

## LIX. Cemeteries and Seminaries.

### The Stringer Graveyard.

The first cemetery in which those who died in Plymouth were buried was what is known as the "Stringer Graveyard," although its real name, as legally laid out and platted, is "Lake Cemetery," about two miles southwest of Plymouth. In the early settlement of the county, in that locality and farther west, there were quite a number of people from among whom the first death occurred in 1836, which necessitated the selection of a graveyard, as they were called in those early days. Joseph Stringer had settled on the land near the city in 1836, and on a high rise of ground a short distance east of his log cabin residence a burial place was selected, and to designate where it might be found it was named after Mr. Stringer. Many of the early settlers of Plymouth procured lots there, and they and their posterity continue to be buried in that place. It is a beautiful spot of ground for the purposes for which it was intended, and has been placed in a good state of repair. To the west and southwest it overlooks a splendid farming country covered with hills and dales, meandering in every direction, through which runs the beautiful Indian river, "Wi-thou-gan," known as Yellow River, and nestled in among the hills is the charming little Dixon Lake, and still further away to the west the glassy surface of the ever beautiful Pretty Lake peeps out from among the hills and treetops, a veritable "thing of beauty and a joy forever," while to the east and northeast, Plymouth with

Its courthouse and schoolhouses, and numerous church spires and manufacturing establishments, and the beautiful farm and county infirmary, presents a picture of beauty and grandeur that takes away much of the dread of passing over the great divide to "that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns."

The Seminary.

The first burial ground in Plymouth was on the lot where now stands the Washington School building, west of Plum street, and between Washington and Adams streets, and it was used as such for a number of years. It came about in this way.

In the early history of Indiana, the United States government set apart certain sections of land (section 16) in every township for the support of public schools. Provisions were made for the donation of grounds on which were to be built seminaries. The lot on which the Plymouth School building now stands was so set apart by the original proprietors of the town and was shown on the city records as the "Seminary Lot." The adoption of the present school system by the state under the constitution of 1850 made unnecessary a county seminary, and in 1854 the lot in question was sold to the town of Plymouth for a nominal sum of \$100, and the town there upon erected the first schoolhouse which was the "seminary building," in time for the winter school of 1854.

Plymouth was organized and the first settlement made in 1836, the county having been organized July 20<sup>th</sup> of that year. Owing to the sickly conditions of the county at that period, it was but a short time until several deaths occurred, necessitating the selection of a burial ground or "graveyard," as they were then called, as they did not seem to know much about "cemetery" or "seminary." It is quite evident that there was great need of a seminary at that time, as it turned out that those who selected the location for the graveyard mistook the meaning of "seminary" for "cemetery" and established the town burial ground on that lot. A large number of people, young and old, were buried there, very few of whom were known to the present generation. There were no marble or tombstone factories here in those days, and few of the graves had any headboards to tell whose remains the narrow house contained. A few headboards made of thick oak plank bore the names, dates of birth and death of the deceased, but that was all. Nobody paid any attention to the graveyard, and at that time hazel brush and blackberry and raspberry briars had full possession. Sunken ground was all that denoted the last resting place of the one who slept beneath.

Before the old seminary building was erected as many of those who, were buried there as could be found were resurrected and re-buried on the grounds now occupied by the Pennsylvania railroad for station purposes, the ground having been set apart by the original proprietors of the town as a public burial ground. At this time these grounds were a long distance out of town, and the coming of a railroad was not thought of as one of the possibilities. So many of the bones of the sleepers on the seminary lot were taken up and buried there. Many, however, were left where they had been buried, the ground smoothed over, and the memory of them left to rot with their bones. The old seminary building was occupied for school purposes until the erection of a new and larger building became necessary in 1874.

when the old building was sold and removed and the new brick building erected on the ground where it had stood. Several years later it became necessary to erect a large addition to the Washington school building, and in excavating for its basement many skulls and human bones were found scattered around in various places. They were boxed, carried away and buried in the potter's field. In digging further along and deeper, for a furnace, a considerable number of skulls and bones in a fair state of preservation were dug up. One afternoon the writer happened on the grounds while a wagon was being loaded with dirt from the excavation on the south side. While waiting one of the workmen dug up a skull in almost a complete state of preservation, many of the teeth being fast in the jawbones. Perpetrating a ghastly joke about it being "chap-fallen," etc., the workman threw it over among the other dry bones. It had the appearance of being a young woman, and the query was who she might have been? The performance recalled vividly the graveyard scene in Shakespeare's play of "Hamlet." The grave digger throws up a skull and Hamlet says: "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once! How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jawbone that did the first murder!"

