

“Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery
Preservation Association

Syracuse, New York

Fall, 2019 Volume 27, Number 2

President’s Message Connie Palumb

So much is happening at Oakwood right now that it’s hard to know where to start. We recently began the very exciting process of re-introducing the American chestnut tree to Oakwood Cemetery. Through the collaborative efforts of SUNY-ESF, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Syracuse Garden Club, and HOCPA, the first twenty small trees were planted on October 5 in Oakwood. A contingent of Scouts, Boys and Girls, ESF students, Kat Korba from the Cooperative Extension, and Paul Harvey of our HOCPA Board were present to plant, stake and protect these trees. Twenty more were scheduled to be planted on October 30.

HOCPA is about to engage the firm of Crawford and Stearns to provide a detailed assessment of the condition of the Silsbee Chapel. They are a premier firm of architects and preservation specialists who have worked in the Syracuse community for decades. The Chapel is in critical condition and must receive immediate attention if it is to survive for the next 140 years. This evaluation is the first step involved in the process of accruing grant money so that we may proceed with construction.

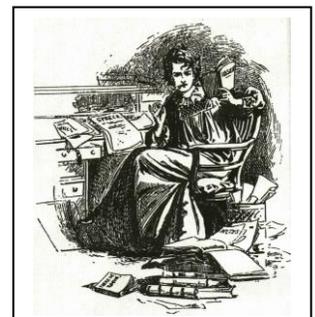
We have also hired the talented firm of Arboxy, LLC, whose founders are Corin Zimmer and John Zell. Their task is to create a preeminent website for HOCPA as we are dragged somewhat reluctantly into the 21st century! This website promises to keep you all updated with the many activities at Oakwood including some wonderful tales about our “residents.”

As you read this newsletter, which has been created and assembled by our resident historian, Sue Greenhagen, you will learn of the many other happenings here at Oakwood. As always, we very much appreciate your constant support as we forge ahead with our mission of sustaining this historical community treasure, Oakwood.



Editor’s Notes ... Sue Greenhagen

Well, here I am, putting the finishing touches on the newsletter. As I look out the window, I see some snowflakes cascading downward. It can mean only one thing - time to close the book on our 2019 season in Oakwood. That doesn’t mean, however, that we can rest on our laurels, or pat ourselves on the back. Yes, we had a terrific year, but let’s start thinking about our 2020 season. Personally, the women’s suffrage movement occupied a lot of my research time. We’ll be devoting the August tour to meeting some of the special women of Oakwood. Have you ever wondered why Harriet May Mills never pops up in our discussions? She was the first woman to run on a major party ticket in New York State. She ran for Secretary of State in 1920. She lost, but she was still the first. We don’t get to talk about her because she’s not in Oakwood. She’s buried with her parents in North Pitcher, Chenango County.



In addition to the women’s tour, called “Remember the Ladies...,” we’ll (re)visit Section 51. We had a real mix-up in July because *somebody* got the wrong date on our tour calendar. Folks showed up on the wrong weekend, but luckily Karl Orlick was there and did a mini-tour for them. Thanks, Karl. By the way, I was the one who messed up the calendar. As my family knows, I can’t be trusted with calendars or checkbooks. Along with tours, we’re looking forward to some great events. The things we did this past year brought out lots of people. Thanks to Scott Peal from O.H.A. and his wonderful Ghost Walk. The Crypt Keepers were busy right from the git-go. There were some special tours, including one for the ESF Alumni. An event was held at the Haggerty Lion, another commemorated the 160th anniversary of Oakwood’s dedication, an October Ghost Walk was a big hit. Nope, we can’t rest on our laurels. There’s a whole new year to look forward to. Gotta start planning. Now where’s my calendar...

