

Prairie View

**Homer, Ogden, Broadlands, Sidney, Allerton
VOL 1 NO 1 FALL/2021**



Homer's Cemeteries

Homer Historical Society

President's Message

Fall 2021

This has been quite a year for all of us and while both the museum and the research room were closed for over a year this has given us an excellent opportunity to focus on several projects for the society for the collection of historical content on Homer and the surrounding area.

Molly Spencer Shoaf, who had been indispensable working on the history of Homer and other projects, has moved to a care facility in Tolono but her work typing up the obituaries for Homer resulted in a large amount of content – approximately 5000 obituaries on Homer and area people. We had used this content continuously but had not added to it. As some of you might know the ownership of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Cemetery was moved from the American Legion Post to the Village of Homer in 2017. The historical society began matching the obituaries to the burials in a year-long project in 2018. While this continued, an effort to find obituaries on the people we did not possess, began. This added another 3000 obituaries to our collection and we are reconciling the records of the cemetery with the newspaper obituaries. We are now creating a new GAR cemetery list and map for the cemetery. Additionally, we are spending time in the archives in Danville and Urbana to strengthen the documentation on the cemetery.

Additionally in the last year I was contacted by Tari Henson-Bricker, formerly of Broadlands, who told me about a newspaper collection of the *Broadlands News* from 1927 to 1957. The historical society received these with the provision to image them and distribute them for the public to use. As I currently teach and have done much document imaging in my career as an archivist and records manager, I decided to move forward with the imaging of these papers. Note that the *Broadlands News* only exists in microfilm for limited years in a few institutions. This also gave us access to obituaries we could never have found as the *Broadlands News* 1927 to 1942 are unavailable anywhere. To date we have imaged 1927 to 1946.

The research room has resumed being open most Sundays from 1 to 4 pm, except holidays. We have had other donations and are processing these as time permits. Indeed, this has been an active year with new acquisitions and opportunities. We are having meetings again on the first Tuesday of the month and are planning activities.

Thank you for your interest and we look forward to sharing Homer's fascinating history with you.

Raymond K. Cunningham, Jr.

President, Homer Historical Society

2021 New Membership Application/Renewal Form

Please send this completed application/renewal and your check to: HHS, 500 E Second St., Homer, IL 61849

Please Check One	<input type="checkbox"/>	< New Membership	<input type="checkbox"/>	< Renewal Membership	Member # _____
Membership is for one calendar year (January 1 - December 31). Please check selection below					
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$7.50 Membership	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$300 Lifetime Membership		
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$15 Family Membership				
Giving Opportunities					
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$ General Fund				
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$ HHS Memorial Honorarium (Donated in the Name of _____)				
The Homer Historical Society is a 501 © 3 non-profit, nonsectarian, educational organization. All contributions are tax deductible.					

Amount enclosed \$ _____

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Prairie View – Homer Historical Society

Editor Message

Fall 2021

Hello, my name is Darla DeNeal Finley, I am the new editor of what was once called the *Homerian*. I truly hope you will find the newly redesigned publication to your liking. The name change was negated due to a feel that the towns that the Homer Historical Society covers was not being given due notice.

I come from many years of being in the publication/design area. It's always been my mission to create what is pleasing and easy to follow. Please let us know your thoughts, questions and suggestions.

I live just west of Homer with my Husband of almost 39 years, three dogs and three cats. I have two large vegetable gardens and enjoy flowers. I ran a very busy horse care business for 33 years and was the artist at the News-Gazette from 1982 – 1990.

GOD Bless

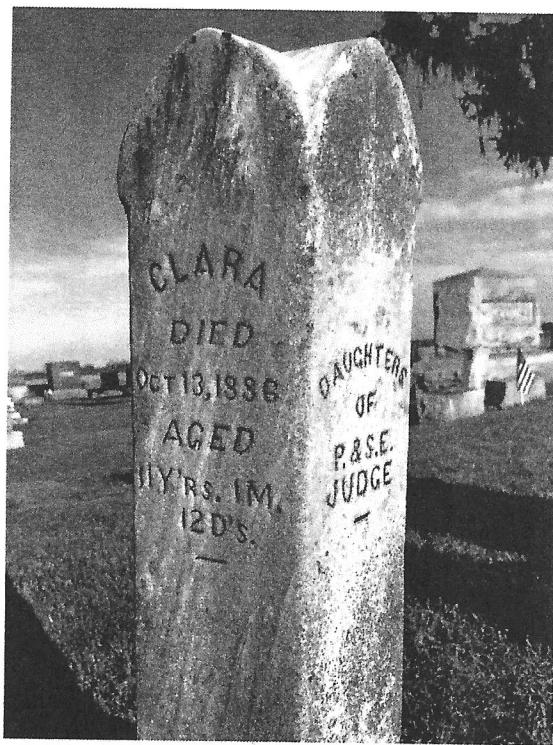
Darla Finley Prairie View Editor

The Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery of Homer

The Grand Army of the Republic cemetery was founded in 1886 by the Grand Army of the Republic post 263 of Homer. The location of Homer's traditional burial ground 1 ½ miles north, known as Old Homer cemetery, was distant and poorly maintained. The idea of a village cemetery was discussed in 1884 with a vision of being between 5 and 10 acres in size. The GAR, a veterans' organization composed of former Union civil war veterans, desired a resting place for themselves and their families.

