

HMG Newsletter: Special Edition Tower of Memories

SPRING 2023

Presented by Highland Memory Gardens Cemetery, a Perpetual Care Cemetery
Owned and Operated by Highland Perpetual Maintenance Society, Inc.

Tales We Might Hear if the Tower of Memories Could Talk

In 1929, when the grounds now known as Highland Memory Gardens Cemetery were considered rural, 60th Avenue was called Hobson Drive and before Des Moines had grown into a city surrounded by suburb communities - a small cemetery began. Within the first six years, the cemetery underwent four name changes. In the sixth year, the Tower of Memories was constructed as the central feature of the 40 acres that are sacred to many families in our community.

I have had the privilege of working in the cemetery office for nearly five years. The records we still use from the 1930's give testimony to simpler times - times when offices kept handwritten ledgers in elegant cursive and a man's word carried more weight than legal documents. Many of the lot owners that purchased their spaces in those first years are just now coming to their final resting place. When we pull those files off the shelf and are greeted by yellowed papers and the historical records of their loved ones that have gone before them, we see stories of lives lived in commitment to our community. It is often humbling to think that a person has trusted us to play a part in the last chapter in the story of their time here on earth.

The Tower of Memories has overlooked these grounds and our community for nearly 90 years. I know the stories I have read and heard in my short five years here and I just wonder what stories the Tower could tell of the lives it has had the honor of witnessing. Growing up, I thought of cemeteries as depressing places - dare I say creepy places for the dead. This place and these grounds have changed my understanding.

This is a place of honor and reverence for lives created and lived for a purpose. It is a place for the living to honor the deceased, allow these grounds to offer aide in healing wounded hearts, celebrate the precious gift of a life lived and look forward to the future.

If the Tower could talk, I am certain it would testify to beautiful love stories as it has seen wives weep at the graves of husbands lost and husbands faithfully visiting their wives who rest in our grounds every day until the day he has the privilege of joining her again. It would testify to the beauty of family as little children and adult children of parents gone before them come to adorn their graves on anniversaries. It would speak for countless hours of grieving mothers struggling to process the loss of a child. It would tell of the horrific tragedy of lives stolen by violence or lives surrendered to mental illness and broken hearts. It would testify of the beautiful souls that come to clean and decorate graves of strangers. The Tower knows of the soldiers that rest in the surrounding earth that gave their



Tower with surrounding concrete fixtures and hedges.

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Highland Memory Gardens Cemetery

TOWER OF MEMORIES

Tales We Might Hear.... cont. from page 3

lives on foreign soil for our country, the ones that suffered their entire lives from the things they experienced for our freedom and the ones that died at an old age with stories of glory and victory to tell. The Tower stands at attention to those men and women and gives



Tower with paved streets during Memorial Day Celebration

reverence as it returns the service of now watching over them. It would tell of the dog walkers that patrol our roads out of care and protection for their community or the runners that take a breather at a statue of Jesus to pray. It would tell of fans of famous music artists coming from the other side of oceans to leave letters of gratitude on their headstones. It would tell stories of new friendships formed while reminiscing at graves of friends lost.

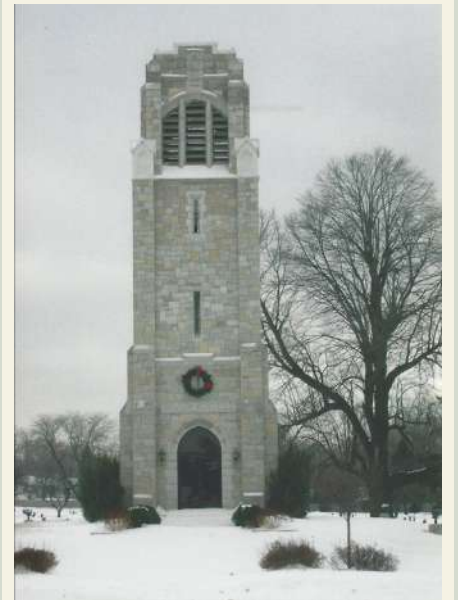
The Tower would share stories of scandal and corruption and wrongs made right as the cemetery management fought to

remain in service to the community in the first couple of decades. It would tell of a man who loved the grounds he mowed and the human beings he buried so much that he has given 62 years of his life to this place. It would tell of volunteers that served on our Board of Directors for decades upon decades out of love for the community that made them. It would tell of floods and derechos that took our trees, bent flagpoles and tore roofs off our buildings.

