

Celebrating 95 Years: A Look Back at One of Michigan's First Memorial Parks



Pictured: The family service office in the formative years of Michigan Memorial Park.

As one of five children raised in a poor farming family, William Heston strived to make a better life for himself and his family. Working as a porter at a second-class hotel in California to pay his way through college, Heston went on to become a two-time All-American University of Michigan football star and one of Detroit's most prominent attorneys and judges.

In 1926, inspired by a memorial park in California, Heston purchased 178 acres of land from a farming family in former Wyandotte Indian Territory on the Huron River. This would become Michigan Memorial Park, one of the first "park-style" cemeteries in Michigan. The initial land for Michigan Memorial Park was purchased for \$217,500.

Ten years later, Heston expanded the park by purchasing an additional 100 acres, totaling 278 acres. Over the next 95 years, the Park would grow to become a pillar of the Downriver community: not only providing a resting place for many thousands of families, but also giving back to the community through Heston's involvement in civic activities.

Innovation at Michigan Memorial
Since its inception, Michigan Memorial has been leading the profession by pioneering a variety of innovations—introducing many first-of-its-kind technologies, sales procedures and other initiatives that would position Michigan Memorial as leaders in the funeral profession.

First-of-its-kind underground sprinkler

system
Costing the cemetery \$143,000, Michigan Memorial Park had an underground sprinkler system installed in 1928. Covering every inch of the park and the largest system of its kind to date, the cemetery was given the nickname "Land of a Thousand Rainbows."

Introduction of pre-need property
In the early 1950s John Heston revolutionized the funeral profession by introducing the sale of pre-need cemetery property. First derided by other cemeteries and funeral homes, the selling of pre-need services over the phone and door to door is now commonplace.

Helicopter Tours
To ensure customers were 100% satisfied in their plot selection, Heston hired a helicopter



service to take them high above the cemetery grounds—allowing them to take in the entire park in a one-of-a-kind, memorable way.

A Family Tradition
Through 95 years and 4 generations, Michigan Memorial Park has remained in the Heston family. Each succeeding generation continued to build on the ideals established by William Heston.

In the 1940s, Michigan Memorial was passed on to William Heston's son, John P. Heston. In 1957, John Heston began the construction of the

beautiful, yet architecturally challenging, Shrine of Remembrance Chapel and Mausoleum.

Unfortunately, Heston died before the completion of the building. His daughter, Barbara Heston, who took over the cemetery operations in 1970, was determined to complete the Shrine of Remembrance. It was finally completed in 1993 and John Heston is entombed there.

As President, Barbara Heston continued to improve and expand the business beyond the difficult task of completing the Shrine of Remembrance project. Notable achievements include adding the first upright monument section to the park, building the first crematory on the property, and purchasing 15 additional acres of surrounding land for future growth.

In 2008, Kelly Dwyer and Heidi Umin became official owners and operators of Michigan Memorial Park. To date, they continue to build on



the legacy that William Heston started more than 95 years ago by adding many new, innovative landmark monuments.

For example, they designed and built a working Lighthouse on the banks of the Huron River, built the Oaks Complex, added a monument to their great grandfather, and built the Eternal Flame honoring veterans, all while maintaining the tradition of excellence at the Park.

Michigan Memorial Funeral Home opens
Twenty years ago, Daniel P. Dwyer, a fourth-generation funeral director, proudly opened Michigan Memorial Funeral Home on property

adjacent to Michigan Memorial Park.

Although not owned and operated by Michigan Memorial Park, this expansive, modern project was constructed in the Michigan Memorial tradition of excellence.

With five additions to the original building since its opening in 2001, and at 35,000 square feet,

Michigan Memorial Funeral Home has grown to be the largest and most frequently visited funeral home Downriver — offering highly-trained and compassionate staff, unique services, an on-site flower shop, and numerous private areas for families to gather, including a banquet area for catered celebration of life gatherings.

