

History of Oak Grove Cemetery

Oak Grove Cemetery in Eagle, Wisconsin has one of the earliest and most quietly significant histories in the Town of Eagle. Its story reflects the settlement of the community, the early churches, and the families who shaped the town's civic and cultural identity.

Origins and Early Development (1840s–1850s)

Oak Grove Cemetery was **established in 1844**, making it one of Eagle's oldest organized burial grounds. Articles of incorporation were enacted in **1853**, formalizing its governance and care.

In its earliest decades, the cemetery was closely tied to Eagle's early religious life. It was known variously as:

- **Presbyterian Cemetery** — reflecting the influence of early Protestant settlers.
- **Potter's Field** — a name sometimes applied to sections where the indigent or unidentified were buried.

Who Is Buried There: A Cross-Section of Eagle's Early Community

Oak Grove holds many of Eagle's earliest settlers and community builders. The burial list includes:

- **Pioneer families** such as the Klines, Betts, Bigelows, Severances, and Brewins.
- **Civic leaders and land donors**, including members of the Kline and Way families.
- **Early New England-born settlers** who migrated west during Wisconsin's territorial period.
- **Immigrant families**, especially from New York, Vermont, and northern Europe.
- **Dr. Peter Grems**, the first veterinary doctor in the Wisconsin Territory.
- **Civil War veterans** such as Philip Bovee, John Adam Draper, Merritt Draper, William Harrison, Henry James, George M. Logan, and Joseph B. Titus.

These burials make Oak Grove a primary source for understanding Eagle's demographic, military, and cultural history from the mid-19th century onward.

Landscape and Character

Oak Grove is a modest, rural cemetery typical of early Wisconsin settlements:

- Located on the **south side of the railroad tracks**, near the historic center of Eagle.

- Characterized by **simple headstones**, many of which reflect 19th-century funerary styles.
- Contains a mix of family plots, individual pioneer graves, and veterans' markers.

Its small size and early date make it a companion to other local cemeteries such as Oak Ridge, St. Theresa's, and Melendy Prairie, but Oak Grove remains the earliest formal burial ground in the immediate village area.

Preservation and Restoration Efforts

In recent years, Oak Grove has undergone significant restoration:

- Volunteers from the **Eagle Cemetery Preservation Association** and community members have cleared brush, removed invasive vegetation, and raised funds to repair broken stones.
- On **October 23, 2021**, a new entry sign—hand-crafted by local metalworker **Carl Roeker**—was installed, modeled after the long-lost original sign.
- Restoration work continues, reflecting Eagle's commitment to preserving its pioneer heritage.

These efforts have helped stabilize the cemetery and restore its historical visibility.

Why Oak Grove Matters to Eagle's Story

Oak Grove Cemetery is significant because it:

- Anchors the **earliest phase of Eagle's settlement** (1840s–1850s).
- Preserves the memory of **founding families** and **Civil War veterans**.
- Reflects the evolution of Eagle's religious and civic institutions.
- Serves as a physical record of the town's demographic and cultural shifts.
- Connects directly to other historical sites in Eagle, including the railroad corridor and early churches.

For local historians, genealogists, and the Eagle Historical Society, Oak Grove is a foundational site for understanding how the community formed and grew.