The cemetery was formed with five acres purchased in August 1886 from George B. Eggleston on the east side of the village of Homer which at that time was undeveloped. The first sale of lots was begun in September 1886 and on January 3, 1887, the Homer town board approved the establishment of a public cemetery within the village limits of Homer.

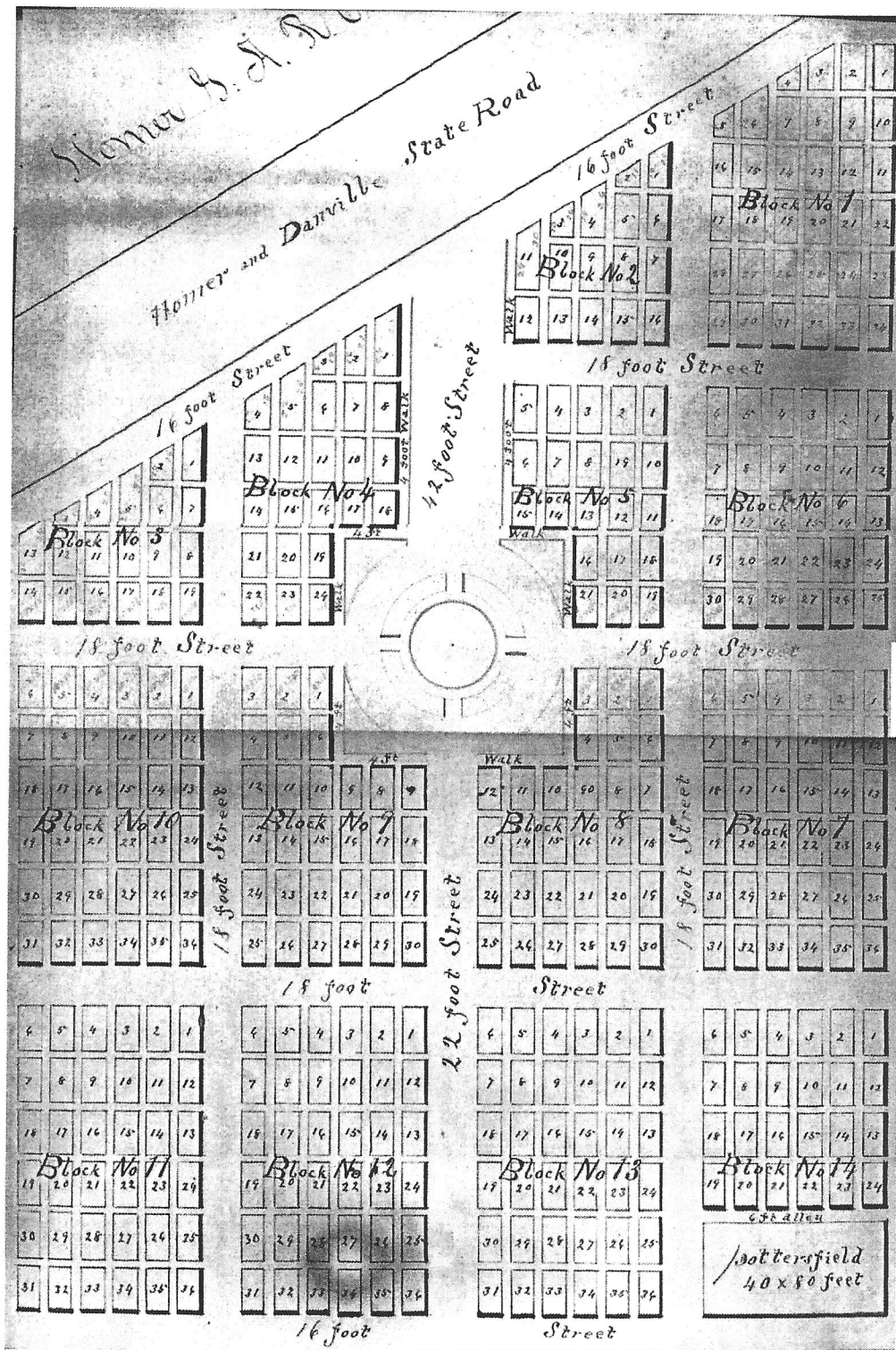
The diphtheria epidemic in the fall of 1886 pushed forward the date of burials and the first burial in the new cemetery was Clara Judge, the 12-year-old daughter of Civil war veteran Patrick Judge, who died October 13, 1886, and was buried in Block 5.



