Welcome to the Defiance Public Library System’s self-guided Riverside Cemetery Walk. We’ll introduce you to a few residents of the cemetery, but the cemetery itself has an interesting history too.

OLD RIVERSIDE CEMETERY

Cemetery Walk 2020
Old Riverside Cemetery

Section A
Section B
Section C
Section D
Section E

Towards South Clinton Street
Towards Auglaize River
Towards Riverside Cemetery

Entrance / Exit

Ravine

Holgate
Mausoleum

Beardsley
Langdon

Old Riverside, originally named Auglaize Cemetery, started with the Langdon family burial plot that sits in the back, next to the banks of the Auglaize River. There exists today a family monument surrounded by smaller individual stones. Lyman Langdon, the patriarch, was one of the early pioneers of the Defiance County area. From South Canton, New York, he traveled to this area by wagon with his wife, Fannie, and became a prominent landowner and citizen of Defiance County. The first burial was that of his daughter Mary at age 2 in 1837 when it was still a private family burial ground. When it was designated an official city cemetery in 1848, his daughter Helen was the first to be buried in this “new” rural cemetery in January 1849, at age 6. Like many families during that time, they sadly lost young children to illness.

The area was originally divided into two sections, one marked “M” for Methodists, and the other “P” for Presbyterians. This was tradition at the time, to designate the religious affiliation for which the cemetery was intended. Riverside was the first in Defiance to combine these different sections into one cemetery. The Presbyterian Cemetery was located on Washington Street, near the banks of the Auglaize River. This is where the parking lot for the First Presbyterian Church in Defiance is currently located. Those remains were moved to Riverside around 1849.

On the east side of the Auglaize River sits Kahlo Cemetery. Several graves from that cemetery were also moved to this new city cemetery. In some spots, paupers were buried without grave-markers. The current sexton of Riverside Cemetery was told never to dig in certain areas of Old Riverside, at the risk of coming across these unmarked graves.

There were old Catholic burial grounds along Ft. Wayne Road (now Baltimore Avenue), southwest of the B&O depot. In 1873, three and a half acres were sold for $1,500 to the B&O Railroad, part of which was the Catholic burial ground. An addition to Riverside was made for those of the Catholic faith, and removals were made from the old Catholic burial grounds to Riverside. Any Catholic markers in Old Riverside dating before 1863 came from this old Catholic Burial Ground.
Lyman Langdon – Old Riverside Section B lot 20

Lyman Langdon, born in 1809 in South Canton, New York, traveled by wagon to Ohio in search of betterment. The first stop was Cleveland, then he continued west. He found some dry roads in the Black Swamp, forded the Maumee at Maumee City, drove around trees, through ravines, up and down bluff banks, and finally reached Defiance, a town of about 150 inhabitants. Some were already acquaintances. Lyman worked both at a mill near Brunersburg, and on a steamboat that ran supplies on the Maumee. In the spring of 1836, the steamboat “came down with the ice” and was stuck and grounded in Maumee City. The crew returned to Defiance on foot. He found land at Farmer Center to build on and bought the property. He had caught the “Ohio fever” in earnest by that time, and traveled back to New York to bring his wife, his 16-month-old child, and his brother-in-law back with him.

They stayed with a Dr. Rice near Farmer until they could clear land and build a cabin. During this stay, he learned of a tavern that he could rent from Payne C. Parker. He took up the offer to have an income while building his home. Other settlers in the area helped raise the cabin. In those days, houses were built without nails or boards, with puncheons, clapboards, mud hearths and stick chimneys. Life for these early settlers was not easy. Winters were particularly harsh, and it was noted that it was common to go to sleep to the music of the wolves.

Lyman knew and interacted with several businessmen of Defiance. Engineers for the canal boarded at his tavern. He was elected as a trustee of the township and a council member in 1838 and was appointed county judge. He lived when parts of Fort Defiance were still intact, although much dilapidated. The timbers of the block-houses were doing service in local barns, but the earthworks, the bastion, the moat, the entrance, the covered way to either river for water, the line of pickets, as well as the stumps of pickets of Fort Winchester were still plainly visible. The fur trade was a large part of business for merchants in Defiance. Native American families would take skins into the stores, a price was agreed upon, then the whiskey was passed around. The tavern also hosted Native Americans overnight.

