

“Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, Indiana”

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Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, Ind.

Three miles and a half northeast of the center of the city of Indianapolis, adjoining its northern suburbs, and on the highest ground in the vicinity, lies Crown Hill Cemetery. The ground chosen for the site is nearly two hundred feet above the streets of the city; so diversified with hill and plain, gentle modulations and lowly dells, heavy forest and open lawn, that there is not a foot of the ground that can not be conveniently used, nor a foot that can not be made beautiful and grateful to the weary or perhaps grief-stricken visitor.

On the 12th of September, 1863, three pioneer citizens of Indianapolis, who had been chiefly concerned in the planning and extension of the old graveyard, called a meeting for the consideration of the far more important work of establishing a new cemetery. These citizens were James Blake, Calvin Fletcher, Sr., and James M. Ray, all of whom now rest in the home of the dead so largely created by their public spirit. To their initial meeting they invited Mr. John Chislett, then superintendent of the Allegheny Cemetery, at Pittsburg. Mr. Chislett strongly advised the purchase of the Crown Hill site, and the committee, relying very largely on his counsel, purchased the property, which now contains, with recent additions, 348 acres, making it one of the largest cemeteries in the world, and fully entitled, both in extent and beauty, to rank with our leading American cemeteries.

Crown Hill was formally dedicated with appropriate ceremonies on the 1st of June, 1864. The fundamental principle of the organization then promulgated was that all receipts from the sale of lots shall be restricted to the maintenance and improvement of the cemetery; except that, after twenty-five years, any twenty-five corporators of the cemetery may direct the managers, if a fund sufficient for all cemetery uses has been accumulated, to appropriate a portion to the benefit of the poor of Indianapolis. This unalterable provision is a perpetual assurance that the property can never be devoted to speculative purposes. The board of managers is elected annually by the board of incorporators, and vacancies in the latter body are filled by vote of the remaining members. The board of incorporators is therefore self-perpetuating.

It is given to but few men to foresee the changes that time will bring. Thirty years have elapsed since the projectors of Crown Hill Cemetery laid deep and broad the foundations of their philanthropic enterprise, and great are the changes wrought by those thirty years. At the time of the purchase of the site it was thought that it was too far from the city. Now it is evident that it could not advantageously be nearer. Then there was some objection

on the score of the distance to be traversed. Now the cemetery is the terminus of three electric street-railway lines and is easily reached from every part of the city. The commanding view afforded from Crown Hill, the beauty and restfulness of its primeval foliage, which under the careful guardianship of the incorporators is destined never to be disturbed amid all the changes of an encroaching civilization, the great extent of the acreage of the cemetery, and the very general favor with which it is regarded by the citizens of Indianapolis—all these and other considerations combine to testify to the wisdom of the original incorporators and the care of their successors.

Crown Hill Cemetery was organized on the principle that every lot-owner has an interest equal to that of the incorporators. On this basis the management has been conducted for thirty years, and to this principle is largely due the remarkable success attained. From a primeval forest, or swampy glade, the greater part of the large tract belonging to the corporation has been converted into a vast and exquisite lawn, studded with native trees and groups of shrubbery, swelling into graceful undulations or sinking into shaded and solitary dells, and everywhere revealing the sedulous care and earnest labors of the superintendent. The simple uniformity and harmony of the grounds is the result of the policy of banishing conspicuous marks of individual interest, except monuments, and, fortunately, this policy has been generally concurred in by the lot-owners. Crown Hill may be said to have gone to the extreme of the tendency to reduce the prominence of individual display, simplifying as far as possible the entire scheme of landscape decoration.

The adoption of this policy is due largely to the influence of the late Mr. Adolph Strauch, formerly superintendent of Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati; also to Mr. John Chislett and, since his decease, to his son, the present superintendent of Crown Hill, Mr. Frederick W. Chislett. The policy of these gentlemen has been, in accordance with modern ideas of cemetery gardening, to make their burial ground as attractive as a park. The glare of monuments and copings has been avoided as far as possible, and the attractiveness of graceful foliage and handsome lawns has been substituted for the bare hideousness of the old-fashioned graveyard. The approaches to the cemetery are along foliage-embowered roads. Within the entrance and close to the ground set apart for a national cemetery, are the chapel and vaults. The vault and chapel combined is a handsome Gothic structure built entirely of Indiana stone. The chapel is in the center of the building, a large room with stained glass windows, tiled floor and walls and groined arched

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