**Headstone of Clara Judge, the first burial in GAR cemetery.
Homer Historical Society photo**

The cemetery contains burials of deceased persons prior to 1886 because families began moving remains to the new cemetery from neighboring cemeteries.

In the spring of 1887, a plank walk was installed to the cemetery which at that time was on the extreme edge of the village. An 8-inch tile was run that year from the cemetery to the Yeazel branch for drainage. Maple trees were planted on both sides of the driveway from the gate to the circle. A six-foot-wide sidewalk was extended to the cemetery in August 1888.



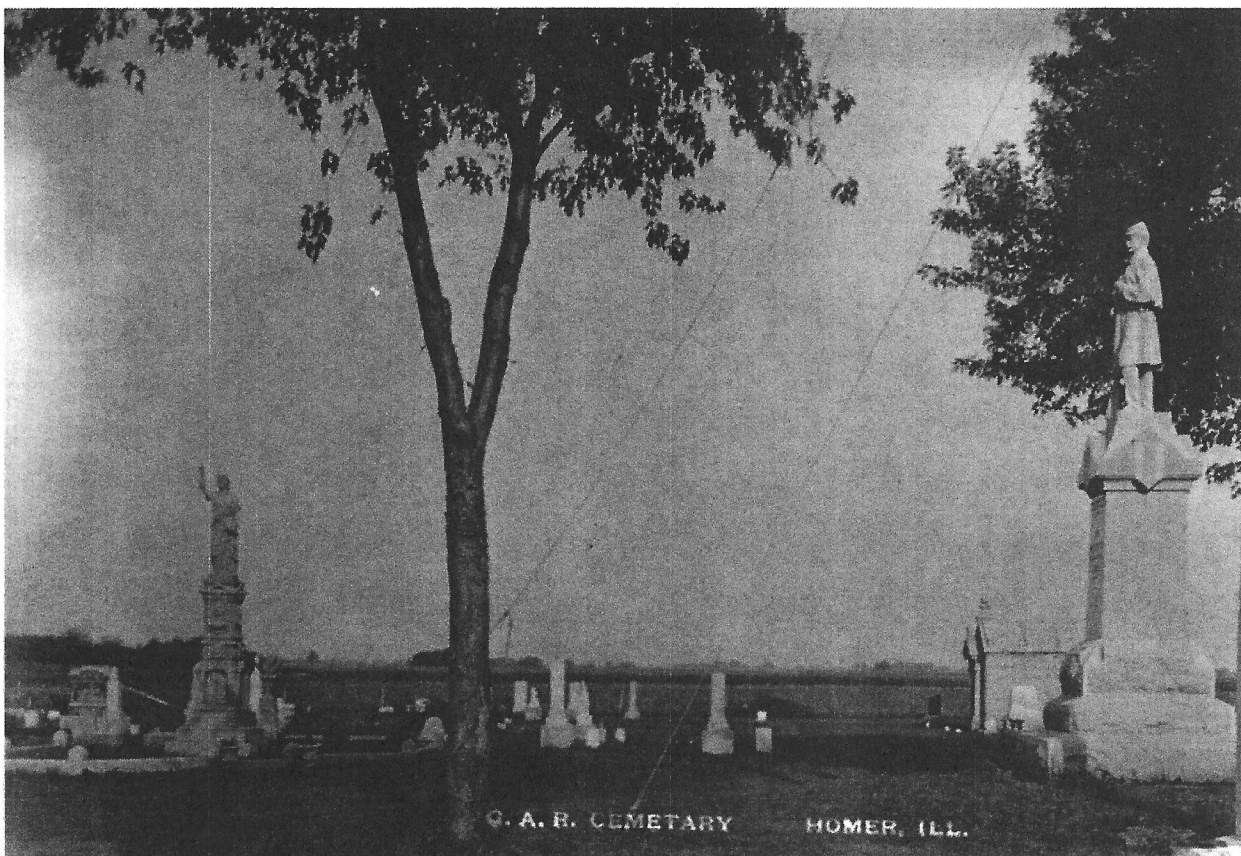
Original Plat of the Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery

The first soldier buried in the Soldiers Circle was Jacob H. Benjamin interred June 21, 1889. The Soldier's Monument was purchased in 1901 by the Women's Relief Corps, the women's organization supporting the veterans, and was dedicated August 20, 1901. It is made of Barre Vermont granite.

