History of transfer of remains from Holy Ghost Cemetery to Zion Cemetery in 1917

Zion Cemetery is a not for profit cemetery which is owned by Zion United Church of Christ Church, 5710 N. Highway 67, Florissant, Missouri. Prior to Florissant, the church was located at 25th and Benton St., St. Louis from 1872 to 1969. The church was briefly located at 23rd and Montgomery St., St. Louis from 1868 to 1872.

Background:
In 1846 there was no German cemetery in or near St. Louis. In that year 9 and seventy-hundreds acres of land were purchased on Gravois road three miles from the courthouse. It eventually comprised twenty acres, the other half being purchased in 1853 extending from Gravois to Arsenal street, just east of Grand Ave. The cemetery was named the Evangelical Protestant Cemetery Association of the Church of the Holy Ghost but was more commonly called "Picker's cemetery" after pastor Picker. The first burial occurred in 1846. By November of 1884, 24,683 bodies had been laid to rest there. Further burials were forbidden in 1893, twenty-four years later all bodies were ordered removed and the property was sold. In April, 1902, the Tenth Ward Improvement Association, as citizens, taxpayers and residents of the vicinity of the cemetery, petitioned the Mayor and Board of Health of the city of St. Louis to order the discontinuance of burying the dead in the cemetery, that the city had grown around it and that it had become detrimental to the health and the property interests of the petitioners. As a result no more burials were made and steps were taken for the removal of the bodies there interred. As far as possible all owners of lots, in which bodies were interred were notified to remove them by a given date. Most of those notified acted in accordance with the request, and in January 1917, it was contracted to sell the property to Richard C. Spackler for the sum of $67,000. All bodies which had not already been placed elsewhere were removed to Zion Cemetery. The contract was closed, and as a result what was then the northern portion of the cemetery is now residential and the former southern portion is the site of the Roosevelt High School.[1]

Cholera outbreaks occurred in 1849, 1854, and 1866. During the cholera epidemic of 1866, Pastor Krebs at Holy Ghost determined that his parishioners should receive Christian burials and he conducted as many as thirty-four a day.

Although no burials were supposed to be made after 1893, burial records show large numbers of burials in 1898 and more in 1905. There was fear of contamination of public water supplies by the cholera-infected bodies in the cemetery. Cholera is so virulent that even today cemeteries have prohibitions against digging in areas where cholera victims are known to be buried.[2]

In 1902 the Old Picker Cemetery at Grand and Arsenal was described as an eyesore and everyone in South St. Louis desired its removal. [3]

Holy Ghost's church board authorized the sale of the cemetery on October 12, 1910. The north half of the cemetery was transferred first. Sale of the south half was delayed by a lawsuit until 1917 when Holy Ghost paid Zion Cemetery for the conveyance of a parcel of ground in Zion for the re-interment of remains.

Who was transferred and how many?

Unfortunately, the short answer is we don't know.

No list of names exists of those moved from Holy Ghost to Zion Cemetery. Various newspaper records state the remains were sent to St. Marcus Cemetery, Zion Cemetery, Bellefontaine, St. Peter's and Independent Evangelical Protestant Cemetery (aka New Picker's Cemetery) but no records have been found that show large numbers of remains were sent to these cemeteries. Individual families moved relatives to these and probably other cemeteries between 1910-1916.

Lots of records exist of those who were buried in Holy Ghost and indexes of the names are found at the St. Louis County Library headquarters on microfilm. The St. Louis Genealogy Society has these records on their website for members to use. Burial Records exist that show Holy Ghost received bodies for burial. Some of these records are being digitized. <u>But no known records show which remains were moved and where.</u>

One newspaper article states 35,000 people were buried at Holy Ghost. Whether it is 24,683 or 35,000 or a number in between, it was a massive project to try to transfer the remains.

Several newspaper articles describe the process of removing small numbers of graves. Citizens watched the workmen and were critical of how the bodies were treated. Many had been buried for more than 60 years and were originally buried in wood coffins that had deteriorated.

Where are they buried?

Immediately when you enter Zion Cemetery if you look to the left near St. Charles Rock Rd there is a space without grave stones. This is section T and it goes for 300 feet and is eight feet or more wide covering about 11,300 square feet. This agreement was signed by Holy Ghost (Old Pickers) and Zion Cemetery on July 13, 1916. This is the site of the new memorial.

What related records are available?

St. Louis City Death Records –
*1850-1902, an index through 1902 is available on Ancestry.com.
*An index through 1908 is available on Deaths Recorded in City of St. Louis 1850-1908 CD #27B at the St. Louis County Library Headquarters.
*The St. Louis Genealogical Society published a CD in 2004 which is an index to the St. Louis Death Registers between 1850 and 1908. There are 450,000 records on the CD including many at Zion Cemetery.

Burial Records –
*St. Louis City Burial certificates, 1882-Oct 1908; and Jan 1900 are available at the St. Louis County library headquarters.

*St. Louis Genealogical Society has City of St. Louis burial permits from January 1882 until October 1908. Each contains a certificate number that corresponds with the number in the first column on the death register. This usually includes the name of the deceased, date and place of birth date, place and cause of death, cemetery, undertaker, age, race, marital status, and occupation. You need to know the date of death to use this source.

Holy Ghost Cemetery burials -
*Roll 19, item 3 Holy Ghost Cemetery Burials 1860-1887 are available at the St. Louis County Library Headquarters.
*Roll 19, item 4, Holy Ghost Cemetery Burials 1877-1887 are available at the St. Louis County Library Headquarters.
*Findagrave.com has over 900 names of individuals who were buried at Holy Ghost/Old Pickers Cemetery.

Zion Cemetery burials –
*Cemetery records on site are NOT digitized or online by the cemetery. About 10,000 individuals are buried here.
* St. Louis County Library headquarters has Zion United Church of Christ Cemetery records from 1884 - ? on film SLCEM Roll 66.
* St. Louis Genealogical Society has an index of the burials on their website for members to use which includes 10,302 burials from the years 1883-1998. The index usually includes, name, age, Section/Lot/Grave, burial date, Mortuary, and sometimes notes. The data is also available on a CD (St. Louis Burials Volume 3) from the Genealogy Society.
*Findagrave.com has about 11,000 graves listed at Zion Cemetery.

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[1] Bohley, Wilferd W., *Historical Review of the Holy Ghost United Church of Christ* (1969).
[2] *St. Louis Genealogical Society Quarterly*, Summer 2003, Volume 36, No 2.
[3] Removal of Picker Cemetery*, St. Louis Republican*, February 17, 1902.