Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as The Alexandria Times and Advertiser

Out of the Attic

Establishing Ivy Hill Cemetery

Alexandria Times, March 1, 2012

Image: Ivy Hill Cemetery, 2823 King Street. Photo, Alexandria Library, Special Collections.

In the early 19th century, the Alexandria Common Council prohibited opening new cemeteries. As a result, many churches established new burial grounds in a cluster along Wilkes Street. Around the same time, about a mile beyond Alexandria's city limits, another site was being used as a family burial ground. But in the mid-1850s, this location, northwest of town, became Ivy Hill Cemetery.

In 1854, a group of proprietors organized a new cemetery to be initially funded by stock sales. In June, a site of about 23 acres, described by a local paper as a "beautiful tract of land," was selected. At the time, plans called for the new cemetery to have a keeper's house, chapel and receiving vault. For each $25 share, subscribers would be entitled to a lot, but with no more than four lots per person, and the sale of other lots would fund improvements.

In March 1855, once the sale was finalized, stockholders met and elected a president and board of directors. At that point, nearly 80 burial lots had already been sold at this new cemetery on a hillside near Timber Branch, but it was not officially called Ivy Hill Cemetery until later that year.

On June 18, 1856, Ivy Hill Cemetery was formally dedicated in a ceremony featuring hymns and prayers. Guests could take advantage of a special horse-drawn omnibus, which departed from the corner of King and Washington streets every 15 minutes that day. On November 17, 1856, Ivy Hill dedicated a monument near the entrance in memory of seven firefighters killed a year earlier. Several members of the Alexandria Fire Department have been buried there since, including the recently departed Joshua Weissman.

This early 20th-century photograph shows the main Ivy Hill building that still stands today at 2823 King St.