

Video Interview with LuAnn Johnson

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Hosea: Today is September 25, 2008 and we are having a conversation with LuAnn Johnson, Executive Director of Oak Ridge Cemetery, in her office. LuAnn, we're going to spend almost all of our time talking about the cemetery but I wanted to introduce you and a little bit of your history. Could you tell us where you grew up and a little of your family and how in the world you ended up as executive director of a large cemetery?

Johnson: I surely can. I was born and raised in Springfield, a lifelong resident. I'm very proud of that. I come from a very large Irish Catholic family that also reside in Springfield. There are only a few cousins who have left the area. Most of us are right here and we are together on a very regular basis. So it's something we are very proud of. We love our Catholic and Irish heritage and our family is closer than many families would be. We've all raised our children to think of Springfield as home and subsequent generations have also chosen to stay here in Springfield. I'm not sure what else you would like to know.

Hosea: How did you end up in this position? Did you work your way up here or did you come here out of school?

Johnson: No, I had owned and operated retail businesses and when I sold those businesses I was home with my children. This position was posted and they were looking for someone with a business background. The cemetery had

not been actually run and operated as a business although it is a self-supporting entity. I was encouraged to send in my application, and I really did have no intent of operating Oak Ridge Cemetery because I had no background in cemetery operation. Once I entered that whole application process I realized that really there was no one in the Springfield area who had cemetery background. They were in fact looking for someone with a business background and experience in operating businesses. So, after several interviews I was the candidate chosen. And I have to say it was probably one of the best days of my life because I am a person that can say that every single morning when that alarm clock goes off, I'm anxious to get up and I'm anxious to come to work. Many people don't have that luxury. They have jobs that they must go to to support their families and to, you know, live. My situation is very different than that. There is nothing I would rather be doing than being the director of Oak Ridge Cemetery. I'm very fortunate that I absolutely love my job.

Hosea: Well, that's really neat. What year was this?

Johnson: Nineteen eighty-eight.

Hosea: So, that's twenty years or so that you've been director here. You have multiple responsibilities and pressures, so just from a personal standpoint, is there a philosophy or a way of approaching being in charge of this cemetery that you use? What things are important to you to get done in your job?

Johnson: Well, first and foremost, we're here to meet with families who have just lost someone who is very important to them. So, no matter what we have planned during the day, when the phone rings or a family walks in the door that takes precedent over anything else. We really can't plan ahead. If we have a project that needs to be done next week, we really need to be working on it this week because we don't know how many families we're going to be serving tomorrow and the next day and each subsequent day until the due date of that project. So, at Oak Ridge we never do things last minute because last minute may not be available to us.

My position is extremely varied. I have a wonderful office staff. We enjoy coming to work. Everyone has a passion for Oak Ridge Cemetery. We just thoroughly enjoy what we do. We feel very rewarded when we're meeting with families, helping them make choices about final arrangements. Whether that's at the time of the death of a loved one or pre-need, because many families come to us making final arrangements very much pre-need. So we have the joy of fulfilling those needs with families. You know, I'm also out in the cemetery every day when there are to be burials. Our Superintendent of Grounds lays out the grave and I go out and, you know, actually approve all of those graves before they are dug. So I'm in and out of the office on a regular basis. I'm also at City Hall each day. Oak Ridge Cemetery is a municipal cemetery owned and operated by the City of

Springfield, but we are unique in that we are one of very few government cemeteries in this country that is self supporting. So we have our own accounts set up at the city treasurer's office. Each day instead of going to a local bank and doing banking, I in fact go to the city treasurer's office and bank there in accounts that are separate from all other city dollars.

Hosea: Do you work directly for the mayor then or ...?

Johnson: Correct. Yes. With the hierarchy of city government and since we are, in fact, removed from the two City Hall buildings, we are under the Department of Public Works and have been for about twenty years. Before that we were under the Department of Public Affairs. But it's just our way of getting information and collating information between City Hall and the cemetery. But, yes, I do work at the pleasure of the mayor.

Hosea: We're going to deal extensively with the history of this cemetery but before we do that let's get some things on the record. How many acres is Oak Ridge?

Johnson: Oak Ridge Cemetery has the distinction of being the largest cemetery in Illinois. We are three hundred and sixty-five acres. So by cemetery standards, we're enormous. If you think of all cemeteries in the state of Illinois and eliminate those little tiny cemeteries with no staff where maybe the local farmer opens and closes the graves and someone at the township office may take any phone calls from families, if you eliminate those very tiny acre or two cemeteries and think of only cemeteries that have a staff, that have someone regularly on premise cutting grass and opening graves and an office where people can have questions answered and make arrangements. The average size of a cemetery in Illinois considering staffing would be about forty to forty-five acres. So Oak Ridge at three hundred and sixty-five acres is huge by cemetery standards.

Hosea: I hope this doesn't catch you off base, but do you have any idea how many graves there are in the cemetery now?

Johnson: Well, we have graves that are pinned and platted. We have graves that are used and then we have other graves that are available for sale that are all pinned and platted and ready for sale. We would probably have in the neighborhood of a hundred and twenty-five thousand grave spaces. Back in the early days of Oak Ridge, we know from reading all past history of the cemetery that they didn't always count all burials when they were making their count of funerals. They didn't always count public assisted burials. There was a city section and a county section in old Block 1 where indigent burials were made. Those were not always counted. We're not sure that all the ethnic burials were always counted. So we have a number that for many, many decades we've added to on a daily basis with each burial made. If there is ever a disinterment we have subtracted that one burial. And we

are over seventy-five thousand. But we know for a fact that is not all inclusive.

Hosea: Can you give us a little introduction to the staff that works here. How many and what kind of positions and so on?

Johnson: There's four of us in our office. A records manager, two cemetery assistants and myself and we make a great team. I think most people would thoroughly enjoy to have a work environment like we have. We have a Superintendent of Grounds who is in a management position. All other grounds employees are union employees. There is a working foreman, a full time mechanic and then I have different levels of groundsmen, depending upon their expertise and years of experience; they typically start as maintenance workers. Then there's Equipment Operator 1, Equipment Operator 2 and cemetery specialists. Cemetery specialists have typically been with us for the longest period of time, have more extensive knowledge of laying out graves, laying out foundations. All the intricacies of a cemetery.

Hosea: Now, as you say, you report to the mayor and the city department essentially.

Johnson: Through the Department of Public Works, correct. Yes.

Hosea: Are there state or federal regulations, agencies that you have to satisfy in your work?

Johnson: Of course. Illinois is a very proactive state in death care industry legislation. We have been for many decades. Back in the '40s, the industry realized that there was a need for statewide legislation so that families were always served well. And the industry itself put together most of that legislation and in subsequent decades, other states have even used Illinois legislation as a model for which they have written their own state legislation. But most of the bulk of the legislation was adopted in the 1940s and then, of course, there's been subsequent legislation ever since then. But cemeteries in Illinois are registered with the Illinois State Comptroller's Office. Oak Ridge Cemetery was established in 1855 as an endowment care cemetery; what that means is that a portion of all property sold—whether it be grave spaces or crypts in our mausoleum; or niches or cremated remains in our mausoleum; or lawn crypts, any places where human bodies are buried—a percentage of that sale is put into our endowment care fund, the principle of which can never be touched. When legislation was enacted in Illinois in 1947 establishing endowment care cemeteries, it did exempt certain cemeteries. It exempted government cemeteries. It exempted religious cemeteries and some not-for-profit cemeteries. But Oak Ridge was established. Our documentation throughout our 150-year history shows that

we are an endowment care cemetery and we more than follow the state law that we truly are exempt.

Hosea: Do you foresee having room to serve Springfield for quite some time?

Johnson: Another century, yes.

Hosea: Another century?

Johnson: Back in 2004, the board of managers decided that we really needed to look at Oak Ridge and determine the future. We knew that I wouldn't be here forever and this very active board of managers wouldn't be here forever, and that we needed to plan wisely. So we initiated a yearlong study and did a long range plan for the cemetery. Burial practices have changed over the last 150 years. In the old days, you know, everyone did full casket burials: one human remain to a grave space. Things are not necessarily that way now. In Illinois, statistically we are at about a 20 percent cremation rate. Oak Ridge Cemetery has always followed, for decades since we have been tracking cremation rates, whatever the state rate, was always exactly within hundredths of a point to what Oak Ridge was. So we are at about 20 percent cremation now, where twenty years ago we were at about 11 percent cremation. So that has changed. Oak Ridge Cemetery also allows the entombment or inurnment or interment of more than one human remain per space. We allow up to three. So that, in fact, saves ground. Also there's different things in place now. Back in the 1850s, there really were not mausoleums, and although our abbey was built in 1910, it was one of the first mausoleums in the Midwest. You know we also have the chapel mausoleum at this time. So there are more burials per acre when you have a building where burials are in tiers. Also with cremation, the inurnment of cremated remains takes up much less space. Through this study that we did in 2004, this long range plan, we determined how we could use land that before we really didn't think was usable for the burial of human remains. Also, we have installed a new veteran's lawn crypt section and that saves land. So with all the things we have in place and plans that we have made for the future, we feel that we can serve Springfield and the surrounding area for another hundred years.

