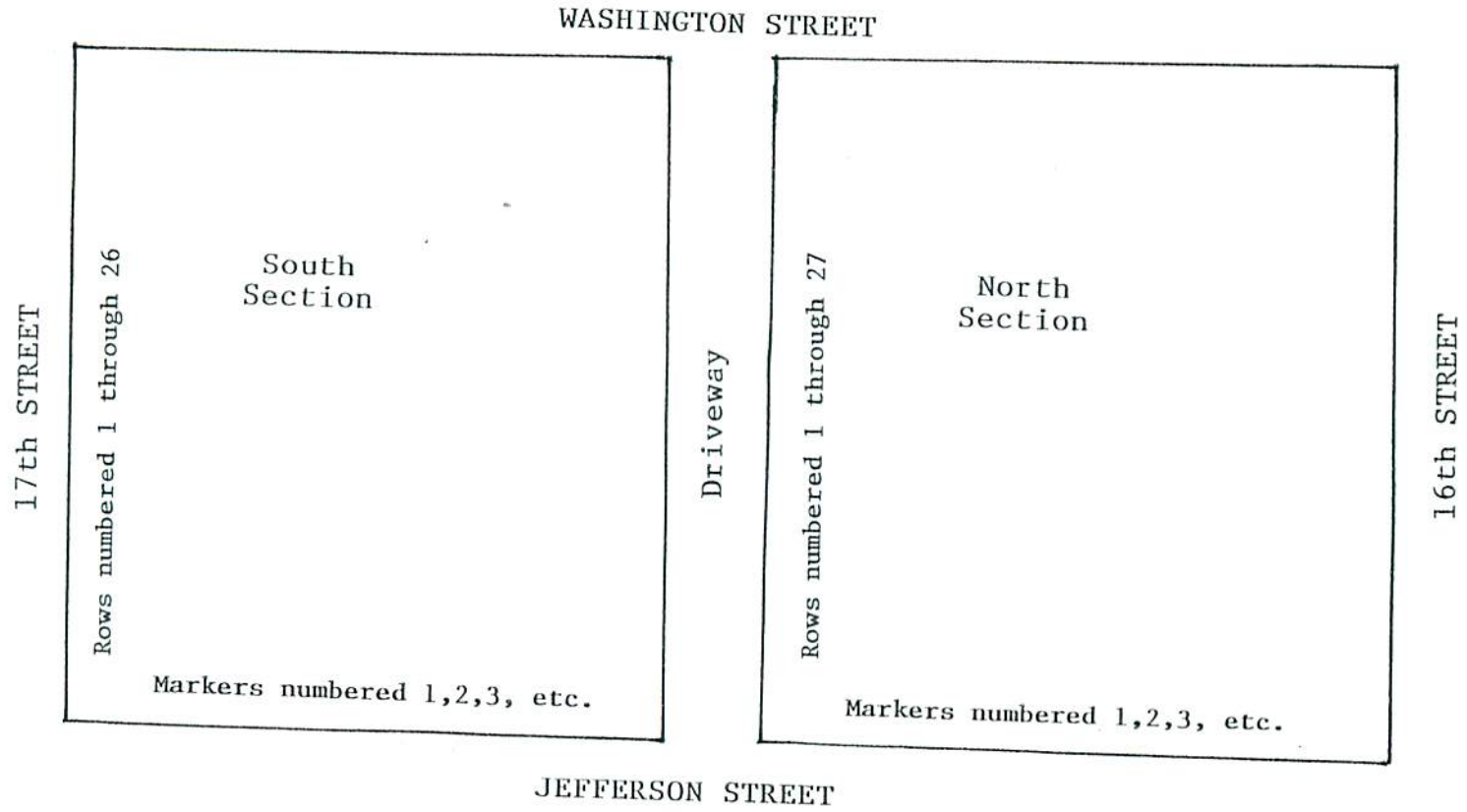
St. Dennis Cemetery



HISTORY OF THE CEMETERIES

ST. DENNIS

St. Dennis Cemetery is located on Block 9 of the City of Lockport. Its history goes back to the days of the Illinois & Michigan Canal Commissioners, who originally laid out the town in 1837. The entire block was first purchased from the Canal Commissioners at public auction by the School Commissioners of Cook County, Illinois. On June 13, 1852, it was sold for $54.00 "lawful money of the United States of America" to James D. Van DeVelde, Bishop of Chicago. This block was immediately put to use as a cemetery, with the burials of Michael Flavin (1815-1852) and the Rev. Dennis Ryan, founding pastor of St. Dennis Church, Lockport, who died on August 28, 1852. It was first called South Lockport Cemetery, as its location was in the neighborhood known as South Lockport.

The layout of the cemetery is simple: the square block is divided down the center by a driveway, and the rows of graves Are oriented north and south. To the west, across Washington Street, is Taft Elementary School, and the other three sides contain houses. A few trees remain, and the location is a pleasant one with light traffic except for school opening and closing times.

The monuments and markers are predominantly older than those in many cemeteries but all the more interesting for their age. Irish names predominate throughout. There are a number of inscriptions containing details of places of birth and death, fraternal affiliations, etc. Several birthplaces specify parish, town and county of Ireland. The monuments for two brothers, James and Michael Burke, state their birthplace of Ballycahill, County Tipperary, Ireland.

The stones themselves are of interest for their variety- from ultra-simple to a larger-than-life female figure. The materials used range from modern granite to early limestone , the latter sometimes illegible due to erosion, as well as bronze and even poured cement. And there are two of the style made to look like actual tree-trunks, with appropriate foliage and bark-like surface. Veterans from the Civil War and both World Wars lie here. Many of the earliest settlers of Lockport, especially those with I&M Canal connections, are here with their descendants and kinfolk.

A walk through St. Dennis Cemetery conjures up impressions of bygone days of the town with its good times and trying times, triumphs and tragedies, and all the lives lived among them.