

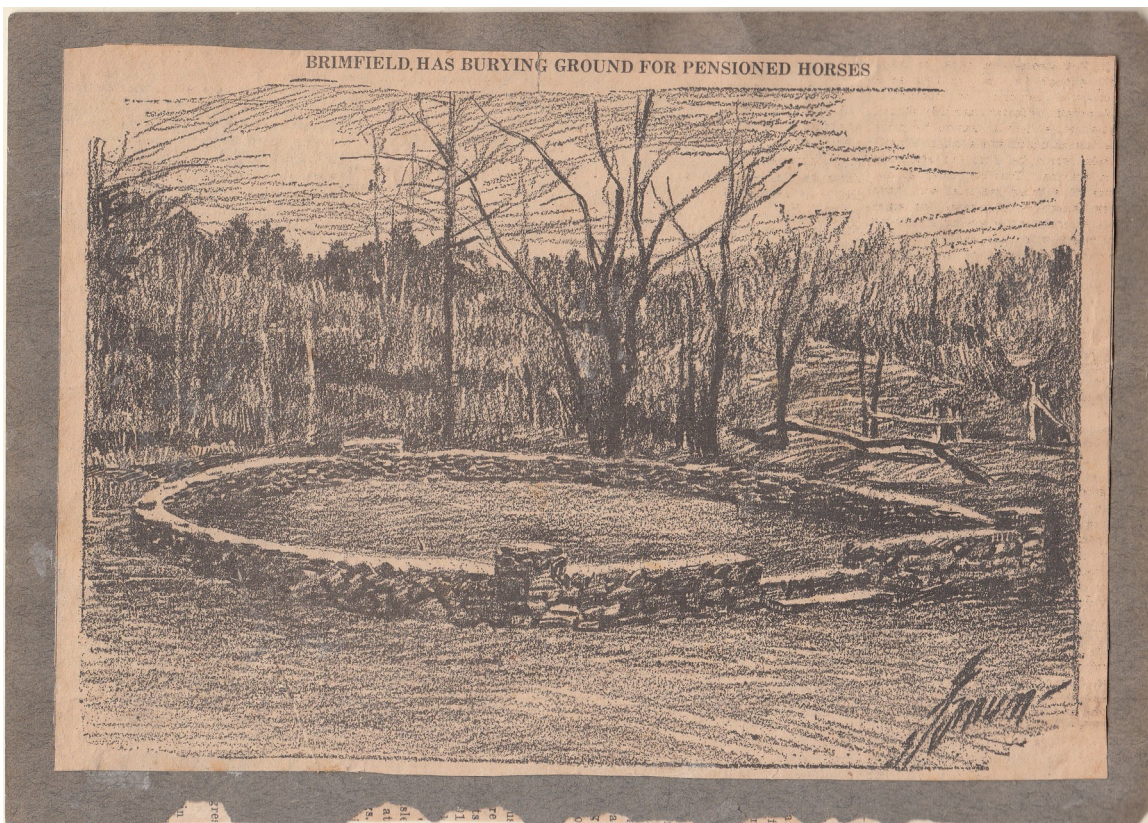
Treasures from the Sherman Room

An Introduction to Brimfield History from the Library's Historical Collections

March, 2020

Issue No. 3

The Horse Cemetery



Certainly the least known and yet most unique cemetery in the Town of Brimfield is the one off of Brookfield Road created as a tribute to one man's faithful horses. James Arthur Garfield Hoyt, a sawmill operator and former selectman, designed and constructed this unusual burial ground behind the centuries old Colonial homestead that for many years served as his and his sister's country home. The wall measures approximately 100 feet in circumference. It stands about 16 to 20 inches high and gives the visitor the impression of a mammoth horseshoe. The history of the Horse Cemetery is presented using actual newspaper clippings and photographs housed at the Sherman Room. A brief summary at the end will provide an update on this special treasure.

(The article below is copied from the Springfield Morning Union, dated November 25, 1976)

They're Riding Herd on the Past

by Frank Kitch,
Palmer Bureau Chief

This rural community of 2,155 population and 10 miles due west of Palmer is best known for the architectural splendor of its First Congregational Church of Colonial vintage and its tri-annual flea markets or sprawling Reid's Auction Acres. But – aside of some of this town's ancients and a splattering of the younger set, little is known of what could probably be the only legitimate private horse cemetery in the commonwealth and, perhaps, in New England.