Hosea: So that's the way Oak Ridge is now. I know you have some unique challenges, because Oak Ridge is more than just an active municipal cemetery, it's also a state and national historic site and a tourist attraction. Can you explain the relationship of the cemetery with the war memorials and Lincoln's tomb?

Johnson: When President Lincoln passed, there was a sentiment that he wanted to be buried in Springfield. Mary Todd Lincoln wanted him buried in Springfield and, of course, the community wanted to bring their President home. So the city fathers at that time had gone out and actually purchased land on which

they felt would be a fitting place to build a memorial for the fallen President. It took three and a half weeks from the time Lincoln was assassinated until the time he was actually buried at Oak Ridge. His body first laid in state in Washington at the capitol and then his son, Willie, who had passed while the family lived in Washington was exhumed and his body and Lincoln's body were placed on the funeral train that was heading back to Illinois. As they passed through communities of size, the body was taken off, laid in state so the people of the area could pay their respect to the fallen President. So it took three and a half weeks from the time of the assassination until the burial.

When that funeral train was enroute, Mary Todd Lincoln got word that the city fathers had bought land on which they planned to erect a fitting memorial for the fallen President. She sent word: "He'll be buried at Oak Ridge Cemetery or I'll turn the train around." We all have read enough about Mary Todd Lincoln to know she probably would have turned the train around. So at that time, plans were then made to bury Lincoln in Oak Ridge Cemetery. Oak Ridge Cemetery donated the twelve acres of land on which Lincoln's Tomb now resides. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency oversees Lincoln's tomb. Once the war memorials were put into Oak Ridge Cemetery, the first dedicated in 1988 – the Vietnam – the cemetery gave a total of six acres on which the Illinois war memorials now sit. That also is overseen by Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. So they are within the confines of Oak Ridge Cemetery. Obviously many tourists come to see and pay their respects at those historic places.

Hosea: How many visitors will you have in a year?

Johnson: We are the second most visited cemetery in the country. Arlington National Cemetery has four million visitors a year. Oak Ridge Cemetery has three million visitors a year. So, we are very used to things that most cemeteries never have to contend with. When the Lincoln Bicentennial celebration starts, we know that we are going to have days when we're going to have fifty, sixty thousand people in Oak Ridge Cemetery. That is something that we can handle, and do handle, annually on many occasions. For example, on Mother's Day alone we typically will have forty thousand people in the cemetery. Some of those will be tourists. Many just coming to pay their respects to mothers, grandmothers, women from their previous family history.

Hosea: So, you have gotten used to this being a more public than usual area in cemetery. Is this something you welcome? Is it a fun thing to deal with? Or frustrating?

Johnson: No. We thoroughly enjoy having our tourists here. We had four ladies in the office yesterday afternoon. They were waiting for the mass transit bus. We have the distinction of the mass transit bus coming through our

cemetery every half hour. It stops in front of our office. It stops at Lincoln's tomb. It goes past the war memorials and out our west gate. These four ladies were from Illinois and surrounding states. They had come to see the historic sites. They were older ladies and they asked if they could come in and sit down while they were waiting for the bus. They commented how much they enjoyed being in Springfield, how every place that they had been over several days they just found everyone to be so friendly, so helpful. I think those of us who live in Springfield, especially those of us who have lived here for decades, welcome the tourists. We know that we have a history here and we're proud to share it. For us at Oak Ridge, it brightens our day. One hour we're dealing with a family who has just lost the most important person in their life, they have a life altering situation that they are dealing with; the next moment we can get a cold drink for tourists and chat about the Lincoln family. So it adds real diversity to what we do. And we welcome all of the tourists that we have here.

Hosea: Has there been a change here since the establishment of the Presidential Library and Museum? Has that impacted you?

Johnson: Yes, it has impacted us. The dedication of that museum was on a Tuesday and we had met and talked about it as a cemetery. We knew that it would impact us. And we really thought that starting the weekend prior that we would see more tourists coming. That people would come to town for that dedication and we expected more traffic in the cemetery starting the week before the dedication. It really started the Thursday before which surprised us that many people would come to town that far in advance. But from the Thursday before the dedication and then, of course, through today and ongoing, we do see many people who have come. Many stop in our office because genealogy is a thing of interest to many people. So they'll stop if they think they might have a family member buried here or just to check to see if there is anyone with their surname buried here. We get a chance to talk to a lot of the different tourists. It surprises me how many people actually plan their family vacations on visiting presidential libraries. We have yet to have a single person who has not proclaimed the Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum to be the best they have seen. So it makes us very proud and we know it brings additional people to Springfield. It helps the Springfield economy and helps make people aware of Oak Ridge Cemetery and we're proud of that too.

Hosea: Okay, let's go now to the really incredibly interesting history of this cemetery. If we came here before the establishment of the cemetery, can you give me an idea, to the extent you know, what cemeteries were around and how people were handling the loss of loved ones?

Johnson: Sure. There were two cemeteries aside from the little family cemeteries. There were two cemeteries in Springfield and they were within the city limits of Springfield. In 1830 the City Cemetery – what we now always

refer to as the Old City Cemetery – was established. And it was established where the revenue building is now. It was bordered by Pasfield, College, Adams and Washington [Streets]. So several blocks east of Springfield High School was the Old City Cemetery. In 1836 Hutchison Cemetery was founded. The Hutchison family were cabinet and coffin makers – kind of an unusual combination – but I guess they worked with wood and were skilled at that. And where Springfield High School is now, is where that cemetery was established. So burials within the city were basically in those two cemeteries. The old Kelly family cemetery was within the city limits and, of course, there were other family cemeteries both within and outside the city limits of Springfield. But the Old City Cemetery and Hutchison Cemetery were the two cemeteries most used by the residents of Springfield and the surrounding area.

In 1855, the city fathers of Springfield decided that it probably was not a good idea to have cemeteries within the city limits. The city limits at that time were defined by what was called the four grands – North Grand and South Grand as we still know them today. West Grand was what we now call MacArthur and East Grand was Nineteenth Street. Within those four grands sat Hutchison Cemetery and Old City Cemetery. The city fathers determined that that was probably not the healthiest place, first of all. They felt that burial places should not be within the city limits of Springfield and so they determined that they would buy some property. In 1855, seventeen acres were purchased in what is now the northeast corner of Oak Ridge. The following year another eleven and a half acres were purchased and they just continued purchasing and purchasing for the next hundred years.

Hosea: Do you have any – I almost said do you have any memory, no, you don't – (LuAnn laughs) do you have knowledge of what this land was like. Was this farmland or parkland or what was it?

Johnson: No, it was just vacant land. It was right here. I can show you. This would be the first – right here is the first corner that was purchased. It's what is called Block 1 of the cemetery and you notice this straight roadway here. When those first twenty-eight and half acres were purchased, graves were platted out. Part of it was noted for county burials and part for city burials. There were also lots platted that families could in fact purchase. Indigent burials were done in that area as were burials of family members.

Hosea: Was it intended from the beginning that the cemeteries inside of Springfield proper would be done away with essentially and those graves moved to Oak Ridge or somewhere?

Johnson: Yes. By the 1850s they had prohibited burials at Hutchison Cemetery and Old City Cemetery. Those bodies, up until the 1880s and even a few in the 1890s, were removed and brought – mostly to Oak Ridge cemetery. Now a few years after the establishment of Oak Ridge Cemetery, Calvary Cemetery

was established. It is directly to the north of Oak Ridge and there is not even a fence line between the two but it runs right here. This is Calvary Cemetery and this is the Calvary Cemetery office. So some of those disinterments from old city cemetery and Hutchison were taken to Calvary if the family was of the Catholic faith.

Hosea: So that was a Catholic cemetery?

Johnson: It was established by the Springfield Diocese as a Catholic cemetery and remains that way today. We've always had a great relationship with Calvary Cemetery

Hosea: Now one of the major things that happened very early they started doing – for want of a better phrase – a traditional cemetery. It was straight lines and everything. At some point they decided to hire an actual cemetery architect to design a cemetery. That sounds a little unusual for a prairie town. Do you know?

