

was taken from one of the sketchbooks that Mayer filled with drawings during his western journey. On the reverse side are some rough sketches of Henry Belland, a well-known voyageur. This little sheet of yellowed paper with its interesting drawings was presented to the society in 1903 by Edward E. Ayer of Chicago, who then owned the Mayer Sketchbooks and who added them to the remarkable collection of Americana that bears his name.²

B. L. H.

A PIONEER CEMETERY

This is the story of a cemetery that was "lost" and has been restored through the loving care of relatives of the hardy pioneers who sleep their last long sleep there. It is known as "Gravesbacken," and is located in the southern part of Vasa Township on a knoll in the center of a large grain farm about two miles north of White Rock and ten miles southeast of Cannon Falls. The first burial was made there in 1859 and the last in 1881. So far as is known, between seventy and eighty persons are buried in the plot. With the gradual settlement of the Vasa community, other cemeteries were provided; and as relatives of those buried at Gravesbacken left the community, the hallowed ground was all but forgotten. The plot was untouched by the plow, and soon brush and trees covered the mounds and the place became a habitat for snakes and wild animals.

In June, 1930, Mr. Ole Zackrison of Woodenville, Washington, a son of Jens Zackrison, one of the pioneers who rests in the cemetery, visited Vasa. Although he was nearly eighty years old, Mr. Zackrison went to Vasa especially to see that the cemetery was restored and placed on record, so that the remains of those buried there might never be dis-

² Warren Upham to Edward E. Ayer, October 21, 1903; to Charles M. Loring, October 21, 1903, Minnesota Historical Society Letter Books.

turbed. He enlisted the services of a number of local residents, including Mr. Ferdie L. Larson, Mr. Ole Haime, and others, to carry on the work.

The brush and trees were removed, the land was fenced, and the small spot was beautified. That was only a small part of the task, however. No record of the burials could be found, and Mr. Larson took upon himself the task of checking the names of those who rest in Gravesbacken. After a search which took him to the Atlantic coast, Kansas, Texas, and the Pacific coast, Mr. Larson identified thirty-one of the graves. In scores of cities throughout the country, family Bibles were checked and pioneers were questioned. More than a year was spent in this work.

The graves were easily discernible after the ground was cleared, for wooden frames placed about the mounds caused them to retain their shape despite exposure to the elements and more than a half century of neglect. There was but one headstone in the cemetery and that was furnished by the government to designate the grave of a soldier of the Civil War. It bears the name of Halvor Eckland, who enlisted in the Union army on October 3, 1861, as a member of Company D, Third Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. He died on January 2, 1862, while home on a furlough and was given a military funeral. Records revealed that another Civil War veteran rests in this cemetery. His grave was located next to that of Eckland. After weeks of poring over government records, his identity was established as Daniel Hanson, who died in 1867. He enlisted on February 10, 1864, in Company K, Sixth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, and was mustered out on August 19, 1865. A headstone, provided by the government, now marks his grave.

In 1857, Erick Jonason, Jens Zackrison, and Ole Hanson emigrated with their families from Harjedahlen in the northern part of Sweden and settled in the southern part

of Vasa Township. Soon more of these sturdy emigrants came, seeking new homes in this country. They were willing to work and to suffer the hardships of pioneer life. They named the settlement Jemtland after their old home in Sweden. In 1859, Minnie Zackrison, a daughter of Jens, passed away and was laid to rest on a beautiful knoll on her father's land about thirty rods from the colony. As the death angel continued to visit this and other near-by settlements, the number of graves on the knoll increased. When Eckland was buried in 1862, Zackrison announced that he would "donate, designate and dedicate an acre of this land or more if needed for a free public cemetery" and that no charge would be made for lots. This was never put on record, but the public used the plot as a burying ground until 1881. Under the law, the responsibility for the permanent upkeep of Gravesbacken now rests with the township of Vasa.

A beautiful monument now adorns the cemetery and with the surroundings cleared and an orderly arrangement effected, it is a most fitting resting place for the once forgotten dead. Those whose graves have been located and whose names appear on the monument are: Maria A. Collins, Mary Hanson, Maria Haime, Edward Haime, Jens Zackrison, Minnie Zackrison, John Zackrison, Magnil Zackrison, Julia Zackrison, Zackri Zackrison, Ramborg Zackrison, Pehr Olson, Gole Olson, Karin Eastman, Karin Olson, Pelle Hagman, Peter Swanson, Ole Johnson, Brita Johnson, Sara Anderson, John W. Anderson, Fredericka Johnson, Ole Erickson, Minnie Erickson, Erick Erickson, Marit Fundin, Halvor Fundin, Gustaf A. Johnson, Elof Wistrom, Helen C. Wistrom, and Mary Holm.

C. A. RASMUSSEN

GOODHUE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
RED WING, MINNESOTA



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