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A Defender of Huron Cemetery Dies at 72

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

Miss Lyda Burton Conley, who became locally famous as the protector of Huron cemetery, burial place of the Wyandot Indians, died at 6 o'clock this morning at the home, 1704 North Third, where she and her two sisters, Misses Ida and Helena Conley, have lived all their lives. She was 72 years old.

Miss Conley first caught the community's attention when in 1906 she instituted injunction proceedings against disposal of the cemetery, burial place of her mother's ancestors. The long struggle that she and her sisters maintained in defense of this famous landmark was the highlight of her picturesque career.

In the treaty of 1855 by which the Wyandots ceded their tribal lands back to the United States, to be subdivided and deeded to the members in severalty, it was the intent of the framers to preserve the historic old burial ground. The treaty contains such a proviso.

Sought Removal

In spite of that guarantee numerous attempts were made to sell the sacred plot and remove the bodies to Quindaro cemetery. In 1890 U.S. Sen. Preston B. Plumb introduced a resolution providing for sale of the cemetery. The act set out that the cemetery was a "nuisance" and that a majority of the then living Wyandots preferred that their ancestors be moved to a more secluded spot. The senator estimated the value of the cemetery at \$100,000.

But local protest was so vociferous that the resolution failed of passage. Later the agitation was revived until congress finally enacted a bill to sell the cemetery and a commission was named to negotiate the deal. At this juncture Miss Conley started injunction proceedings and the sisters Conley erected their famous "[fort](#)" in the cemetery to fend off all invaders. The fort was a small frame building in which the conleys resided and maintained a day and night vigilance. They were armed, according to tradition.

Although the defense of the cemetery was carried to the highest court in the land, invariably all of the courts sustained congress in authorizing the secretary of the interior to make the sale, according to a local history book.

No Buyer Found

But until this day no buyer ever was found for the cemetery and it still is directed by the

Bureau of Indian Affairs of the interior Department - and the Conley sisters. They have always contended that the original treaty guaranteed perpetual preservation of the cemetery, and that a subsequent federal order declared that it be held in trust for the Wyandots, with the city of Kansas City, Kansas as trustee.

Miss Conley again physically "held her ground" in June of 1929, when the city began excavation for a new retaining wall on the west side of Huron cemetery. Excavation for the new wall was completed except for a strip about 5 feet wide, 7 feet long and 20 feet deep, when she sat with her feet hanging over the ledge, defying workmen and city officials to continue digging.

She declared that the construction would invade five feet of sacred burial ground. "I'll fight this encroachment as long as I live," she was quoted as saying, "in my sentiments and feelings I am an Indian. When Miss Conley began tossing clods back in the trench she was forcibly removed from the ground and taken to jail where she stayed in preference to paying the \$10 fine because she said she had done nothing wrong. Her appeal to Vice President Curtis was to no avail. Helena, better known as Lena, was also on the scene to reinforce her sister if necessary.

Built It Legally

Because the city was responsible for the maintenance of the park, the wall was legally built against the will of the Conley sisters.

The parents of the Conley sisters, Andrew S. Conley and Eliza Zane, are both buried in the Huron cemetery, where Miss Conley will be buried. Eliza Zane was part Indian, according to Miss Conley, and their father was a white man.

Since 1906, Lyda Conley had not ceased to patrol the cemetery. She could be seen each day en route to the cemetery, up Third Street to Everett, on Everett to Sixth to Minnesota to the cemetery. Her route seldom varied and she often took with her garden implements to aid her in cleaning the cemetery. She was a member of the Seventh Street Methodist church.

The body was taken to the Gibson funeral home where funeral arrangements are not complete.