

HISTORY

of the South Lead Cemetery

The South Lead Cemetery is a monument not only to the many individuals who found their final resting place here, but also to the ethnic diversity, frontier spirit, and mining history of Lead itself. Here you will find 3,900 people buried under 2,200 monuments. This cemetery can claim, along with West Lead, to be the community's earliest cemetery. Before it was the "South Lead Cemetery," this space housed the Catholic and Protestant cemeteries that would latter be combined into a single, nonsectarian burial place. The South Lead Cemetery became the preferred burial place for the city's blue collar, immigrant families. You will find as you walk through these graves their occupants came from places such as Italy, Cornwall, Austria, Germany, Croatia, Lithuania, Sweden, Finland, Montenegro, Poland, Greece, Ireland, and Switzerland. Highlighting this fact, all of the graves highlighted in this tour are of people born in other parts of the world.

Beyond the great ethnic diversity that went into the fabric of communal life in Lead, you will notice that frontier and mining life was hardly easy. In addition to the many graves for infants and children, a quick calculation from birth and death dates reveals a number of people who died in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. Some of these deaths were the result of the danger inherent in mining, as the South Lead Cemetery is the final resting place for 158 people who died as the result of accidents related to work in the mine. Many others, though, died as the result of sickness. Pneumonia was a common cause of death and anecdotal reports claim that not infrequently someone would die within three days of showing symptoms. There are also several deaths from the flu during the 1918 Influenza Pandemic (Spanish Flu). At the same time, life in early Lead was not all suffering and tragedy. You will also find many graves of those who lived into ripe old age, dying of natural causes and remembered not for how they died but for how they lived and contributed to the community.

In the end—and, what is a cemetery if not a reminder of the end—to spend time with these immigrants, homemakers, mountain men, miners, business leaders, and politicians is to open a window into the character of Lead itself.

SYMBOLS

in the Cemetery

Designs on grave markers are rarely purely decorative and often convey some meaning about the person who died. Here are a few symbols found in the South Lead Cemetery

Woodsmen of the World



Recognized by the their tree-stump tombstones. Until 1920, this society provided each member with a tombstone, which is why they are so common.

Knights of Pythias



Originally founded as a secret society for government clerks in 1864. Often graves are marked with P, C, and B for Friendship, Charity, and Benevolence, but this society made use of over 20,000 symbols.

Odd Fellows



Sometimes known as the "poor man's Freemasonry," this secret society's primary symbol is three linked chains.

Lamb

Symbolizing innocence, lambs are one of the most widely used symbols in Christian art and mark the graves of children—especially infants.



Dove

This most frequently seen animal symbol in cemeteries represents peace or the Holy Spirit. A dead or fallen dove represents a life cut short.



SOUTH LEAD CEMETERY



South Lead CEMETERY

Entrance at the intersection of Gold and West Summit Streets, Lead, SD 57754. From the Visitor's Center, go southeast on Mill Street four blocks (0.25 miles) until it intersects with West Summit. Turn left onto West Summit and go two blocks. The cemetery entrance will be on your left.

William P. Raddick (February 17, 1850 – May 12, 1930)

As noted on his tombstone, William Raddick was one of the city's founders. His parents brought him to the United States from Ireland when he was two years old. He lived in Missouri, Iowa, and Wyoming before coming to the future site of Lead in April, 1876 in hopes of finding gold. He would go on to be one of eighteen men who chose the name of the town and helped to lay it out in lots with the help of a larlat ropes on April 9, 1876.

John Aho

(September 21 1892–March 24, 1940)

Aho's death serves as a reminder of just how dangerous mining could be. Born in Härmä, Finland, he came to South Dakota in 1912 and worked first on a farm near Newell before working for Homestake for twenty-two years. He was killed while oiling and wiping a pulley motor on a stamp in a stampmill. His clothes or arm became entangled and he was pulled into the machine. Aho is one of the 158 workers killed in the mining-related work who is buried in South Lead as well as one of the latest burials in the cemetery, since burials for the most part stopped in the 1930s.

Frank Abt (August 28, 1838 – December 12, 1918)

Frank Abt immigrated from the Kingdom of Bavaria in Germany in 1861. Despite having avoided military service in the German Army, he enlisted in the Second Iowa Cavalry during the US Civil War. After spending time in mining camps in Colorado, Idaho, and Montana, he arrived in Lead in 1876. He both mined and then ran the downtown Abt Hotel. Described as a man of "unflinching integrity, strict honesty, and staunch citizenship," Abt served as a member of the school board and served for two years as Lead's first mayor starting in 1900.

Hilda Niemi (March 27, 1867 – December 7, 1919)

Hilda, a housewife from Sweden, had a quite uneventful life. Her gruesome death, on the other hand, remains one of Lead's great historical mysteries. On Sunday morning, December 7, 1919, after searching unsuccessfully for her mother and deciding she had gone to visit neighbors, Hilda's daughter found her mother's body incarcerated in their home's furnace. Both murder and suicide theories abounded, but the case remains unsolved to this day.

Maksim "Mike" Koprica (1883 – December 26, 1908)

Maksim, who was only 24 or 25 when he died, was tragically killed the day after Christmas when he was accidentally shot through the right eye. He and a friend were trying to shoot a tin can. Koprica was born in Banjani in what is now Montenegro and served as the president of the Grobovoo lodge, the Serbian society. The inscription on his headstone is one of the several written in the Cyrillic alphabet in the South Lead Cemetery, and, translated from Serbian, it reads:

Here rests
the servant of God
Maksim Koprica
born 1883 in
Banjani, Crna Gora
died 26 December 1908
Marker from his brother
Spasoje.