The Angel of Peace: the Rest of the Story ... David Haas

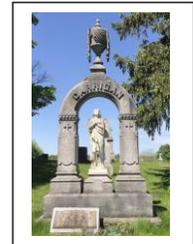
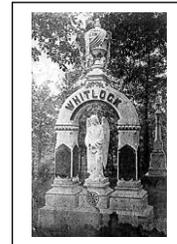
Pictured at right is the headless angel that sits on the Whitlock family burial plot located in in Section 4 of Oakwood Cemetery. The stone carving was the work of John C. Esser. Esser was born in Germany in 1838 and moved to New York City at the age of 8. While in NYC, Esser learned the trade of sculpting before moving to Syracuse in 1863 to establish a company for that very purpose. It has been written that Esser was the



first artist to sculpt in local limestone. The angel he carved for the Whitlock family was modeled after his daughter, Kittie Esser McCarthy (at left). Kittie had passed away several years earlier at the age of 19. Her death was listed as “childbirth.” Kittie’s body is buried just three lots away in Oakwood cemetery from the monument that reflects her image. Obviously, the stone is currently missing its head. A nearly identical stone can be found at Saint Mary’s Cemetery in Skaneateles, New York.



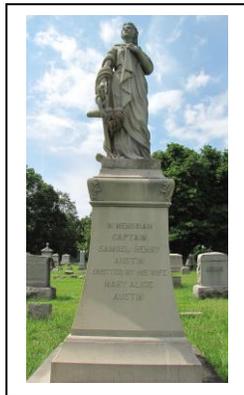
That stone was carved by Esser at the request of the Carrigan family after seeing the Whitlock burial plot. You can see the comparison of the two stone carvings in the photographs at right.



[Editor’s Note] *The Syracuse Journal* of 23 May 1933 reported that our statue was discovered stolen by cemetery attendants the day before. Police theorized that at least three men using a truck were probably involved since the statue weighed between 400 and 500 pounds and had a 10-foot wing span. The angel was later found, according to the *Journal* of 3 June, on Stadium Place, under some hedges and “badly damaged.”



Captain Austin’s Monument - There’s More to the Story



The monument pictured at left is that of Captain Samuel Henry Austin. A classical female figure stands atop a granite pedestal. The figure’s right hand rests on an anchor standing at her side. A heavy rope is attached to the anchor. The cut-off rope represents the cessation of life, and although anchors often represented hope, this one also represents the life of a seafarer. Born in 1824 in Rensselaer County, Samuel Austin went to sea at the age of 16. By the age of 25, he was the captain of a large whaling vessel. Always sailing out of European ports, he made eight voyages around the world. In 1862 he retired from sailing and bought the St. Charles Hotel in New York City. He bought a partnership in Syracuse’s Globe Hotel in 1867. Captain Austin didn’t marry until the year 1885. His hotel partner (and especially the partner’s wife) were not pleased that Mrs. Austin was the former Mary Hogan, an Irish immigrant who came to America in 1868. Worse yet she worked as a domestic in local hotels. Apparently their treatment of her was so bad that, in 1887, she initiated a lawsuit against John and Martha Bacon for slander. She sought damages of

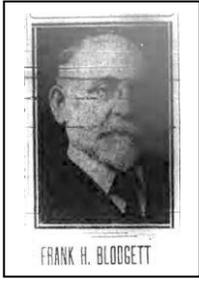
\$10,000 (\$280,000 in today’s money). She was awarded \$5,000. When the verdict was overturned in the Court of Appeals, a second trial in December of 1888 was held and this time, although she won her case, the award was reduced to \$1,000 (\$28,000 today).

When Captain Austin died in 1894, Mary had the monument pictured placed in Section 36. She inherited his personal property worth \$9,500 (\$276,000 today). She already had title to their house at 201 Delaware Street. She sold the house in 1907 for \$10,000 (\$272,000). All in all, not bad for an Irish immigrant. Mary died in 1923 and is buried with her husband.



And how, you may ask, do we know how much money was worth “back in the day,” as compared to the value of today’s money? One of the best and easiest to use websites is *The Inflation Calculator* at <https://westegg.com/inflation/>. Just enter the money amount you’re looking for, then the year, hit enter, and there’s the conversion.

Frank, Fred, and the Black Hand



The two men who play a role in this story are Frank H. Blodgett (left), and Fred R. Peck (right). In the early 1900s they were both Syracuse businessmen. Blodgett was born in 1849, began a successful restaurant and bakery business in 1874. In 1879, one of his ads read, "Ladies may patronize this place unattended, and be sure of respectful treatment." He offered leftover baked goods to the "newsies," local paper delivery boys, every evening. He was held in high regard by the citizens of Syracuse.