Park and Funeral Home pioneer "The Witness Crematory"
In March of 2013, Michigan Memorial Park opened "The Witness Crematory" inside Michigan Memorial Funeral Home as the first of its kind in the state of Michigan.

Changing the practice of

cremation, "The Witness Crematory" allows a family time with their deceased loved one in a private viewing room and grants them peace of mind in knowing there's guaranteed individual cremation on site.

Michigan Memorial Park and Michigan Memorial Funeral Home continue to preserve the principles, integrity, and philanthropy set forth by William Heston back in the 1920's — a man who, in the early years, dedicated undeveloped areas of the Park's land for community gardens. In 1963, a scholarship program was established by John Heston that awarded the area's brightest students with a gift of \$1,000 to pursue their dreams.

Numerous charitable activities continue today that improve the lives of the people in the Downriver community, including fishing derbies for children with disabilities, blood drives, Catholic Masses, and walking clubs, to name a few.

The future at Michigan Memorial Park and Michigan Memorial Funeral Home holds many bright promises, including the continual expansion of services; a pledge to lead with innovations that will set the pace for the profession; and a lasting commitment to serving generations of families in the Downriver community.



Michigan Memorial

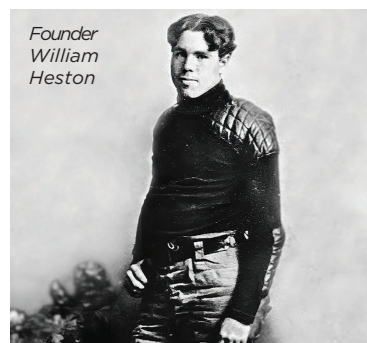
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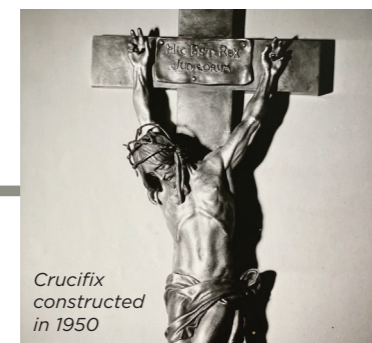
Michigan Memorial Funeral Home, Inc.; Michigan Memorial Park, Inc.; Michigan Memorial Park Crematory Company, Inc. These companies are separate owned and operated. Daniel P. Dwyer, President / Owner of Michigan Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. All Family Owned and Operated

Historical Timeline

A brief history of Michigan Memorial Park and Michigan Memorial Funeral Home



Founder William Heston



Crucifix constructed in 1950



Shrine of Remembrance Construction



Inside Shrine of Remembrance



Funeral Home Exterior



Horse-Drawn Military Caisson



Viewing Room & "The Witness Crematory"

- 1926 Michigan Memorial Park (MMP) opens
- 1928 First burial takes place
- 1934 Sunday services were broadcast from the Park on radio stations WJR & WXYZ

- 1945 The 1,000th burial takes place
- 1950 Large crucifix erected in consecrated Catholic area of the cemetery
- 1957 Construction begins on the Shrine of Remembrance Mausoleum

- 1963 Founder William "Willie" Heston dies
- 1964 10,000th burial takes place
- 1970 MMP President John Heston dies - Barbara Heston takes over as the 3rd generation

- 1980 The 25,000th burial takes place
- 1986 Final 15 acres of land purchased
- 1993 Shrine of Remembrance is completed

- 1996 New MMP Administration building opens
- 1998 MMP records its 50,000th burial
- 2001 Michigan Memorial Funeral Home (MMFH) and Michigan Memorial Flower Shop open

- 2003 MMFH introduces specialty hearses including motorcycle and horse-drawn options
- 2007 Garden of Angels Mausoleum opens
- 2008 Kelly Dwyer and Heidi Umin, purchase the cemetery from their mother, Barbara Heston

- 2013 MMP Crematory opens inside MMFH
- 2015 The 75,000th burial takes place
- 2019 MMFH completes 5th building addition