NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ABOUT DSH OR POTTERS FIELD, DELAWARE

Later article, just before Almshouse and its cemetery were closed.

**Delmarva Star, Wilmington, Delaware, March 19, 1933**

**Headline: “Potter’s Field – Final Haven for Friendless”**

Photo of rows of headstones; caption: “In this neglected spot, back of the County Hospital at Farnhurst, lie the remains of the unknown and friendless.”

Subheadings: “County’s Acre at Farnhurst Hides Life’s Ghastly Failures; 2326 White Posts Mark Burial Spot of State’s Derelicts; 50 Graves Added to Area Yearly.”

Main story: “Half hidden behind the sloping ground in the rear of the New Castle County Hospital, lies Potter’s Field – final haven for the friendless, the unknown, and the derelict. Flotsam and jetsam, human driftwood on the sea of life, here they rest at last, crowded closely together in the tiny area, as if even in death the living begrudge room for the unfortunate.

Row after row stretch the small white posts – each post with a number cut into the top. The last number was 2326, the next will be 2327, and so on. Each year sees a half hundred of the forgotten of life dedicated to the County Acre. The exact count of the number buried there is difficult to maintain. Sometimes a mother and her child are interred in the same desolate grave. Infrequently, a relative arrives too late, and takes the body to some more seemly ground for the long sleep.

Quietude and peace for the dead hover not over this marshy ground. Close underneath the rumble of railway trains, the very air seems to generate the foment and turmoil which was theirs in life. The visitor who wanders near departs with desolation in his heart, and a tug at his emotions for the unfortunates who lie there. Who knows what ghastly mistakes, what unfulfilled aspirations of youth lie beneath the marshy, water-soaked graves. What hidden sorrows and heartaches are here concealed? What victims, perhaps, of manly ingratitude and womanly treachery? As Gray’s “Elegy” reminds:

“Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid, Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire, Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed, Or waked to ecstacy this living lyre. “Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast, The petty tyrant of his fields withstood, Some mute, inglorious Milton here may rest, Some Cromwell guiltless of his country’s blood.”

But the tranquility of the country churchyard is not for these. They died without the heritage of death – someone to mourn their passing.

Ancient Grave Digger

Like a figure out of a play, the ancient grave-digger shuffles along. He is slightly deaf, and talks aimlessly and incoherently. He has been the grave differ for years, he says, pointing to the long rows which have yielded to his spade. He speaks sepulchrally of the depth of the frost, and the difficulty of the profession he pracices. At the end of a row, freshly turned earth marks the latest addition to the ranks of the dead. “He pisened hisself,” the guardian of the acre dismally tells you.

Already, he has started the next opening in the soft clay.

“I cover ‘em up well,” he says. “They wasn’t always buried so good.” He points to a spot where several tiny boxes peep up over the sod. “The rain washes badly here, and the babies ought to be put in deeper.”

He tries to keep the place in a semblance of order, this venerable custodian of the hallowed ground. He has planted trees, and done his best to alleviate the barren appearance of the field. The grass is clipped, and the stones kept white. But it’s a fruitless task, he maintains. Last Christmas a man came in and chopped down one of the grave keeper’s trees.

The old Potter’s Field was a large and beautifully situated one, located at the corner of Eleventh and King streets, where the Court House now stands. Some time before the Revolution, these bodies were disinterred and removed to a cemetery in the northwest part of the city.

Present Site Fifty Years Old

When the old Almshouse on the King’s Highway, near what is now Lancaster avenue and Broom street, bodies of the friendless were interred in a field bordering the property. In 1884, the present Almshouse at Farnhurst was completed, and the Potter’s Field set aside where it now lies.

Centuries ago there was a Potters’ Field at New Castle, near the site of the old Fort Casimir. Now the river has encroached sixty feet on the old burial ground, and it is not unusual for skulls and bones to be washed up on the beach by the tide.

The name Potters’ Field comes from the old clay pits of the workers in pottery in England. When one of the craft died, he would be interred in one of the pits dug to provide clay for the wheel. From this grew the name now bestowed upon the County Acre.

Another explanation goes back to Biblical times. The first field for the burial of paupers was established outside the city of Jerusalem. Matthew speaks of “thirty pieces of silver for the potters’ field to bury strangers in.”

Last year Coroner Pedrick’s report showed more than 50 bodies interred at Farnhurst. Many were the unknown dead, lying unclaimed at the morgue. Others were inmates of the county asylums. Who they were, where they came from, and what tragedy of life was theirs, only the tiny white posts in Potter’s Field can tell.”

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Implies first burial happened in 1883. But Almshouse not built until 1884, not occupied until 1885. Guesstimate?