Johnson: Springfield is really rather progressive, you know. We think of Springfield – those of us who have lived here our whole lives – as an overgrown farming community. I mean we still have the ways of a smaller town in some respects but we have grown into the nice city that we are today. But when those first twenty-seven and a half acres were purchased, there was a Springfield architect who in fact laid out and platted those graves. They were done in straight rows. One row following the other. His name was William Sides.

Hosea: How do you spell that last name?

Johnson: I believe it's S-i-d-e-s. He platted Block 1. The city fathers then became aware of a movement called rural landscaped cemeteries. And they hired William Saunders. William Saunders had come to this country as a landscape architect, as his father was before him. He had done much work in the Washington area establishing Gettysburg Cemetery, for one, and doing many historical spots in the Washington area.

Hosea: They knew this man just by reputation?

Johnson: By reputation. He was asked to come here and see Oak Ridge Cemetery and, of course, as they continued to buy acres, more and more of the beautiful hills and rolling terrain was then part of Oak Ridge. It was a perfect place to have a rural landscaped cemetery. And the difference is that instead of graves all being in the regimented rows, typically all facing one direction, roads are put into the cemetery to follow the topography rather than cutting a straight road going up hills and down vales and so on. The roads were put in to follow the topography and the graves were laid out facing the roads. So in many cemeteries established in the 1800s, all burials were facing east. It depended upon your religious beliefs whether you

thought it was facing the rising sun or facing the second coming of Christ, but many, many cemeteries were set up that way. The very first part, Block 1 of Oak Ridge, was set up in straight lines, but the rest of Oak Ridge is set up in a rural landscape cemetery fashion and that was done by William Saunders. He laid out what is now considered the historic north end of the cemetery. All of this up here is higher than the rest of the cemetery. The cemetery kept that theme and in most instances, you know, our roads all curve and burials are done facing the roads.

Hosea: So Oak Ridge has grown gradually over the years buying relatively small additions?

Johnson: Well, in the 1800s they really did purchase a lot of land – what we now refer to as the front end of the cemetery. All of this that's in view of Lincoln's Tomb was purchased by the year 1900, and in fact, was pinned and platted. It was available for sale. And in the year 1900, Monument Street was made the main entrance of the cemetery. So all of that acreage was purchased by then and was available for the families of Springfield.

Hosea: When Lincoln's Tomb was established and the deed or the gift given to the State, was that essentially an entirely open area at that time?

Johnson: It was, yes. It was a nice high ground, you know. I presume at that point there may have been discussion of moving the entrance from what was always called Third Street, which now, with enhanced 9-1-1, we call First Street.

Hosea: We'll see that later.

Johnson: Yes. It was considered a nice high place and so it was determined that that would be the place for the erection of a tomb for our sixteenth president.

Hosea: I understand from some reading that – this is particularly interesting since later we'll be seeing all these incredible monuments – that there was some feeling at the beginning that there should be very few, if any, monuments. That it should be green and open, is that ...

Johnson: Yes, I think that's true and I think it's evident by the large yard in front of Lincoln's Tomb. When you enter the gates of Oak Ridge Cemetery, looming ahead is Lincoln's Tomb. There's the green vista in front of it and I think that was always the intent and has remained so.

Hosea: Do you have any idea how large Springfield was in the late nineteenth century or late 1800s or ... we're talking about a relatively small town, aren't we?

Johnson: We are, yes. I mean we were still within the confines of the four Grands at that time. Um, I think there was some building west but not much past

MacArthur. You know, we were a smaller community than we are today by all means.

Hosea: So this must have been a rather incredible municipal project.

Johnson: Obviously. Yes. I mean, there were cornfields around the cemetery at the time. We were considered to be out in the country, removed from the city population. So, yes, Springfield has definitely grown around us, so we are landlocked at this point.

Hosea: At what point was it considered a graveyard, open for business. When was the dedication of the cemetery?

Johnson: We had our first burials before the dedication. Our first burial was in 1856. A little nine-month-old girl by the name Eliza Helmly; her cause of death back then was listed as teething. I don't know that today we would have that medical diagnosis, you know, but medical conditions were not the same back in 1856 as they are today, thankfully. It was an infant of the age when she would be teething. Any mother knows about who has raised a baby that when they are teething they're fussy. So what the real cause of death is we don't know. But it was listed as teething.

Hosea: And then gradually graves

Johnson: More burials were done. The actual dedication was in 1860 but the cemetery had done burials from 1856 on. It is said by historians that Mary and Abraham Lincoln were at the dedication of Oak Ridge, and he has supposed to have told Mary that he found Oak Ridge to be the most beautiful and restful place he had ever seen and it was where he chose to be buried. And it was for that reason that Mary insisted that the burial be at Oak Ridge.

Hosea: And the transfer of graves from the two city cemeteries and I assume some happened from outlying rural and even private burial places.

Johnson: Right.

Hosea: Was this a gradual process or was this a big project or ...

Johnson: It was. Surprisingly it lasted all the way to the 1890s. By the 1880s most of the burials had been removed from Hutchison and Old City Cemetery but our records do indicate that some of the last burials were not removed until the 1890s. Families were given options. If they had property at Old City Cemetery, where they had established family heritage—maybe they had purchased ten, twelve, twenty graves—they were given the same number of graves at Oak Ridge Cemetery. So, their loved ones were disinterred and brought to Oak Ridge. They still had the benefit of having family heritage; subsequent generations were able to be buried, in their family lots.

- Hosea: Can you tell us a little bit about the decision to change; you mentioned this had been completed essentially by 1900. What was the thought of changing the orientation of the cemetery from the east entrance that we will see later on, to the gates that we look at today from Monument Avenue?
- Johnson: Sure. Previously, right here, is what was called the Third Street gate or the walk-in gate. This would be Lincoln Park. And, of course, that did not exist at the time Oak Ridge was established. There was no park system in the city of Springfield. But the street cars did run, and the end of the street car line came to this point. In fact, it crossed over the wall and came into Oak Ridge Cemetery. It was very common for families on Sunday to go to the church of their choice in Springfield, go home, collect their baked goods, flowers from their gardens, board the street car and come to Oak Ridge. This was such a popular thing to do that tickets were issued to gain entry to Oak Ridge on Sundays. So, families would come if you were a property owner. If you owned interment rights at Oak Ridge, you had tickets. If you were a tourist and you were staying at one of the major hotels in town, the hotel or the mayor or city clerk, if they deemed you proper – whatever proper might have been at that time – would give you tickets to enter Oak Ridge. Or other people could go to City Hall that were not interment right owners and get tickets to come to the cemetery. Families would come and spread out their blankets, open their picnic baskets on the graves of their loved ones and have a picnic and, presumably tell the children and grandchildren the oral history of their family.
- Hosea: So there were tourists then and just visitors to the cemetery pre-Abraham Lincoln? It was a sight back then that people would come to.
- Johnson: It was. It was. It was before park systems in Illinois and so here was this gorgeous place with this rolling terrain. It was just a beautiful sight and, yes, it was something that people wanted to come and see.
- Hosea: When we walk around the cemetery itself, we're going to be seeing many, besides Lincoln's grave, imposing monuments and so on. I know now, if I wanted to have a monument, I assume there is an approval process that I need to go through.
- Johnson: There is.
- Hosea: Back then if you had the money could you essentially build what you wanted to build?
- Johnson: There is no indication the cemetery had real specific records and I think that just looking at all the different monuments it's rather obvious that there weren't specific regulations in the 1800s regarding the memorialization that was placed. There were obviously artisans in the area that could carve some absolutely magnificent things. When we go in to the cemetery, we will see

tree trunks and chairs and things that were all hand carved from stone that are just absolutely magnificent. They all have their own symbolism, but there were artisans in the area able to do that. There were also, of course, sellers of monuments – monument dealers too. Another thing that's very unusual is that the Sears Roebuck catalog also sold monuments. So, if you wanted to choose something, you could get the Sears catalog and actually order from the Sears Roebuck catalog.

Hosea: I'm sorry, I didn't follow up on this earlier. It's just shifting back a few minutes. What was the essential reason that they decided to change the entrance to the Monument Avenue entrance?

Johnson: I think it would basically have been because of Lincoln's Tomb.

Hosea: Okay.

Johnson: Lincoln's Tomb was erected then. It was facing south and so Monument Avenue was, you know, developed as the main entrance of the cemetery.

Hosea: And when did the west, the new—I assume it's new—the western entrance to ...

Johnson: I don't know the exact date that that was done, but those acres on the west part of the cemetery were the last purchased. It's been many decades since those purchases were made and that road was extended to J. David Jones Parkway.

Hosea: That western area, is that all a single purchase?