The most significant monument in the cemetery is the "Soldier's Monument" in the center of the soldier's circle. The monument, made of dark Barre, Vermont, granite, was purchased for \$900 by Mattie Butler, chairman of the Women's Relief Corps (WRC), the Grand Army of the Republic's women's auxiliary organization, and Henry J. Wiggins, chairman of the monument committee of the G.A.R. The monument was

purchased from Clark Monument Company in Champaign and was unveiled at a ceremony on August 20, 1901. G. A. R. commander Henry J. Wiggins addressed the crowd.

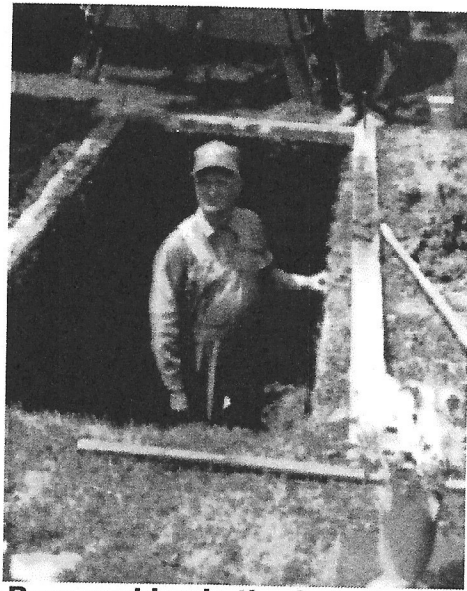
Another notable monument in the cemetery is the Custer monument in block 5, erected by Martin B. Custer in honor of his first wife and himself. On the shaft of the metallic monument are portraits of Custer and his wife. Materials cost \$1,250 and the sculptured faces cost \$350. The monument was erected in the Davis cemetery in 1884 but in September 1907 the monument was removed to the G.A.R. cemetery by Clark and Company of Urbana, and the remains of Custer's second wife reinterred with Martin who died in 1906.



Tudor photo of the Grand Army monument and the Custer monument taken about 1907.

Homer Historical Society

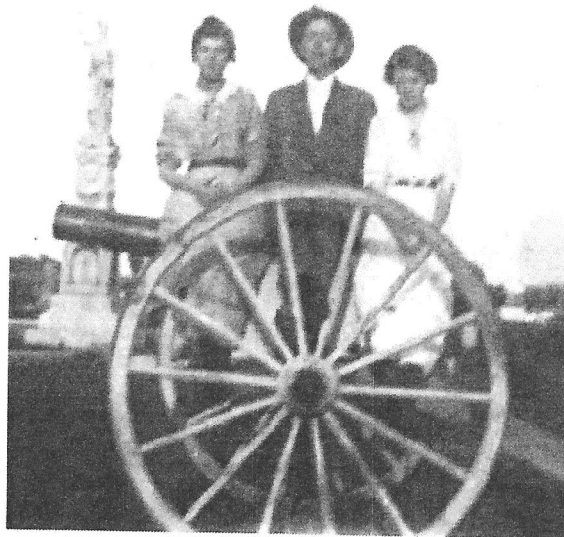
As the GAR veterans passed away the cemetery was given to the American Legion post 290 on April 12, 1922. Sam Bretz and Vernon Anderson were two of the cemetery sextons to serve until 1957 when the members called for volunteers to mow and maintain the cemetery. Other notables at the cemetery were Tom and Jack Bear. In 1937 Tom and Jack began digging graves to supplement their income and became a part of the cemetery. The twin sons of William and Flossie Robbins Bear, they were responsible for clearing and restoring the old Homer cemetery in the 1930s. For just over forty years the brothers hand dug all the graves. When the backhoe was purchased in October 1978 the 71-year-old twins retired.



**Jack Bear working in the G. A. R. cemetery
Carl Goad Photograph**

In March 1909 a Civil war era canon was donated to the GAR post and placed at the foot of the Soldier's monument. The cannon was a gift from Congressman William McKinley to the G. A. R. post. The cast iron cannon was sent from San Antonio, Texas, and the carriage mount constructed by the members of the post. The cannon was dedicated on Memorial Day in 1909.