He kept this country tavern through the end of his life. Together he and his wife had 10 children, five of whom survived to adulthood. They all settled in this area. The couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in September of 1882. An article in the Defiance County Express described the festivities. At the close of the celebration, Mr. Langdon recounted important events in his life.
The country tavern Lyman Langdon kept to the end of his life. At right, a Crescent-News file photo from Nov. 2, 1993 shows the tavern being relocated.

Livingston Everett Beardsley – Old Riverside Section D lot 28

Livingston Everett Beardsley was born on January 30, 1840, in Macedonia, Ohio. The family moved to Cleveland for his education. He became a painter’s hand for a time, then enlisted in Company C of the 21st Ohio Infantry Regiment in 1861. He was involved in Sherman’s March to the Sea during his time in the service. Once leaving the service, he moved to Defiance and later married Martha Alsina Cass. They lived at 503 Wayne Street, and he made a good living as a photographer, even maintaining a gallery behind his home. His son Leroy also became a photographer and helped in the family business.

Later in life, Livingston served as treasurer of Defiance Home Savings and Loan, then as director of the bank in 1888. He was also a charter member of the Masonic Lodge. Livingston continued to pursue his passion for photography until his death on April 17, 1923.
In 1883, the city took control of Riverside and increased its size by 50 acres. This expanded the cemetery beyond the gulley to the South. This gave space for many new sections, including **Soldiers’ Circle**. This veterans’ section was purchased in 1896 by the Commission of Defiance County for the burial of Defiance County veterans. The first burial was George Gilbert, a G.A.R. veteran, on May 18, 1895. It now contains some 206 burials in six circular rows. Wanting to distinguish this section more, a group of citizens in 1965 worked to move the Civil War Soldiers Memorial from Veteran Park (now Triangle Park) downtown to the center of Soldiers’ Circle. It does seem to belong there, standing guard over the veterans.
Riverside Chapel was constructed in 1888 near the entrance to the cemetery. It is a beautiful example of Gothic Revival-style architecture. It was built from limestone with detailing in red portage stone. The doors and window frames are pine, and stained glass completes the windows. The flooring is Georgian marble.

Its purpose was twofold: it served as a chapel for funerals, and also has a vault underneath with a lowering apparatus to lower and store caskets during winter until graves could be dug in the spring. In fact, in February of 1905, the Crescent-News ran an article that stated there were 13 caskets in the vault due to an unusually hard winter.

The Chapel is owned by the City of Defiance, and the interior is in the care of the Defiance Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.
“Imposing Temple of the Dead Now Being Built in Cemetery Here” was the headline in the Crescent-News on July 10, 1926. This, of course, refers to the construction of the **Riverside Memorial Mausoleum**. It cost $150,000 to build and featured a Bedford stone exterior with an interior of white marble. It contains 353 burial spaces. Fort Wayne Clergyman Rev. Arthur J. Folsom dedicated it upon its completion.

*Interesting fact: There was an accident on March 22, 1927, while the mausoleum was being built. Twelve-year-old Columbia Lewis, who was assisting in the construction of the mausoleum, was struck on the ankle by a hoisting derrick that fell. His father asked for $587 to cover the bill for the boy’s care (which was granted) then later filed for an additional $10,000 in damages.*

Eventually, the city grew, and the veterans’ section at Soldiers’ Circle was not nearly big enough. An expansion was needed. In 1985, a memorial honoring veterans of the armed services and a new veterans’ section were developed. This area sits in the front of the cemetery, right off South Clinton Street. It has four sections surrounding the memorial and flagpole. All of the stones are the same size and shape. The project was funded by private donations and is another important addition to Riverside.

Lyman Langdon could not have foreseen what his humble family plot would become as the City of Defiance grew. In 1875, the Ladies’ Rural Cemetery Association was organized to raise money to beautify and improve the grounds. This was at a time when cemeteries were also utilized as public parks. The stone borders and steps in many sections of the cemetery were added at this time. There was also a large lily pond in front of the chapel and a large wrought-iron archway over the entrance.

