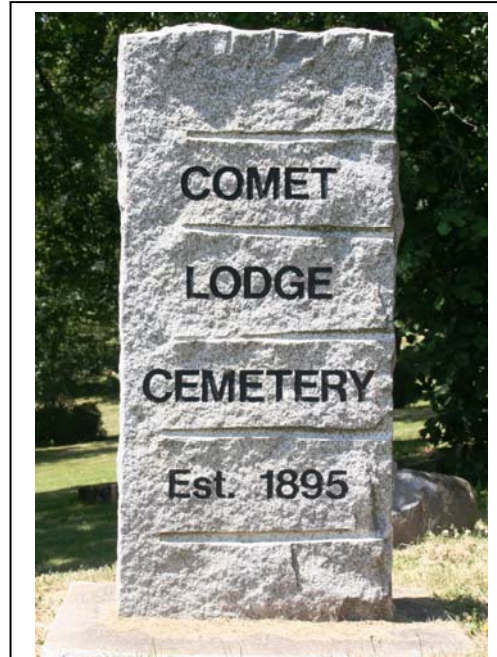


Comet Lodge Cemetery (DRAFT)

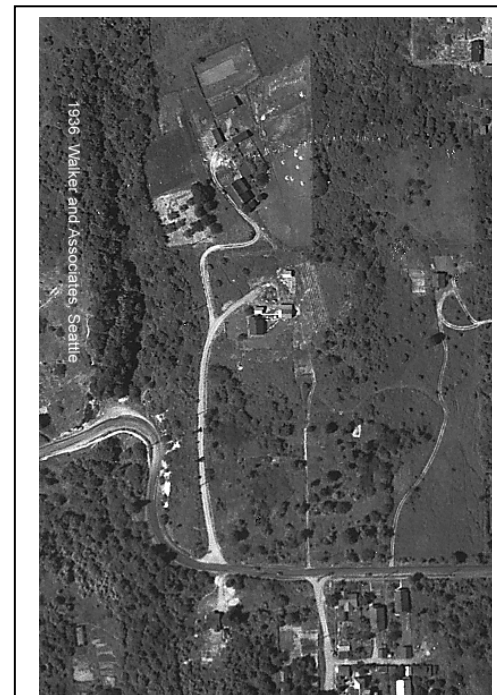
This cemetery was disputed for many years as the King County claimed it was not a cemetery and wanted to turn it into a park for dogs, despite the tombstones that were still located there. The cross streets for this cemetery is S. Graham Street and 23rd Avenue South. The County had expressed their intention to restore the cemetery “with sensitivity, dignity and integrity”. Today dogs are allowed to run through the unfenced property.

The site was originally used by the Duwamish nation. When the Maple family settled the area they referred to the cemetery area as the Old Burial Grounds. There were many Duwamish members recorded on the Tribal roll buried there before the family arrived and as many as 800 pioneers may have been buried there over time. The Maple family settled in the area and lived peacefully alongside the Duwamish Tribe. The Maple family then deeded the land to the IOOF Comet Lodge which platted, dedicated and recorded the land, establishing the cemetery in 1895.

While the grounds were somewhat abandoned in the 1920’s the remains of deceased people were added to this hallowed ground until 1930 when other cemeteries became popular. The last recorded burial was a three year old child named Jewel Lundin who passed away on September 21, 1936. The Comet Lodge cemetery eventually became neglected and overgrown with brambles. While cemeteries are protected sites, ownership of the land came into question and the city of Seattle and King County had several rounds of foreclosure actions. Many civic groups attempted to protect the graveyard through the years.



