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Stones mark the final resting spots of Teddy and Ritzie at Brown Pet Cemetery, where companion animals were interred from the 1930s until the 1990s.

By **Theodore Decker**

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The cemetery is larger than it first appears from Sawyer Road. The jumbled grid of headstones that begins in open grass at the roadside eventually disappears under a canopy of trees, where the grave markers run to the edge of a low bluff that overlooks Big Walnut Creek.

A glance at any one of the hundreds of stones reveals the cemetery for what it is. A visitor can stand in one place and see headstones for a Blondie, a Brownie, a Rusti and multiple Blackies.

Generations of pets were interred here at Brown Pet Cemetery, beginning well before World War II, and a stroll through the cemetery just west of South Hamilton Road near John Glenn Columbus International Airport is a historic reminder of the bonds forged between people and their pets.

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Some of the stones are as elaborately carved as those in Green Lawn Cemetery. Others appear to have been chiseled by amateurs, which might make them even sweeter. The maker of one stone pressed marbles into concrete to spell out the departed pet's name, Inky. Rows of cockleshells were similarly applied to the stone for Queenie, an effect that leaves you wondering whether she was happiest along the shore, running along a strip of sand somewhere, tongue out and eyes bright.

There are stones at the cemetery for a Puggy Boy and a Toodles. A Skippy rests near a Nippy, and a Lucky Boy near a LuLu Belle. There are graves for Soot and Cinder, Snippy and Tippy. Some, including the marker for Buddy the parakeet, include photographs decades old. There are common pet names, such as Rex and Bear, and the less traditional: Sir Poncho and Bimbo XI.

The cemetery's history grows foggier with the passing years. Dispatch stories that date to 1949 said it was founded by a local veterinarian, Walter A. Brown, and that the Brown Pet Cemetery Association was founded in 1934 "for the purpose of beautifying and keeping up appearances of the place."

State business records indicate that the association incorporated in 1941 and listed Henry L. Snapp among the agents. A monument to Snapp remains in the cemetery, but the association's nonprofit status expired in 1997. Walking the rows of stones, that was the year of the most recent burial I could find.

The cemetery, and funds for its upkeep, were donated to the Capital Area Humane Society in the early 1990s by Brown's son, Walter W. Brown, also a local veterinarian, who died in 1997.

Rachel Finney, the Humane Society's executive director, was out of state at a conference this week, but said in a statement that the cemetery is inactive and no pets have been buried there for years.

"It's a wonderful piece of Columbus history, and a true testament to our community's longstanding commitment to cherishing pets," she said.

Mary Hiser, the society's spokeswoman, said the society board is committed to caring for the cemetery as best it can without drawing money and resources away from its primary mission of animal welfare.

The cemetery is showing its age, but not terribly so. Some of the stones have been overtaken by brush, and others have toppled. A few trees toward the back of the 3-acre plot remain where they fell. But though leaves were piled deep in some corners of the cemetery last week, the grass had been freshly mowed.

It's hard to know whether people still come and pay their respects. A single grave was marked with flowers, but they were plastic and weathered.

The statements of love and affection, though, remain fresh.

"You were a noble dog and I miss you Changie Boy," states the stone for Chang Cooper, who died in 1940.

"Our little Lady was buried with care and if there's a dog heaven little Lady is there," reads another.

Jiggs Boy died in 1938.

"You have gone and left such emptiness," his stone reads, "that time can never refill."

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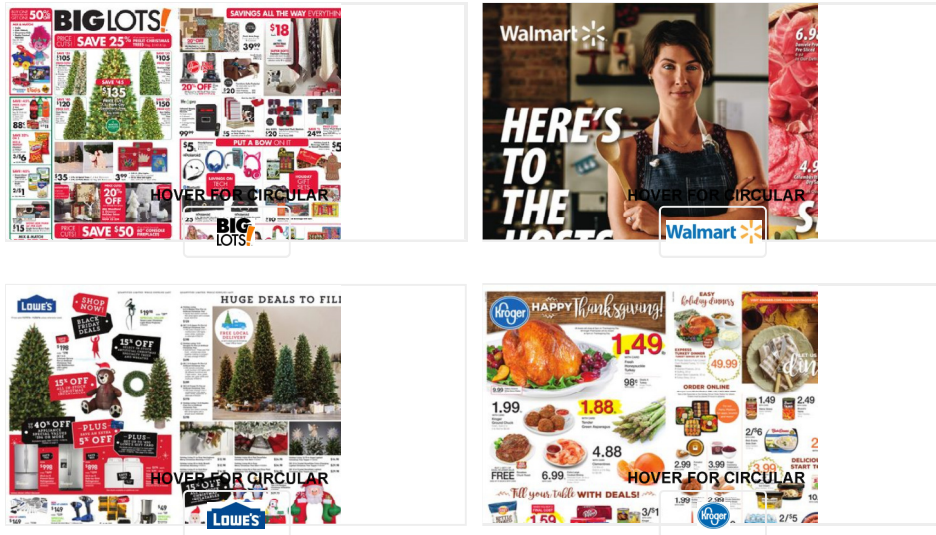
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