



Potter's Field

By Kathy Jordan

It is possible that the present Potter's Field, located across the road from the Department of Energy Compound and north of the City of Grand Junction Police Department shooting range, was the first cemetery in Grand Junction.

An 1882 news recap in the Dec. 29, 1883, Grand Junction News reported Baby Garland, who died in 1881, was the first to be buried in the "new town cemetery." B.A. Scott and P.H. Gordon in pursuit of cattle rustlers, drowned in 1882 while attempting to cross the Grand (now Colorado) River, were the second and third burials.

While the news article mentioned no specific west Orchard Mesa area as the town cemetery, it is surmised that it was located at the present Potter's Field site. According to early records, the area was public domain land when those burials occurred.

There was a great deal of activity near the site at the time, because the railroad was pushing west. Many people lived there while the railroad bridge was being built across the river.

In 1883, Joseph Harper filed for his homestead on acreage that included the Potter's Field site. He then sold 50 acres to Gen. William Palmer, founder of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. The site of what is now Potter's Field was part of that 50 acres.

There were no known burials during the time Palmer owned the property. Palmer died in 1909.

In 1911, the Palmer estate sold the Potter's Field property to C.L. Connelly. According to records there were five known burials in Potter's Field, two in 1911 and two in 1913, and the last burial in 1936.

Connelly sold the property to James Rankin in February 1919, and Rankin re-sold the cemetery to the City of Grand Junction that same day. The first time the property was referred to as "Potter's Field" came after the city had purchased the property.

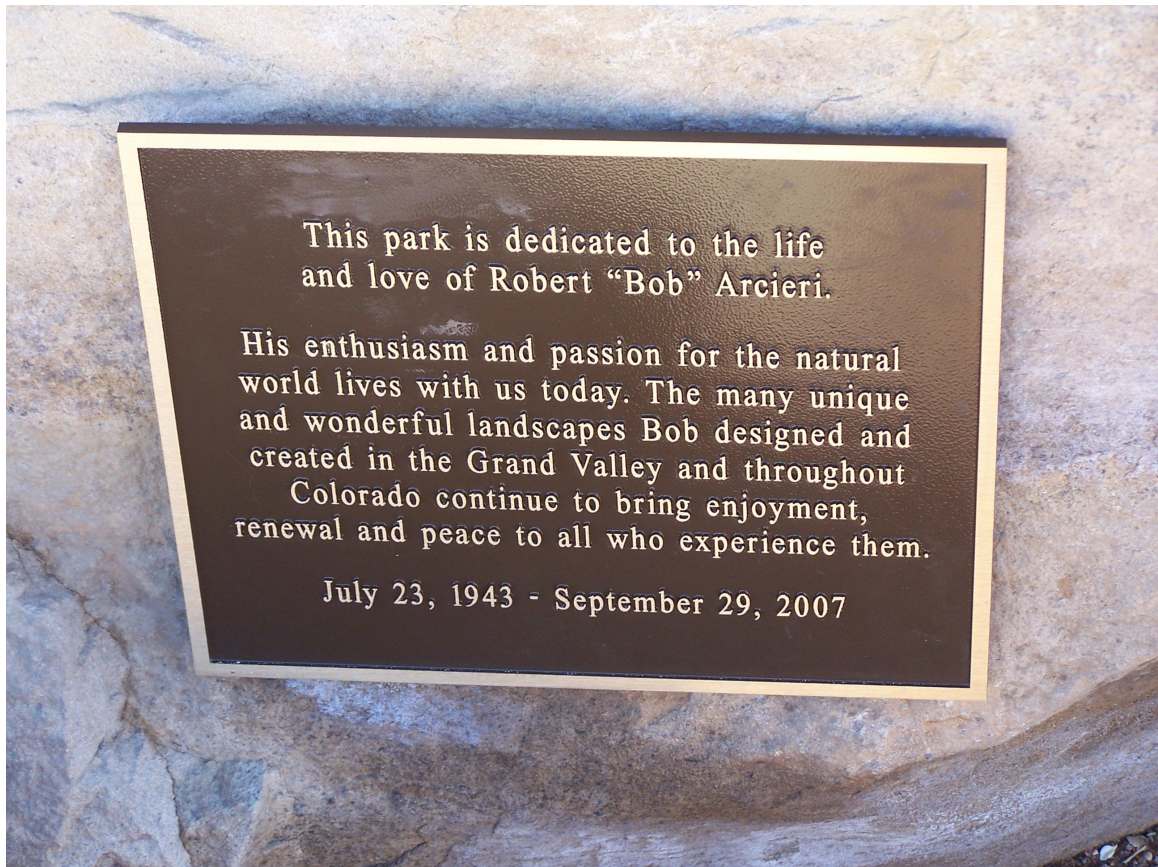
Because those buried there, or their families, didn't purchase perpetual care from the city, Grand Junction doesn't maintain it.

Research for this column turned up other "Potter's fields". A current map of the area shows a Potter's Field at the northeast corner of B $\frac{3}{4}$ and 26 Roads where it turns south to go to the Department of Energy. A 1964 map in a cemetery report done by the City of Grand Junction identifies Block E as "Potter's Field". Records show that in 1894 the county purchased a small piece of ground about one-half acre just to the north of the better known "Potter's Field". It is not known if the county used it then as a burial ground, but at some point the city may have acquired the property. The county also operated a "Paupers Field" in what is now Section D of the Orchard Mesa Cemetery.

In 1985 the local chapter of the Telephone Pioneers of American approached the City of Grand Junction about adopting the long-forgotten and neglected Potter's Field. Each year they have a "work party" to clean up this historic cemetery and in doing so have preserved, protected and cared for it for the last 15 years.

This year was no exception. On May 17, 11 members cut down weeds and picked up five bags of trash. They trimmed the sagebrush, careful not to remove it because sagebrush slows erosions. They also painted the gate and oiled the cedar sign that they had made for the cemetery several years ago. Members do all of this at their own expense to preserve this important part of our heritage. Once it is gone, it can't be replaced. On the back of the sign are the names of those who are known to be buried in the cemetery.

Thank you members of the Telephone Pioneers for your efforts in preserving this early-day cemetery in memory of those pioneers who gave so much in the early days to help establish the young city on the Western Frontier. The past needs to be recognized to ensure a better future.



This park is dedicated to the life
and love of Robert "Bob" Arcieri.

His enthusiasm and passion for the natural
world lives with us today. The many unique
and wonderful landscapes Bob designed and
created in the Grand Valley and throughout
Colorado continue to bring enjoyment,
renewal and peace to all who experience them.

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