Johnson: To my knowledge, yes, the bulk of this. Not all up in here to my knowledge, but this was the last part of the cemetery purchased and that was done at one time.

Hosea: Now we're going to see a site as we go in to the cemetery that dealt with African Americans and another area where Jewish religious people were. Was essentially everybody able to be buried in Oak Ridge throughout history that has wanted to be or were there ... did you have to meet standards of some kind?

Johnson: Everyone was buried at Oak Ridge that wanted to be, or their family had that as a choice. I'm embarrassed and sorry to say that Oak Ridge Cemetery was a segregated cemetery until 1961.

Hosea: 1961?

Johnson: 1961. Here our sixteenth president was buried and we were a segregated cemetery. There was a section up on Block 5, up in this area, where all of our black burials were. Some up into the single section of Block 4 here.

Also I have not found anything particularly written but also on that same block was our first Jewish section. So I don't know if that makes a statement regarding their religious affiliation or not. But that is the area where Oak Ridge Cemetery performed all Jewish burials and all African American burials.

Hosea: Now that we have become such a diverse society, a challenging part of your job must be all the different burial customs and needs and requirements.

Johnson: Right, right. I mean, we have something unique within our cemetery. Currently in Springfield there are two Jewish synagogues and each has purchased land on which it is their intent that their congregation be buried. So in Block 18 here and parts of 25 here, those interment rights are, in fact, owned by the Jewish synagogue. As members of their congregation choose to pre-plan or have a death, they in fact repurchase those interment rights from the temple. We have the same relationship over here in Block 39, Section 8. The Islamic mosque owns interment space over there and as each member of their congregation passes, they then resell interment rights to that family. There is also a Greek Orthodox section on 26, right here, but that is not a relationship where the Greek Church owns those interment rights. The Greek community just has purchased their interment rights in that area.

Hosea: And, lastly, you mentioned and, again, I failed to follow up immediately, that you were a self-supporting institution.

Johnson: We are.

Hosea: So you are not on the tax situation.

Johnson: No, no. I mean we all know that city government has ups and downs and there's years when they are struggling to balance the budget and other years when they're able to do more capital projects. I know each year that, whether the city has extra dollars to spend or is really struggling to balance a budget, that I'm not in line with the fire department and the police department and the library and the street department and any other entity of the city as dollars are being passed out.

Hosea: What are your sources of income?

Johnson: Our sources of income are the sale of property, merchandise and services. We have interment rights, commonly called by people "grave spaces," that we sell to families. We have two mausoleums and in those mausoleums are crypts for the entombment of full casket burials. We have niches for the inurnment of cremated remains. We have a new veterans' lawn crypt section where the vaults are actually in the ground and we will do military burials there. So we have all of those, what we consider property selections for families. We are also discussing adding some garden mausoleums and other free-standing columbariums and that will also be selections for people

choosing Oak Ridge Cemetery. Then there are services that we provide. Namely, the opening and closing of graves, the digging and pouring of all the foundations for all the monuments within the cemetery. All the physical services that Oak Ridge Cemetery provides our families. Then there is merchandise. Oak Ridge Cemetery, for the last hundred years, has sold monuments and markers. People sometimes don't realize that. They think they have to go outside the cemetery to memorialize their loved ones. But we, in fact, have sold monuments and markers and all types of memorials for a century now. We sell flowers. Our flowers are specifically designed for cemeteries so that they weather all the outdoor elements and sun and what have you.

Through the sale of those things – property, merchandise and services – we actually raise the money to operate the cemetery, to pay our payroll, to buy our equipment, to repair things that need repair. Just all of the basic operational needs. I also mentioned earlier that we are an endowment care cemetery. A percentage of all those ways of burial – that property – is put into the endowment care fund, the principal of which we can never touch. But we do gain interest income from that investment and that interest income can be used to operate the cemetery. So those are our two sources of revenue. We are the second-most-visited cemetery in the country and the federal government does not support our cemetery.

We have state historic sites within our cemetery. Namely, Lincoln's Tomb and the Illinois War Memorials, and the state does not support our cemetery. And we are a municipal cemetery, owned and operated by the city of Springfield; they do not have a financial obligation to Oak Ridge Cemetery because we are self-supporting and that is something we are very proud of. You know, we would like our city tax dollars to go for our libraries and our police and fire protection and our street department and those things. So it's something we are very proud of.

Hosea: I guess the last question for this session is, is there anything I left out? Is there something about the cemetery that you are proud of that I haven't asked about?

Johnson: I think Oak Ridge is a magnificent place. I mean, it is so beautiful. It is just absolutely wonderful. I always say that I have the best office in the whole world because it's in Oak Ridge Cemetery. I think we have the luxury of having the best staff anywhere. Our staff is just dedicated to this cemetery. We've had men who have worked twenty, thirty, forty years, dedicated their whole life to Oak Ridge Cemetery. I think we show respect to the families that we serve and to those that we bury. I think we just have an inner commitment that most people don't find in their daily jobs. I think we are a very special place. I think we have very special people working here. And it's a thing of beauty. I mean people come on their lunch hour to take a stroll. Whether they are just looking at the birds in the trees or actually

walking a little faster for exercise. We love to have people in Oak Ridge to enjoy its beauty.

Hosea: Thank you very much, LuAnn.

Johnson: Thank you.

(End of segment #1)

Video Interview with LuAnn Johnson

FM-V-L-2008-069

Interview Part 2: September 25, 2008

Interviewer: Newlyn Hosea, ALPL Oral History Program

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[Continuation of Interview]

Hosea: We're continuing our interview with LuAnn Johnson. We were in her office and now we're overlooking the building in which her office is included. LuAnn, as I understand it, this building in itself is an historic building. Can you lead us through that a little bit?

Johnson: I can. This building was built in many different phases. If you're inside, all of the interior walls are about eighteen inches thick. That's because they were once exterior walls. The stone was left in place and we just added on. The corner over my right shoulder, the room with the turret, was the original building of Oak Ridge Cemetery. In the 1800s, it sat down across from the receiving vault, near the bell tower. In the year 1900, when Monument Avenue became the main entrance to Oak Ridge Cemetery, a one room basement was dug. The building was brought up here and sat on that one room basement. The front window that you see was originally the front door and if you were in the room there is a door leading to a back hallway and that was the back door.

- Hosea: And so the building has kind of grown over the years in various stages?
- Johnson: It has. The cemetery was operated out of that one room office until 1947. At that time, the rest of what appears to be the front of the building was added. It's all one large room. For many years, when you walked in the front door there was a very large, tall counter, and people would stand at that counter and do business. It didn't matter if you had just lost the most important person in your life or if you were just doing some genealogy, everyone stood in line and was served at that counter. In the 1850s we added the vault. The vault holds all of our paper records of all of our burials, all of our ownership, all of the information regarding the cemetery. In 1989, we built the back half of the building; it includes new restrooms and a little tiny kitchenette, the director's office and another office.
- Hosea: This morning you mentioned a board of managers. Is that for making policy and these kinds of things.
- Johnson: The board of managers has the fiduciary responsibility of Oak Ridge Cemetery. They are each appointed by the mayor. They serve for three year terms and can be reappointed if the mayor so chooses. Many of our board members have been with us for a number of years. They do meet monthly and go over the finances of the cemetery.
- Hosea: We're here where most visitors probably get their first glimpse of Oak Ridge Cemetery and it's quite an impressive site. We have Lincoln's Tomb in the background. We have two entry gates. Two mausoleum buildings. LuAnn, can you tell us a little bit about these gates? As I understand it there's some future plans for these.
- Johnson: There are. I'm not sure exactly when this set of gates was erected. In the mid-1900s is when they were erected. Bob Vose, who was an alderman for the city of Springfield, was also responsible for the beautification of Monument Avenue. Mr. Vose has gotten a state grant for \$50,000 to redo the entrance of Oak Ridge Cemetery and take it back more to the way it appeared in the year 1900. That is when Monument Avenue became the main entrance of the cemetery. There were four stone pillars at that time, not in the exact location where they are now, but at the corner of Oak Ridge Avenue and Monument Avenue. So at the corner of our building, right by the turret, were these stone pillars at the entrance of Oak Ridge Cemetery. There were also wrought iron gates, not quite as large as the gates we have now. But in the mid-1900s that was taken down and the gates that you see now were erected. In honor of the Lincoln Bicentennial, this grant has been received from the state of Illinois and we will, in fact, be erecting an entrance more befitting of the President and more similar to what it was in the year 1900.

