

Andrew De Graff – “The Railway King”

DeGraff, Ohio got its name from this man: Andrew De Graff – “The Railway King”

Andrew De Graff was not only known as “The Railway King” but had been described in *The Saint Paul Globe* as a “marked man of the nation,” “builder of railroads, elevators and projector of great schemes,” and lastly, “one of the most notable characters in the growth of the northwest.”

Just who was Andrew De Graff?

No one could write a better or more descriptive appraisal of Col. Andrew De Graff than the writer of this article in *The Saint Paul Globe* published on Thursday, November 8, 1894.

At 11:15 last night, Col. Andrew De Graff, one of the most noted figures in the Northwest, and widely known over the whole nation, passed away at the Merchants’ hotel, at the advanced age of eighty-three. Col. De Graff has, naturally, for several years past, been subject to occasional fits of declining health; but generally he appeared to be from twenty to thirty years younger than he was. His tall, massive form has for a quarter of a century or more been about the most familiar figure at the Merchants’ hotel. Col. De Graff and Col. Allen were a pair no one could see and ever forget. Col. Allen, still living, was Col. De Graff’s junior by eleven years, but although he is still sprightly and apparently many years younger than he is, Col. De Graff, up to the past three or four years, looked almost younger than he did. The two were fast friends; both were jokers of the wittiest type, and they naturally were always magnetic central figures wherever seen.

The break has not come for Col. Allen. He is still possessed of a youthful spirit; but the break came for Col. De Graff nearly five years ago. Up to that time he was a wit and joker, with only Col. Allen for a rival; then his mind seemed to give away, and his many old friends, with Col. Allen as a leader, excused his vagaries with a quiet dignity that caused all the others to realize the situation and regard the failing old man with reverence.

No one could see Col. De Graff, even in his broken condition, and not realize that he was one among many thousands – a man marked by nature with force and keen and broad insight. He was a man of affairs. No one could see him and not realize that he was, or had been. Standing considerably over six feet tall, with square, broad shoulders, possessing a handsome, strong, magnetic countenance, clear keen eyes, rather heavy eyebrows, hair black and only tinged with gray even to his dying day, he was a most commanding figure wherever seen. Up to his last appearance walking about, even in his declined condition of mind, he stood as straight as an arrow, and seemed to thrill with the inspiration of youth.

For more than fifty years he was a great organizer of great schemes, such as railroads, elevator projects, etc. He began in Ohio, and came eventually to Minnesota, not giving up his prodigious schemes in the former state. At the time of his death he was a heavy stockholder in great projects in both Ohio and Minnesota and in several other states.



The funeral arrangements are not yet made.

Andrew De Graff, or Col. De Graff, as he has always familiarly been called, has long been an important figure in the Northwest. All that region tributary to the Mississippi owes much of its present prosperity to the shrewd foresight of Col. De Graff, who was quick to perceive the necessity of railroads for the rapid transportation of the rich products of this fertile region. Under his able generalship lines of rail were constructed all over this entire district, and over thirty years ago Col. De Graff received the well-earned title of "Railroad King of Ohio."

Col. De Graff was born near Amsterdam, Schenectady county, N.Y., in the Mohawk valley, Oct. 21, 1811, and in this region the De Graff family has had its domicile for over 200 years. In 1831 he assisted Messrs. Swait and Vedder in building the Utica & Schenectady railroad. Three years later he superintended the construction of the Norwich & Worcester railroad. He afterwards purchased Mr. Vedder's interest and finished this line in 1839. During the four years that followed, he built the Attica & Buffalo and also the Attica & Batavia railroads.

Within a half century this notable man has seen little villages expand and grow into large and important cities. Under his watchful eye thinly settled territories have grown into great and populous commonwealths. His field of operation in the way of railroad construction has extended over no less than a dozen states. With the iron arteries of commerce he united these states. His foresight told him that this vast and fertile region would someday become the seat of a new empire, where millions would find prosperous and happy homes. The introduction of railroads was the chief factor required to make the virgin wilderness blossom like the rose, and throb with life, energy and commercial greatness. This great factor Col. De Graff was instrumental in giving. His life has been a success, and that success has been the crowning honor of his declining years. In his life may be found an example of energy, pluck and perseverance well worthy of imitation. In this community, where he has so long resided, Col. De Graff has always had the sincere respect and esteem of all. Mrs. John A. Berkey is the daughter of Col. De Graff.

Ever since 1870 Col. De Graff has made the Merchants' his home. He has been afflicted from time to time with illness incident to his advanced age, but, owing to his amazing vitality, has always recuperated. On Tuesday two weeks before the day of the election, Col. De Graff, accompanied by Col. Jeff Carson, of the Merchants', went out to register. He contracted bronchial pneumonia, and it was this that ultimately carried him off. During the last days of his illness at the Merchant's, he was surrounded by kind relatives and friends who ministered lovingly to his every want.

They sure don't write obituaries like that anymore!

Col. Andrew De Graff died on November 7, 1894 in St. Paul, Minnesota at the age of 83. He was returned to Dayton, accompanied by his daughter, Minnie Berkey, and placed in the De Graff Mausoleum at Woodland on November 11, 1894 in Section 106 Lot 1798.

In addition to all of the above works in De Graff's life, he was also involved with construction of a considerable portion of the Mad River & Lake Erie Railroad, construction of the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton Railroad, the Little Miami Railroad between Xenia and Cincinnati, the Winona & St. Peter Railroad in Minnesota, part of the Northern Pacific railroad and in 1881, the Little Falls & Dakota railroad. This just being a small collection of built rail lines.