It is the final resting place for members of an equine family which was intensely venerated by a man who owned, worked with and cared for them.

This is the story of the late James A.G. Hoyt and his horses. The cemetery, as Hoyt intended it to be, is a fitting tribute to what he always referred to as "Faithful Comrades."

The words, "Faithful Comrades," appear on a bronze plaque which is permanently fastened on top of a large boulder, serving as a general grave marker. This is the only monument inside the cemetery.

It thus is only right and proper to expound upon this special burial ground which was designed and constructed by Hoyt, a sawmill operator and wood-lumber businessman before the 1950s and earlier. Hoyt died 25 years ago in October, 1951.

The tidy and well-manicured and green-grassed cemetery is set off in a clearing behind the 200-year-old Colonial-style homestead, which, for many years, was the home of Hoyt and his sister, Miss Ila M.E. Hoyt, a retired registered nurse. The burial ground is located approximately a quarter of a mile from the farmhouse. It cannot be seen from Brookfield Road, the main highway, because it is screened by tall trees and usual rural growths. It can only be reached on foot, although years ago, it was possible to drive a motor vehicle or horse-and-buggy through an uplifted rural gate fence and proceeding up a rather long incline to reach the cemetery.

Today this is neither the wish nor the attitude of the present property-owners, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Morris who purchased the homestead and land from the Hoyt Estate over a decade ago. Mrs. Morris, when asked about the volume of visitations to the horses graves in recent years, replies that only a "handful of curious people have asked permission to pass through her property to reach the cemetery.

"They seem to be very cooperative by leaving their cars parked on Brookfield Road and walked through the old rustic gate and fence. According to Mr. Hoyt's old deed, visitors must be permitted."

Some of the town's older residents who knew Hoyt very well place him in a class as a generous, cooperative and understanding individual who harbored a fanatic love for his horses, especially the four which gave him service and companionship during the later years of his life.

Hoyt, who once served as Brimfield selectman for nine years, could see that his stalwart animals were inching towards the end of the road and he vowed his faithful mute servants deserved a just and fitting place after death. He lived to see four of them accorded an unusual and fitting burial. He finished his work on earth in 1951 at 71.

The green grass is mowed and there is not a sliver of paper or other refuse to be seen within or outside the enclosure, indicating the town and Mrs. Morris have been fulfilling Hoyt's last wishes for perpetual care of the plot.

The cemetery, to all intents and purposes, was well-planned and painstakingly constructed to the minutest specifics of Hoyt. A masonry wall of flat field stone has withstood mortal visitations and the

elements remarkably so well that there are no sections where the stones have disengaged.

The wall measures approximately 100 feet in circumference. It could go over a foot in height. It was ingeniously laid out to give off the appearance of a mammoth horse-shoe with the opening in front. At the opening is the large boulder with the bronze plaque. The first thing which catches the visitor's eye is the epitaph heading, "Faithful Comrades." Beneath are listed names and ages of horses in order of death. The first animal buried was obviously "Jerry," which died at age 31. We assume it was the first to die because the name heads the list. [Ed. Note: This apparently was a mistake since it's clear from the plaque that "Daisy" is the first horse listed.] Old-timers say "Jerry" was Hoyt's favorite mute companion. The horse was a general rural or farmal workhorse which, for many years, hauled timber to Hoyt's sawmill from nearby forests.



Other horses who were interred in order of death were: "Daisy," a driving horse, also 31; [Ed. Note: The second horse on the plaque is "Jerry."] "Dolly," 20, and "Peggy," 25, Hoyt's pet ponies. These were the four devoted animals which preceded Hoyt in death.

Nearby homesteaders have often spoken of Hoyt's sister talking about her brother and a horse he later he once sold and later reclaimed. This was "Peggy." He bought her back, the story goes, when the horse reached an advanced age and became of little or no use anymore to the other owner.

Hoyt's love for his dear animals did not stop with his death. He made sure of that in his last will and testament, bequeathing a \$400 fund to the town for perpetual care of the cemetery. He also willed the burial ground to the Town of Brimfield. At a later town meeting, voters accepted the money and gift of land.

For a number of years before Hoyt's sister died, the fund remained untouched in the town treasury because she assumed responsibility of keeping the cemetery tidy and grass cut as her brother wished. Since Miss Hoyt joined her brother in death, the Morrises and the town have kept Hoyt's wishes alive.