"Behold this ruin! 'tis a skull ! Once of ethereal spirit full !  
 This narrow cell was life's retreat-  
 This space was thought's mysterious seat!  
 What beauteous visions filled this spot –  
 What dream of pleasure long forgot!  
 Nor joy, nor grief, nor hope, nor fear,  
 Has left one trace on record here! "

The sight to the writer was a sickening one, and as he turned away these words rang out loud and clear: "To this sad end must we all come at last !"

#### Oak Hill Cemetery.

When the preliminary survey had been made, and it became known that the Pittsburg, Ft. Wayne & Chicago railroad was to be built through Plymouth, and that the depot grounds were to be located about or on the grounds then used as a burial place, steps were taken by the town authorities to procure suitable grounds and far enough away so that the bodies would not again have to be taken up and removed. Grounds were therefore purchased just outside of the extreme southern limit of the town, platted and regularly laid out, the lots numbered, and drives and walks laid out, shade trees set out, grass sowed and everything done to make it a creditable place to bury the dead. The dead bodies in the old graveyard were then taken up, or at least as many of them as could be found and re-buried in the new cemetery, which was called "Oak Hill Cemetery." But it can readily be seen that with the miscellaneous removal that took place from the "seminary" "cemetery" it was impossible for those having charge of the removal to tell anything about what were the names of the persons whose bodies were being removed, and so they were taken up as the workers came to them, except such as had friends to look after

their remains, and there were few left here at that time to perform that duty. This Was twenty-five years after the county was organized. Many had died during the first years here, and many of their relatives, becoming discouraged, had moved away to find more inviting fields for future homes. The town authorities did the best they could under the circumstances, to give the remains of those removed a respectable burial, but throughout, up to the time of the opening of Oak Rill cemetery, the whole thing was little less than a "graveyard vaudeville."

Since that date, now fifty odd years ago, with the deaths that have occurred during that time, and those that were removed from both of the old cemeteries, or graveyards, Oak Hill now contains about 4,000 who have "taken their places in the silent halls of death."

Since Oak Hill was first purchased several additions have been made to it, and the whole has been kept in excellent repair, and it is one of the most beautiful parks of its kind in northern Indiana. And as the living wander through this "silent city of the dead," what a lesson in right living should it teach them. Here as many as living and walking the streets of Plymouth are quietly sleeping side by side in that sleep that knows no waking. Here political antagonisms are lost in forgetfulness; church creeds and religious differences are unknown; bickering and backbiting, and tattling and gossiping about one another is unknown; here there is no hunger nor thirst, nor heat nor cold. Peace and tranquility reign supreme, and there is nothing to molest or make them afraid.

They do neither plight nor wed  
 In the City of the Dead,  
 In the city where they sleep away the hours ;  
 But they lie while o 'er them range  
 Winter blight and summer change,  
 And a hundred happy whisperings of flowers.  
 No, they neither wed nor plight,  
 And the day is like the night,  
 For their vision is of other kind than Ours.

They do neither sing nor sigh, In the burg of by-and-by,  
 Where the streets have grasses growing cool and long ;  
 But they rest within their bed,  
 Leaving all their thoughts unsaid,  
 Deeming silence better far than sob or song.  
 No, they neither sigh nor sing  
 Though the robin be a-wing,  
 Though the leaves of autumn march strong.

There is only rest and peace, In the city of surcease,  
 From the failings and the wailing 'neath the sun.  
 And the wings of the swift years Beat but gently o 'er the biers,  
 Making music to the sleepers everyone.  
 There is only peace and rest,  
 But to them it seemeth best,  
 For they lie at ease arid know that life is done.