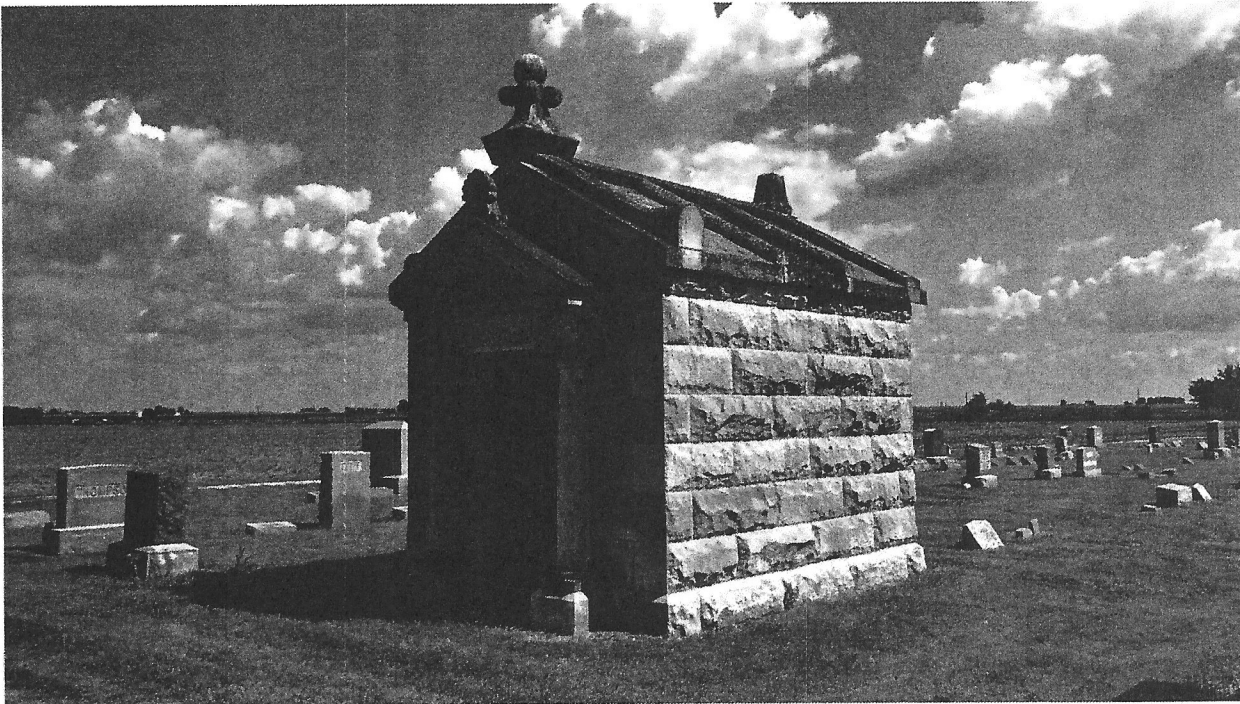
The gun carriage eventually rotted away over the years and the cannon was bolted on a concrete base in the honor circle of the cemetery. On the night of August 30 or 31, 1977, the old cannon was stolen. It was believed that because the cannon weighed 500 pounds that a truck was used to remove the artifact. Area antique dealers were given a description of the item but the cannon was never recovered.



The cannon at the G.A.R. Cemetery about 1925.

Catherine Davis Clinebell photo

The cemetery also contains three mausoleums for the Swearingen, Jurgensmeyer, and Elder families. The Swearingen mausoleum in block 7 was constructed in late 1904 by Johnson Armstrong Swearingen. His first wife and child were moved from the Bodkin cemetery in 1905. Johnson A. Swearingen was interred in 1908. The Jurgensmeyer mausoleum in block 1 was constructed in the summer of 1922 after the death of Dollie Palmer Jurgensmeyer. The remains of Virginia May Craver Davis were interred in the mausoleum in 2013. The Elder mausoleum in block 18 was constructed in 1929 and contains the remains of farmer James R. and Mary Robbins Elder.



The Swearingen mausoleum was the first constructed in the cemetery in December 1904.

Homer Historical Society Photo

In May 1976 the pavilion and cemetery directory board was constructed. A marble bench was also included donated by the Bear brothers.

In 2017 the village of Homer assumed ownership and the tradition of volunteers continues. The GAR cemetery presently holds approximately 3600 burials and is open to all.

If you would like to volunteer to mow and maintain the cemetery, please call the village hall at 217 896-2521.

Cemetery Items

Plans for a New Cemetery March 31, 1884 page 3 *Fairmount Local*

A project is on foot in this place to purchase a plat of 5 or 10 acres of ground near town for cemetery purposes. The nearest graveyard to the city is at Old Town.

Headstones Erected at Old Homer Cemetery June 4, 1884 page 4 *Champaign County Gazette*

There were seven headstones erected at the old Homer cemetery and three at the Insley cemetery at the graves of soldiers, on Decoration Day.

There are thirty-two graves of deceased soldiers at the Homer and Insley cemeteries.

G.A.R. to Build Cemetery July 28, 1886 Page 4 *Champaign County Herald*

The G.A.R. Post has purchased five acres of G. B. Eggleston and will lay it out in lots for a cemetery. They expect to have it all laid out in nice shape by Aug. 15. They get the northeast corner of his place in the east part of town.

