



OUR HISTORY

On September 8th, 1853, St. Thomas Aquinas Cemetery was consecrated by Bishop J.M. Henni.

Reverend P. Schwaiger cared greatly for the cemetery and had the fence installed in 1874. In 1910, Fr. Albers had the low spots filled in, and the grounds were surveyed and plated. A concrete sidewalk was installed from the church to the cemetery.

On May 1, 1912, Fr. Albers, the pastor, died and was buried. In 1913, a Memorial Chapel was erected over his gravesite by mason, Joseph Dressmann and carpenter, Joseph Harter for \$800, which was donated by parishioners. The cemetery monuments were also cleaned and straightened. It took 25 men two days to do the clean-up. By 1915, the entrance was built at a cost of \$400. Fr. Pierron, who had directed the building of the Memorial Chapel for his predecessor, was also laid to rest in the Memorial Chapel in 1945.

In 1941, the Henry Naber family donated the "triangle of land" to the church as an addition to the cemetery. Joe Linneman donated dirt-fill and Mr. Reesman hauled it to the cemetery. Water was made available to the grounds. The Norton family donated additional land on the north side. Due to this area's low elevation, Dora Beck filled it in and paid the back taxes so the church could receive a clear title to the land. Additionally, in 1947, Dora Beck sold 40 acres of land for a fee of \$5,500 to the cemetery, with the remaining land value being considered a gift. Rental from this property was used to pay most of the cemetery's expenses. The land was sold for over a million dollars in 2000 and helped immensely to fund the new church in 2007.

In 1950, 2.5 acres of land north of the cemetery were purchased. Wanting to identify the cemetery to the general public, Walter Mass and Raymond Roloff had the two gateposts erected at the south driveway and two at the north driveway from excess Lannon stone used in the rectory construction. One reads "St. Thomas Aquinas" and the other, "Catholic Cemetery." The original stone flowerpot markers are located at the north and south boundaries of the cemetery. In 1990 and 2009, monuments were leveled and reset, along with tuck point repair to the Chapel and stone markers. The Knights of Columbus donated a memorial monument to the unborn, located on the east side of the cemetery.

Trees planted in 1990 on the north side of the north driveway were moved in 2002 because they were too close to the driveway for grave digging equipment to pass. Records indicate the Chapel was painted in 1938, 1991, 2004 and 2017. Pine trees were removed from the east side of the grounds and new plantings were added along with an information sign as part of Ben Mehring's Eagle Scout Project in 2003.

Windstorms blew down large maple trees on the north side of the cemetery, volunteers cleaned up and removed the debris in 2006 and 2008. Dirt fill was added to the north side of the cemetery, and a parking area was added to the east side in 2007. The north section of the cemetery was also replotted at this time to better utilize the space and conform to other gravesites.

Larry Kempken and Sons Construction built and donated a maintenance shed with Jack Essman finishing the concrete slab on which it stands. The north driveway was ground, raised and repaved and more parking area was added in 2009. The paving projects were funded by the cemetery along with donations of materials from the Arthur DeGrave family. Labor and equipment were donated by a family member in memory of Robert and Mary Johnson. Brush from encroaching lowlands was cut back in 2009. A very talented machinist repaired the iron crosses and tooled a new latch for the iron cemetery gate. He and a very talented carpenter also constructed and replaced the rotted vent of the cemetery Chapel. In 2016, hedges were removed from the west side, as they posed a safety concern with cars exiting the grounds. 2017 brought the removal of five large maple trees. It was sad to see them go, but safety concerns due to rotting made it necessary.

Many hours, materials and equipment have been donated by countless people to help in the maintenance throughout the years, names of which are too numerous to list. All contributions of time, talent and treasure are greatly appreciated. Presently, over 1700 souls are interned at St. Thomas Aquinas Cemetery with some graves dating back as far as 1847.