

Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

August 2025

The Three Lakes Cemetery

A Grassroots Archive

At an objective level, cemeteries developed as a designated space for dignified burial and to prevent the uncontrolled scattering of gravesites. They manage the remains of the dead, prevent public health issues, and allow for the expression of cultural and religious beliefs surrounding death. While our present concept of a cemetery is fairly new - evolving over the last couple of hundred years - early humans were performing complex burial rituals 200,000 years ago.

At the more profound human level, cemeteries serve as places for remembrance and reflection for the living. They provide a designated space to honor the deceased, offer solace to the bereaved, and preserve a community's history. Over time, they have become places for families and communities to maintain a connection with their ancestors.

Journalist Katie Thornton writes

Most monuments to history are created in a top-down manner. Individuals “earn” a place in our mainstream retelling of history through a combination of notable deeds and substantial social privilege. Cemeteries are, in theory, more representative archives; in these spaces, individuals and families are given an opportunity to etch their own names into the annals of history.

If we fail to read between the lines (or between the stones, as it were), we risk rehashing a fictitious, incomplete history. But if we do our due diligence to learn and talk about those who have been made less visible in these spaces, we can gain a more holistic understanding of our collective stories.

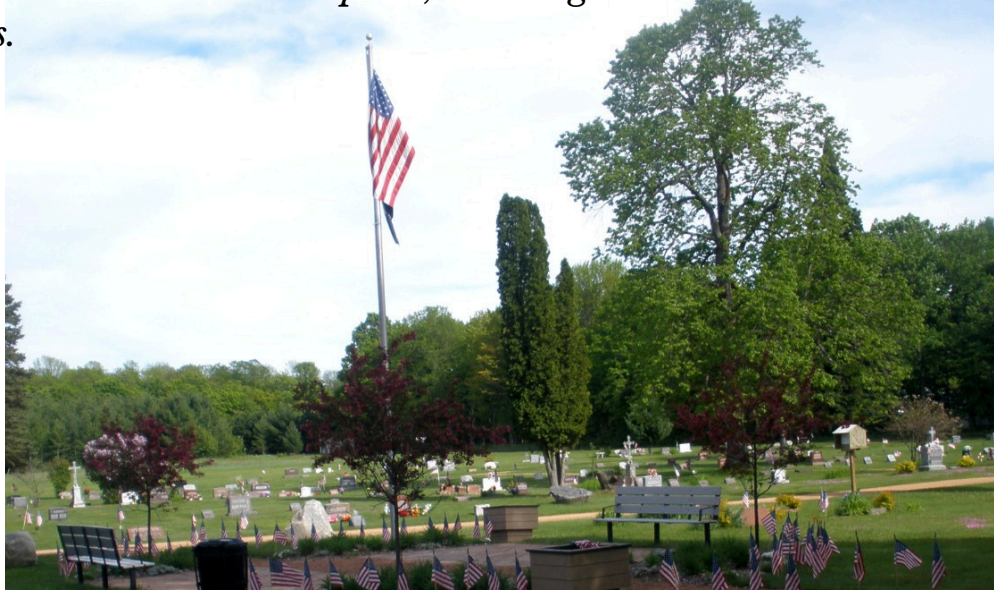


photo credit - Find a Grave 2013

The headstones in the Three Lakes Cemetery give all of our ancestors buried here “an opportunity to etch their own names” in our history.

The following historical note citing the establishment of the cemetery was copied from an old ledger in the Three Lakes Town archives. Note- this was at a time when the village of Three Lakes was part of the Township of Gagen.

"The Town Board met at Clerk's office at 2 o'clock p.m., April 15, 1890, pursuant to Chapter 296 laws of 1885 for purpose of acting on application for liquor license and transacting other necessary business. All members present.

"Offer of cemetery site presented by Wm. Cashman, site for sum of \$125. On motion, all members voting yes, cemetery site accepted and Chairman and Clerk are hereby instructed to draw an order for \$125 on the cemetery fund in favor of Wm. Cashman in payment for said cemetery site upon execution and delivery of a good and sufficient deed from Wm. Cashman to Town of Gagen of said cemetery site, and that this cemetery shall be public for all religions and other denominations.

"On motion, all members voting yes, ordered that the Town Board extend the sum of \$150 of the cemetery fund in clearing, surveying and improving the cemetery.

Historically, cemeteries like Three Lakes were often segregated by religion, with separate sections dedicated to different faiths, like Catholics and Protestants. This reflected the prevalent social and religious divisions of the time. Early on, the Town Board and the Catholic church were responsible for maintenance and records.

Today three local entities monitor the Cemetery. The Three Lake Town Board that oversees the general welfare of the property, takes care of the financials and provides maintenance. The Cemetery Committee that makes budgetary proposals. And the Three Lakes Genealogical Society that maintains family records.



It is the Genealogical Society that puts the life back in the tombstones by searching out the stories behind the names. Using *Find a Grave* software they have cataloged the information on tombstones to make names and locations searchable. They update and document local obituaries and they can help you fill out your family tree. You can set up an appointment to meet with a Genealogist to work One on One to gather the pieces to your past.



A popular program that ran three times over six years was a cemetery walk put on by the Genealogy members,

"If Tombstones Could Talk"

People had the opportunity to hear stories of the founders and past residents of Three Lakes, interacting with re-inactors dressed in historical attire taking on the persona of the ancestors they represented.

A great way to connect yesterday to today!

Cemeteries are the living archives of a community's history. The Grassroots.