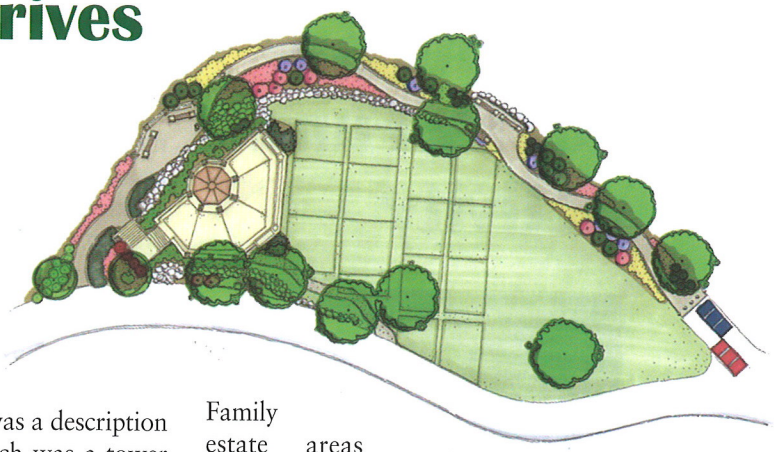
# Historic Significance Drives Tribute Design Project



In early 2007, Dave FitzSimmons, president and CEO of Woodland Cemetery and Arboretum in Dayton, OH issued a design challenge unlike most. Dave wanted a columbarium developed on the highest, steepest and most prominent site in his cemetery. At the same time the project was to reflect the historic nature of Woodland, which is on the National Historic Registry and finally, the project needed to produce a positive return on investment.

*The original "Lookout Tower" sketch from* "The Dayton Daily News" *March 12, 1899.*

Tim Hentges, vice president of Operations, Tribute Precast Systems, toured the site with Dave to discuss the objectives and constraints of the project. The site overlooked the city of Dayton and was accessed only by a narrow road which was immediately adjacent to a steep embankment. Several overgrown trees and discarded stone rubble distinguished the site from the existing 100+ year old graves that bordered the area.

Working with Dave and the cemetery Board of Directors, Tribute's design team developed several alternative site plans. Unfortunately, while acceptable, no design stood out as being truly unique. During the process, Dave shared an article that had appeared in *"The Dayton Daily News"* on March 12, 1899. Included in the article was a description of "The Lookout" which was a tower built on the same site as that designated for the current project. The tower served as both a beacon and fire watch station for the entire Miami Valley.

There it was - the historic tie that was needed! The architectural team, led by Ben Erdmann, project manager, Tribute Design Systems, designed a structure that replicated the original tower. The historic tower was designed to be built into the hillside and to serve as committal space within the Lookout Plaza. A columbarium, consisting of three sections containing 128 inurnment spaces would separate the plaza from the adjacent grave spaces. Stone materials, similar to those used on the cemetery's existing mausoleum and administrative building would be used in the design.

The road surrounding the plaza and existing burial section was to be removed and replaced by a meandering pathway which took advantage of the site's spectacular views and allowed for placement of smaller columbariums, family mausoleums and private estates. Family estate areas are being individually designed based on clients' particular preferences and will be constructed as sales dictate.

Since its introduction to the Dayton Community, the tower project has been widely accepted and recognized as a transition for this historic cemetery, from the past to the future.

The Lookout Columbarium and plaza was dedicated at a ceremony held on July 10, 2010. A time capsule to be opened at the 300th Anniversary of Woodland in 2141 was placed behind a plaque in the structure.

The Tribute Companies, a cemetery design, development and administration company, is based in Hartland, WI and may be reached by email at *mail@tributeinc.com.*

*Columbarium niche spaces now help distinguish the plaza from its surroundings.*

*Recently dedicated "Lookout Tower" replica, including the columbarium shown at left.*