

# Sandusky workers enliven Cholera Cemetery

10/11/2017 Any Ouriel, Sandusky Register

SANDUSKY — They're keeping a promise to clean up the Cholera Cemetery.

Since springtime, Sandusky's public services workers have made many upgrades at the green space located on Harrison Street near AMVETS Park.

They include:

- Touching up a monument, or obelisk, acknowledging those dying from the disease
- Placing landscaping materials around the memorial
- Refurbishing the historical marker
- Adding a butterfly pollinator area to strengthen its [Monarch City title given earlier this year](#)
- Removing dead and trimming overgrown trees
- Making other minor modifications

Some unfinished tasks remain, namely painting the "Cholera Cemetery" sign to white from its green shade.

Brad Link, the city's public services director, explained the reasoning behind this ongoing job.

"It's been years since we have done major work to our non-active parks, which this would qualify as one," Link said. "There is a great historical reference here at the Cholera Cemetery. It's important, especially for the people who are buried here and those who visit them, to make sure this isn't run down and actually is enjoyable to visit and pay your respects to the people who passed away in our history."

This marks the cemetery's [first such major makeover in about 50 years](#). Many pushed for these changes, namely city commissioner Dave Waddington.



Since springtime, many upgrades have taken place at the Cholera Cemetery in Sandusky. Among them:

## Catching up on the Cholera Cemetery

The cemetery, also considered a memorial park, pays tribute to what many consider as Sandusky's "darkest hours." Prevalent in the 1800s, cholera is an infectious, and often fatal, bacterial disease of the small intestine, which is typically contracted from toxic water supplies. "When transportation started ramping up, on the Erie Canal and on steamships, cholera traveled with it," city commissioner Dick Brady said. "The more mobile the population got, the higher the propensity was for this disease to

spread."

History records show at least 400 Sandusky residents died from cholera between the late 1840s and the early 1850s. This count includes the 357 buried at Cholera Cemetery in 1849. An additional 2,500 people fled the city because of this disease. "We lost half of our population," Sandusky ex officio mayor Dennis Murray Jr. said. "This was definitely one of Sandusky's darkest hours, no question about it."

In the near future, and especially for Sandusky's bicentennial, or 200-year anniversary in 2018, city officials want to host walking tours and other tributes commemorating those buried there.

But why remember something so terrible? "It's a big part of the history of this community, and now it's time that we should be taking advantage of showing off our history, no matter good or bad," Brady said.



City officials meet at the Cholera Cemetery on Harrison Street on Sandusky's west side to discuss updates to the historic area on Wednesday, March 8, 2017.

## History lesson

Cholera first appeared in North America in or around 1832. It spread rapidly up the St. Lawrence River and into New York due in part to crowded and unsanitary conditions on the ships people traveled on and also some of the shore accommodations along the way, where eating and drinking was done with little regard for cleanliness.

The dreaded disease hit Sandusky that year with the death of Captain S. Wadsworth of the schooner *Ligure*, which had arrived the week before from Buffalo, N.Y. The Sandusky *Clarion* announced his death and reported: "He was not a resident, and his habits had recently been such as to be a cause of cholera."

During the period, there were thirty (30) or thirty-five (35) deaths, all of them strangers or person of dissipated habits so that there was no loss to the city.”

In June 1832, a petition was presented to (the Sandusky city) council to pass an ordinance to guard against cholera and other contagious diseases. Council passed an ordinance providing for the inspection of vessels and passengers before allowing the discharge of same as a measure of prevention.

Cholera plagued many areas of the country, but Sandusky was relatively free of the disease until the summer of 1849, when, from July 1 to Sept. 7, there were 357 deaths. Unreported cases would bring the total to at least 400. There were 357 burials in the Harrison Street Cemetery (now known as the Cholera Cemetery) in 68 days, including 60 of them in a common grave on July 28-29. Many people, naturally, fled from the city and, according to a story, there was no one to dig graves, so the “town drunkard” volunteered his services and dug graves all through the summer for the cholera victims.

*Source: Erie County Historical Society, “Cemetery History” by Barbara K. Wendt*