Tile in G.A.R. Cemetery March 16, 1887 page 1 *Champaign County Herald*

The G.A.R. boys are having an 8-inch tile put in from the Custer branch to their cemetery, and will have it thoroughly tiled in a few weeks. The town furnished the 8-inch tile from the branch to the west side of the cemetery and will extend the tile west about 200 yards so as to tile East First street.

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Homer's First Automobile Funerals March 25, 1915, page 7 *Urbana Courier*

The two funerals held here Monday and Tuesday, the Osborn and the Riggs funerals, were both automobile funerals, the first held in this vicinity, although there have been several in which all the conveyances were automobiles but the hearse.

These are the funerals of George Osborne (1850 – 1915) and James Riggs (1833 – 1915) both buried in GAR cemetery.

SURVEY OF CEMETERIES IN COUNTY GIVES INTERESTING FACTS OF HOMER HISTORY

September 24, 1936, *Homer Enterprise*

**Old Homer Cemetery One of Oldest Burial Grounds In This Vicinity:
Earliest Grave Known That of John Wright, September 26, 1845**

Lost Grove or Insley Cemetery

The Lost Grove or Insley cemetery lies in the northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 30-18-11 in the southeast corner of a road intersection into which it extends north and also some to the east, indicating that the burial place antedated the right of roads to fit the rectangular system of land surveys which was done extensively about the time of the Civil War.

The cemetery lies on a prominent elevation of land which is a part of the main ridge extending northwesterly and southeasterly across Champaign county. It is surrounded by old trees and plantings and has the appearance throughout of being one of the oldest burial places in this part of the state. The land, the first one acre, was deeded May 31, 1858, by John and Nancy M. Insley of the County of Tippecanoe of the State of Indiana, to Frederick Thompson, Isaac White and Simon B. Woody, trustees and their successors in office. "and road to be inclusive of any road that be laid out . . . for the use of public burying ground, with the express understanding that the said trustees make or cause to be made a good substantial plank fence around the said land; to have and to hold the same for the purposes above specified."

It was organized as the Lost Grove Cemetery Association April 30, 1896. George Trick is president, Jeane Harte, secretary, and Mabel Ocheltree, treasurer. O. J. Henderson, E. B. Sylvester and John S. Hart are the trustees.

It is fenced and kept in good condition from interest on endowment fund donated by members of the organization and others.

The west additional acre was donated by V. Davis, father of the late George Davis, former sheriff of Champaign county.

There are eighteen Civil War veterans. Nine are without markers. There are no veterans of other wars.

"The name Lost Grove is said to have originated in that a man became lost there in a pioneer jungle. It was related that during a road grading burials were discovered, but whether they were immigrants buried along the road or part of (two lines not readable). It was originally a free burial place, and there are few remaining places. The Legion Post of Homer registers and marks the veterans' graves.

*Note-Lost Grove proper is located 1 ½ miles south of Lost Grove school and cemetery on the farm now owned by Charles Messman. The name was given the grove after the body of a man was found there, whose body was partly destroyed by buzzards.

The Old Homer Cemetery

The Old Homer cemetery is located in the southeast quarter of the southeast quarter of section 33-19-14 on a ridge along the south bank of the Salt Fork about twenty feet above high water. It was, in all probability, the earliest burial ground in that vicinity and while it has not been used to any extent since the establishment of the Homer G. A. R. cemetery in 1887, some burials are still being made here.

No doubt burials were made as early as the late thirties. A number are noted during the forties. The earliest burial noticed is John Wright, September 26, 1845. Another early burial is that of Rev. John Fox, a minister of the Methodist Episcopal church, August 26, 1846. The burials were made to some extent in rows, but many are found in hit and miss fashion. It seems that while the surface of the ridge slopes in all directions and would appear to be an ideal burial site, the under drainage has never been satisfactory. This is true of many other similarly selected sites and may account for the abandonment or a partial disuse of many of the pioneer cemeteries.

The eastern part of this cemetery is known as the Drunkard burial portion.

There are 25 veterans of the Civil War buried here. Also, James F. Butler, a veteran of the Black Hawk War, is buried here, though complete proof has not been supplied.

Three or four Revolutionary War veterans from this vicinity were buried in the Davis cemetery, Vermilion county.

Two from Homer were buried here before the establishment of a satisfactory burial ground here.

There are not known veterans of other wars buried here.

This cemetery has by some been called erroneously the Old Bodkins cemetery. The latter is really located one and one-half miles north of the old state road in Vermilion county.

G. A. R. (Homer) Cemetery

The Homer G. A. R. cemetery and the American Legion annex thereto, lies on a gently rising slope about one-fourth of a mile northeast of the village of Homer in the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter of section 9-18-14.

