

# ROCK PRAIRIE CEMETERY

## HALLTOWN, MISSOURI



125th Annual Meeting  
May 25, 2024 2:00 P.M.

Chapel Hours  
Memorial Week:  
Mon 5/20 - Mon 5/27  
9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

## The “Changing of the Guard”



At Arlington National Cemetery, it quietly takes place every hour on the hour during fall and winter and every half hour during spring and summer in a very moving and elaborate ceremony.

At Buckingham Palace, it happens every other day and lasts for 45 minutes as crowds from all over the world swarm.



Here in Halltown . . . it takes place once every 20 to 30 years and lasts about 5 minutes . . .

. . . yes, a “Changing of the Guard” will take place this year at Rock Prairie Cemetery’s 125th Annual Board Meeting! If you’ve never been to a meeting, this might be the year to attend. It’s not often that our board’s roster changes (mainly due to the extremely difficult task of finding volunteers (sigh)), but this year we will be saluting and saying goodbye to two members who have steadfastly “guarded” our little cemetery for 27 and 21 years, respectively, Sherry Neeley and Jim Carson. No one in the history of our association has ever served longer.



cause. Here, at Rock Prairie Cemetery, that heartfelt cause is family so the job is always a truly gratifying one no matter what.

Most of us never think twice about who is behind the little country cemetery that looks so peaceful and serene beside the interstate as we drive by or maybe only visit once a year. But, not-for-profit rural cemeteries are cared for by volunteers who are passionate about family, legacies, history, beauty and nature – all things found . . . and felt . . . in a cemetery. Despite being judged, criticized and rarely thanked, volunteers do the job anyway. Why? The simple response is that they are good people – naturally kind, caring and hardworking folks inspired by a heartfelt

Volunteer work, as with most things in life, has its ebbs and flows, but all it takes is one lively, motivated individual to bring a renewed energy to a group. In 1997, Sherry Neeley was that individual. She saw a need, stepped up and offered to help. She tackled pressing problems with urgency and common sense and has never stopped. Jim, too, came along when Rock Prairie needed him providing engineering expertise, a sense of calm and reassurance and sound advice. We slept peacefully knowing Sherry and Jim were watching over our sleeping ancestors.

A few years ago, however, they knew it was time to begin preparing a new board to carry on the work as they had so long ago. Sharing the wisdom and experience from all those years of service, they painstakingly trained the rest of us on the board to ensure the integrity of Rock Prairie’s future. We cannot thank them enough for the many gifts and tools they have given us. We may not be able to completely “fill their shoes,” but we promise to keep them on and tightly laced!!

Please join us  
Saturday, May 25th, at 2:00 p.m.  
to say “Thank You!” to

**SHERRY NEELEY & JIM CARSON**

### Association History

By the time the JN Downing family decided the land currently known as “the old cemetery,” to the county in January, 1888, they had helped over 100 friends and neighbors with their burial needs. The land had already been used for burials since

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## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

### JUNE 1, 2023 – MAY 1, 2024

DONATIONS	INTEREST	PLOTS SOLD	SUBTOTAL	(EXPENSES)	BALANCE
\$2,610.21	\$6,539.56	\$600.00	\$9,149.77	-\$5,435.95	\$3,713.82

**TREASURER’S STATEMENT:** Having completed my first year as treasurer, I can confidently say the budget forecast for Rock Prairie Cemetery is strong. My main focus will be on growing the Endowment Fund after yearly budgets and forecasts are met. The checking account will keep enough funds to pay the bills including an appropriate “cushion” for emergencies. Unless specifically designated to a particular fund, your generous donations will be carefully allocated to earn the highest rate of return. It is my goal to not only steadily grow our accounts, but your trust in me as well. A complete year-to-date financial report for the 2023-2024 fiscal year will be given at the annual meeting on May 25th. If you have any questions, please contact me, Mike Pycatt, at [Mike@RockPrairieCemetery.com](mailto:Mike@RockPrairieCemetery.com).

“Volunteers don’t get paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.” – Sherry Anderson

For your convenience, there are 4 easy ways to donate:

By mail at: **P.O. Box 45 Halltown, MO 65664**

By credit card using the ‘PayPal Donate’ button on our website: [RockPrairieCemetery.com](http://RockPrairieCemetery.com)

By dropping your check in the mail slot at the chapel

By choosing something from the Wish List below



**WISH LIST:** We started a wish list of items or services we could use last year and will continue to publish them in our yearly newsletters.

- (1) guestbook podium, (2) easels to hold picture boards, (3) portable heaters, (4) security cameras, (5) permanent section signage, (6) topsoil from your farm, (7) trees to replace storm-damaged ones or to plant along north border to lessen the noise from I-44, (8) your expertise in webpage design, (9) your time and energy for projects (just ask), (10) something you have and don’t need, but you think we might could use, etc.