- Hosea: I notice there is a green expanse here, quite a bit of lawn to the right as you enter that doesn't have any graves. Is that just on purpose for aesthetics?
- Johnson: It does have graves. A part of that area is pinned and platted and is available for sale. As you see, closer to the tree line you'll begin to see monuments. That is available for sale and it's the front end of the cemetery. That is Block 33 and it is a six grave minimum area; you have to purchase at least six graves.
- Hosea: We're going to be looking at and going into two mausoleums that are here. One associated with the chapel and one that you call the Abby.
- Johnson: The Abby Mausoleum.
- Hosea: How long have mausoleums been around and what function do they perform?
- Johnson: Mausoleums have been around in Europe for centuries. In the United States they became popular in the late 1800s. Our Abby Mausoleum was built in the year 1910. It's exquisite. It's all white marble interior. That building is not heated and air conditioned, being built in the year 1900, but because of its stone façade and marble interior it is very cool in the summer and relatively warm in the winter. It has three corridors of crypts for the entombment of full-casket remains. There are also niches around front windows but those are all sold out. It's a gorgeous building.
- Hosea: Well, let's go take a look at it. We're standing in front of what's called the Abby, which is one of the mausoleums at Oak Ridge Cemetery. Before we talk about that, LuAnn, I notice all of these flags. Is that a permanent display here at the cemetery or a special occasion?
- Johnson: During spring, summer and fall we have the Avenue of Flags out. It's kind of a nice entry into Oak Ridge Cemetery – leads you to Lincoln's Tomb. Also it's a remembrance of the Illinois war memorials that are also in our cemetery. We have these flags at both this entrance and our west entrance.
- Hosea: We're outside of the Abby; you spoke of, uh, how many cubicles or receptacles or what you call them?
- Johnson: There are several thousand crypts in the mausoleum. There is also several hundred niches for cremated remains. The niches were not original to the 1910 construction. They were added in the 1980s.
- Hosea: When this was built in the early 1900s, was this kind of building being built around the country and various ...?
- Johnson: No, this was rather unusual for the Midwest. There were mausoleums just starting to be built in the Midwest; more prevalent on the east coast.

- Hosea: And can you tell us anything about that display right under the word Abby, right behind you?
- Johnson: No, I'm sorry, I can't.
- Hosea: Well, let's take a look inside. This is obviously a very impressive and beautiful place. What's the material?
- Johnson: This is all white marble. The whole building, all of the crypt fronts, the floor, the walls, are all done in white marble.
- Hosea: Can you tell us where this marble comes from? Do you happen to know?
- Johnson: No, I'm sorry, I don't remember right now where the marble was quarried but, this is all done in one fashion, with one kind of marble.
- Hosea: On the right, these two places, one of which has kind of a grill in front of them, are those for individuals or ...?
- Johnson: Those are family areas. There are the two at the front of the building. There are several more at the back of the building behind the corridors. Families were allowed to purchase those specific areas where they could have their individual family members entombed.
- Hosea: Is this building full now or are there places of ...?
- Johnson: No, we do still have places in this building. One of the reasons that we do still have room is that this was built at a time when bodies were placed in coffins. Coffins are different than today's caskets in that they were usually wooden and they were flat topped. These crypts have enough width and length for today's caskets but we have to be careful of the height. It does require flat-topped caskets so that there is enough height variance to entomb. Some families are not used to thinking of flat topped caskets so, you know, they now choose to use the chapel mausoleum instead of the Abby.
- Hosea: And I see there is room in here for a small, I assume, the equivalent of a graveside service type of thing?
- Johnson: A committal service, yes. Yes, they are held here.
- Hosea: Very good. Now we would like to go over and see a more modern mausoleum that I know the cemetery is very proud of.
- Johnson: Yes, thank you.
- Hosea: We're standing in front of the more modern mausoleum here, but before we talk of that, this is a good spot. We're just surrounded by magnificent trees,

and LuAnn, right in back of you is just an extraordinary tree. Most of the trees that are the hallmark of this cemetery, have they been here since the cemetery started? Or when did they arrive, or ... What's the story there?

Johnson: You know, obviously, the very old trees are three and four hundred years old. Those obviously were here when Oak Ridge was started, when the land was purchased and the cemetery developed. The cemetery has the distinction of having had a tree nursery. In 1988, we developed a tree nursery. It's about an acre big and we planted historical trees. In Oak Ridge Cemetery there is a hybrid oak that is kind of a freak of nature, a cross pollination of oak trees that were present here. We call this the Oak Ridge Oak. It is drought resistant, disease resistant, and so many of the trees in our tree nursery were acorns from those special Oak Ridge oaks. Others were saplings gathered from historic places having to do with Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, from the fields of Gettysburg and Appomattox and other historic places. So they were in our tree nursery. They grew for several years and then were planted into the cemetery. We knew that as the old trees matured and some died or storms got them, that we needed to re-green the cemetery, and we planned this as a ten year project. We ran it for fifteen years, planting literally thousands of trees back into Oak Ridge. Just last year we did close the tree nursery.

Hosea: Well, it had an extraordinary effect. The building behind you, can you give us a little bit of what the reason was. Obviously you had the Abby, a mausoleum, what was the reason for the building behind you?

Johnson: Most cities of any size have mausoleums. Springfield is kind of unique in that many people in Springfield are unaware of mausoleums. If we mention our mausoleum to a family, they think it's only for cremated remains. They don't have a real knowledge of mausoleums. But in 1974, the cemetery decided that they were going to build what's called a chapel mausoleum. It's an indoor mausoleum. There is a chapel area where committal services can be done. In fact, families who even have interment rights in the cemetery can choose to use that chapel for a committal service. It's entirely up to them and there is no cost for using it. When this was built, it was built with the idea of adding on to it and we have done that. We added on in 1991. The first two corridors are all Spanish and Italian book-matched marble; when we go inside, I can show you what book-matched marble is. When we did the additions in 1991, we decided to go with a lighter Italian marble and so it's all Italian in corridors three and four.

Hosea: And what again was the year that this was originally built?

Johnson: This was originally built in 1974, with the addition in 1991.

Hosea: And what is its capacity in terms of ... ?

Johnson: We're getting very close to being sold out. We probably have another hundred and fifty crypts and probably about that many niches left. So, you know, we don't have a real long life expectancy on this building.

Hosea: So your total would be how many?

Johnson: Oh, we have thousands of crypts and niches in here total.

Hosea: Well, let's go see what that beautiful marble looks like.

Johnson: Alright, thank you.

Hosea: We're standing obviously in what's essentially a crossroads here. I assume, LuAnn, that the area you're in, immediately back of you is the chapel where the services are held?

Johnson: Yes, committal services are held in this area. There is a church truck on which the casket is placed and brought up this center aisle, and placed in front of the stone wall. There's a pulpit off to the side where eulogies can be given and the service can be conducted.

Hosea: And then we have two wings. One on our left, and one on our right. Is that part of the original building or part of the additions you were talking about?

Johnson: Yes. This is all part of the original building. So, this was all built in 1974.

Hosea: And then, right here, are the ...

Johnson: Are the original niches. Yes.

Hosea: Okay, those are the original niches.

Johnson: For cremated remains.

Hosea: And those are for urns essentially?

Johnson: Cremated remains, yes.

Hosea: Cremated remains. And those also are part of the original building?

Johnson: That is correct.

Hosea: Can you tell us anything about the magnificent wood in here. What kind of wood is that, or ...?

Johnson: I'm sorry, I don't know about the wood that was put in this building.

Hosea: And the stained glass obviously up at the ...

Johnson: The stained glass was added in 1991 when we did the addition. There was a different glass up there. It was colors of the '70s – kind of screamed '70s – so we replaced not only the windows at the end of the corridors but this glass up here at the time that we did the addition in 1991.

Hosea: Okay, let's go back and take a look at what you called book-matched marble.

Johnson: All right.

Hosea: This is the addition we were talking about and I know there is a special kind of marble in this. It just looks magnificent. What is this, LuAnn?

Johnson: This is Italian marble. This entire wall, this entire expanse, was quarried at one time. The sheet of marble was taken into a factory. It was polished and it was cut. You'll see that the veining runs top to bottom, left to right. It is in place in this corridor exactly as it was in the quarry. It's called book-matched marble. All of the veining runs exactly as it did.

Hosea: I see and all of these new things that you've built, I assume you have budget situations like we all do, but your intent really is to build with as good and lasting a quality as you can accomplish.

Johnson: Well, definitely. I mean this mausoleum is built to last forever. Yes, I mean it is very, very sturdily built. In fact, when we did this corridor in 1991, we were very conscious of earthquakes and the New Madrid fault. This corridor is built to withstand a California earthquake

Hosea: So we are close enough that you have to take that into consideration when you ...

