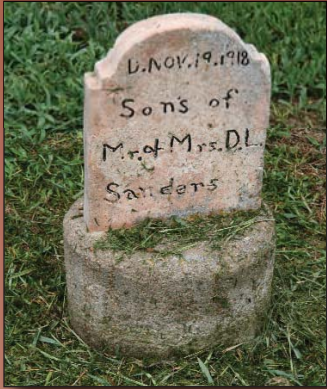


# GREAT BEND AREA Cemetery Tours



Cemeteries tell the stories of our past. They are the stories of our people, art and culture.

Long after they are gone, the people who first sought out this land hold power over us. They are the reminders of our legacy. Wander into almost any Kansas cemetery and the tombstones tell

stories of how generations before us lived and died.

## There are stories that can intrigue.

Before you visit the cemeteries of Barton and Stafford County, we invite you to familiarize yourself with the local history. Go to the Barton County Historical Society museum complex to become acquainted with how this region was settled and who has lived here.

The **Great Bend Cemetery** on Broadway was developed in the late 1890s. In this cemetery, alone, more than 12,000 people are buried, some with extravagant headstones and monuments carved and placed by hand, horse and wagon; others, with simple, poignant stones.

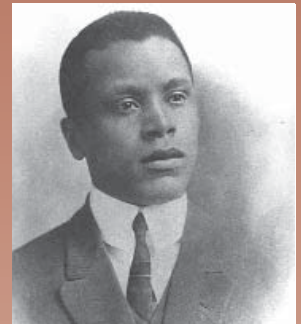
One story includes Arthur Banta, a Great Bend attorney and son of a prominent judge who was found dead on July 6, 1921. The 31-year-old Banta had been shot six times and was left lying by his car on a dusty, forgotten road west of town. His death shocked the region and was the talk of the town for weeks.

Great Bend residents reeled that summer of 1921 when The Great Bend Tribune carried the story that his killer was none other than W.A. Nixon, the local doctor who performed abortions and was linked to bootlegging liquor. The murder had all the elements that could be volatile in Kansas: abortion and prohibition. By Dec. 3, 1921, Nixon had been sentenced to prison and Banta's tombstone was placed in the Banta's family plots in of **Section P** of the Great Bend Cemetery.

In fact, **Section P** is the oldest section of the cemetery. Walk among the stones and see the names of prominent

early families of Great Bend. One of the tombstones you will find in **Section P** along a circular drive in the cemetery is that Oscar Micheaux, one of the nation's foremost black movie producers.

His family moved to this area in the early 1900s. Some of his family members homesteaded near Seward, located near the Barton and Stafford County border.



Like most pioneers, the Micheaux family survived harsh winds, floods, droughts and crop failures. But unlike many of their neighbors, they also survived prejudice during the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Kansas.

Some of those experiences may have had an impact on a young Micheaux because he went on to become one of the most prolific movie producers of the early 20th century. His topics included lynchings, white on black crimes and interracial discrimination. His 1919-1920 movie, "Within Our Gates" was his answer to "Birth of a Nation," produced in 1915. For years, his grave was unmarked. But in 1988, a tombstone proclaiming him "a man ahead of his time" was placed on his grave, paid for by family, friends and fans. He is buried next to his brother, Swan.

In recent years, the community of Great Bend has celebrated Micheaux with a film festival held every other year to which national celebrities are invited. Other Micheaux family members are buried not only in the **Great Bend Cemetery** but also in the **Eden Valley Cemetery** near Seward.

Other stories that may intrigue us include those of frontier justice and lynchings. At least two lynchings are connected to Great Bend. The Great Bend Tribune

reported on April 30, 1885 that George Mack was lynched by a vigilante crowd and hung for killing Frank H. Parker, owner of a local billiard hall.

Local historian Karen Neuforth writes of the lynching: "A rope was tied to Mack's neck and he was drug behind a horse and rider toward town. Probably already dead long before the growing lynch mob reached Great Bend, Mack's body was drug around the courthouse square and then over to the billiard hall where the murder had been committed. There he was strung up from the awning and one of the crowd fired a shotgun blast through his body. "The second lynching occurred in June 1898 when John Becker was hung for the murder of Myrtle Hoffmeister, age 15. The Great Bend Tribune's June 18, 1898 headlines read: "The work done deliberately and well. "The following story: "For the third time in the history of Great Bend Judge Lynch has taken the law in his own hands and for the second time has been successful in avenging a cold-blooded murder. "Both lynched men are believed to have been buried in unmarked pauper's graves in the Great Bend Cemetery; historians are uncertain because sexton's records were destroyed in a 1930s fire. The pauper's section was located at the far western edge of the cemetery near a row of trees.