The land for the G. A. R. portion was sold by Amanda Eggleston in her own right and George B. Eggleston, her husband, to Jacob M. Ocheltree, Lemuel R. Thompson and Aubert J. Conkey and to their successors in office as trustees of Homer Post No. 263, of the Department of Illinois Grand Army of the Republic, August 2, 1886. It was accepted by a resolution of the village trustees and A. G. Woody, president, as a cemetery and surveyed and laid out by J. R. Spraker in 1887 who was village clerk.

For a number of years it was in charge of the G. A. R. Post No. 263 but is now being maintained by the American Legion Post of Homer who platted the annex lying to the west of the G. A. R. portion. Joseph Brayshaw surveyed the annex about 30 years ago.

Near the entrance of the older portion stands a Grand Army statue mounted on granite, flanked along the west edge of the oval by ten Civil War veterans' markers in front of which is a mounted cannon.

The cemetery is well fenced and kept. It contains three mausoleums and numerous fine stones. The west portion of the American Legion annex is still vacant.

There are 98 Civil War veterans buried in this cemetery, including the ten about the oval, it having been the principal veteran burial ground in this part of the country for many years. Some removals have been made from other cemeteries. There are also four veterans of the Spanish American War: Robert H. Roberts, William Patton, Charles Lewis and Bert Burdick. One Black Hawk War veteran, T. L. Butler, is said to have been buried in the Old Homer or Bodkins cemetery. Four veterans of the late war are also buried there.

YOUNT CEMETERY THOUGHT OLDEST IN SOUTH HOMER

October 1, 1936, *Homer Enterprise*

Stone Marking Grave of Will N. Yount Erected in 1837

The story of a county survey of cemeteries, printed in last week's *Enterprise*, has brought forth considerable comment and additions to the survey. The Yount cemetery, situated 2 ½ miles northeast of Homer, is now believed to be the earliest burial ground in this township.

The oldest grave in the cemetery is that of Will M. Yount, a 16-year-old youth who was buried in 1837. Six other graves comprise the cemetery, found in the center of a 20-acre field farmed by W. E. Yount.

Each grave is marked with a well-preserved stone. The inscriptions are very clear.

The most recent grave is that of Arberry Yount, who died December 23, 1872. Mr. Yount was the grandfather of Mrs. Pauline Yount-Smith and Gordon Freeman, and father of Will Yount and Mrs. J. J. Freeman.

Joseph Yount, grandfather of Mrs. Freeman and W. E. Yount, died in 1842. His grave is one of the seven.

The cemetery is cared for by Will Yount, who has never missed a Decoration Day in placing a bouquet on his father's grave as long as he can remember. There have always been two cedar trees and a large bush of tiger lilies in the cemetery.

The mother of Mrs. Freeman and Mr. Yount, Sally Yount Clutter, is now 94 years old and lives four miles east of Homer.

The other Yount children living are Dr. Joe Yount, Chicago; Mrs. Fanny Bicker, Seymour, Missouri, and Mrs. Nell Read, Plain City, Ohio.

120 Years Ago, in Homer

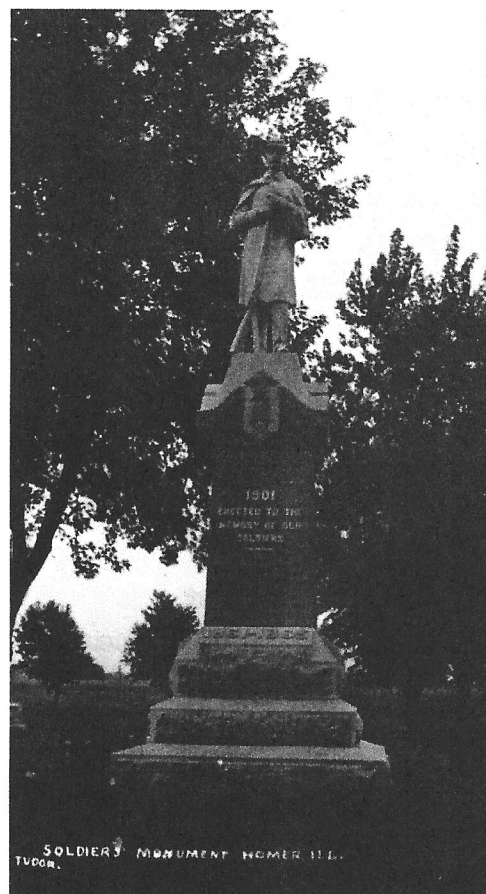
Dedication of the Homer Soldier's Monument

Imposing Shaft Erected in Memory of the Gallant Dead is Unveiled With Appropriate Ceremonies.

