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What ever became of the large crucifix that stood in the former St. Joseph's Cemetery?

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By



Onondaga Historical Association

This crucifix stood for years at St. Joseph's Cemetery on the North Side of Syracuse, near Pond and First North streets.

"I have a mystery for you," the e-mail from Jerry Wallace began. "I'm interested in knowing what happened to the crucifix that stood for many years in St. Joseph's Cemetery."

It turns out several other folks have the same question, although it hasn't come up in a while. I don't know the answer to the mystery; maybe a public display of the mystery will help some.

St. Joseph's Cemetery was a landmark of Syracuse's North Side for more than 100 years. It rambled across a steep hillside on Pond Street and First North. The site now is a paved parking lot for a Wegmans Food Market store. Wegmans announced recently the store will close this month.

This was where some of our early citizens were buried. Most were of German decent, with a minority being Irish Catholics. We're told St. Joseph's was a parish cemetery of Assumption Church, staffed by Conventual Franciscan friars early on. It was opened by the church in 1859.

Some North Siders still remember the cemetery. Jerry Wallace says he played baseball there. His grandfather dug graves there.

The cemetery was abandoned by Assumption Church in 1953. Newspaper accounts describe neglect and vandalism. According to information compiled by Norman Staub Sr., a total of 6,567 remains were removed from the cemetery (only 509 were identified) in 1965 and 1966 and placed in a common grave at Assumption Cemetery, also operated

by the Friars. The burial place is marked by a single stone.

What happened to the crucifix?

Jerry Wallace says the cross — “it was a beautiful cross” – stood at the top of the Pond Street hill. He estimates it was 10 or 12 feet tall and “too big to just lose.”

The crucifix was dedicated to St. Boniface Verein, a German patron.

I checked with the office at Assumption Cemetery, which opened in the 1920s. An official who answered the phone said she didn't know about the crucifix. “St. Joseph's was a diocesan cemetery. We are Franciscans,” she explained.

Danielle Cummings is the public relations voice of the Syracuse Catholic Diocese. She offered to ask the archivist of the diocese to look through the files to see if she could find a mention of the crucifix. No mention was found, according to Danielle.

She did mention an interesting possibility; when crucifixes aren't used anymore, they are usually buried. Maybe that's what happened to the St. Joseph's cross.

End of mystery?

And Meadowbrook?

Reader Andrew McClurg served up another mystery, this one on the concrete endcaps along Meadowbrook Drive in Syracuse.

Andrew and his family live at the corner of Meadowbrook and Scottholm Terrace, which, he points out, is decorated by Tim Robinson's airplane birdhouse.

Andrew said he's intrigued by the iconography impressed into the concrete of some of the bridges. At the Scottholm bridge, for example, he sees a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's famed “Virtruvian Man” drawing, of a male figure with outstretched limbs.

There's a rising sun on another bridge. Others are blank, according to Andrew.

The folks at Onondaga County's Water Environment Protection Department, which looks after the Meadowbrook basin, don't know the answer to that one but they're looking into it.

Andrew said he's interested in “hearing the story of these understated embellishments.” Me, too.

Eastwood alumni

Gordon Maycumber, Eastwood High School Class of 1946, adds a follow-up to the column item about the final Eastwood High Clambake, Saturday, at Hinerwadel's Grove. The outing will include a signing and sale of Eastwood historian Margaret McVicker's newest Eastwood opus, a follow-up to her "Did You Know?" book.

Gordon wants to remind all Eastwood alumni that a group of graduates meets regularly the first Monday of each month for lunch, at noon at Steak & Sundae restaurant, on Teall Avenue. "All Eastwood alumni are invited and encouraged to attend and enjoy the camaraderie of former classmates," he says.

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