In 1850, Col. De Graff began surveying routes for the Bellefontaine (Bee Line) Railroad. De Graff and William Boggs, son of the town's first settler John Boggs, surveyed and mapped out the site of a new town and it was named DeGraff, Ohio after De Graff. The railroad in DeGraff arrived in 1852. The town ladies served the railroad men a dinner and they in turn were treated to a ride on the new line.

Charles A. De Graff, son of Col. Andrew De Graff, died July 20, 1887 at St. Paul, Minnesota. He was 42 years old, unmarried, and left a considerable fortune.

Charles worked with his father and built a large portion of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Upon the failure of Northern Pacific to build the road, the De Graff's pushed forward and completed the project. "The Minnesota legislature had promised the Northern Pacific a considerable subsidy in state lands, but upon the failure of the company to complete its part of the contract the company's interest was forfeited, and the legislature thereupon voted the De Graff's the lands in pay for their services in building the road." Of course these lands soon became very valuable and the De Graff's reaped the rewards of such an immense tract of land.

Charles De Graff was a native of Dayton and his body was returned to Dayton where a funeral was held at the De Graff homestead on the southwest corner of Monument Avenue and Ludlow Street. He is buried in Section 106 Lot 1798.

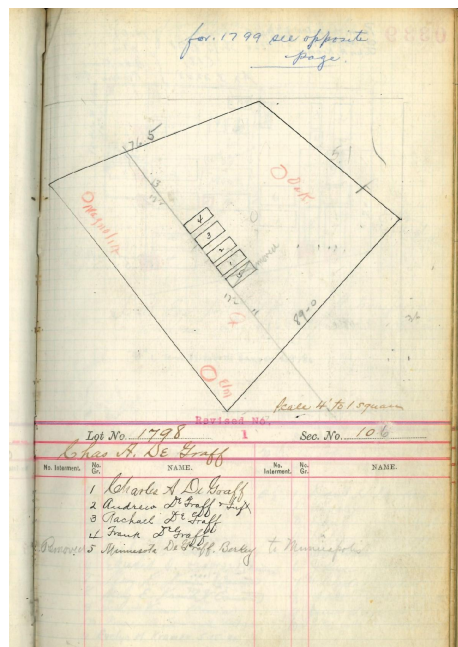
We didn't know that there had been a De Graff Mausoleum at Woodland but with a little research this article was found in The Dayton Herald newspaper published on May 3, 1898.

The De Graff Mausoleum.

The beautiful De Graff chapel erected in Woodland cemetery by the late Mr. Charles De Graff, about 25 years ago, at an expense of \$10,500, is by direction of Mrs. Minnie De Graff Berkey, to be torn down. The remains of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew De Graff and of her brother Frank, are to be buried in the ground by side of those of her brother Charles, the lot leveled, sodded, and otherwise beautified, and a suitable monument erected on new made ground, which settled and cracked the marble walls. About three years ago Mrs. Berkey had the chapel repaired at an expense of \$2,000. She now deems it best to remove the chapel and inter the remains of her parents and brothers in graves that will never again be disturbed. Mrs. Berkey and husband, Mr. John A. Berkey are now at Hot Springs, Ark.

Minnesota De Graff was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1858, the same year that Minnesota was admitted to the Union. She moved to Minnesota with her parents in 1870 at the age of 12. In 1877, she married John A. Berkey and from the time of her marriage until her death on March 26, 1906 at the age of 48, she lived at 234 Dayton Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. She was buried in the family lot in Dayton, Ohio. Typically, there would be an interment card on file for every person even if there was a removal. Unfortunately, one was not found however on the Lot Map, Mrs. Berkey is listed as being placed in grave 5 and next to her name is written "Removed to Minneapolis." Minnesota Berkey De Graff received final burial on May 1, 1925 in Block 50 Lot 22 at Oakland Cemetery in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The De Graff Lot at Woodland is quite beautiful and is located at the top of a hill in Section 106. From the back of the lot you can look over the far eastern edge of the cemetery and see the pond near the back gates. Also on this lot is one of the largest oak trees at Woodland. Charles A. De Graff purchased the entire lot in 1873 at a cost of \$2,688.60 with the stipulation of Perpetual Care from the cemetery. Unfortunately, no headstones or markers were ever put in place after the demolition of the family mausoleum. There is however a lot marker bearing the family name.



NAME DeGraff, Chas. A.				
LOT	SECTION	AREA	PRICE	DATE OF DEED
1798	104		2688 60	Sept 2 1873
REMARKS Perpetual care				
WOODLAND CEMETERY.				

Left: Diagram of the DeGraff Family burial lot where a family Mausoleum once stood. The last entry is for Grave 5: Minnesota DeGraff Berkey. "Removed to Minneapolis."

Right Top: Charles A. DeGraff lot owner card indicating purchase of entire lot 1798 in what was then part of Section 104 at a cost of \$2,688.60.

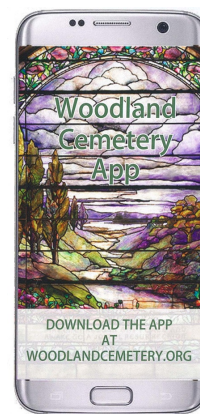


Right Bottom: DeGraff lot marker on the site of the DeGraff Family burial lot. No headstones or markers were ever put up for the family.

You can take your own walking tour at the cemetery or a virtual tour from the comfort of your couch by visiting our website at: woodlandcemetery.org/tours.

From your phone you will be prompted to download our app. Take one of 12 walking tours we have available for your enjoyment at the cemetery. If you are on your desktop, laptop or tablet, you can take the tour right from the tour page. We will be adding more tours so come back often to learn about the men and women who made it Great in Dayton.

[Download the mobile app for your phone by clicking here.](#)



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Using our app, you can:

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