What is certain is that the Tribune reported Myrtle Hoffmeister was carried away to Great Bend's "City of the Dead" -- **Section Q, Row D, Lot 14.**

As you wander through the rows of tombstones in the **Great Bend Cemetery**, you may notice the vast numbers of Civil War veterans. Why so many? *Blame Mary Bickerdyke*. The beloved Civil War nurse served on 19 Civil War battlefields following the Union battle line through Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana and Georgia. She also founded nearly 300 hospitals along the way to aid the wounded. After the war, Bickerdyke traveled to Chicago, borrowed \$10,000 from a bank and brought 300 homeless Union veterans and their families to the Salina area on free fares she begged from the Union Pacific Railroad. In Salina, she operated the Bickerdyke House, offering a social center for homesteading veterans. Word spread and the veterans came settling first in nearby counties and then, throughout the state.

Some of the stories in the **Great Bend Cemetery** become, in time, just numbers, particularly when it comes to children's deaths. At the turn of the 20th century, one of every nine babies born in Kansas died before its second birthday, according to the State Board of Health. Toward the south portion of the **Great Bend cemetery**, directly north of the cemetery office and maintenance buildings is the **infant burial section**. Stroll into the section and it's not unusual to see Hot Wheels toy cars left on the stones, puppy dogs etched into memorials, ceramic angels and other tokens to show us, the living, how much these lives once mattered. Some of the graves in this cemetery were dug following massive epidemics such as when smallpox swept the area during the winter of 1882 and 1883 or in 1918 when the world's deadliest outbreak of influenza came to Kansas. Some called it the Spanish Lady. Old-timers called it the grippe. German soldiers called it Flanders Fever. One in every four Americans caught the flu and 12,000 Kansans died of it or its complications. In fact, wander into almost any cemetery and there are reminders of the 1918 flu.

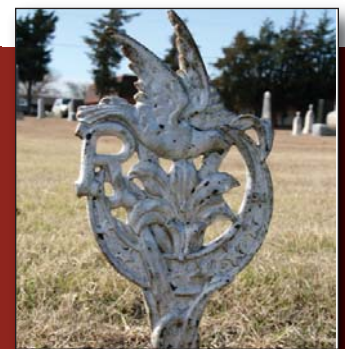
## Trends

Like most cemeteries, Kansas in the mid-19th century often had tombstones with warning messages encouraging visitors to the graveside to get religion. By the beginning of the 20th century, Kansas's cemeteries started to take on grand designs, becoming a source of community pride, such as the **Great Bend Cemetery**. People landscaped, planted trees and put in benches to encourage passers-by to stop.

During the 1930s and 1940s, commercially made tombstones with basic information about the person buried underneath became popular because they were less costly than handmade stones.

By the 1950s, the trend had shifted into making cemeteries resemble golf courses. Memorial parks with walkways and identical bronze markers on each grave were common, as were flat tombstones lying close to the ground.

In more recent decades the trend has shifted and memorial stones have become bold. There are custom





## Common 19th symbols and their meanings often inscribed on stones include:

**Angel:** A flying angel means rebirth or resurrection. Trumpeting is symbolic of resurrection. Weeping is grief and mourning. The angel serves as a messenger between God and man. Look for angels on children and women's grave. And, although her stone has faded with time, in Section P, look for Elizabeth Wyman's stone to show a late 19th century depiction of an angel.

**Dove:** The dove symbolizes purity, love and the Holy Spirit. In Section P, look for Joyce Riegel's stone with a dove carved on top.

**Garland:** Victory over death is symbolized in a garland and one such example can be found on Oliver Aber's grave in section P.

**Hands:** The hands were particularly popular on stones in the late 19th century. Section P has several examples such as is found on Rev. P.P. Wesley's stone or Nancy and Jacob Kemmeling's stones. Two hands means a partnership. A handshake means farewell, friendship and unity. A hand with a finger pointing up points the pathway to heaven's reward. A hand pointing down depicts God reaching down from above.

**Lamb:** Baby lambs symbolize innocence. Often found on children's graves such as on Hilas Fair's stone.

**Heart:** The heart means devotion. In the veteran's circle of the cemetery near Broadway, look for Leonard Klusener's stone as an example of a heart symbolizing devotion.

**Crossed swords or cannons:** In Section P, an example highlighting a person's military service is in Ira Brougher's stone, which has an eagle and cannons carved on the stone.

**Door or gate:** The entrance to heaven is symbolized with a door or gate. In Section P, look for Claudia Watson's stone with a heavenly gate and dove. While exploring the cemetery, look for other symbols as you pass the memorial stones. Take note of the Civil War soldiers of the Grand Army of the Republic. Their stones have been in a circle toward the west portion of the cemetery. Another Veterans Circle is located on the south side of the cemetery near Broadway.

laser etchings, porcelain photographs, epitaphs, emblems, vases and bronze statues.

The most popular stones are black granite imported from India, Africa, and China with laser etchings using photographs or compilations of photographs that had meaning in a person's life.

The upright stones have made resurgence.

At the **Great Bend Cemetery** all these trends are easily spotted. For instance, recent trends can be found in Linda Haussler's stone, her husband had flowers engraved on her stone with these words: "The best friend I ever had. I will miss you. Your loving husband, Wolfgang." And, Venna and Emery Jenks have on their stone an RV and trees.

