



Crown Hill: History, Spirit, and Sanctuary

Douglas A. Wissing, Marianne Tobais, Rebecca Dolan, Anne Ryder

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Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, Crown Hill Cemetery has been a vital part of the Indianapolis community dating back to its first interment, Lucy Ann Seaton, on June 2, 1864. Since then, Crown Hill has grown from a rural cemetery into the third largest private cemetery in the nation and is a community treasure that serves a broad range of needs and stands as a monument to the memories of hundreds of famous Hoosiers and the thousands more who selected Crown Hill as their final resting place.

Published by the Indiana Historical Society Press in cooperation with the Crown Hill Heritage Foundation, *Crown Hill: History, Spirit, and Sanctuary* examines the complete history of Crown Hill and places its story in a the larger historical context of the development and growth of American landscape architecture. In addition, the book includes vignettes of the famous families and individuals buried and/or entombed at Crown Hill and numerous photographs of the cemetery, its remarkable architecture, intricate sculptures memorializing the dead, and its lush landscape in every season. The cemetery is not only a place of memory, but it is also a place of contemplation for thousands of Indianapolis residents that pass through the site annually for such special events as Memorial Day, the birthday of Benjamin Harrison, Veterans Day, and other public and private group tours. Its rural setting also draws nature lovers to see deer, foxes, red-tailed hawks, and the more than 250 species of trees and shrubs on the grounds.

As far back as 1711, there were those who advocated for the development of landscaped cemeteries in rural settings. Since the founding of Mount Auburn Cemetery near Boston, Massachusetts, in 1831, Americans had looked to bury their loved ones in these rural cemeteries located on the outskirts of cities and towns across the United States. These locations were civic institutions designed for use by the public as a place to enjoy refined outdoor recreation and be exposed to art and culture.

The first burial ground in Indianapolis was a five-acre tract near the White River. The 1821 graveyard became the nucleus of Greenlawn Cemetery (later known as City Cemetery). By the 1860s this cemetery was unable to meet the needs of the growing capital city. With the suggestion of a Fort Wayne businessman, Hugh McCullough, some of the leading citizens of Indianapolis called upon John Chislett, a landscape architect from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with the development of what came to be Crown Hill Cemetery, which began with 274 acres bought for \$51,000. Over the years additional acreage has been added to Crown Hill, the last coming in 1911.

Today, the cemetery occupies a 555-acre plot of land in northwest Indianapolis. More than 200,000 individuals are buried there, including many notable native and adopted Hoosiers. Some the famous, and sometimes infamous, interments include:

James Whitcomb Riley, the Hoosier Poet

President Benjamin Harrison

Vice Presidents Thomas R. Marshall, Thomas A. Hendricks, and Charles Fairbanks

May Wright Sewall, reformer, educator, and suffragette

Colonel Eli Lilly, the founder of Eli Lilly and Company; J. K. Lilly, businessman and philanthropist; Eli Lilly, businessman and philanthropist; and Ruth Lilly, philanthropist

Oliver P. Morton, Indiana s Civil War governor

Mattie Coney, founder of the grassroots Citizens Forum organization

Alexander Ralston, designer of the original plat for the City of Indianapolis

John Dillinger, bank robber and outlaw

Cannonball Baker, motorcycle racer and endurance driver

James Baskett, the actor who played Uncle Remus in the Walt Disney film Song of the South

Julia Carson, Indiana Congreswoman



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