Simply contact a board member to discuss your item before you make a purchase or go to any trouble. The board’s phone numbers and emails are listed on the website: [RockPrairieCemetery.com](http://RockPrairieCemetery.com)

### “THINGS TO BE REMEMBERED” . . .

1. The days and weeks leading up to Memorial Day see a lot of activity by decorators and visitors to the cemetery. Courtesy and caution are advised when using the cemetery roads. Be mindful of others needing to get around you and remember that some graves are closer to the road than they seem.
2. The wind often blows our beautiful flowers all over the cemetery and, with no way of knowing where they belong, they end up on the wrong headstone or in the chapel. Please attach a tag to your flowers or saddle indicating the name on the headstone and the section so we can put them back in the right place. Thank you!
3. As always, flags for veterans are free and available to you daily on the front porch of the chapel the entire week before and including Memorial Day.
4. For a small donation or an obituary solicitation, the chapel is ready and available for funerals, memorial services, etc. Let us know your needs and we will try to accommodate.
5. If you don’t have a favorite charity, you can publish a simple statement in the obituary like, “In lieu of flowers, please make donations to Rock Prairie Cemetery.”
6. When planning your estate please don’t forget Rock Prairie – “A gift to Rock Prairie Cemetery will live beyond your lifetime.”
7. Don’t forget to contact Roxie Sharpe, if you move or change your phone number or email. We don’t want to lose touch! – [Roxie@RockPrairieCemetery.com](mailto:Roxie@RockPrairieCemetery.com) or [RockPrairieCemetery@yahoo.com](mailto:RockPrairieCemetery@yahoo.com) or 417-234-4077.

“Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.” – Elizabeth Andrew

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at least 1838 (probably much earlier), so their kind gift simply made it official – Halltown had a cemetery. Eleven years later, in 1899, when GJ McCoy donated a second tract of land doubling the size of the cemetery, a group of like-minded citizens saw the need to organize an association to care for the sacred ground. They set about the task of writing articles of incorporation and formed the first Rock Prairie Cemetery board of directors: J.A. Sifferman, President, J. L. Porter, Secretary, and James McCray, Treasurer. The Lawrence County circuit court filing dated October 8, 1900, reads:



J.A. Sifferman  
1848-1923

“ . . . Come now James McCray, John A. Sifferman, and James L. Porter and say that James McCray, John A. Sifferman, James L. Porter, Frank Mason, Chester Mitchell, John McDorman, James Downing, and Henry Sifferman and others have associated themselves by written articles of agreement as an association formed for the purpose of providing and maintaining a cemetery on Rock Prairie, in Lawrence County, Missouri . . . ”

Signatures of the “and others” were affixed to the back of the document.

The original ledger our founding fathers used for cemetery business from 1899 thru 1930 is still intact and in our files. It had pre-stamped page numbers and, though some years are “out of order,” the minutes and financial transactions were dutifully handwritten and safely recorded for posterity. In those days, annual meetings were held in August. Instead of giving receipts for lots sold or donations collected, they simply listed them in the little brown ledger. The first page is the “Table of Contents.” The following pages give a description and hand-drawn map of the cemetery dated Dec. 6, 1900, complete with “Things to be remembered” and the very first “Rules and Regulations to be observed” . . .



“All wagons and teams that enter the cemetery follow wagon way to fence on West side thence South untill (sic) they find room to turn and come back same way”

A far cry from our extensive list of rules and regulations today! We are thrilled to have such a priceless and tangible piece of history in our possession. In 2001, copies of the ledger were made, placed in 3-ring binders and sold in a fundraising effort for \$25 each and quickly sold out. The offer still stands, just let us know!

The last meeting recorded in the little brown ledger was May 30, 1930. After that, minutes spanning 1931 thru 1979 were either lost or accidentally destroyed. Many other years were spotty at best leaving only unsigned treasurer’s reports or the occasional legal document with trustees names. It is rumored that

a fire was the culprit leaving us with only assumptions and speculations for those unaccounted for years. With the exception of 1972-1975, accountants pad spreadsheets were diligently filled out and have been scanned, referenced, and stored on hard drives.

With so many years of missing documentation, it is difficult to say with certainty who may have come close to Sherry and Jim’s service record, but, our best guess would be brothers, Stanley and Jerry White who began taking part in board proceedings in the early to mid-80s. Stanley served until his death in December 2007 and Jerry served until 2001. Lela Neeland served from 1921-1942 as both secretary and treasurer for many of those years. What is clearly evident is that since Sherry got on the board, documentation never lagged, got lost, or burned up again.

Even without written evidence, we believe our boards have all tried their very best working with foresight, determination and heart – relieving us of the burden and responsibility of caring for the cemetery. No matter the weather or circumstance, they were always there to prep for burials, fix problems, address issues and help devastated families at their most vulnerable. We counted on them to generate donations. We trusted them to use and grow those funds wisely so that our cemetery would remain solvent. It is only right that we remember them from time to time. Therefore, a list of those “and others” founding members and all who have served on our boards from 1899 thru today (as best we can ascertain) is enclosed with this newsletter. You may recognize some as friends and neighbors and you might even see a relative whom you didn’t know served. Either way, as you read over the names and slip back in time, you will soon understand why Rock Prairie Cemetery is still thriving 125 years later when small, rural cemeteries all around us and across the nation are fast disappearing.

Thank you for your kind and continued support. As Sherry and Jim’s protégés, your new “guards” promise to do our very best to make sure their achievements were not in vain.

Halltown’s “changing of the guard” is the perfect time to express your gratitude and show support for the promise of good things to come. We hope to see you at the meeting, Saturday, May 25th, at 2:00 p.m. There are sure to be lots of tears and laughter as we reminisce about the ups and downs of Rock Prairie through the years!!

And speaking of records . . . Meet Sherry’s beautiful mom, Ms. Annabel Kivett, who turned 100 years old last October. She holds the record for being our oldest living association member! She has been a staunch supporter of Sherry’s efforts and hasn’t missed an annual meeting since 1997 when she was just a sprightly, young gadabout in her 70s! Happy Birthday, Annabel! And best wishes for many, many more!!



“As you grow older, you will discover, you have two hands – one to help yourself and the other to help others.” – Audrey Hepburn