### Other cemeteries

Reminders of our legacy can be found beside speeding highways, busy streets, on the edges of towns, and sometimes hidden on the windswept prairie. From all cultures, faiths and circumstances, the cemeteries of Barton and Stafford Counties have been created. Many of

their stories reflect the struggles life on the prairie. At the turn of the 20th century, one of every nine babies born in Kansas died before its second birthday, according to the State Board of Health. Among those statistics is the Marquis family of rural Barton County. In September 1900, Mary Marquis was but five years old when she died; her sister, Georgiana Pearl, nearly three. Their little sister, Retta Marquis lived only four days. Their tiny grave markers can be found in the **Olivet Cemetery** all in a neat row. One more haunting reminder of how harsh life could be on the 19th century prairie is a crudely hand-carved limestone with only one word: "Baby."

### Cemeteries of faith

In exacting, tidy rows the **Dominican Sisters' Resurrection in Cemetery** in Great Bend mark more than a century of faith and service. Its only one of many cemeteries throughout the region reflecting the role religious convictions played in settling the prairie.

### St. John's Catholic Cemetery in Hoisington

Located on the western city limits of Hoisington, one of the

cont.



more noteworthy graves was recently dug. It represents the life of a Korean War veteran who died more than six decades ago but whose remains were not identified until 2009. In the last letter Lt. Edward Schwartz's family received, Schwartz wrote that the U.S. Army was moving his unit up to the front lines in North Korea and he was cold. Could they please send him little bottles of whiskey to keep him warm? It was November 1950. His family did send him a homemade care package but they never heard from him again. He was dead. His unit was overrun by Chinese troops on Nov. 28, 1950 and Schwartz was declared killed in action. Through DNA testing, Schwartz' body was identified nearly six decades later and his burial made international news in May 2009. Also of note is Ed Kaiser's tombstone of the laser-etched "Ed's Apco" filling station on one side and a "two on something" hand of cards, and his Knights of Columbus symbols on the other.



### Schoenfeld Cemetery

In northern Barton County there is the Schoenfeld cemetery where several of the tombstones are in German reflecting early settlers' ties with the motherland. Of special note is the grave of Sgt. 1st Class Marvin Popp, a Korean War veteran recipient of two purple hearts, presidential unit citation, and United Nations Service Medal. Popp died in 2001 and worked for Haliburton oil services for 40 years.

### Seward's St. Xavier Cemetery

This cemetery is surrounded by trees and wheat fields and is special for its wrought iron cross tombstones. It also reflects the heritage of the German and Irish Catholic settlers who homesteaded Stafford County. The crosses reflect names such as August Guderian, born in Colmar Germany in 1849 and who died seven decades later in Seward. Guderian's memorial is typical of thousands found across the heartland. Symbolic because the cross represented the sacred; and the iron, strength. They were built to withstand time.

### Pawnee Rock

Think of this cemetery as one of the region's more avant-garde places of eternal rest. It's a changing display of memorabilia loved ones leave at the graves from ceramic bunnies and poker chips to banners and fishing lures. This is where Batman is buried or, at least Mary Batman, who died in 1928. It is also where Newton Phillip Smith, one of the earliest pioneers to the area is buried. Smith ran a blacksmithing and repairing shop in Pawnee Rock. He was the town's constable and was known for having broke up the Taylor gang of outlaws and horse thieves. In a 1912 biographical history of Barton County it makes note of the Taylor Gang and Smith: "This was one of the most

desperate gangs that ever infested this part of the state and before they were captured it was necessary to kill their leader." The cemetery is also where U.S. Senator from Kansas George McGill from 1930 to 1939 is buried. He was a member of the U.S. Tariff Commission. There is one more grave worth noting. Near the Pawnee Rock cemetery is, of course, the monument and rock itself. There lies Mexican War-era Pvt. Nehemiah Carson who died of an unknown illness while traveling on the Santa Fe Trail on July 13, 1846.

### Stafford County

The Stafford cemetery off U.S. 50, west of Stafford, features a Grand Army of the Republic memorial. A local stonecutter, J.R. Carmichael, who carved a limestone stump into a memorial for the county's Civil War soldiers, created the monument more than a century ago. An African-American cemetery is only a few miles west of the U.S. 281 and U.S. 50 intersection. The Martin Cemetery on the north side of U.S. 50, represents black homesteaders who settled in Ohio township in the late 1880s and 1890s. By 1914, the county attracted as many as 425 African-Americans.

### Neeland's Cemetery - Stafford County's "Gathering of Woodmen."

In the late 19th century, Joseph Cullen Root from Omaha, Neb. organized the "Modern Woodmen of America," a fraternal society that was particularly popular in the Midwest. Members could only be white men and they vowed to take care of their brothers' widows and children. Although the society's name changed slightly through the years with variations being "Woodmen of the World" to "Supreme Forest Woodmen" the premise was this: upon a member's death, the society would donate \$100 toward burial expenses if the surviving family allowed the society's emblem to appear on the stone. This cemetery has nearly half dozen of these memorials representing a life cut short.

- When it comes to exploring cemeteries, sometimes the best getaways are the ones made up along the way.
- Go where the heart takes you.
- Set your own direction and pace.
- Each cemetery tells its own story.



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