



The School That Rose From A Graveyard

BY CATHY BUCHHOLZ

Flanked by residential homes to its north, a city park to its east, Minnetonka Boulevard to its south, and a school to its west, Groveland Cemetery provides a quiet repose for both the living and deceased. Strolling through the grounds, one can listen to children's voices from the nearby schoolyard and imagine voices of young pioneers. Out of the corner of one's eye, one may even imagine a small figure darting among the gravestones; hear a child's laugh echoing from the older section of the cemetery or a sudden gush of water emitting from an old hand pump.

It all began in June 1855 with the death of one man—Mr. Waters, a Pennsylvania pioneer—who succumbed to cholera a week after his arrival in Minnetonka. Amos Nixon Gray, an early settler for whom Gray's Bay of Lake Minnetonka is named, set to work building the coffin; George W. Chowen offered the land for Waters' burial site.

This first cemetery in Minnetonka would be known as Groveland Cemetery.

Within a year, a second burial followed. Gray's own son, Ernest Sumner, only 15 months old, died on October 9, 1856. While both bodies were buried in what is referred to as the old part (Section 2) of the cemetery, only Baby Ernest's burial site was marked with a gravestone and its exact location documented.

William Streeter Chowen, George's brother, also settled in the area and was elected to the first Minnesota State Legislature. He donated land to the south of Groveland Cemetery where he helped build the first one-room log schoolhouse in Minnetonka. With no public transportation, all of its students walked from both near and far. Due to a growing population, in 1871 a larger school was erected on the land that would later become Section 1 of the

cemetery. A water pump for the school was installed in this same section and still stands today among the graves.

In 1915, the one-room school was vacated and the cemetery purchased the empty lot for their first addition (Section 1). A four-room schoolhouse was then built to the west. Remodeled throughout the years, the building still remains in that location and is called Groveland Elementary School. In 2004, Groveland celebrated its 150th anniversary.

Separated from the school by a chain-link fence, Groveland Cemetery has expanded into eight sections and encompasses 3.8 acres. Neighboring schoolchildren, on assignment, often visit Sections 1 and 2 to research Minnetonka's earliest settlers. According to Shelley Duoos, the cemetery's current administrator, Groveland continues to offer cremation and traditional burial plots as well as an infant burial section. ■