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## Trees pose a challenge to fencing, signage in Fort Walla Walla cemetery

Annie Charnley Eveland Special to the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin  
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Reserve Organization of America WA Chapter 021 in Walla Walla built and installed a new archway for the entrance at Fort Walla Walla Post Cemetery at the end of May.

Photo courtesy of Reserve Organization of America Chapter 021

*Editor's note: The City of Walla Walla has addressed many tree issues referenced in this story in the last couple of years according to Andy Coleman, director of the City of Walla Walla Parks & Recreation Department. "We do not believe there are tree hazards that remain that could impact the fence at the Cemetery," he said in a clarification.*

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Fort Walla Walla Museum Executive Director James Payne said the new archway at the entrance to the Fort Walla Walla Post Cemetery is beautiful. Museum grounds are right next to the cemetery.

Walla Walla Reserve Organization of America WA Chapter 021 “did a great service to the community by redoing that entry. “It’s beautiful,” he said.

But the mature trees in and round the cemetery are a hazard to the fence, which has needed restoration and repair about every eight to 10 years because of sporadic windstorm damage from falling trees and branches.

One recent windstorm dropped huge debris that fell 6 inches from one headstone, 12 inches from another and 24 inches from a third.

“It did not hit a single stone. It’s amazing. If it had fallen one degree differently, it would have hit them,” Payne said.

A 1906 photo shows the trees in the post cemetery as just sticks, Payne said. Now they’re huge and dropping branches or toppling in windstorms.

They’re the only risk to the new ROA entry archway, he said.

Two of the biggest cottonwoods in the state, both hit by lightning, were just taken down in the cemetery. Silverwoods there, from 80-100 years old, are becoming decrepit and in danger of breaking apart and rotting inside.

However, it’s a common misconception that the not-for-profit museum cares for the post cemetery in the park off Myra Road, Payne said.



The headstone for U.S. Army Cavalry soldier Joseph Machler, who died at age 29 on July 23, 1888, was among grave markers uprooted by a toppled tree in the Fort Walla Walla Military Cemetery.

GREG LEHMAN

“We don’t own the land and are not in charge of the park, the Rotary shelter, the Fort Walla Walla Amphitheater or the historical cemetery.”

The museum has a 75-year lease for the 15 acres on which it sits. Payne said forward-thinking city council officials and local historical society members began looking for a way to have a museum for the community.

Descendants of Walla Walla's early white settlers formed the Walla Walla Valley Pioneer and Historical Society in 1886. The society helped found the Fort Walla Walla Museum in 1957. Before that, the society occupied three rooms at city hall for display, storage and office space.

In the late 1960s they worked to find a location for the museum aided by U.S. Rep. Catherine Dean May, (R-Yakima), the first woman elected to Congress in the state of Washington. In 1968 the museum moved to 15 acres within the original 640-acre Fort Walla Walla military reservation.

Payne said Fort Walla Walla land was transferred to the Veterans Administration in about 1921. “After World War I, forts were converted into VA hospitals, including in Walla Walla,” he said.

But the park was left without maintenance.

“In the 1960s, you could get lost in the cemetery, it was so overgrown.”

Land was transferred to the city, including the cemetery. The museum picked the spot it now occupies.

“Without early pioneer and historical society members, this area would not have the park,” Payne said. Walla Walla Valley Pioneer Historical Society merged in 1957 and became the Walla Walla Valley Historical Society Fort Walla Walla Museum.

Fort Walla Walla Park offers play equipment, picnic tables, horseshoe pits, sand volleyball facilities, the Rotary covered picnic shelter, the amphitheater, a model car track and model airplane field, a bicycle motocross track, a skateboard park and paved bicycle trail. Its 70-acre Arthur G. Rempel Nature Trail wildlife preserve has streams and a hiking trail.

Retired editor/journalist Annie Charnley Eveland freelances the Etcetera column and stories for the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin. **Full disclosure: She is a Fort Walla Walla Museum board member.** Send contact name, daytime phone number, news and clear sharply focused photos as .jpg attachments to [acereporter1979@gmail.com](mailto:acereporter1979@gmail.com) or call 509-386-7369.

MORE INFORMATION



**Fort Walla Walla Post Cemetery has a new archway as of May 25**