

Groveland Cemetery

By Julia Gillis

Shelley Duoos, administrator of Groveland Cemetery in Minnetonka, has been a MAC member since 2010. Groveland is a private, non-denominational cemetery run by a volunteer board of directors.

How was Groveland Cemetery founded?

Groveland Cemetery was officially organized on March 15, 1871, but the first known burial was in June 1855 when Mr. Waters, a pioneer from Pennsylvania, died of cholera a week after his arrival in Minnesota. A man named Amos Gray built his coffin, and another man, George Chowen, donated the land for a burial site. Within a year, Amos Gray's own son, Ernest, age 15 months, died and was buried in the first burial site at Groveland marked with a gravestone.

William Streeter Chowen, George Chowen's brother, donated land just south of these burials for a local school that was built in 1871. Eventually a larger school was built nearby, and in 1907, the cemetery purchased the land where the former school was located to expand the cemetery. The school's water pump still stands today among the graves.

What's the size of Groveland, and the total number of interments?

Five years ago, the homeowners on the north side of the cemetery approached Groveland to purchase their land which expanded the cemetery from an almost-sold-out 3 acres to the 3.8 acres it is today. The cemetery currently has just over 2,200 interments, with more than 400 of those being cremations.

How many burials each year?

The past five years, we have averaged 30 burials per year; 61 percent cremation and 39 percent traditional burials. We have one area devoted to infants.

We allow cremated remains to be buried in a regular grave in certain combinations and we also offer cremation lots. We have no plans to add niches at this time.

There must be some famous locals buried there.

Yes, Alvah Chowen (1866-1933), who was the first custodian of the cemetery, is buried at Groveland, along with William Streeter Chowen (1826 – 1912), whom I mentioned earlier. He was elected to the first Minnesota State Legislature. There's also the Gray Family. Gray's Bay



Veterans marker at Groveland Cemetery

on Lake Minnetonka was named after this family because their farm surrounded the bay. Phebe Gray (1797 – 1870) was the mother of the first white children born in Minnetonka. Susan A. Gray (1828 – 1904) was known for her early women's suffrage work.

This year, we honored a special Civil War veteran buried at Groveland, Captain Dudley P. Chase. He died on May 9, 1863 at age 45. Captain Chase was a Union sharpshooter injured during the Battle of Chancellorsville. His left arm was injured and had to be amputated. He died a few days after the surgery in a Washington, D.C. hospital. Chase was one of only 18 soldiers out of nearly 800 Minnesota civil war soldiers killed who were hauled home to be buried in Minnesota. He was originally buried in the Soldiers and Pioneers Cemetery in Minneapolis, then moved to Groveland in 1923 when that cemetery was preparing to close. The Governor's 150th Anniversary of the Civil War Task Force recognized Captain Chase at a special program on May 4, 2013. A new granite headstone will be added next to the existing weathered marker.



Chase family headstones

Do you hold a Memorial Day service?

Every Memorial Day at 9:00 am we host a service put on by the Excelsior American Legion and a local minister from a neighboring church. Flags are put on all veteran's graves for the week.

Give us a snapshot of what you do for Groveland.

I am responsible for coordinating burials, meeting with families to purchase graves, answering questions, supervising our part-time caretaker and an independent contractor who does grave digging, snowplowing and lawn mowing. I have learned everything on the job, but my background as a coordinator and property manager have certainly helped. The cemetery board of directors has been very supportive as I've learned the job and I like that they are open to my suggestions.

How did you end up working for the cemetery?

I responded to a newspaper ad after being laid off from my

previous job. I've lived in the neighborhood for 27 years. I volunteered at Groveland School next door for nine years, and have walking my dog through the cemetery and park across the street for as long as I can remember, so I was very aware it was there, but I never saw a burial happening or knew that it was such an active cemetery. I was hired in 2011 to replace Art Nicol, the previous caretaker for 42 years, who was retiring that year.

What do you most like about your job?

Meeting with the families and helping them choose the right grave for them and their loved ones. I also like looking at the old records and deciphering what happened when and by whom – it's like solving a mystery!

Do you have goals for the cemetery?

I want to make the community aware of this little jewel in their neighborhood. Many people have lived in the area for years and were not aware of its existence, or if they did

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Family gravestone at Groveland

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know about it, they assumed it was fully occupied since it is so small and so old. I've worked with local news sources and have had the cemetery in the news four times in the last year and a half.

How do you think you've influenced cemetery?

As a Baby Boomer myself, I can relate to the people I work with as they plan the burial of their parents. I think I've been more open to new ideas families come up with for their loved ones. Upon my suggestion, Groveland's board recently changed the rules to allow upright headstones in all sections.

Can you give me an example of a recent challenge?

One challenge has been finding inconsistencies in the maps. Apparently buried remains were discovered on two different graves affecting two related families who each had four graves, but the remains were unrelated to them. Fortunately, we had space adjoining their lots to give them in return, so after the paperwork was completed, they were both satisfied.

What is your favorite thing about Groveland?

Groveland encourages live plants in plant stands or planted in the ground below the marker (artificial flowers are not allowed). In the spring, many visitors come to plant annuals and tend their perennials. The flowering crab trees are so beautiful and everything is fresh and green. Often families visit daily or weekly to tend and water their special gardens.

Tell us more about you.

I was raised in Edina, graduated from St. Olaf College, and have lived in the Minnetonka area for almost 30 years now. I have a wonderful partner, Robert Kranz, and two great sons. Jeremy, 25, graduated from the University of Minnesota and is working in Portland now. Austin, 22, just graduated from the University of Montana in Missoula, and will begin work at KPMG in their Advisory area in Portland this summer.

What do you like to do when you're not working?

I'm outside whenever possible, so the cemetery job fits me perfectly. In the summer I can be found up at the cabin, boating, waterskiing, golfing, biking, doing yard work, and floating in my pool. In the winter I'm snow skiing, walking, and reading. I'm also doing what I can to help out my 95-year-old mother.

How can people learn more about Groveland?

The cemetery is always open for visiting, and we have a website at www.grovelandcemetery.org.



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