The Tower of Memories is now telling a tale of the toll life requires of us as its stone crumbles and falls away - speaking

volumes of empathy for our humanness as it relates to the storms and deterioration that life inevitably brings our way no matter how many years we are granted. In the coming months, as we begin our restoration project on our beloved Tower, I wonder what tales will be spun under its watch in the years to come. I wonder about the hands that will touch the files that are bright white now to be yellowed and historic in another hundred years - and if they will understand the preciousness of the stories those papers hold or if they will ponder the stories held by the Tower that lights their path as they walk to their cars.

Oh, I hope they understand and wonder in awe.



Tower in winter



Tower in 2000 with ivy vines



Tower of Memories after 2005 restoration

Embracing Change While Honoring History

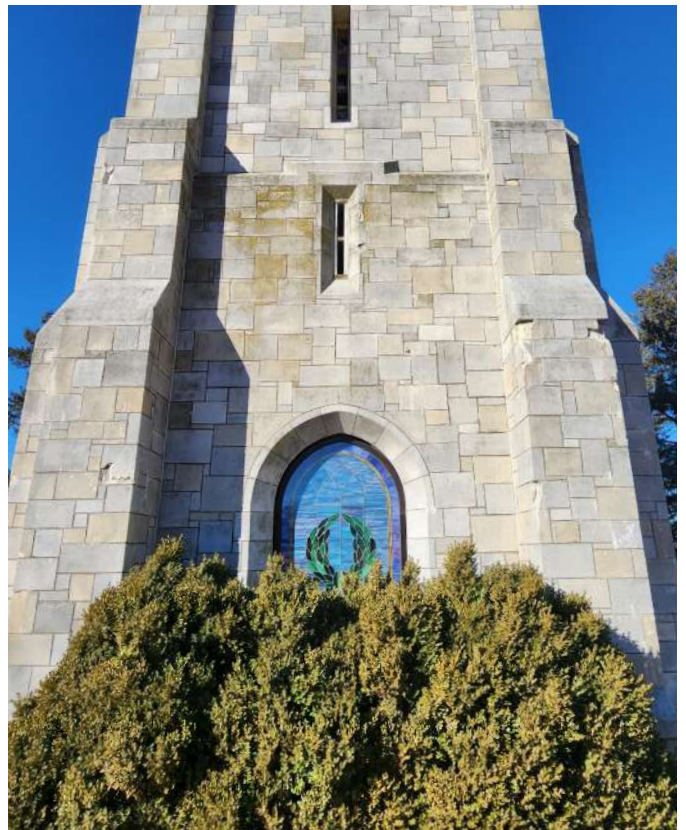
Highland Memory Gardens Cemetery has been blessed by the Des Moines community for nearly 100 years - in fact, we are only six years from our centennial anniversary. There has been a tremendous amount of change over the years in our small community, surrounding metro, technology and economy overall. While change is inevitable, we in our humanness find comfort in consistency and resist change by nature. We learn through experience, and for all of us, we have experienced change that left scars - so we resist when the opportunity for change shows its face again. But what about the changes that result in growth and hope? What about the changes that bring people together and make us better people than we were before?

Our voluntary Board of Directors and cemetery management meet monthly to discuss and plan for how we respond to circumstances that require change and put into motion changes that have potential to positively impact our 40 acres and the staff that tend to our office and grounds, our lot-owners and our community.