Champaign County News Saturday August 24, 1901, page 2

Homer, Ill., Aug. 23. – The event of the past week in this little city was the unveiling of the new soldiers' monument at G. A. R. cemetery. The affair occurred Tuesday afternoon and was witnessed by a large number of spectators in spite of the rainy weather of that day. The exercises were in the main carried out as advertised. At 1:10 p.m. a procession was formed, consisting of old soldiers and headed by the ladies' cornet band, and marched to the cemetery. Arriving there the assembly was sounded by George Eggleston, the "Red, White and Blue" was played by the band, and then Rev. Poe invoked the divine blessing upon the audience. The opening address was delivered by H. J. Wiggins, commander of the Homer post, G. A. R., and then Miss Anna Butler unveiled the monument, while Master Maurice Ochiltree raised the flat to the new shaft erected near the monument. The dedicatory service was performed by Mrs. Maria Custer. The dedicatory address was at this point delivered by Judge W. G. Cochran of Sullivan, after which Mrs. Addie Martin, for the W. R. C., presented the memorial to the care of the post. Mrs. Mattie Butler followed with a brief history of the monument and the efforts of the corps to provide funds for its construction. The audience sang "America," Judge Cochran sang two stanzas of "Illinois" and the benediction was pronounced by Rev. J. A. Gehrett.

The monument is a shaft of dark Barre, Vermont, granite, stands eighteen feet from the surface of the mount upon which it rests. Its total weight is 33,000 pounds, G. A. R. emblems appear on four sides and suitable inscriptions are engraved on the north and south sides. The figure at the top is a life-size soldier in full uniform, giving the magnificent memorial a most beautiful appearance.



Danville Commercial-News

Legion Post Continues Cemetery Care

Friday, March 28, 1969

By Mrs. Edna Lewis

Homer—For 47 years Homer American Legion Post 290 has had charge of Homer GAR Cemetery. For the past 12 years, they have supplied all the manpower needed to make it one of the best cared for cemeteries in the area.

Instead of one caretaker, it isn't at all unusual in the summer to see several mowers at work at the same time in the cemetery. In addition, there will be several men clipping around the stones.

These are the Legionnaires, who work at their jobs all day and then, in their spare time, maintain the sections of the graveyard assigned to them. Their only pay is the personal gratification of a job well done.

In 1887, members of Homer Post, Grand Army of the Republic 263, took steps to establish a cemetery in "new" Homer to honor deceased veterans. Prior to that, the only one was Old Homer Cemetery on the Salt Fork established when the village was located there.

When these veterans became older, the GAR Post disbanded but first officially turned over to the care of the American Legion Post 290 the GAR Cemetery in April 1922.

In the transfer, the American Legion Post promised to continue the name as the GAR Cemetery, that graves of all Union soldiers in GAR, Bodkin, Davis, Lost Grove, Old Homer and Umbanhowar cemeteries (which were in the jurisdiction of the GAR) would annually be decorated with flags. Also, that graves of all Union soldiers would be kept perpetually marked with the official grave marker for Union soldiers.

The Post hired a sexton to maintain the cemetery until 1957. Twenty-seven days of rain in May enabled the grass to grow out of control. The committee asked for volunteers to help get the grounds in shape for Memorial Day. One hundred and fifty showed up with the necessary equipment.

In August of that year, it was decided there was too much work for one caretaker and not enough money to hire two.

After discussion, the idea of the Legionnaires volunteering services was initiated. About 70-100 men volunteered and used hand mowers. Now power mowers are used so there are only about 30 active workers to maintain the 25 acres.

Divided into groups, each group does all the work necessary for the upkeep of its designated section. Mowing isn't considered completed until the grass is neatly clipped around the gravestone. Only the digging of the grave is hired done.

The cemetery trustees, Vincent Robertson, Paul Stevens and Harold Cope are pleased with the response of the members through the summer and on cleanup day in the spring before mowing begins. Normal mowing season requires 70 to 100 hours labor each week.

On Memorial Day when services are held at the cemetery, visitors comment on the neat appearance.

By volunteer subscription in 1901, a monument was erected in memory of deceased veterans of the Civil War. It is located near the north entrance and is encircled by graves of Civil War soldiers. A cannon of Civil War vintage is in the circle and faces the entrance. In 1957, the 100th anniversary of Homer, another monument was erected honoring World War I and II and Korean veterans.

All money from the cemetery is kept separate from the general fund and is used solely for expenses and maintenance of the cemetery.

There has been a total of \$25,725 expenses in the past ten years. Breaking this figure down: \$5,315 for mowers, trimmers, repairs, parts and fuel; \$9,722 for grave openings; \$4,361 for miscellaneous including cutting trees, Memorial Day services, grass seed, regravelling of roads, spraying of evergreens and spraying of buckhorn.

There were 274 burials in this ten year period.

A friendly competitive spirit is fostered as each group tries to keep its section looking better than the one next to it.

The men will continue to maintain the cemetery, fulfilling the charge given them by the GAR and are determined they will not turn it over to the township to be another expense and burden to the taxpayers.

