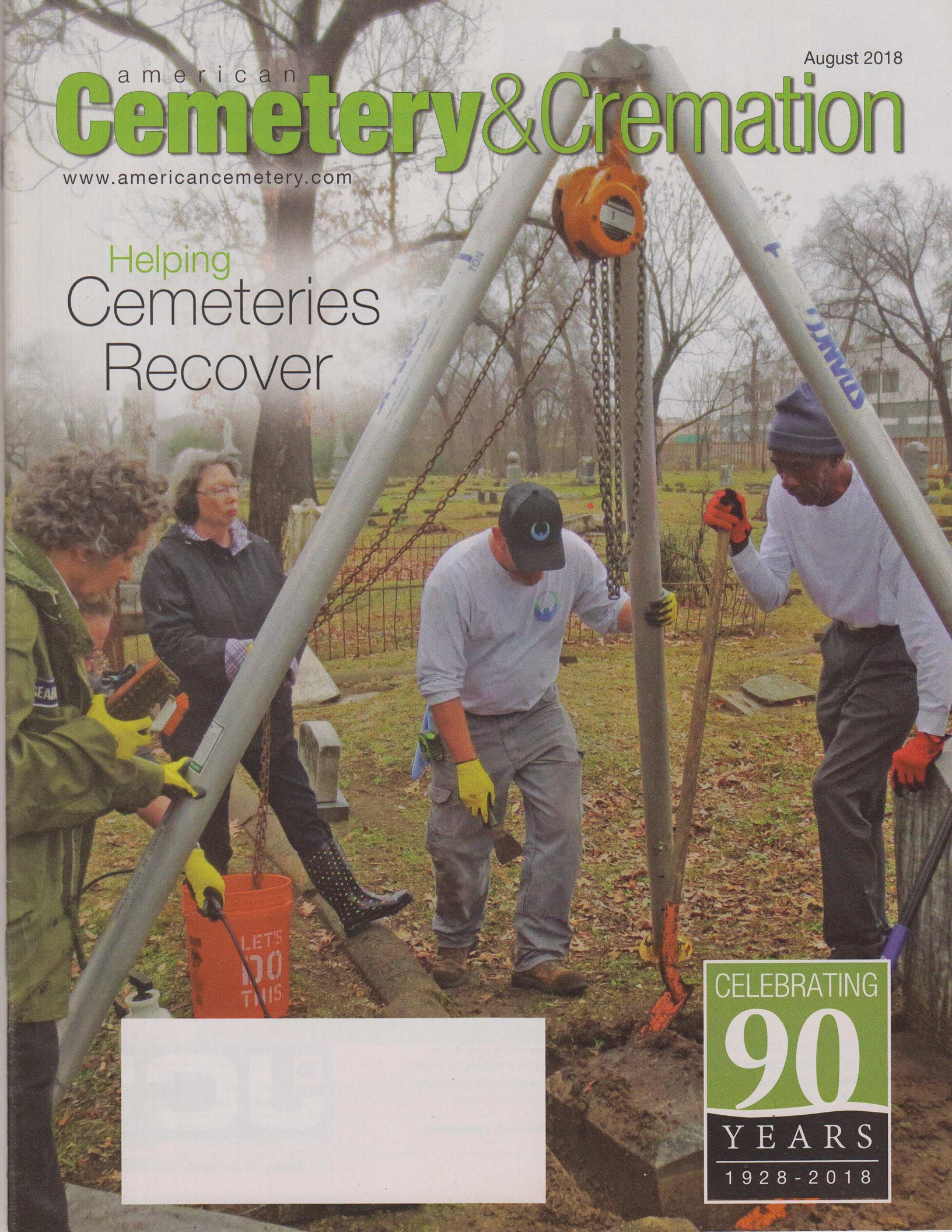


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Editor's Message

[Patti Martin Bartsche]

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Things Change

One of my things to do each month in *American Cemetery & Cremation* is to find the quotes that appear on the back page of the issue. This month's focus is on nature ... something I believe *everyone* – not just cemeterians – should be thinking about.

When I should have been writing this letter, I was looking for quotes for next month's issue and stumbled upon this quote from author Stephen Chbosky: *Things change. And friends leave. Life doesn't stop for anybody.* (You can read more quotes about change next month).

Change, though, is a good way to describe this issue.

