

Union Cemetery

When I was in the san in 1955-56, I heard stories of a cemetery close to the san grounds that was used as a burial place for the unclaimed bodies of TB victims, but I never went there to take a first-hand look. For me, it always remained one of those unverified "san legends", very interesting, but was it true? Well, apparently the existence of the cemetery is true, as shown by the following information. Chuck Felton

(The following article was published in the Johnstown, Pa. Tribune Democrat on Sunday, September 6, 2009)

Cemetery Holds Remains of Unidentified TB Victims

By KATHY MELLOTT

The Tribune-Democrat

CRESSON — Tucked away on a small Cresson Township road is Union Cemetery, a final resting place for perhaps hundreds of long-forgotten victims of tuberculosis.

The unmarked graves, some said to be butting against one another, contain remains of patients who lost their battles with the disease at the Cresson Sanatorium.

The San, as many former residents refer to it today, operated from 1913 to 1963 as one of three state-supported TB hospitals.

Thousands recovered and returned to their homes across the state. But others, including many children and teens, were not so lucky. For some victims of the once-dreaded disease, their families could not or would not claim their remains.

As a result, they were given a final resting place on a grassy slope about a mile from the wooded hilltop where they spent their final days.

While not exclusive to the San, Union Cemetery was used by the state until the mid-1960s, when the sanatorium was closed. The facility evolved into Cresson State Hospital, housing mentally retarded residents.

“The Cresson State Hospital used it very little. It wasn’t something that carried over,” said Mike McGuire, a Cresson resident who helped with maintenance at the cemetery and fixed markers more than 25 years ago.

The restoration project was instituted by Ginny Thornburgh, wife of then-Gov. Dick Thornburgh, and included a large marker on a field containing an unknown number of unmarked graves, McGuire said.

Initial efforts were made to identify at least some of the graves, but San records were unavailable. Most documentation was lost in 1972, when Hurricane Agnes hit Harrisburg.

Loss of the records also made it impossible to determine the number of San patients buried at the cemetery.

What information was available came from people in the area at the time who worked in the medical records department of the San, McGuire said.

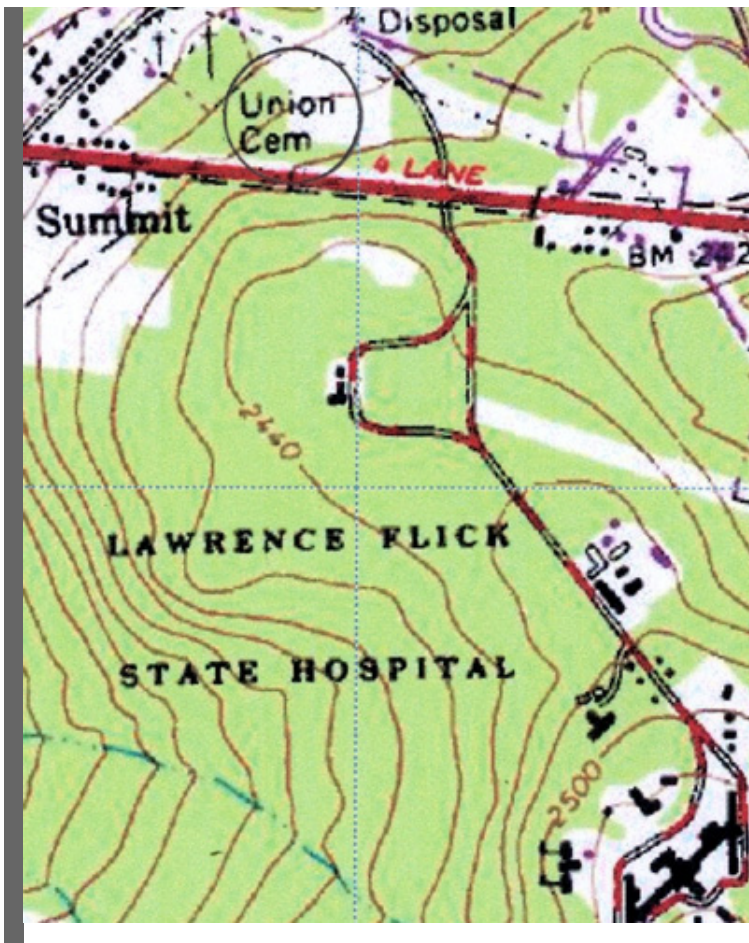
For a while, the cemetery was cared for by members of the maintenance staff of what was eventually renamed the Cresson Center.

The graveyard now is maintained by the State Correctional Institution-Cresson, prison spokeswoman Rebecca Reifer said.

The state Department of Corrections took over the property in the early 1980s.

MAP LOCATION

On "Harvey 1" page, Harvey Docchio writes the following: "On Decoration Day (Memorial Day now), Ms. MacKreth would gather us kids and we would go down to the main highway (Route 22) and cross it, for there was a cemetery in that area for



those individuals that had died at the san and had no one claim their body."

At left is an internet topographical map of the san area which clearly shows Union Cemetery (circled) right where Harvey said it was, just across Route 22 by the san entrance.

GRAVE MARKER

At left is the large grave marker erected in Union Cemetery. (Photo courtesy of Johnstown Tribune Democrat)

A large metal plaque is fixed to the back of the monument and reads as follows:

IN SINCERE APPRECIATION

TO THOSE
WHO WORKED FOR AND CONTRIBUTED
TO THE RESTORATION OF THIS CEMETERY

ALTOONA, CRESSON, EBENSBURG
CENTERS
ASSOCIATION, THE CLIENTS AND STAFF
OF EBENSBURG CENTER, COMMUNITY
CHURCHES AND INDIVIDUALS.

REDEDICATED - NOVEMBER 1986

Former patient's Web site awakens memories of long-gone TB center

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Click on the following link to see more photos of the monument:

<http://www.camgenpa.com/cems/CreUnion/p0000.html>

Click on the following link to see a listing of people buried in Union Cemetery, many with photos of their grave markers:

<http://www.camgenpa.com/db/cemetery/cemList.php?cem=111>

The information contained on the two Union Cemetery links above was transcribed and contributed by:

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