Fred Peck, born in 1869, bought into the coal business in 1903, a business he owned for the next 37 years. In 1908, his telephone number was 487. Also held in high regard by his fellow citizens, he, at his funeral, had the usual six pallbearers, but also 38 honorary pallbearers. So, what do these two gentlemen have in common? In 1906, both of these men, along with numerous others, were targeted by a cadre of criminals known as the "Black Hand." This was a society of Italian criminals that were particularly active in the big cities. With threats of violence, usually delivered in a letter sent to the victim, they extorted money from whomever was frightened enough to pay. On a smaller scale, the Black Hand was also active in central New York. The *Syracuse Herald* reported on April 17 that Frank Blodgett received a letter ordering him to appear at the entrance to Oakwood Cemetery at midnight with \$500 (\$14,000 in today's money). The letter was decorated with skulls, black hands, blood, and a dripping heart with a dagger through it. The writer included the warning, "We mean business." On April 19, he received a second letter. He had a police escort for a few days but nothing came of the threats. Blodgett dismissed the whole incident as the work of a "shallow-minded" individual. On August 1, Fred Peck received a threatening letter from the Black Hand. Bring \$150 to the entrance of Fayette Park at midnight, he was told, and give it to a man wearing a white hat. Failure to comply, the letter went on, would result in a terrible calamity, death, torture, and his house would be blown up. Peck turned the letter over to the police who set a trap for the letter writer. No one, however, showed up at Fayette Park where the police were waiting. Frank Blodgett and Fred Peck didn't take the threats of the Black Hand very seriously, and indeed, the local miscreants seemed particularly inept. Others who received letters reacted similarly to this gang's tactics. The extortion racket thrived, however, in New York City, and the Black Hand ("Mano Nera" in Italian) became what we now know as the Mafia.



Frank Blodgett is buried in Section 54, Lot 105, and Fred Peck is in Section 50, Lot 9 of Oakwood Cemetery.

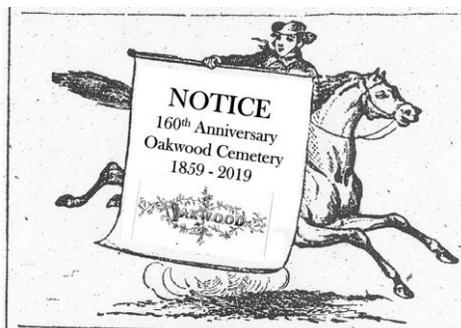
The "Perfect Tree"

The characteristics of the American chestnut tree make it the nearly perfect tree. It's the largest, tallest, and fastest-growing tree. It's rot-resistant and straight-grained. The chestnuts feed wildlife, people and livestock. In 1919, there were approximately four billion American chestnuts growing in the eastern United States. Then the chestnut blight, *Cryphonectria parasitica*, hit and the chestnut population was decimated. In an effort to revive the chestnut tree, tree plantings have been held in Oakwood. Various groups have volunteered to plant, stake and protect the new trees. The following is from Katherine Korba of the Cornell Cooperative Extension:



"We received the 20 American Chestnut trees from the SUNY ESF research project. I've been working with the HOCPA volunteer group that helps to maintain the cemetery. We've been working together for several years to obtain trees to replenish the tree canopy in Oakwood. Oakwood lost many trees in the Labor Day storm of 1998 that have never been re-planted in full. Many of the trees in Oakwood are reaching maturity and will need new trees in order to have a balanced forest of young, medium and mature trees. As trees come out, we'd like to continue to work with Oakwood Cemetery to replenish the loss."

This is a long-term project, and any help offered will be appreciated. For more information on volunteering, call Paul Harvey at 315-247-4420.

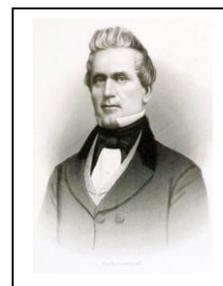


In the Beginning: Early Oakwood ... Diane Medvitz

In the midst of the rural cemetery movement, a number of local citizens met in 1852 to form a new cemetery under the name “Rural Cemetery Association of the City of Syracuse.” Smaller local cemeteries such as Rose Hill on Willow Street and Franklin Park, which is now a parking lot, were either at capacity or in the way of development. A committee wanted the current location but the Jamesville Plank Road was an obstacle and no one would “assume the necessary labors and responsibilities” to make it happen, so without leadership, the idea of a new cemetery was dropped.



