

Introduction

Since its founding in 1869, the Lake View Cemetery has been tagged with many descriptive titles: silent suburb, outdoor museum, green island, arboretum, bird sanctuary, sculpture gallery, public garden and Cleveland's best address. The 285 acres spread across three municipalities is all that and more, a place established from the start to serve both the living and the dead.

It began as an idea, the brainchild of prominent influential civic-minded men whose surnames have become permanent parts of Northeast Ohio history: Wade, Perkins, Payne, Sherman, Bingham, Stone, and Holden. They saw a need for an alternative to the overcrowded, often neglected, desecrated, and even abandoned urban burial places scattered around the city. Along with other community leaders they formed an association and took on the task of raising money to establish a more suitable, spacious, and permanent resting place and retreat for present and future generations, what Jephtha Wade, the association's first president, described

as "a Cemetery that shall rank among the most beautiful in the land, and as shall be a constant place of resort for citizens and strangers."¹ Over time that singular idea developed into an iconic, landmark destination.

A large wooded parcel five miles east of Public Square, on a ridge overlooking Lake Erie, was purchased. Back then it was a relatively remote site—55th Street marked the end of Cleveland. The property encompassed rolling hills, deep ravines, panoramic views, streams and springs, outcroppings of shale, forested areas dense with native flora, and majestic old trees that had been growing on the site long before there were townships and trolleys. Adolph Strauch, an expert in cemetery landscaping, was hired to develop the site, tame this wilderness and transform it into a man-made paradise that would pay homage to the departed and delight those that came to visit. An 1870 newspaper headline captured this multi-faceted intention: "The Lake View Cemetery. The Plans Laid for the Most Beautiful Cem-

etery in the World—Extraordinary Natural Advantages—Park and Burial Grounds to be Combined.”²

In concept and design Lake View is an outstanding expression of the garden or rural cemetery tradition that began in 18th century Paris with Père Lachaise, flourished in Victorian England, and first appeared in the United States in 1831 with Boston’s Mt. Auburn Cemetery. Unlike graveyards of the past, the splendor and tranquility of nature in these expansive, thoughtfully conceived, and intentionally planted grounds was meant to ease sorrow, prompt a sense of serenity, and provide a quiet and comforting reminder, season by season, of the continuous cycle of birth, death, and renewal. They became both refuges and playgrounds, attractive to city dwellers hungry for green space. By the 1880s, Lake View was such a popular spot for Sunday strollers that it was necessary to control the number of visitors by issuing admission tickets.

The Lake View Cemetery of today did not happen all at once. Nine miles of paved and winding roads are flanked by carefully cultivated vistas, the result of more than a century’s worth of human labor: planting and pruning, planning and preservation. The terrain has provided a backdrop to the gradual accumulation of an astonishing display of art and architecture. An 1877 newspaper story paints a vivid picture.

Trees and hills clothed in their liveries of brilliant green form a pleasing relief to the massive and varicolored monuments, the handsome vaults, smaller

stones, and slabs of white and gray which mark the last resting places of departed loved ones. Even the most indifferent visitor cannot but feel awed into respectful reverence for the place the moment he enters the gate of this vast garden rest. . . . [P]robably no cemetery in the country presents greater attraction in its natural advantages and the variety and elegance of its monuments and tombs than Lake View. In every direction, on the hill, in the valley and on the level, they may be seen towering in their great height or nestling in the velvety grass.

The writer goes on to describe selected markers, memorials and headstones using such terms as *handsome, massive, and magnificent; highly polished, inscribed, carved, and ornamented with a triplet of callas bound by a ribbon, a cross, tablets, tapestry work and striking figures* such as *a weeping woman leaning on a staff with bowed head, an angel bending over with outstretched hands administering comfort*.³

But this acreage is more than the sum of its shrubbery and sculpture. It is a place filled with stories of lives that unfolded on front lines and in back rooms, on stage and behind the scenes, for only a day or until the age of a hundred, in the halls of power and around kitchen tables, against the odds or with every advantage.

Almeda Adams (1865–1949), blind from the age of six months, cofounded the Cleveland Music School Settlement and composed operettas.

Eugene Oberst (1901–1991), athlete and coach, won a bronze medal at the 1924 Paris Olympics for the javelin throw.

Dorothy Tolliver (1920–2001) opened Cleveland's first bookstore specializing in African American authors, the only one between New York and Chicago. Daniel Thompson (1935–2004), Cuyahoga County Poet Laureate, was an outspoken advocate for the homeless and the hungry.

James Henry Salisbury, M.D. (1822–1905), a Civil War veteran, is credited with formulating the ground beef “steak” named after him.

James Dexter (1891–1990) fathered eleven children and by the time he left this world the clan had expanded with five more generations, totaling 148 offspring.

Zenas King (1818–1892) built bridges.

Elaine Brown Pearse (1935–1993) was the first female member of the Cleveland Police Department.

These facts are the start of whole chronicles, eight out of more than a hundred thousand. Mayors and masons, soldiers and servants, parents and philanthro-

pists, inventors and infants, are all gathered here. The famous are remembered and get their due, but those who are now forgotten still possess a past and leave some record, detailed or not, of their presence.

Beyond its obvious and essential purpose, the Lake View Cemetery has fulfilled the founders' larger aspirations. It draws mourners and marvelers, researchers and sightseers, birders and brides. The combination of history, both visible and implied, and stunning loveliness provided by Mother Nature in concert with human creativity, craftsmanship, and effort, has an enduring value and allure. It is a wonderful place to be—calm, peaceful, inspiring, and intriguing. There is always something new to see, something previously unnoticed that is revealed by a change of light or season or state of mind, a different path taken, a slower pace, a closer look. And in these things, so many reasons to return.