We have interviews with Mitch Rose, the new president of the Cremation Association of North America; and David LaBarre, the new executive director of the Catholic Cemetery Conference.

We also look at how cemeteries can change their ways, and become more welcoming places for their community, its individuals and their deceased.

Finally, raising funds for much-needed repairs is something many cemeteries struggle with. For Highland Cemetery in Ypsilanti, Michigan, a novel idea to repurpose unused land now has the cemetery seeing green – environmentally and economically.

Patti Martin Bartsche

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



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Green

By Paula Strenski
and Maggie Brandt

Harvesting Perpetual Light

There are hundreds of historic cemeteries in Michigan.

Ypsilanti's Highland Cemetery, among the most storied of these, is nestled on a natural wooded bluff along the northeastern shores of the Huron River. To the south, river flats are marked with various concrete and iron relics of bygone industrial days. To the west is a wooded area that includes protected wetlands. To the north are the cemetery's undeveloped grassy fields and knolls, which slope gently down and away from Highland's plotted areas. At the northeast corner, the land slopes steeply down to the intersection of Ypsilanti's historic River Street, which runs along its eastern border, and Clark Road along the north end.

Dedicated July 14, 1864, Highland is an example of traditional rural cemetery design, which began in the early 1800s. Cemeteries in North America and Europe became planned landscapes, characterized by an emphasis on the contours of the countryside with minimal impact on natural landforms. Highland's original 40 acres were purchased in 1863 for use as a burial ground by an association of 25 prominent Ypsilanti businessmen. The founding association appointed a nine-member board of directors, who commissioned Col.

James Lewis Glen of Niles, Michigan, to design and construct the cemetery.

Highland, the third of three Michigan cemeteries Glen designed, is often described as a landscape architecture masterpiece. It features a garden-like setting of winding roads and walkways, enhanced with flower beds, ornamental shrubbery and native varieties of oak, pine, willow and cedar trees. The wooded areas were preserved to provide habitat for wildlife.

Still owned by the cemetery association, although zoned as park land, Highland Cemetery is a cherished gem among Ypsilanti's original green spaces.

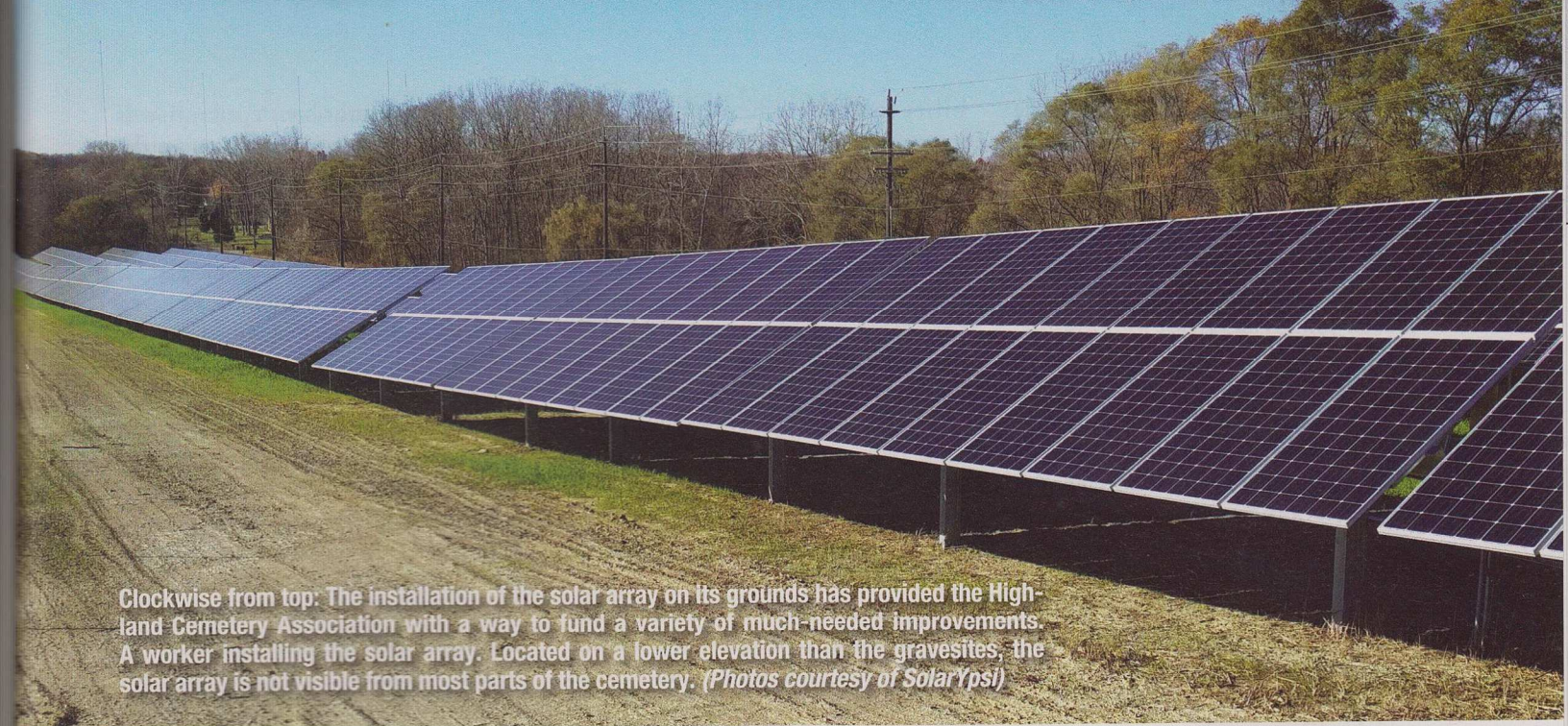
Highland continues to offer solace and a sense of timelessness and spaciousness to today's visitors. Although it is relatively small compared to the sprawling plains of mid-to-late 20th century memorial gardens, it's easy to lose one's sense of direction and location while casually strolling Highland's looping, hilly and wooded pathways. Deer and foxes have been sighted. Bald eagles regularly perch in the tallest evergreen treetops. For visitors in cars, a small sign at the cemetery entrance recommends four-wheel drive for traversing Highland's steeper lanes.