Johnson: We did take it in to consideration. Many properties do not. But knowing that we were putting Italian marble in here, knowing how long it took us to get it through customs, we wanted to make sure that it was going to last forever. So we did build beyond the specifications that California had at that time.

Hosea: Getting through customs was a problem?

Johnson: It was. It took three months just to get it through customs and, of course, that was before nine eleven [9/11].¹ I have no idea it would take to get marble through customs at this time.

Hosea: This was just all the inspections of the crates, and ...

¹ September 11 – 9/11 – was when a terror attack by radical Islamists demolished the twin Trade Towers in New York City. The event has been known simply as 9/11 since.

- Johnson: And the huge amount of marble that we were shipping.
- Hosea: And again, stained glass on either side that is consistent with the ones ...
- Johnson: All part of the 1991 addition, yes.
- Hosea: Okay. Well thank you so much for showing us this lovely building. We are going to move now and begin to work our way into some of the more historical parts of Oak Ridge.
- Johnson: Thank you.
- Hosea: After seeing two magnificent edifices we see a much smaller mausoleum. Are there others ... is this the only private mausoleum that's in the cemetery or are there others?
- Johnson: No, there's many private mausoleums of different sizes throughout Oak Ridge Cemetery, some in this front part of Oak Ridge and some in what we call the west side. They're kind of all over the cemetery but they are built by families for that particular family. They are individual mausoleums. This one I believe is for six entombments
- Hosea: And would that still be possible today if someone had the means to do that kind of thing?
- Johnson: By all means, we do have special areas set aside where we would entertain the idea of having individual mausoleums.
- Hosea: Okay, in the background we can see some Corinthian columns. Let's go up a little bit and we'll take a closer look at those and see how that is situated by Lincoln's Tomb, as well. As I mentioned, we're situated with some magnificent Corinthian columns and, I assume, that an individual family decided to put that up as a memorial?
- Johnson: It really is two different families, the Reese and the K_____?? Families; they owned interment rights next to each. It's my understanding that they decided to go together and make the big statement with the big columns, and it really is magnificent.
- Hosea: We see a couple of places, or a number of places actually, in the cemetery where you'll have an individual monument and then the individual graves around the monument essentially.
- Johnson: Around it, sure, we have family areas. Some of them are twelve graves, some twenty-four, some as many as sixty.
- Hosea: We're just east of the Lincoln Memorial which you can see just in a gap of trees to our west, the very top of it. I assume once Lincoln's memorial was

built with its accompanying fame, that this area and the areas around the memorial became instantly wanted for gravesites.

Johnson: About the year 1900, this part of the cemetery was pinned and platted and available for sale. And, yes, families did want it because it was right across the street, literally, to the east of Lincoln's Tomb. The trees weren't as big as they are now and there was a clear view of the Tomb at that time. So it was a place of honor and prestige and families were very interested in purchasing interment rights in this area.

Hosea: While we're in the midst of a number of tombstones here, a couple of questions for you LuAnn. Number one, I notice that there are a lot of different dates. So when you look at tombstones in a section, there may be someone buried as late as two thousand and someone in 1913. Is that done on purpose or is that because of families, or how does that happen?

Johnson: It was literally was done because that's what families purchased. As I said, this area was pinned and platted in nineteen hundred and we started selling right away. So you'll see many death dates in the very early nineteen hundreds. Subsequent family members, you know, we might be two or three generations removed from those original property owners but they bought enough interment rights so that subsequent generations could all be buried together. So you see death dates that will span many centuries. We will have some places up in the historic north end of the cemetery where we could be six generations removed from the original property owners.

Hosea: Also, I notice in some parts of the cemetery it seems as if the grave stones are widely separated, and another area, such as this one, it seems the tombstones are much closer together. Is that, again, just personal choice in families?

Johnson: In this area you see a lot of times that there is one large family monument. It will have the surname of the family on it. And then you see individual foot stones. The individual foot stones give the information: the surname, the given name, the birth year and death year of the deceased. So the foot stones denote each particular interment right and the person buried there. The large stones are family stones denoting the family lot.

Hosea: Well, thank you very much. What we would like to see now is one of the more unusual monuments in the cemetery, one that houses a governor and his family and one that perhaps has the most unusual architecture in the cemetery.

Johnson: Very good. We'll go to Tanner's tomb.

Hosea: We're standing in front of the John Tanner memorial but we also want to talk about the graves and the area that's around it. LuAnn, you were

mentioning that there are actually, and some people would not believe this, still plots available in this area?

Johnson: Oh, there definitely is. This is called Block 31. It's directly across from Lincoln's Tomb and we still have interment rights available for families where they can really be within a few hundred feet of Lincoln's Tomb, facing the Tomb.

Hosea: And we have, of course, behind you just a remarkable memorial. Does that have a particular style or is that unique?

Johnson: It's quite unique. That is Governor Tanner's tomb. Governor Tanner was the governor of Illinois from 1857 to 1901. He just served one term, was not in very good health at the end of that term, and, in fact, died within several months of leaving office. He was buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery but his wife and friends of the family thought that there should be a monument benefitting of his stature and in 1906 this tomb was built. It was designed by the Tiffany architect of New York and he was then disinterred and re-entombed in 1906, into this tomb. Also if you look in the front door there is a bronze sculpture of his head that you see at the back of the tomb in front of the window.

Hosea: Now when you say designed by the Tiffany architect, you mean someone of that quality or an actual architect ...?

Johnson: Well, it was a Tiffany architect, you know, so I don't know specifically which Tiffany did it.

Hosea: Oh, but it was actually an architect for the Tiffany company?

Johnson: Yes.

Hosea: Okay. And do you happen to know what those columns are made of?

Johnson: It's all stone. It's all rough hewn. It has a very Greek look to me, you know; it's not done in a polished or real elegant fashion. It's done in a more sturdy, older fashion.

Hosea: In reading about some of these things, someone describes some of this as having a Stonehenge look and it almost looks that old.

Johnson: It almost does. Yes, I hadn't thought of it in that respect before but, you're right, it does.

Hosea: And approximately what year was that built?

Johnson: It was built in 1906. It was built here in Block 31. This is a twelve grave minimum area. It's intended that each family have a large family stone of

their choosing. There's all different styles of stones in Block 31 and then each individual interment right is marked by a foot stone or head stone.

Hosea: While we're here, most head stones today are made of what, granite or that material?

Johnson: Granite or bronze. Yes.

Hosea: Back in the early 1900s, it was all essentially stone.

Johnson: Limestone and sandstone, yes. They kind of erode over time and you don't see the carvings as well after a century or so. Up in the historic north end of the cemetery, we'll see a lot of limestone and sandstone but now the cemetery requires that all monuments be either of granite or bronze.

Hosea: I understand about this time, in the early 1900s as this cemetery was progressing, that they had a lot of machinery essentially invented and developed during that period that let them carve more esoteric things.

Johnson: Yes, well, and the old craftsmen died off and new people did not take up that trade. And so, yes, the memorialization is more standard in appearance, although on Block 31 you do see a lot of very unusual monuments.

Hosea: Okay, we're going to move now to some of the more historic parts of the cemetery: the receiving vault, the bell tower and the east entrance.

We're standing at the bottom of the hill from Lincoln's Tomb. This is a tomb that many tourists may not even know of but it's a hugely historical area. LuAnn, can you tell us a little bit about that?

Johnson: Sure, I can. Behind me is the old receiving vault. It is the vault in which Lincoln's body was placed while the tomb was being constructed. Oak Ridge Cemetery had six of these receiving vaults throughout the cemetery. Really they are kind of gloried caves. They were built into the hillsides. Shelves were placed where the coffins could be placed on those different shelves, because in the 1800s, graves were dug by hand. In the middle of winter when the ground was frozen, there were times when it was not possible to open the graves. So the coffins would be placed on those shelves and then in the springtime, when the ground thawed, the burials could be completed.

When President Lincoln was assassinated and Mary Todd Lincoln wanted him buried at Oak Ridge, they decided to use this receiving vault to place the casket of both the President and Willie, their young son, who had died in Washington, D.C. Willie's body had been disinterred and brought back on the funeral train with Abraham's. Because this area was so open and in such close proximity to the gates of the cemetery, which was the east gates, the walk-in gates that we now have, it was decided that this was a nice

area where they could have the committal ceremony. There were bands present. There were eulogists present and thousands of the community were here to pay their final respect to the fallen President. This is one of six different receiving vaults that the cemetery had but after the President's body was placed here, this particular receiving vault was not used ever again.

Hosea: So before the use by Abraham Lincoln and his other family, this had just been a normal receiving vault that had been used routinely by various people?

Johnson: That is correct. That is correct. But out of respect for the President, it was not used after that.