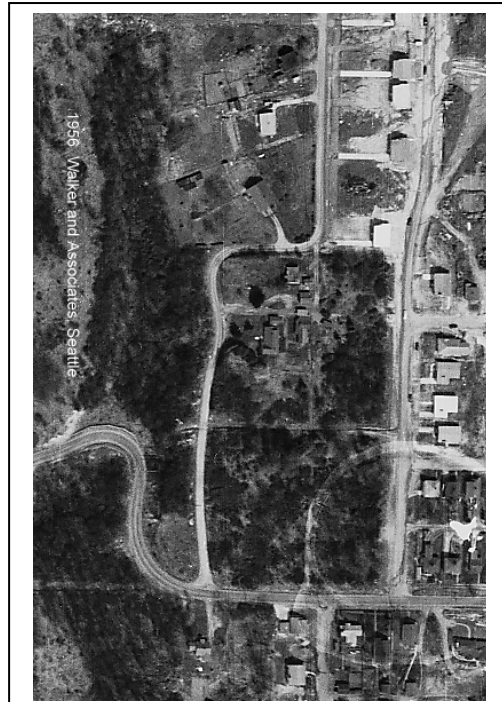
Comet Lodge Cemetery
A burial ground? A dog park?
A haunted story



Aerial photo of Comet Lodge
Cemetery in 1936

In 1959 a past Lodge member sent a letter to the County detailing a plan to move the cemetery, stating that the cost of moving the bodies would be recovered by the sale of the land. Nothing was done and years later the City would officially declare that there had never been a cemetery at that location! Property lines seem to have become blurred in this area. In the 1970's houses were built over parts of the cemetery where children had been buried. The City assured homeowners that there was not a graveyard on Beacon Hill. There are ten or twelve houses that were built on this "baby land". An article from the Seattle Times in 1985 reported that "...nobody knows the exact boundaries and nobody is certain where the bodies are situated because the detailed map has been mislaid and most gravestones have disappeared." This information can be verified by checking a copy of Volume 9 of Plats and looking on page 19 from King County. Indeed, many people have reported that they found gravestones from the cemetery in various places.

One person reported that their father told them they found a gravestone that had been stolen and dumped in the alley behind their house. In 1965 members of a small garage band (who wish to remain anonymous) stole a gravestone from the cemetery and took it to the basement where the band practiced. They burned candles on top of it during their band practice. This stone marked the location of Cynthia Brownlee who was born in 1833. County records show that she died on June 26 and was buried in the Comet Lodge Cemetery in 1898 having reached the age of 68 years. Cynthia would have seen the city of Seattle rise up and be burned down in the great fire. She would have seen the rebirth of the city... One can wonder how her spirit took to the Seattle music scene as the band played on in their basement. Eventually one of the band members convinced the rest of them to return the stone to the cemetery. Not knowing where they originally took it from, they abandoned it along the edge of the cemetery.



Aerial photo of Comet Lodge Cemetery in 1946 showing "babyland"

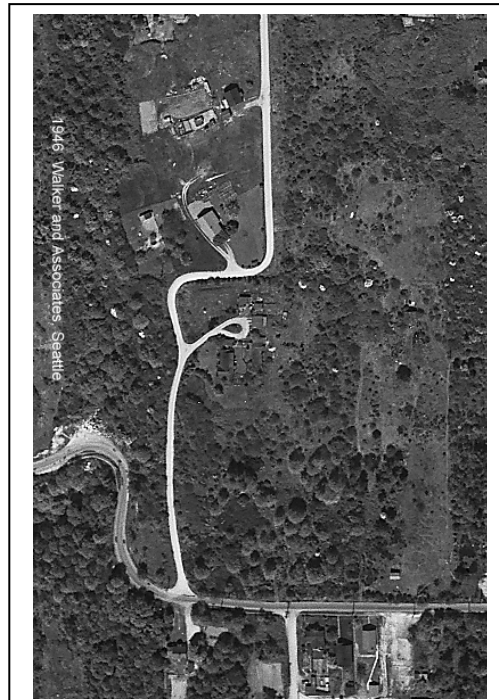
One family had an expensive collection of porcelain dolls which they kept on display in an illuminated cabinet. They kept the cabinet locked and checked the lock nightly. Despite this security measure, the owner would find the dolls scattered around the house the next morning as if some ghostly spirit had been playing with the dolls.