Gardeners tasked with trimming Highland's vegetation must frequently

rely on smaller implements to accommodate its challenging slopes and valleys. Mowing decks aside, this style of cemetery is worthy of preservation for its natural beauty. Although none of our family members are buried there, we are among the devoted amblers of its paths – the grounds are so tranquil and mesmerizing.

Typical of cemeteries originating in the 19th century, Highland holds monuments honoring veterans of several American wars, and prominent pioneering families. One impressive example is the monument erected in memory of Capt. Mortimer Rosecrants, a West Point graduate from the class of 1837, who was promoted to brevet captain Aug. 20, 1847, for "gallant and meritorious conduct in the battles of Contreras and Churubusco, Mexico." He died in Ypsilanti the following year at age 30. The tall square stone, flanked with small canons, was funded in 1867 by officers of his regiment, 19 years after his death.

Several beautiful structures were added during Highland's first 50 years. A caretaker's cottage and smaller office/storehouse were built in the Swiss Chalet style near the entrance. These were later relocated a short distance to make room for a



Clockwise from top: The installation of the solar array on its grounds has provided the Highland Cemetery Association with a way to fund a variety of much-needed improvements. A worker installing the solar array. Located on a lower elevation than the gravesites, the solar array is not visible from most parts of the cemetery. (Photos courtesy of SolarYpsi)

towering carriage and pedestrian gateway donated by the Leetch family. Completed in 1912, the gates were crafted with field stone pillars and decorative wrought iron. According to cemetery records, the stonemason may have been William Wilson of Ann Arbor.

Not far from the gates is the centerpiece of Highland Cemetery, Starkweather Memorial Chapel, commissioned by local philanthropist Mary Ann Starkweather, widow of John Starkweather. Designed in the Richardson Romanesque style (named for American architect Henry Hobson Richardson), Starkweather Chapel was designed by architects Mason & Rice of Detroit, well-known for their work in this style. Dedicated in 1889, the Starkweather Chapel also features Tiffany stained-glass windows.

A larger receiving vault of canyon sandstone and ornamental doors was commissioned by the Quirk family and dedicated in September 1906. A receiving vault was needed during the cold winter months, when the ground was frozen and graves could not be dug. Caskets were more securely stored in receiving vaults while awaiting burial, safe from local grave-robbing medical students. The architects for the receiving vault were Donaldson & Meier of Detroit.

Highland is also home to the first mausoleum in Washtenaw County, commissioned by the Brayton family in 1914. The Brayton Mausoleum was built of Vermont gray granite and Italian marble, with bronze grill doors.

