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Affirmative Action Employer

Office of the Caretaker, Pioneer
& Soldiers' Memorial Cemetery,
2945 Cedar Avenue South,
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55407;
Thursday, May 10th, 2001...

**Ms. Jeanne Andersen,
333 "N" Street S.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20024--**

Dear Ms. Andersen:--

Dennis, the head caretaker, has asked me to write you addressing your concerns as soon as the press of my other duties would allow; and, as this afternoon is too rainy to continue with my groundskeeping chores, I've decided to try to clear up some of the confusion regarding any connection that may have existed--or may have been said in the press to have existed--between this Cemetery and the Minneapolis Quarantine Hospital, a.k.a. the "Pest House," and its attached burial ground, the Bass Lake Cemetery.

And ~~that~~ is the crux of the matter--evidently much of the supposed history of this place that you cite has come out of old newspaper files, from a time when reporters were as loath to check their sources--and as quick to embellish--as many of the worst of them are today. From all the internet addresses you give, you've got to be familiar with the motto abbreviated, "G.I., G.O."--"Garbage in, garbage out"--that programmers use. Some of these long-dead '1920's & '1930's "ink-stained wretches" (newspapermen) have fed you a load of garbage about us!

For one thing, it's Martin G. Layman Sr. (not "Lymon") who founded this place; and they used the pre-twentieth-century convention of the freer use of "Jr." & "Sr." (the two Martin G. Layman's were grandfather & grandson, NOT father & son; as we use these terms today--remember Pliny the Elder & Pliny the Younger [Plinius Senior et Plinius Junior, in Latin] were uncle & nephew?) More over, it is certain that the decrepitude of the Cemetery in the hands of the heirs of the Senior long

preceded the tenure of the Junior, with his drinking problem, as head caretaker of the Cemetery; in fact, Martin Jr.'s lack of diligence in the *maintenance* of the place was part of the heirs' long-term plans--a purposeful neglect. They were trying to encourage voluntary removals, with a view towards regaining title to the emptied plots, on the pretext that it seemed likely that the City would be *condemning* the land shortly, but really with the ultimate purpose of *selling* the land to the Railroad and to the then-immensely-wealthy Sears & Roebuck (the equivalent in those days of the Airlines and the Internet-Retailers) for a huge profit! The reason the family resorted to this subterfuge was, of course, that the place was almost filled up (the numbers I've always heard was 27,000 out of 32,000 spaces occupied, and the majority of the remaining spaces sold; so that only a couple thousand were left to provide future income), and little more money could be expected from sales.

In such circumstances, with the owners trying to *empty* the place for commercial reasons, does it make any sense to suppose they'd accept a whole slough of reburials from the Bass Lake Cemetery? When their income was coming from removals to *other* cemeteries, which also furthered their long-term plans for recouping the family fortunes, lost when European "Bourses" (stock markets) were frozen to foreign (e.g., *American*) investors with the advent of the First World War? Let me tell you how they worked it: In 1919, at the behest of aldermen friendly to the Laymans' schemes for *developing* (as we call it now) the Cemetery, the City Council passed an ordinance forbidding all sales and burials after Memorial Day of that year, and removals went into "*high gear*," as the family came to settle expenses after removing their "loved ones," the Laymans or their agents would quote them "grave-opening" & "rough-box" (temporary casket) fees that amounted to almost a week's wages for an ordinary working person (totally *specious*, as far as being needed to meet expenses, since the Laymans were getting "referral fees"--*kickbacks*--from the Cemeteries to which the bodies were going!), then offer to waive them if the family signed "this little paper here"--a *Quitclaim Deed*, assigning Title to the grave-plot back to the Laymans! Very few saw through this scam, paid the fees, and kept title to the grave-plots, worth many times those amounts!

Well, such removals went on for several years, tapering off finally in 1926, after a newspaper editorial the previous year had

raised a public outcry over "saving the old Cemetery," and the pendulum of opinion swung from (as we'd put it) "development" to "preservation." Several aldermen lost their jobs, and Sears and the Railroad lost interest, not wanting to be characterized as "ghouls" in the press. Martin G. Layman, Jr., died of cirrhosis in 1927, and later that year the City Council appropriated the money for buying the Cemetery by floating a \$50,000.00 bond issue--\$35,000.00 for the purchase price, plus \$15,000.00 for needed improvements, but it is not clear from the documents we've seen whether the sale was finalized later that year or early the next. We do know that, from at least 1928, the City has owned the Cemetery.

The Council ordinance of 1919 is still on the books;--it is illegal to sell any land at this Cemetery for burials. What happened in 1934--the lawsuit you mentioned that reached the State Supreme Court--was that an original owner's heirs were denied the right to bury him in the Cemetery, and they sued to enforce the implied contract of burial under the "no impairment of contracts" clause of the State Constitution (modeled on that same clause in the U.S. Constitution). The lawsuit had nothing to do with "parties who wanted to bury the St. Louis Park remains," it had everything to do with "a family who owned a plot and wanted to bury a family member," but there was no "unless..." attached to the above. Until the lawsuit, there was no burial even in those circumstances; and after the lawsuit, there was only burial in those circumstances. Therefore, under the law, the Bass Lake remains could not have been reburied in this Cemetery!

The only reburials, in any numbers at all, from one source, that we have records of, occurred in the 1900's & 1910's, marked "from the U.of M." Evidently the Laymans did rebury the cadavers autopsied at the Medical School that were not otherwise disposed of; at least, that's our interpretation of this notation, which appears on two to three thousand of our cards over those two decades. It is perhaps what created the impression among journalists, and the general public, that the Bass Lake remains, though in fact legally barred (unless related to an original owner), should have ended up here... "Isn't that where all those sorts of folk end up?"

I hope this puts some light on the matter. Audrey is welcome to look thru the "from the U.of M." files if you think they hold any clues; but from what you've said they're way too early to be the ones you want.

Sincerely yours,
Thomas W. Swierczek,
Assistant Caretaker...