Hosea: And what's happened to the other five receiving vaults. Are they still around?

Johnson: They have all been removed, yes.

Hosea: That function is now totally the funeral home, so ...

Johnson: No, no, with the equipment that we have today there is never a time when we cannot complete a burial. Oak Ridge Cemetery has never missed a burial, even with all of the snow storms that we have had and everything, we have always been available.

Hosea: And this receiving vault is part of that gift that was made to the state?

Johnson: That's correct. This whole hillside was given to the State of Illinois by Oak Ridge Cemetery. It encompasses the twelve acres of Lincoln's Tomb.

Hosea: Okay, we're now going to look at the bell tower and the place where you would probably have come into Oak Ridge Cemetery in 1850, '60, and immediately following that. This is a plaque that is part of the bell tower. It has an unusual distinction in that Abraham Lincoln's body, when it was first brought to Oak Ridge, was laid on this plaque; as the tower and all the other buildings that were attached to it were built, this became a permanent part of this bell tower. We are in a very, very historical part of this cemetery. We've just left the vault. We're just a little ways away from it and LuAnn, can you tell us about the bell tower and the slab that's in it, which I understand was once part of a much larger building.

Johnson: Yes, that is the bell tower. It used to ring as each service was performed. The bells no longer ring. You can see the large bell is still up in there. About twenty years ago we had to have it braced because it was really not real safe. We had to have architects and engineers make it more structurally sound. But the big bell is still in there.

This area has seen many different changes. Back in the 1800s, there were two big ponds adjacent to the bell tower and it was really a very beautiful setting. People would come here and have picnics and visit their loved ones at Oak Ridge. Then over the decades they became conscious of the danger that the ponds could impose and the fact that they were unattended, so at that time they decided to fill them in and magnolias were planted. This was always called the magnolia field after that throughout the 1900s. About five years ago, maple blight affected all of the magnolia trees and we lost every one of them in this area down here. So now it's an open field. Eventually, part of our long range plan is for there to be garden mausoleums in this entire area. So that is something that we still in the years to come.

Hosea: And just over your right shoulder is a structure with some flowers in it. Can you tell us what that's about or what it was?

Johnson: What that was, was a drinking fountain. The streetcar line ended right about in that area and people would get off at the streetcar and have a drink of water and have a picnic in this area. So it's was a drinking fountain. Now it's a flower garden.

Hosea: Immediately behind us is perhaps one of the most historical parts of Oak Ridge Cemetery. What's that gate about and what was its purpose?

Johnson: That was the original gate of Oak Ridge Cemetery. It was always called the Third Street gate, but with enhanced 911, we now call that street First Street. So those of us who have been at Oak Ridge for decades are never quite sure what to call that: the Third Street gate or the First Street gate or the walk-in gate, but that was the original entrance of Oak Ridge Cemetery. The wall was there and the streetcar line came over that wall and people could disembark in this area. This was the end of the streetcar line at that time.

Hosea: So people came by streetcar, and walking in through that ...

Johnson: And horse and buggy, and horses, and, yes. All modes of transportation, yes.

Hosea: We're going to go up that hill in just a few minutes and as I understand it, if you were coming to the cemetery before the advent of Lincoln's Tomb, you would go up that hill to the graves themselves?

Johnson: Correct. Yes, that was the first entrance up to the historic north end of the cemetery. There's now two others. But, yes, that's the east entrance and that takes us up to, well, Block 15, but also at the far corner is Block 1. You know, the original part of Oak Ridge Cemetery.

Hosea: Well, let's go to Block 1 and see what that looks like.

Johnson: All right.

Hosea: We're standing in a very interesting area of the cemetery for a lot of reasons. Number one, can we talk a little history. LuAnn, isn't this one of the oldest parts of the cemetery?

Johnson: Yes, we're standing right now on Block 1 and Block 1 has many different sections. All of the area behind me and to the right and then behind the camera, all of those areas are considered Block 1. These, of course you'll remember were all laid out by the Springfield architect William Sides. This was done in straight rows, in a grid-like section. Over my right shoulder you'll see there is an area back away towards the fence where you don't see much memorialization. There was a city area and a county area in there and it was provided for the indigent where the residents of the city were buried in one area, residents of the county in another. It was for those whose families could not afford burial. Other parts of Block 1 were purchased by families; you can look around and see all the magnificent stones, some of them being hand carved, some of them tall obelisks, some in varying shapes and designs that are very unique. The old stones that you see that are difficult to read are of sandstone or limestone. Over the 150 years of their existence in Oak Ridge Cemetery the weather has eroded them a little bit making it difficult to actually read all of the information. That's why now we require that the memorialization be of granite or bronze.

Hosea: I assume because many graves were moved here that we would actually see headstones with a death date before the establishment of the cemetery.

Johnson: Exactly. We know that Old City Cemetery and Hutchison Cemetery were started in the 1830s and those were all disinterred and brought to Oak Ridge. So, yes, although our first burial was in 1856, you will see many burials that preceded; they were originally in either Old City Cemetery or Hutchison Cemetery and later brought to Oak Ridge.

Hosea: And, of course, we can see as we just panned around the various stone, you have everything here from tiny, simple little blocks to statues, the kind of memorial we just saw with Tanner.

Johnson: You know, that's the beauty of Oak Ridge, is something that we still encourage today. We encourage families to think about the memorialization they are choosing for their loved one and we really like to help them design memorialization that depicts the life lived. If it's someone who loved oak trees then let's put an acorn on that monument. If it's someone who loved felines, then let's put a little kitty on there. Whatever depicts the life lived, you know, should tell the story on that monument.

Hosea: And essentially everything is allowed that is not offensive in some way to various groups and so on?

- Johnson: Right. I mean there's been times when we've had to ask people to re-word things that it could have been taken in a different connotation. And they were willing to do so, but typically people are trying to show respect for those that they have lost and it's rare that we have to make those suggestions.
- Hosea: When walking and driving around the cemetery one of the things that struck me is that there's really very little vandalism despite the modern age ... there's evidently a core of respect for these kinds of places.
- Johnson: Yes, there really is. Every once in a while we will have vandalism. Back in the 1980s we went through a period where, you know, there was some cult things going on, and we would find evidence of it here. I don't think it was ever anything serious. It was typically young children, teenagers, you know, just being teenagers really, if nothing else. We are lucky in that we don't have vandalism. A few years ago we did have people come in the cemetery and try to push down some of the old spires; you just hate to see them damaged like that. We're very fortunate in that when we do have storms and some of the big trees come down that we've not lost a big stone in that fashion. It really takes vandalism to actually destroy or mar a stone.
- Hosea: We're going to head now to what is, at least for me, one of the most heart tugging parts of the cemetery and that is a remarkable memorial to what were called friendless children. And we'll take up that story in a few minutes.
- Johnson: Home of the Friendless.
- Hosea: We're standing in the middle of, or inside of, one of the more remarkable parts of the cemetery and something that speaks a little bit to the changing of society. For most of the frontier days, of course, families took care of themselves or you just didn't get taken care of. As the city grew, LuAnn, what is this portion of the cemetery all about?
- Johnson: This is Block 4, and this particular part of Block 4 is called The Home for the Friendless. There was a gentleman by the name of Reverend Frances Springer. The Springer family and the Lincoln family lived on the same block here in Springfield. Rev. Springer and his teenage son joined the Civil War. Rev. Springer was the minister to tend to the troops. After the war was over the young son came back to Springfield with the family but Rev. Springer stayed in Arkansas. He noticed all of the young children that were roaming around the towns. They were basically orphans. Their fathers had been killed in war. The mothers had been killed. Some instances where there were young widows with babies. Rev. Springer knew that something needed to be done to help these people. So the Home for the Friendless had been established and Rev. Springer put all of these people on a cattle train and he brought them back to Springfield.

Some were very ill with malnutrition. Some died enroute because they were only in cattle cars with no heat and died from exposure. But many arrived in Springfield. Some of the young children were adopted out by families. Some were really taken into homes and raised as their own children. Others were kind of brought into their homes to help in the fields or the girls to help in the kitchen and help with raising children. But at least they had a stable place to live and food to eat and were cared for. Many of the young women with tiny infants lived at the home until they were able to get on their own, find employment and raise their own families.

