Fremont, Kit Carson and Senator Thomas Hart Benton. He traded with the Indians and knew their language. He accompanied John Calvin McCoy when McCoy surveyed the Osage Indian lands. His farmhouse stood for many years on the old McGee homestead at 37th and Washington. He had three wives. The first two were sisters. None survived him. He left two daughters and a son at his death in 1903.

37. MILTON J. PAYNE was a five-term mayor of Kansas City. He secured Kansas City’s first \$100,000 bond issue for public improvements. He was the first city official to do anything about street conditions. Payne was a member of the original Union Cemetery Association.

38. CHINESE GRAVE SITE: A Chinese population has existed in Kansas City for many years and there are a number of Chinese burial sites in Union Cemetery. There are four tombstones at this particular site. These sites are rare in cemeteries because most Chinese, at death, were sent back to China to be buried with their ancestors.

39. JAMES and MARY KELLY were born in Ireland. Shortly after their marriage, they came to New York where James became a horse trader. They traveled by wagon throughout the eastern half of the United States, becoming known as the “King and Queen of the Gypsies” although they were not ethnic gypsies. Mary died of “lockjaw” in Florida in 1885 after puncturing her hand while sewing a garment for a pet monkey. James died of pneumonia one month later while bringing Mary’s body to Kansas City to be buried. The Brewer family, buried nearby, are Gypsy relatives and descendants of the Kellys.

40. JOSEPH LOEFFLER was born in Germany and came to St. Louis with his parents when he was a boy. At the outset of the Civil War, he enlisted in the First Missouri Volunteers and served at the siege of Vicksburg, where he was injured. He came to Kansas City in 1865, where he worked as a bricklayer. In 1876, he and Charles Raber opened the first of the “Joe and Charley” saloons for which they became well known. The Loeffler monument is an example of those erected by members of the Woodmen of the World. The tall height indicates a man of mature years at the time of his death.. The snapped-off, hanging branch on the side indicates that his wife, Rosa, died before him. The ivy is a symbol of immortality and the mushrooms are a symbol of rebirth. The ferns represent humility, frankness and sincerity. The wreath of flowers symbolizes immortality. The three smaller grave markers, closed books propped against stumps, symbolize the end of life.