NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ABOUT MOORE’S LANE POTTER’S FIELD

*The Sunday Star*

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**Headline: “They Rest in Lonely Peace”**

Photo of man making a coffin. Caption: “Coffins for the Potter’s Field are made at the New Castle County Workhouse of pine boards. The estimated cost of each is about $8.00.”

Photo of shack. Caption: “This shack located at the entrance to the potter’s field is used as a mortuary.”

Subtitle: Numbered Headstones Mark Final Resting Places of Indigent

Article: “A dirt road off Moore’s Lane near New Castle leads between fertile cornfields to a forlorn yet rather exclusive little cemetery. . . . only about fifty persons are buried there each year, and those who are admitted must meet strict qualifications. They must have died utterly destitute and without a friend or relative to pay for their funeral – for this is the New Castle County potter’s field.

As might be expected, there are no pretentious tombstones on these desolate few acres, only small stone headmarkers each inscribed with a number. The square stones range across the field in orderly rows, giving the cemetery a sort of hobnailed effect. At one end is a wooden building that serves as a mortuary.

A caretaker mows the grass, digs the graves and keeps the paupers’ last resting place in orderly shape. The cemetery’s sexton is Coroner C. Everett Kelley, who supervises all burials there.

The chances of an average person finding a resting place in potter’s field are rather slim. All military veterans, for instance, are excluded. Even if they die penniless, the government will see to it that they are buried decently in the nearest national cemetery. The State of Delaware also will allot $100 towards the funeral of an indigent veteran.

In any case, it is not easy these days to die without leaving something in the way of assets. Even the very poor usually manage to put away a nest egg – a small insurance policy at least – for their final trip. If not this, then there most likely is a friend or relative anxious to pay for the funeral.

But some few persons manage to become eligible for potter’s field. These funerals are known as “welfare burials” – a curious paradox in terms even for officialese.

Photo of markers in field. Caption: “Graves in the New Castle County public burial grounds are marked with numbers. The coroner keeps a record of all persons buried there. Relatives may, if they wish, remove the bodies to another cemetery after complying with the necessary legal requirements.”

The story behind such cases varies little. A “blue-flamer” is found dead on the street, perhaps with no identification. An elderly woman dies alone in her junk-strewn house. A man collapses in his shack on the city dump.

The police are called and the corpse is turned over to the coroner. “We embalm it and prepare it for burial the same as we would anyone else,” says Chief Deputy Coroner Herbert M. Harrington.

Then we start investigating. We do a thorough job. Usually we find some relatives or at least a small estate, which makes it unnecessary to send the body to potter’s field.

“In the case of unidentified bodies, we are just as careful. You can never tell. We have had bums, unwashed and in tatters, brought in to us, only to discover later that they come from well-to-do families eager to see that they get a decent burial.

“We check thoroughly in all cases, as we certainly don’t want to give anyone a public burial only to have the relatives turn up later.

Sometimes relatives are never found, and the body is listed on the potter’s field records as “unknown.”

A potter’s field funeral is much the same as any other. The viewing may be held at the coroner’s funeral home. The coroner’s hearse takes the body to the public burying ground. Relatives may attend. “If they request religious services, we do our best to oblige.”

The coffins – boxes of finished pine – are built to order by prisoners at the county Workhouse.

The identity of all those buried in the county lot is kept on record in the mortuary. The stone numbers are used as an index to the records.

The county’s Levy Court pays for the upkeep of the cemetery and allots $75 for each funeral there.

Some of the graves show evidence of loving care. Over one grows a rosebush. On another lays a bouquet of withered flowers.

Hunters sometimes wander into the place, attracted by a plentitude of rabbits and pheasants. Occasionally, children, whose play has drawn them far from home, venture inside.

But nobody stays very long. Usually, the cemetery is deserted – an excellent place to rest in peace.

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