



America's Newspapers

**Paper: THE SEATTLE TIMES**  
**Title: NO BLISS IN ELYSIAN FIELDS**  
**OFFICIAL CALLS FOR PROBE OF CEMETERY CLEANUP WORK**  
**Date: November 16, 1987**

One man's drive to clean up and restore a neglected pioneer **cemetary** on Beacon Hill \_ where headstones have been knocked down, chipped and moved by a bulldozer \_ has the executive secretary of the Washington State **Cemetery** Board calling for state and local investigations

The board executive, Paul Elvig, charged with regulating **cemeteries**, toured the Elysian Fields **Cemetery** recently and said he was shocked at what he found.

"Someone had gone through that **cemetary** with a bulldozer and pushed over all the vegetation and monuments and scraped off the land," Elvig said. "I have never seen anything like it. It was devastation."

He has issued a cease-and-desist order stopping all activity at the **cemetary**, and has asked for investigations by Seattle police and the state attorney general's office.

Elvig said the group trying to clean and restore the **cemetary** does not have a required certificate of authority from his office to operate the **cemetary**.

Donald Kipper, a 37-year-old Beacon Hill native who recalls that his childhood friends played in what they called "the old Indian graveyard," has directed the **cemetary** renovation. His foes call it devastation. Kipper says he simply wants to restore the **cemetary** to its original state.

"When we are through planting grass and chestnut trees and blueberry vines to give food to the food banks, it may look like a park but it will be a **cemetary**," said Kipper, who supports himself by working as a home health-care specialist for two elderly people.

Dedicated in 1895, the **Comet Lodge Cemetery** sits on a two-acre tract at 23rd Avenue South and South Graham Street, overlooking what is now Boeing Field. It is believed to have been the burial ground of about 200 people, including some of Seattle's earliest settlers.

Many were later exhumed by their descendants and moved to other **cemeteries** as the **Comet Lodge** become more and more overgrown and suffered more and more vandalism.

Missing or confusing records have clouded the **cemetary's** ownership. But for most of the past 40 years, it has been buried in brush, trash, discarded household appliances, old tires and berry vines, according to Kipper and news accounts.

To begin the restoration two years ago, Kipper formed the Elysian Fields **Cemetery** Association \_ himself and four friends.

However, two of the four other board members have left. The Rev. Art Mampel has resigned from the association, saying he has too much church work. And John Brower, who said Kipper has asked him to resign, took the **cemetary** bulldozing issue to Elvig and the state board.

Kipper said he believes he has the authority to do what is necessary at the **cemetary** because he acquired quitclaim deeds, for \$1 each, from two of the three grandchildren of Dr. Hiram Corson, who at one time owned the **cemetary**.

Kipper believes "the **cemetary** authority, that is the association, has broad discretion to do what is necessary. The shrubs, the markers \_ what to do with them is our decision."

Kipper said he began the restoration by hand, ``working my butt off clearing and cleaning this place."

In two years, with some help from youth groups, he made limited headway against the tangle and trash. And he came to the conclusion more effective methods were required.

One day last August, he says, it was his good fortune that the city hired a contractor for a nearby sewer construction job.

``There was this bulldozer and I talked to them and asked them if they could use it here. I paid them \$400 of my own money for 10 hours' work clearing the land," Kipper said. Later he paid \$200 to another contractor to use heavy equipment for more clearing of the **cemetary**.

The bulldozing has infuriated local residents \_ anger that Kipper believes may be behind what he calls harassing ``ghost phone calls" he's gotten from people ``going whoooooo and rattling bones."

Carol Farnum, past president of the Seattle Genealogical Society, also is disturbed with Kipper's methods. Farnum said she gave Kipper a list of some of the descendants of those buried at the **cemetary**, but Kipper never contacted any of them.

Kipper's response to both Elvig's order and the criticism is: ``I'm dismayed. Nobody else had the will or the courage to do it. I feel like I have been had.

``I'll never try to help anything or anybody again.'

Caption:

RICHARD S. HEYZA / SEATTLE TIMES: DANIEL LEEN AND HIS DOG, HILARY, WALK PAST TOMBSTONES PILED IN A CORNER OF THE ELYSIAN FIELDS **CEMETERY** ON SEATTLE'S BEACON HILL.

Caption:

PHOTO

Correction: PUBLISHED CLARIFICATION DATE: 87/11/20 - DONALD KIPPER, HEAD OF THE ELYSIAN FIELDS **CEMETERY** ASSOCIATION WHOSE CLEANUP WORK AT THE OLD **COMET LODGE CEMETERY** ON BEACON HILL WAS DESCRIBED IN THIS STORY, DENIES THAT A BULLDOZER KNOCKED OVER HEADSTONES. KIPPER SAYS THE BULLDOZER WAS USED TO CLEAR THE **CEMETERY** AND MOVE HEADSTONES AND BASES. IN THE PROCESS THE BULLDOZER CHIPPED SOME OF THEM BUT DID NOT KNOCK ANY OVER, AS ALLEGED BY RESIDENTS OF THE AREA. KIPPER ALSO SAYS HE DID TALK WITH TWO PEOPLE WHO HAD ANCESTORS BURIED IN THE **CEMETERY** AND ONE OF THE PEOPLE MADE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ASSOCIATION

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