In 2005, our Tower of Memories underwent mortar restoration and surface repairs after the removal of ivy vines. The restoration at this time was largely accredited to a sizable donation from The Fitch Foundation in an effort to preserve what F.W. Fitch had envisioned and brought to fruition during his time as HMG Board President in the 1930's. At that time, the exterior repairs were deemed highest priority and interior repairs were not an immediate need. We are nearly 18 years later and the Tower has brought to our attention its need for change once again. In addition to more stone repair, the Tower has fallen victim to the elements and is in need of much more extensive repair than it received in 2005.

Our grounds crew began noticing stone on the ground around the Tower that had crumbled and fallen off over the last few years. During that time, our Board and management consulted with contractors in pursuit of estimates. As contractors inspected the Tower, it became clear that the work needed was throughout the entire structure - both inside and out. Moisture had begun infiltrating through cracks in the stone and had also made its way to the inside rooms and belfry. The wood louvers that allow the music to be heard during burial services are experiencing decay and the electrical system needs replaced. When the full damage had been realized and estimates provided, much discussion was had about how to move forward. The cost seemed too high and the idea of tearing down the Tower was put on the discussion table.

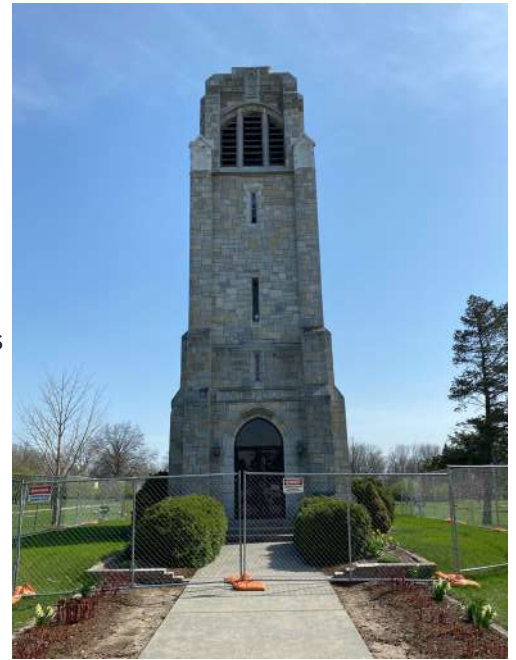
The removal of the Tower of Memories was seriously considered and, thankfully, the importance of honoring history prevailed. A commitment was made to devise a plan to save the Tower and preserve what it stands for - endurance, reverence, protection,



stability and hope. While there was no doubt that a contractor would be available to do the work, our identity as a non-profit organization placed a financial limitation on us. We would have to raise the money.

While conversations continued with fundraising ideas, the safety concerns grew as more stone crumbled and fell to the ground from the highest points of the Tower. The need for repair was now presenting itself as urgent - there was not time to implement a fundraising campaign if the Tower was going to be saved. The Board took action and sought out architects and contractors for new estimates knowing that the pandemic had done a number on the economy and the estimates would likely be much higher. A fence was installed around the Tower to prevent harm to the public and our staff.

As it sits today, and after thorough cash flow analysis, the Board has financed the restoration project for a total projected cost just upwards of one million dollars. The project will be directed by Shive Hattery Architecture and Engineering, who has enlisted Forrest & Associates for the masonry work. The project will begin when the ground thaws in the spring of 2023. Upon projected completion of the project before the winter of 2023, our Tower will be restored to it's original beauty - honoring the history of these sacred grounds and our surrounding community.



Would You
Consider
Helping us
Preserve
History?

Although the urgency caused by safety concerns propelled us into financing the restoration project through a local bank and the project has an anticipated completion date in 2023, we will be making loan payments for many years to come. Our Board of Directors is currently developing a fundraising campaign to be communicated in the coming months. In the meantime, we are asking you to consider donating now to get a head start on offsetting the cost of our commitment to preserve an important part of history in our community.

Donations can be made by:

- Calling the HMG office at 515-289-2230
- Mail to: Highland Memory Gardens Cemetery
One NE 60th Ave
Des Moines, IA 50313