What's more, Hoyt, in his will, made sure the public was given the opportunity to visit this novel cemetery. In one of his final acts, Hoyt inserted a clause in the property deed for a right-of-way to allow access to the burial ground through the roadway and the rural fence in back of the farmhouse. He stipulated, "This right-of-way shall never be closed to the public."

Mrs. Morris said vehicles have not used this roadway since they took possession of the property.

According to record, a fifth horse found its eternal haven of rest about 1955. "Elite Dare," an American saddle horse, belonging to a Mrs. William Cox of Brimfield, was interred here. Mrs. Cox and her husband, according to folk lore, did the landscaping when this cemetery was constructed. In gratitude, Hoyt allowed "Elite Dare" be given a final resting place within the horseshoe enclosure after death at 15.

A subsequent article by the same reporter in the November 3-9, 1988 edition of The Journal Register noted several additional facts. Hoyt stated in his last will that "There will be one more horse buried there before the cemetery be closed to all future burials." After his death, the last recorded burial was an elderly pony belonging to Amherst College professor, William Haller, and his family, who were friends of the Hoyts. It was also noted that several other animals ended up in the enclosure, including, unofficially, Miss Hoyt's two pet goats.

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Jim Hoyt and one of his horses

(Unfortunately, over time the Horse Cemetery was abandoned and forgotten. The article below, copied from the Springfield Union-New, dated September 6, 1997 tells the story of its "rediscovery" by the town.)

Brimfield rediscovers horse cemetery

The graveyard was recently found when the selectmen's assistant was looking through old town records.

by Andrew Woodcock

Under a canopy of trees a half-mile deep into the woods east of Belchertown [sic] Road stands a cemetery that was nearly buried in a thicket of brush and trees.

It is the final resting place for four horses owned by James Arthur Garfield Hoyt, said Brimfield Cemetery Commissioner Henry Pelletier, as he approached the detailed monument on a half-acre deeded to the town.

"I just figured it was somebody laying out a bunch of rocks," said selectmen's assistant Carol DeNegro. "I never suspected something like this. I can't believe he went to this degree to honor his pets."

A knee-high rock wall in the shape of a horseshoe surrounds the plot, marked in the center by a bolder with a polished, engraved front naming the horses.

A close look shows that nail heads rise slightly above the shoe, staggered four feet apart. The toe grab is at the head of the shoe and two heel calks are at the end – all in stone.

The stone's heading reads, "Faithful Comrades." Pelletier says he doesn't know when Hoyt built it, but it was before World War II. Hoyt died in 1951.



Staff photo by MORRIS KENNEDY

Henry Pelletier and Roy Bacon, both of Brimfield, stand outside the horseshoe-shaped horse cemetery in Brimfield that was recently rediscovered, overgrown with brush and trees after decades of neglect.

A few weeks ago the burial site was known only to a few and invisible under the overgrowth, DelNegro said. She said she rediscovered the site when sifting through some town files, and realized that the town owns the landlocked property. She also found a trust fund established to maintain the property.

She decided to visit it and knew exactly whom to call.

"I knew it was here. I'd been here with old man Hoyt," Pelletier said.

When the two trekked to the site, they couldn't immediately find it. "We tripped over it, it was so overgrown," Pelletier said.

The town owns a right of way through Thomas Keough's property, [Ed. Note: The Keoughs owned the property after Hoyt but before the Morrises.] but a beaver dam has flooded that route under two feet of water, Pelletier said.

Hoyt had taken stones from two walls not far from the final resting spot. He picked rocks of similar size – oval shapes just bigger than two hands cupped together – and cemented them together.

"There's a trust fund established (by Hoyt) so it can be maintained," DelNegro said. "It will at least get periodic maintenance."

"He left it to the town to take care of it, so I spent it – some of it," Pelletier said.

Pelletier hired Roy Bacon, a Brimfield resident who maintains one other town cemetery. Bacon cleared the overgrowth, cut a few trees and may be asked to cut a few more, Pelletier said.

The reclamation is a special project for Pelletier, who occasionally worked for Hoyt.

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CURRENT STATUS OF THE HORSE CEMETERY

- Access is no longer available to the public. Industrious Brimfield beavers have constructed a dam which has flooded the Right of Way.
- The Brimfield Cemetery Commission continues to provide maintenance on the cemetery several times a year. A private landowner has graciously granted permission for the necessary access.
- The fund that Hoyt bequested to the Town still exists and is managed by the Cemetery Commissioners. It has grown to approximately \$3400 and is used to cover maintenance work at the Horse Cemetery.