

UPDATE: Illinois state offices release statements regarding Wanda Cemetery investigation

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
March 29 2018 4:12 PM



SOUTH ROXANA – Illinois state departments can neither confirm nor deny they are investigating allegations of resold plots in South Roxana's Wanda Cemetery.

In an unusual press release from the South Roxana Police Department sent Wednesday, South Roxana Police Chief Bob Coles said his department is investigating allegations the Wanda Cemetery sold the same grave plot to two different people. This was not discovered until another person had died who was supposed to be buried in the already-filled plot.

Coles said the transaction leading to the investigation occurred upon the death of a village board member's husband. That board member had purchased a plot from the Wanda Cemetery in 2012 for her husband, who died in 2017. Coles said the plot was sold to the board member by Wanda Cemetery Supervisor and then South Roxana Village Board President Tom Flemming, who was appointed by Madison County Board member Helen Hawkins.

In a phone interview with Riverbender.com, Coles said the cemetery did not have a database in which sold plots were recorded, adding they ultimately did not know if a plot had been sold unless someone was buried in it.

This claim was backed by an anonymous source who told Riverbender.com she worked within the cemetery after 2013. She said the cemetery “was a mess,” adding people were coming to the office with bills, deeds and receipts to find no record of the transactions.

She also said further investigation may come across larger misdeeds done within the cemetery.

That assertion was downplayed by Diana Williams, who sat on the Wanda Cemetery Board as its secretary in 2013. She said she has been doing her best to assure people their plots are safe since the release was issued by the South Roxana Police Department late Wednesday morning.

Williams said the incident between the board member and Flemming was most likely isolated, adding she was working on the books to ensure it was. She said she could not comment on any of the practices done at the cemetery previous to her arrival in 2013 before abruptly ending the call with a reporter from Riverbender.com.

Coles said he took the case to the Illinois Comptroller's Office, which he said regulates cemeteries. A representative from that office called a reporter from Riverbender.com late Wednesday afternoon and said, while they were involved in the investigation, it is mostly under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation as of a 2010 state law.

“The Illinois Comptroller's Office is aware of the complaint and is working with local law enforcement, the cemetery's board and the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation,” the representative said in a text message. “If customers have concerns or questions, they can call our hotline at (877) 203-3401.”

The Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, however, could neither confirm nor deny its participation in the investigation, it said through its spokesperson Terry Horstman.

“The Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation does not comment on investigations, or their existence, that have not yielded official department disciplinary action,” Horstman said in an email. “IDFPR investigates all complaints of illegal or unprofessional conduct involving its regulated professions. Should an investigation yield instance of clear non-compliance with Illinois statute and rules, official action will be taken.”

The Wanda Cemetery is located at 915 Indiana Avenue in South Roxana, where its main office is located. It can be reached at (618) 254-2007. Coles said anyone with any concerns should call the cemetery's main office. He said incidences may have occurred any time over the past 15 years. If one discovers their plots have been double sold, Coles advises to contact the South Roxana Police Department.

As of now, however, the case is an open investigation, and no charges have been filed at this time.