The cemetery realized that all of these dead from the Home for the Friendless needed a place of honor in which to be buried. So the cemetery designated this area specifically for the Home for the Friendless. Each grave was platted out and that's something that is unusual. Usually only lots are platted with corner posts. In this instance there was a post put for each particular grave space. There were over six hundred graves designated in this area and for quite some time historians thought that there were probably at least six hundred burials from the Home for the Friendless in this area. Once we verified with cemetery records, it was determined that, no, there is only about two hundred and twenty burials in this area that are part of the Home for the Friendless. But as part of the cemetery's hundred and fiftieth anniversary several years ago we wanted to do something to honor this area. This stone was originally placed here several decades ago and we decided that it was wonderful and denoted the area but it didn't actually tell the history. So as part of this project we put a bronze plaque on the back that kind of tells the basic history of the Home for the Friendless, the children and young widows that were brought here and the fact that some of them have this as a final resting place. It kind of denotes the fact that this has a very sad area. It's called the Home for the Friendless and we hate to think that these children didn't have a friend. They may not have had a family but surely they had a friend.

Hosea: And then back at this wall that's been built?

Johnson: Yes, that was another part of our 150th anniversary. We built this stone wall because most of these little graves here are unmarked and we felt that they deserved the honor of having their names recognized. There are a few stones in this area but they are very few and far between. So we built this stone wall, put the antique bench and urns here. It's a place of reflection. A place of prayer. On the arms of this magnificent stone wall are six bronze plaques and it has the names of those people who are buried here who were part of the Home for the Friendless. So they now no longer are buried in graves that are unmarked. Their names are now known. Some, we don't actually know the name and you'll see where it is just listed as an unknown or an unknown from Arkansas or an unknown baby. But at least they are no longer forgotten.

Hosea: So in a lot of ways, this is almost the cemetery's own outreach, if you will.

Johnson: It surely is.

Hosea: From the very beginning to modern times now.

Johnson: Exactly. You know, dating back to the 1860s to current day, it's a way for the cemetery itself to show respect. We have an employee at Oak Ridge who spearheaded this entire project. He was the one who had the compassion for these little children buried here. He was the one who brought the idea to our Board of Managers. Paul Mueller is the one who really is the reason that we have this magnificent memorial to the Home for the Friendless. I can tell you that the Home for the Friendless has evolved into what is now the Family Service Center, still doing fine work in the city of Springfield.

Hosea: Okay, we are going to move from one of the more emotional to what some might call the revenge memorial and one of the more striking and unusual memorials in this or any other cemetery. If you were to ask someone who had the second tallest memorial in Oak Ridge short, of course, of Abraham Lincoln's memorial, most people wouldn't know, and if you told them it was Mattie Rayburn, they still wouldn't know who you were talking about. LuAnn, can you give us some background on this most impressive memorial?

Johnson: I'd be happy to. Bishop Rayburn, I am told, was a self proclaimed bishop. He was married and had a family. He was kind of a fire and brimstone type preacher and began preaching free love. After a while he began practicing what he preached. He then sent his wife and children back to her family and he took up residence with Mattie Rayburn. Historians have never been able to actually prove that he and Mattie were legally married although they always said that they were. Before he took up residence with Mattie, when he was with his wife, they were really very much part of the inner social circle of Springfield. We don't think of Springfield as being real social area out here in the middle of the prairie in the 1800s, but the ladies of society would go and visit each other in afternoons for tea, leave their calling cards and do many of the things that the ladies on the east coast would do. Bishop Rayburn and his wife were part of that social circle. Once he took up residence with Mattie that seemed to change. The socialites weren't real fond of the lifestyle and the fact that he and Mattie were residing together. One of the times when they had gone to Europe and came back, they were really rather shunned by the social community of Springfield. At that point Bishop Rayburn moved his congregation out northeast of Springfield, more in the area that Riverton is now, and he started another church there and lived there with Mattie until her death. At the time of Mattie's death he purchased this very large area in the center of Block 7 and had this magnificent marble stone erected with a statute of Mattie at the top. And the

reason he did this was so that you could never again look down your nose at Mattie.

Hosea: But as I understand it, he himself ... I notice the tombstone right in back of you, Mattie S. Rayburn, but he himself is not buried here?

Johnson: He is not buried here. After Mattie's death, Bishop Rayburn went to Ireland. He did marry there. They had a young daughter and shortly after the birth of that young daughter, that wife and daughter went to New York City, never to return to Ireland. The story goes that Bishop Rayburn did, in fact, remain in Ireland. Did die in Ireland and is buried in Ireland in a pauper's grave. But Mattie, the love of his life, is at Oak Ridge Cemetery.

Hosea: Would it be accurate to say that we are standing now in more or less the heart of the historical part of this cemetery, not far from graves of contemporaries and friends and people who were in Lincoln's life.

Johnson: Yes, very much so. In fact Block 10 is behind us. Ninian Edwards and many of the other family members of the Lincoln-Edwards families are buried there. Yes, we are right in the middle of the historic north end of Oak Ridge and right in the middle of all of its history.

Hosea: Okay. So we are speaking, LuAnn, that behind you essentially is an area that has many of Lincoln's contemporaries?

Johnson: Yes. This whole part of the cemetery does, but behind me is Block 10, past Block 7, and that is where Ninian Edwards and all of the Edwards family are buried. Many of the contemporaries of Lincoln are buried in that area, as well as in other parts up here, Block 7, 8, you know, all around us are many of the people from Lincoln's era. People of prominence at that time.

Hosea: We spoke that the War Memorials themselves over on the west part of the cemetery are really under the State administration now but there is one war memorial of sorts that is part of the cemetery still and we're going to visit that next. (long pause)

Hosea: Oak Ridge Cemetery is the home of some really extraordinary war memorials including Vietnam and Korea and so on. But those war memorials we think of was not the first time, of course, that people thought that special homage was done to those who had sacrificed their lives in the struggle. Can you give us some background on this LuAnn?

Johnson: This land right here at this point was donated by Oak Ridge Cemetery to the American Legion. It was for them to bury members of the Legion, either those that they felt that they wanted to honor specifically by placing in this area or possibly families who could not afford an interment space in another part of Oak Ridge. Most of this area has not been used for decades.

Although within the last few years we have done several burials at the request of the American Legion.

Hosea: And there is another area that has more Civil War graves?

Johnson: Up in the historic north end, very close to Block 4 where the Home for the Friendless children are, there's a small little island and in that small little island there are Confederate and Union soldiers buried there.

Hosea: And so we're going to go very soon to the more modern area, but even back here in the more historic parts there are places for specific groups of one kind or another, a particular religion, or whatever.

Johnson: Exactly, yes. Oak Ridge tends, you know, to draw people from all cultures, all religions, and we love that. We have Islamic burials that we do for that mosque. We have Jewish burials on a regular basis, the Greek Orthodox, there was a Lutheran section that's been sold out very long ago. There is a Masonic section. So yes, Oak Ridge does have specific places for those of that membership or faith.

Hosea: We're going to conclude our tour by going from Civil War history and take a look at one of the areas that kind of marks the future of Oak Ridge Cemetery. ...

When you think of Oak Ridge Cemetery, of course you think of history and you think of Lincoln and bygone days and we've talked about that. But as we've also talked, Oak Ridge is a modern cemetery with future plans and very active. LuAnn, we're at a site which is one of the newer parts of the cemetery. Can you give us some idea of what's going to be here?

Johnson: Yes. We're standing, and behind me you see Block 50. It's the newest block that we opened for upright memorialization. There still is plenty of choices for families in that area. Behind 50 is 51, another upright section, and then to the west of 50 is 49. We call them all by numbers. They do have names that the families know but none of us working at Oak Ridge even know the names of the blocks. We call them all by the numbers designated by them. Where I am standing, and then to the right, is garden areas. These are areas that were put in in the 1940s. There was a movement in this country in the 1940s, kind of when the Second World War was over, to establish what was called garden cemeteries. As you go around the country you will see that many even have garden in their name. You know, Garden of ABC, you know, Garden of Memories. And they were flush cemeteries, all of the memorialization being flat with the ground. That kind of came after the Second World War. As all of the soldiers came home, it didn't matter if they were colonels and generals or if they were the pfc, all were treated with the same respect and the same dignity for having served their country. Those that died, the same. By having flush garden areas,

every life lived was given the same respect. There wasn't a small marker next to a very large marker. So garden areas were very popular in the late 1940s and the 1950s. Oak Ridge, of course, was a hundred years old at that time, but we did develop many garden sections. In this part of the cemetery, on the western edge, you'll see that there's about eight different gardens all adjoining each other. It gives a real park-like setting. It almost looks as if no one is buried here, that this is just all open green space; but there are, in fact, many burials here. There is space still available for those that choose a park-like setting, just as there is space available for those that prefer upright monuments.

Hosea: Well thank you very much LuAnn. You've given us an excellent viewpoint of what this cemetery was all about, and is all about now. We really appreciate your contribution.

Johnson: Thank you for coming to Oak Ridge Cemetery. We really appreciate it.

[End of interview]