Local families continue to commission memorial enhancements to Highland's distinctive grounds. The cemetery entranceway was recently graced with the addition of a towering wrought iron archway sign, designed to complement the



106-year-old iron and fieldstone cemetery gates. An ornamental iron banner, supported by wrought iron newel posts, was designed and forged by blacksmith Ron Bishop of Ypsilanti. The ironwork is supported by a fieldstone base crafted by local stonemason Johnny Beverly.

These days, the most expensive work of historic cemetery stewardship is taking care of older buildings. Due to the trend away from in-ground burials, cemeteries everywhere, including Highland, are experiencing budget shortfalls. Cash-flow problems pervade all civic life in a smaller Rust Belt town; the demands of daily life leave little for the preservation of memorials erected during boom times.

Historic preservation groups offer valuable opportunities for increased publicity and occasional restoration funding partnerships. In August 1989, Highland Cemetery was recognized as a historic site by the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission. The designation allows the Highland Cemetery Association to apply for grant money to offset the costs of preserving specific historic features. Although such grants are a vital source of support for project expenses, cemetery stewards still must struggle to stave off the deterioration of these landmarks from the ravages of time.

As are many community organizations, the Highland Cemetery Association is constantly looking for innovative fundraising ideas to achieve its goals. Social media can be helpful for short-term fundraising efforts. A recent GoFundMe campaign to raise money for the restoration of Starkweather Memorial Chapel brought in several hundred dollars from a few generous citizens. However, this amount represented a tiny fraction of what was needed for repairs that would stabilize this landmark building. The cemetery needed a long-term plan to raise money. Fortunately, a serendipitous proposal emerged, seemingly out of the blue.

In the spring of 2015, Ypsilanti city officials contacted the Highland cemetery board regarding the possi-

bility of the cemetery leasing a narrow 3.5-acre area of the cemetery's unused north end to DTE Energy, the region's main utility company. DTE was looking for a location to install an array of ground-mounted solar panels to expand its renewable energy program. To DTE, the north edge of the cemetery's vacant grasslands appeared to be just the place for a solar energy installation.

So began the journey to harvest sunlight in order to fund a cemetery's historic preservation dreams.

It is ironic, cemetery officials say, that a giant power-producing corporation 40 miles away in Detroit would look at a satellite image of a small historic cemetery and see a solution to its solar energy expansion goals.

But that is exactly what happened.

A manufactured grid of silicon rectangles in aluminum frames, the visual antithesis of meandering pathways through a nature sanctuary, would blossom into a perennial source of revenue for Highland.

City of Ypsilanti as Matchmaker

How did this partnership come about? Backing up a few years to 2012, DTE Energy announced that the company was looking for high-visibility locations to install a one-megawatt array of solar panels to expand its Solar Currents renewable energy program. A volunteer group of solar power enthusiasts, locally known as SolarYpsi, started looking at maps to find a potential site from among the city's unused parcels. With the free technical assistance of SolarYpsi, the city of Ypsilanti submitted a proposal to put solar panels on vacant city-owned land near Interstate 94.

The 7-acre parcel near the highway seemed ideal for a solar panel installation. It was a popular area for billboard advertising, next to an interchange that served as the city's gateway. Although visible and convenient, it was not attractive to developers because it was hilly, wooded, and overgrown. Decades earlier the land had been the site of a city dump.

DTE saw the highway location as a great opportunity to showcase the Solar Currents program to millions

of passing motorists. Ypsilanti was delighted to be selected. Leasing the undeveloped land would generate much needed revenue, while helping to showcase the transformation of a former factory town into an attractive, future-oriented community.

SolarYpsi was dedicated to powering the transformation.

By 2012 SolarYpsi had a solid seven-year track record of bringing solar power to schools, nonprofit organizations, city-owned buildings and homes. It had been hosting free monthly public talks, educating scores of local people about the benefits of using solar power in Michigan. For Ypsilanti and SolarYpsi, this would be the biggest and most exciting solar project to date.

Unfortunately, DTE soon got cold feet about the I-94 site. During the planning phase, potential hazards and accompanying liabilities soon emerged. The land's prior use as a landfill immediately raised legal concerns about the possible leakage of toxic substances. DTE decided to pursue other locations.

