

(Written by Secretary Parnell Sanford in 1992; transcribed as handwritten; no changes made in spelling, punctuation, or grammar)

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Oak Grove Cemetery Ass'n

3 Secretaries in 110 years

First move toward locating a cemetery was on April 24, 1874 when a committee was formed and a decision to purchase 10 acres of land from Geo. H. Johnston for the burial of the dead was made. This cemetery was used for several years and then it was decided in the spring of 1882 a new organization was formed known as Oak Grove Cemetery Association with seven trustees being elected. The first meeting of the Board of Trustees was held on May 16, 1882 and the following officers were elected:

President - A. H. Wilcox

Secretary - James T. Bestick

Treasurer - H. A. Bowman

Annual meetings were held each year and James T. Bestick would make his annual reports. The cemetery grew and it was necessary to purchase more land.

In 1906 James T. Bestick passed away and his son Elmer J. Bestick was elected secretary of Oak Grove Cemetery.

James T. Bestick was born in 1840 at Henderson, North Carolina. When he was 5 years old, his family moved to Braintree, Massachusetts, where he attended school. In 1861 at the outbreak of the Civil War he enlisted in the Army and served in the Massachusetts Company. He took part in all the campaigns of his regiment until in June of 1864 when he was taken prisoner of the south and spent some time in Andersonville prison. He was discharged in March of 1865. He went back to [\(page 2\)](#) Braintree, Mass. to recuperate. In the spring of 1872, Mr. Bestick saw an ad in the Boston paper when a Col. George H. Johnston was organizing ex-soldiers and families to come to settle in Minnesota, in Detroit Township. They arrived in Detroit in April 1872. These families were known as the New England Colony. Mr. Bestick that summer built a small house which was claimed to be the first house built with planed lumber in the town of Detroit. Mr. Bestick was a shoe cobbler. He also was a deputy sheriff, worked in the Court House and later became a judge of probate. He passed away in 1906 and his son, Elmer Bestick became Sec'y Oak Grove.

Elmer J. Bestick was born in Detroit July 11, 1874, son of James & Hannah Bestick. Elmer attended school in Detroit Lakes and graduated from the Minneapolis School of Business. He was the first person to be able to take shorthand in Detroit and served as a private secretary to E. G. Holmes. He also worked in a bank and he became city clerk for the city of Detroit in 1910. He retired as city clerk in 1949. Elmer Bestick's main community interest was the city band where he was a member for over 50 years, starting in the band as a young boy. He served as secretary of the band for many years and one year the Detroit City band

was the music at the grandstand at the Minnesota State Fair for one week. He was secretary of Oak Grove Cemetery Ass'n for 46 years until 1952. He passed away in 1956 at the age of 82.

(page 3) Parnell Sanford grew up at Hawley, Minn. and graduated from Hawley High School in 1929. He attended Dakota Business College and in March of 1931 became employed at the Detroit State Bank, now First American Bank, Detroit Lakes. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1942 until in 1945 when he was discharged and returned to his job in the Detroit State Bank. In 1945 he married Elinor Bestick and they raised 3 children, Martha (Eric) Johnson, Franklin, Tennessee, Robert in St. Paul, and Mary (Stephen) Edwards of Detroit Lakes. Parnell retired as President of the Detroit State Bank in 1976 after being with the bank 45 years. His wife, Elinor, passed away in 1986. And in 1987 he married Marian Wieck. "Sandy" was always active in community affairs. He became secretary of Oak Grove Cemetery Ass'n in 1952 succeeding his father in law, Elmer Bestick. Sandy is still the secretary of the Cemetery ass'n and is now serving his 40th year as secretary.

Since 1882 Oak Grove Cemetery ass'n has had three secretaries: James T. Bestick, Elmer J. Bestick, and Parnell E. Sanford. Parnell Sanford has all the books and records of meetings held of the Cemetery Ass'n since it organized in 1882. Most of the early years it was difficult to have sufficient funds to pay for the upkeep of the cemetery. For years they asked each lot owner to contribute \$2.00 annually for care of their lots. Then they started an endowment fund (page 4) and asked each lot owner to contribute \$50.00 towards perpetual care. However, all through the twenties and thirties it was hard to raise very much money because times were very difficult especially during the depression years during the 1930s. In 1940 they started taking a part of the lot selling price and putting that into the fund. The endowment fund now has \$90,000.00 and only the interest from the fund is used for care of the cemetery grounds.

In 1990 the Cemetery Ass'n inherited from the Theodore Lindbloom Estate the sum of \$58,346.00. This came as a pleasant surprise to the Trustees of the Cemetery ass'n. Theodore Lindbloom was a single man who lived a few miles east of Detroit Lakes. A few years previous he had purchased a single lot for his resting place from Secretary Sanford. Mr. Lindbloom had passed away July 3, 1989. He apparently liked Oak Grove Cemetery and had decided to leave his estate to this non-profit association.

The cemetery ass'n in 1990 had the old chapel and vault building tore down and had a new building built at a cost of \$31,240.00. They also had all the roads resurfaced at a cost of \$13,565.00. In 1992 the cemetery ass'n had a landscaping project where new trees and shrubs were planted and dirt was hauled in at the entrance to the cemetery. This was done at a total cost of \$13,487.00. (page 5) The cemetery ass'n has had to dispose of at least 150 deceased elm trees. These trees had been planted about 50 years ago. They are now replacing these trees with green ash trees.

In 1973 the ass'n purchased a large piece of land just east from the cemetery from Mrs Edna M. Haas. The cemetery now has ____ acres of land, a sufficient amount to last for many years.

In 1986 Clare Gibbons & her daughter Jan Lindsley began compiling the Oak Grove Cemetery records. They acquired copies of the records from Secretary Sanford. They also went out to the cemetery and copied information from the stones and markers. They also checked records at the Court House and Becker County Museum. Mrs Gibbons passed away at Christmas time in 1986, and nothing more was done until in 1991 when Jan Lindsley brought all the information up to date and put all this information on computer. She now has all the burials by name, death date & location of the burials in a book. The book is a great help to the officers of the cemetery. There are around 6500 burials in Oak Grove Cemetery. Anyone can contact Jan Lindsley Route 4 Box 308, Frazee, Mn. 56544, or reach her by phone at 334-5971. The cemetery ass'n is made up of seven trustees. There have been many trustees over the 110 years and several trustees each served for many years.

Steven - Sexton

(page 6) Present Trustees are: Dr Curtis N. Cherry, Mrs. Mary Ann Evans, Wayne Lance, Parnell Sanford, Bill Reid, Bruce Barrett and Eugene Fuchs.

Present officers are:

President - Dr Curtis N. Cherry
Vice President - Mary Ann Evans
Treasurer - Wayne Lance
Secretary - Parnell Sanford

Present sexton and caretaker of Oak Grove Cemetery is Steven Earley, assisted by his father, Lawrence Earley. With the cooperation of the lot owners they try to keep a nice looking cemetery.