In 1857 subscription papers were adopted but not acted on until a committee was formed two years later with Mayor Elias Leavenworth as the chair. In an attempt to raise \$25,000 for purchase of the land, sixty-three residents pledged amounts starting at \$50. A full ten percent of the total was subscribed to by brothers Horace and Hamilton White. After making arrangements with Charles A. Baker (portrait at right) and Henry Raynor (headstone at left) for the purchase of their farm land, the committee had to deal with the shareholders, directors and residents of the plank road for its removal. Charles Baker was president of the

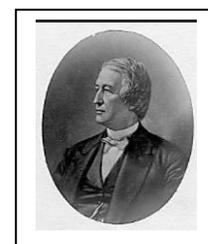


Jamesville Plank Road Company and aided in procuring the approval of all parties.

The Syracuse *Central City Daily Courier* covered the establishment of the new cemetery, asking the pubtate rules regarding rural cemeteries were read, officers were elected and twenty names for the new cemetery were presented. These included Memory Vale and Mount Rest, but the top vote getters were Oakwood (15), Oakland (2), Onondaga Rural (1), Mount Memory (1), Wood Lawn (1), and Woodland (1). Given that three fourths of the trees in the cemetery were oak, it was felt that Oakwood was the most appropriate name. It was presented to the committee by Secretary L.W. Hall, whom we believe was Levi Wells Hall, President of the Syracuse Chilled Plow Company. The *Courier* felt Oakwood compared favorably to Greenwood in New York City and Oakwood in Troy, N.Y.

The *Courier* went on to publish resolutions outlining the cost of lots in the cemetery. The area along the railroad tracks would be denoted third class grounds and would cost 8 cents per square foot. The area on the west ridge temporarily known as section 1 and 2 and two sections to the south of that area would be first- class grounds and cost sixteen cents per square foot. Northwest of the orchard and four circular sections south of them would also be first class. The balance of the grounds would be second class at a price of twelve cents per square foot. A standard lot would be considered two hundred square feet and these lots would be sold at auction the following week. Each successful bidder would have fifteen minutes to select the lot and choose as many contiguous lots as he would desire. If they waited until May, 1860, the prices would rise to ten, fifteen and twenty cents per square foot. A train of cars left from the depot of the Binghamton Railroad at 10:15 on the day of the sale and carried citizens to the grounds free of charge.

Unfortunately, due to the “disagreeable state of the weather,” only 30-40 people were present to choose lots and the first person to do so was Mayor Elias Leavenworth (right). The average area purchased was 12½ lots costing approximately \$400, which today would be over \$11,786. The earliest purchasers chose lots to the east of Dedication Valley behind the current chapel. Within four months more than seven thousand dollars’ worth of lots were sold.



As more burials occurred in the cemetery, a means for getting people to the area outside of the city was needed. William Breckenridge began running his omnibus from the Post Office to the cemetery on an hourly basis. Passengers would be picked up at principal hotels. If a family of four or more desired transportation they would be called for at their residence. The cost was ten cents each way.