The cemetery has 57 different types of trees, including the weeping willows that shade the winding drives, thanks to the Defiance Garden Club. It is a peaceful place to walk, especially during the fall when the maples, birch, elm, and ash trees are emblazoned with colors. On a winter’s day, when the snow is falling softly, the pine and spruce covered in snow help to give reverence during the holiday season. It is among the city’s most gorgeous historic areas, made richer by the many unique stories of those who rest here.
William David Hill – New Riverside Section 30 lot 90

The famous “Old War Horse of the Northwest” has died, is the description of William David Hill given in the Crescent-News’ December 27, 1906, edition. He was born on October 1, 1833 in Virginia of patriotic stock: his great-grandfathers on both sides were soldiers in the Revolutionary War, and both grandfathers served in the War of 1812.

In 1849, the family came to Ohio and settled near Jamestown. He was the oldest of 11 children. Always a hard worker, he oversaw his father’s farm at a young age. Thus, his prospects for an education were limited. He did eventually in 1853 purchase a scholarship to Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. He supported himself by sawing wood, tending gardens, and doing any other jobs he could secure. While in college, he became interested in politics. He also studied law, was admitted to the bar in 1859, and began practicing law in Springfield, Ohio. Later, he became the mayor of Springfield, serving for three years before moving to Defiance.

He became a member of the Ohio State House of Representatives, a member of the Board of Education of Defiance, and Superintendent of Insurance. In 1879, he was elected as a Democrat to the 46th Congress, serving from 1883 to 1887. He was not re-elected, and thus continued practicing law, serving as the city solicitor for Defiance.

During all his public service, he had four children with his wife, Augusta. His wife is to be commended for her care of the children while her husband worked diligently. Later in life, his health deteriorated due to overwork and he moved to Kalispell, Montana to improve and “reinvigorate” in the western air. It is said that he hunted and camped out with only Native Americans for companions. In 1896, he returned to Defiance with renewed strength. He continued to practice law until his death on December 26, 1906.
Charles James Thompson – New Riverside Section 30 lot 78

Publisher, postmaster and congressman were all titles held by Charles James Thompson. He was born in Wapakoneta on January 24, 1862, to a largely conservative family and spent his early years there. After graduating high school, he spent one year as a student at Ohio Wesleyan University and was a member of the Ohio militia.

He then dove into the newspaper printing arena when he was hired at the Wapakoneta Bee and served three years as an apprentice printer. Subsequently he worked as a journeyman printer at various points in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In 1884, he moved to Anderson, Indiana, to direct the Anderson Herald.

He also made it a point to support the entire Republican ticket; he had a future in politics. He returned to Wapakoneta, where he left newspaper work and for four years worked as the bookkeeper and cashier at Wapakoneta Wheel Works.

He then moved on to Defiance and bought the Weekly Express newspaper in 1889. He established a daily edition of the Express as the first daily paper in Defiance. He continued in this vein for 13 years before selling to William C. Kegel in 1902. Because of his sturdy support for the Republican party, he was appointed postmaster by President William McKinley. He continued working as such through the administrations of presidents Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson, until succeeded by H.A. Spangler. He was a Republican nominee for mayor in 1915 but was defeated. This soon followed a nomination for Congress, and he defeated Democrat John S. Snook.

He started his congressional career as a member of committees on waterways, canals, Indian affairs and other minor assignments. He moved on to agricultural issues and served in Congress for 12 consecutive years. He also took up the cause for veterans: he championed the compensation claims of WW veterans, and fought back when claims were delayed or rejected.

As his health declined, he moved west to the home of one of his sons in Albuquerque, New Mexico. There he suffered two strokes, lapsed into a coma, and never regained consciousness. His remains were brought back to Defiance for burial at Riverside Cemetery.
The monument on a quiet back corner of Riverside, that has crumbled some with time and is in the shape of a small pile of children’s clothes, complete with a small hat and boots, is for 2-year-old Johnnie Franklin Wilhelm, son of John and Mary Ann Wilhelm. Legend has it Johnnie took off his hat and shoes and went down to the river to swim and subsequently drowned. Some research revealed that in truth, he died of influenza. His father was deeply involved in the beautification of the cemetery grounds and is also buried at Riverside. If you get a chance, walk out to that corner and visit his resting place, maybe place a small toy there as well.