DTE then considered an empty portion of a small airport 10 miles to the west. However, the airport location drew a great deal of local opposition. Many nearby residents felt that a large array of solar panels would ruin the character of their neighborhood. When SolarYpsi volunteers learned of the airport site's rejection, they decided to initiate new discussions with DTE to explore whether another Ypsilanti location could be considered. During these discussions, the open grasslands of Highland Cemetery came to light.

A New Hope

Currently about three quarters of Highland Cemetery's 75 acres is occupied – home to about 16,000 graves. On the north end are several acres of open grasslands that slope down and away from the original plotted areas. The downward slope offered an ideal location for a solar array in several respects.

From Clark Road and River Street, the installation of solar panels would be hard to miss. Clark

Road was already lined with utility poles, convenient for supplying solar generated electricity to the local power grid. For cemetery visitors, the solar panels would be out of sight, on the blind side of the hill, not visible unless they were willing to hike over the unlandscaped field to the extreme northeast corner of the property.

Initially – and not surprisingly – the idea of a large solar array at the cemetery also inspired a few voices of opposition among both neighbors and cemetery board members. Most of these were concerns about aesthetics. One person lamented, “The tall grasses and empty fields are scenically calming,” fearing the view from

Shepherding Electrons

In early spring of 2015, all rezoning requirements were swiftly satisfied. Installing the panels took just a few months. The installation work never disturbed cemetery visitors or operations. DTE’s workers used an entirely separate entrance so that trucks could come and go without using the cemetery’s main gate or interior driveways.

Pre-existing power lines along Clark Road provided easy access for the electricians, requiring only a small transformer to be installed near the array. The project remains fully enclosed by a chain-link fence to prevent visitors and wildlife from stumbling into them.



The solar array on a sunny day. (Photo courtesy of Solar Ypsi)

the neighboring Catholic cemetery might be altered. Realizing that Highland’s visitors would not be able to see any of the solar installation from the gravesites, and that there could be significant revenue generated for the cemetery, most people were soon extremely supportive of the Solar Currents project.

Highland Cemetery Association trustee Barry LaRue pointed out that the section of the property the array was planned for was a lower elevation than the gravesites and would not be visible from most other parts of the cemetery.

“My first thought was that it was going to be respectful, and the revenue would allow us to work on the historical assets in the cemetery,” LaRue said.

The 844-kilowatt installation consists of 2,520 solar panels arranged in four rows. This is enough electricity, on average, to power about 160 homes. In November 2015, DTE hosted public tours of the completed solar array. Throughout the construction phase of the project, the cemetery did not incur any additional costs or demands on its small staff. Highland is collecting \$20,000 per year from DTE for the lease of the parcel. The current lease is for 10 years, with an option to renew for an additional 10. At the conclusion of the lease, DTE will remove the panels and hardware and restore the grassland.

The City of Ypsilanti is also receiving revenue from this project, mostly in the form of taxes and fees

paid by DTE. Highland Cemetery Association’s board members also wanted to recognize the city help in locating the DTE Solar Currents program on cemetery property and elected to share a percentage of the of the rent with the city for the duration of the lease.

A Green Light for Copper Flashing and Red Tiles

Usually one wouldn’t want a cemetery to be an especially busy place, but Highland Cemetery is thrilled with the extra activity. The cemetery is moving forward with restoring beloved landmarks to their original splendor, as well as making improvements that satisfy today’s structural safety codes.

According to cemetery board members, the first two lease payments paid for a new roof on the caretaker’s cottage, asphalt for some of the cemetery driveways and the replacement of underground water lines.

Plans are underway to replace the roof of Starkweather Chapel, bring the electrical circuits up to code and install climate control systems. The new roof will be built of red tiles similar to the original roof. New copper gutters on the tower, as well as copper coping, flashing and flat work will be installed at the same time.

Future repairs include fixing or replacing brickwork, wood trim, insulation and plaster. The chapel may someday be able to serve as a multiple-purpose venue for special occasions. Also on the list of future restoration projects are repairs to some of the chapel’s original furniture.

The cemetery association, LaRue said, is pleased with its decision to partner with DTE.

“Not only is it increasing the amount of alternative energy being generated in our community, but the income stream flowing to Highland will help us preserve one of the premier 19th-century landscapes,” LaRue said. “We see it as a perfect melding of the past, present and future.”

Managing editor Patti Martin Bartsche contributed to this story. •