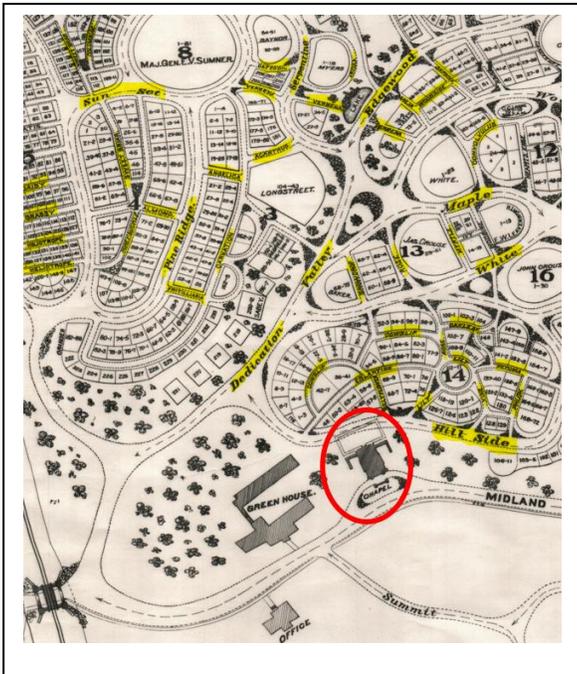
In the next few years, Oakwood was mentioned in newspaper articles for some unsavory events. In 1863, Julia Gallagher, a fifteen-year-old girl, was locked up in the Watchhouse (a place with a guard where persons under temporary arrest are kept) after she “maliciously” picked off the top of an evergreen shrub. Although her punishment was not listed, she could have been fined \$150, received six months in prison or both.

Superintendent George Gardner was adamant in pursuing people that stole flowers from graves in the cemetery. In May of 1870, Emma Briggs and Mary Smith were arraigned, pled guilty and paid fines of five dollars each for the offense. Others were similarly charged but not named in the newspapers.

The most unusual case appeared in an article from the *Buffalo Morning Express* deriding the citizens of Syracuse for being “rigidly righteous and painfully virtuous.” In 1865 a husband and wife were visiting the cemetery when they became tired. When sitting down Mrs. B. “put her arm around her husband’s waist in an affectionate manner.” They were ejected from the cemetery and brought before a Police Justice who decided against the couple. We don’t know if they ever returned.

In 1867 Elias Leavenworth wrote a letter to the editor explaining that the avenues and paths in the new cemetery needed to be identified, and laid out the proposal to name the avenues after trees and the paths for shrubs, vines and flowers. What would not be allowed were the names of persons and places and the final selection would be left to the Board of Trustees. These names can be seen on the maps of the older sections. The Syracuse *Central City Daily Courier* of 10 November 1859 quoted Leavenworth’s words at the cemetery’s dedication, “Thus has been

consecrated to the dead, a lovely spot, that will be hallowed by us now living, as the resting place of those who shall have gone before us, and generations yet unborn, as that boundary line which separates [sic] us and them from the beautiful City of the New Jerusalem.”



The 1912 map at left shows the roadway names highlighted in yellow. The Chapel is circled in red.

The First Burial in Oakwood

On the 6th day of November 1859, Nellie G. Williamson died. The wife of Edwin Williamson, she was only 21 years old. Two days later her funeral was held, just five days after the cemetery had been formally dedicated. The Syracuse *Daily Journal* wrote that Nellie “...was enjoying all the blessings of life, but since, by a fatal accident, she has been called from our midst, to be consigned the first ‘lifeless form’ which will dedicate this new repository for the dead.” Rest in peace, Nellie.



Tales from the Crypt Keepers ... Paul Harvey

The Crypt Keepers are on a tear! This year they have helped refurbish the Haggerty Lion Memorial grove, they have cleared a hillside to prepare for a new entrance from SUNY-ESF to Oakwood, they nearly cleared the Lilac Circle recently rediscovered by HOCPA members and they discovered and cleared twenty graves that had been taken over by an eighth of an acre swath of reeds. They have also flagged and begun to clear several smaller plots, helped Cornell Cooperative, SUNY-ESF and HOCPA in planting the American chestnut trees in the new Chestnut Tree project and are planning with Karl Orlick to re-erect the old F. Franklin Moon tombstone, an 8 ft high memorial that had toppled over in recent years. Moon was dean of the N.Y.S. College of Forestry from 1920 to 1929.

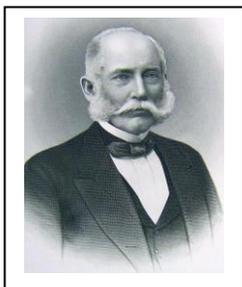
Started last year, the Crypt Keepers now consist of 15 girls and boys, and several mothers from Girl Scout Troop 10186, Boy Scout Troop #1, and a big new group of SUNY-ESF students whom the college is now naming their official representatives to Oakwood Cemetery.