Another family criticized their only son for leaving his toys around the house all the time. The boy protested and claimed that he was not playing with the toys, but was forced by his parents to clean up his room before going to bed each night. He dutifully placed the toys in a box each night. The next morning the toys were discovered all over the house. They were found on the stairs and on every level of the home. Finally, the child confided to his parents that a strange boy, dressed in funny clothes came into his room each night and sit on the edge of the bed. The boy felt that the spirit was watching over him. One of the homeowners told reporters that she was assured that her property was not part of the Comet Lodge Cemetery, but felt that they were not alone from the start. The day that they moved in, all the lights suddenly went out, and then came on all by themselves. She told the reporter that they live with it and knew that the spirits were there. Several times

she turned off the lights in her display case, left the room and came back to find the lights on again. Suspecting that her children were playing a trick on her, she turned the lights off one time and went to her bedroom. She stood at the door to spy on the case and the lights came back on all by themselves! One night while she was making dinner alone she saw a clear cloud swoop past her. She followed the ghost to her bedrooms where she saw it more clearly, a full outline of a person, as if in a cloud. The spirit then swooped into the bathroom.

Her daughter also says that she has seen spirits. One day she visited the cemetery and then came home to her bedroom. When she looked out her bedroom window she saw a ghost. This spectral woman had long hair with loose waves and approached the little girls' window. The spirit looked happy so she got up and looked at her. Other children reported that they saw ghosts as well. People have reported seeing strange lights and actual apparitions in the cemetery at night. Many of the reports indicate that the spirits are short, probably children who run and dart between the trees. Psychics claim that there are probably between 50 and 100 spirits hanging around in the area.

In 1987 a Beacon Hill Resident Don Kipper began to clear off the land after acquiring clear title to the property from two of the three Lodge owners. It soon became apparent that he really intended to build his home there. Apparently he had a lifelong dream to live on a cemetery! People thought he was restoring the cemetery. During the same period the City of Seattle began a sewer line project through the cemetery!



Aerial photo of Comet Lodge Cemetery in 1956 showing homes where "babyland" once stood

Although Kipper lacked any rights or finances to restore its grounds, he managed to convince the City workers to bulldoze the tombstones on All Souls Day, November 2, 1987. They were there deeply trenching the sacred grounds putting in a sewer main! A restraining order was enacted to “safeguard the cemetery”, although the city took no action to prevent further desecration and completed the sewer project. Shortly after the incident the City changed the zones of this area from cemetery to single family residence and retail space thereby making it official that there was no cemetery on Beacon Hill.

This resulted in an ownership challenge over the cemetery that lasted another decade! John Dickinson took the project under his wing as the subject of his Master’s study at Seattle University. John’s cousin found the gravestone of their great-great grandfather (who had been the last mayor of Southpark) as well as that of their great grandfather. John had a work permit issued by the County, good for five years, and a promise that the cemetery would be turned over to his non-profit organization. He began to work on restoring the property.

Emotions ran high as John sought to protect and restore the cemetery with his non-profit organization at no expense to the taxpayers. One objector to these honorable activities was a City employee who had reportedly been seen removing grave markers from the cemetery. It seems that this person wanted to protect her source of markers and eventually managed to get John barred from the cemetery by claiming that a protected species (the red-tailed hawk) was being disturbed by the non-profit restoration activities.

Eventually the County gave up on its promised, but costly, plan to restore the cemetery with “sensitivity, dignity and integrity”. Eventually the County completed its plan to turn the cemetery into a dog run park and invested over a hundred thousand dollars to give the park a cemetery appearance. The cemetery was turned into a park where dogs are welcome to run. There remain some wonderful examples of gravestone markers from the Woodmen of the World still there, but as one walks the cemetery it seems apparent that there is no pattern, rhyme or reason for the placement of the handful of stones. According to the King County records there are 494 people buried in the cemetery!

In 2006 I spoke with John who said that some of the wooden cross baby markers were stored in a tavern for a while. Some of the markers were standing found inside a local tavern for a while, and others were taken from the site by residents who wanted to use them in their gardens after being told that the cemetery was abandoned. 22nd and 23rd Avenue now encroaches on the cemetery and in the middle of that avenue one can find marks where the asphalt was melted to find the survey markers for the cemetery when Mr. Dickinson had the site surveyed. Some web resources for future investigations on the Comet Lodge Cemetery complete with photos, maps and drawings can be found at:

<http://worldperc.com/comet/faqs.shtml>

<http://dailyuw.com/2008/10/31/ghosts-comet-lodge-cemetery>

www.interment.net/data/us/wa/king/comet_lodge.htm