Several seniors have joined us and membership is open to any groups, family group or individuals who would like to work with us. Contact Paul Harvey at luludoodah@aol.com or 315-247-4420 for more details.

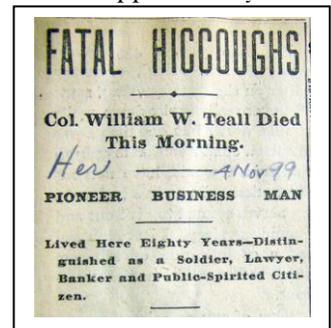
Oakwood Cemetery Crypt Keepers at Work



Who's Who in Oakwood



William W. Teall (1818-1899) was a man of many achievements. He had attended school at Cazenovia Seminary, Union College and Yale Law School. In 1839 he passed the bar. In 1844 he was appointed agent to the Onondaga Nation. He was appointed Syracuse postmaster the following year. He had a lifelong association with Syracuse banking establishments. He rose to the rank of Colonel in the Civil War, serving on the staff of his father-in-law, Major General Edwin Vose Sumner. His post-war career centered on banks, businesses, real estate, and railroads. When he died on 4 November 1899, the *Syracuse Herald* headline was quite unusual (at right). According to *A Medical Miscellany for Genealogists*, hiccoughs were "...a convulsive catch in respiration caused by a spasm of the diaphragm. At times, continuous hiccoughs were a complication of influenza or encephalitis." Col. Teall, at 81 years of age, suffered his fatal affliction for nearly nine days. He and his wife, Sarah Sumner Teall, are buried in Section 8, Lot 1.



HOCPA Donors as of Fall, 2019

We are most grateful to all our donors for their continued interest and support.

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Whose Is It?



Can anyone identify the owner of this beautiful headstone? The clasped hands show the relationship of the deceased to those left behind. They also represent reunion as the two meet again in the next life. The wreath of roses indicates beauty and virtue rewarded. If you recognize this stone, contact Sue Greenhagen at greenhsh@morrisville.edu.



HOCPA MEMBERSHIP FORM

_____ New Member _____ Renewal

_____ Senior/Student \$5 _____ Individual \$15 _____ Family \$25

_____ Patron \$100 _____ Corporate \$200

Name _____

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Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization.

Donations are deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Please make checks payable to **HOCPA**, and mail to:

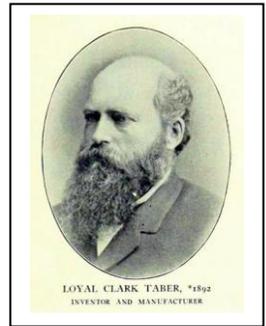
HOCPA, PO BOX 15065, Syracuse NY 13215

Oakwood All-Star: Loyal Clark Taber

Loyal Clark Taber (1832-1892) was born in Madison County, at Taber's Mills, in the Town of Cazenovia. He attended Cazenovia Seminary, graduating in 1850. Having a mechanical aptitude, he worked in machine shops of the New York Central Railroad in Syracuse, worked as an engineer on a Canadian railroad, but returned to the hamlet of Eaton



in Madison County in 1858 where he became a partner of machine manufacturer Allen N. Wood. Walter Morse joined the company to form Wood, Taber & Morse Steam Engine Works. There they built steam engines that were stationary, portable, and eventually traction. In 1870, a WTM steam engine was said to have threshed 40,000 bushels of grain in one season. They could cut a cord of wood from logs in ten minutes. In 1863 WTM was selling portable steam engines at a cost of \$350 to \$1500, depending on the horse power. At the peak of their success, they could produce three engines in a week. In



1885, Loyal Taber invented the four-wheel drive traction engine, which could pull and be steered. After one month on the market, WTM had nineteen orders for the new tractor. These steam engines would revolutionize farming.

The saddest aspect of the Taber story is that of Loyal's widow, Mary. Twenty-three years after the death of her husband, Mary met with a tragic accident. While cooking her breakfast over a gas stove, her clothing accidentally caught on fire. Before her son, Wellington, could come to her aid, she was engulfed in flames and severely burned. She survived but a few hours.

Loyal and Mary are buried in Section 47 on a prominence overlooking Midland Avenue.



address correction requested

H.O.C.P.A.
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