



# “Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery  
Preservation Association

Syracuse, New York

Spring, 2019 Volume 27, Number 1

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## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE: Connie Palumb

As we look forward to Spring, we anticipate Oakwood’s 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! Sue Greenhagen and Diane Medvitz have an exciting schedule of tours planned for your enjoyment. Always interesting and often humorous, these women dig up amazing facts about our “residents.”

Diane and Sue are also engaged in developing a new publication modeled after a wonderful book recently published by Mt. Hope Cemetery in Rochester, NY. An anonymous benefactor has agreed to help finance this endeavor for which we are very grateful.

Our relationship with the students and faculty at SUNY-ESF remains an indispensable addition to our practical workforce. Board member, Paul Harvey, has created a group who work monthly tackling the most difficult tasks. They are known as the “Crypt Keepers” identifiable by their T-shirts which sport their logo!

We hope soon to have the Chapel floor made safe for visitors. Board members Karl Orlick and David Haas, met recently with contractor, Andy Erickson and architect, Hilary Mansur to determine a plan for renovation. This and other similar projects would not be attainable without your continued support. We are most grateful to all of you... those who attend our tours and those who contribute financially. Thank you from us all!

## EDITOR’S NOTES: Sue Greenhagen

Some people are clock-watchers. I’m a calendar-watcher. I watch those winter months drag by, week after snowy week. And then March comes along. Summer tours have been charted, the newsletter is almost ready to send off to the printer, and afternoon sunshine warms our hearts. The 2019 Oakwood season is about to begin.

How about these tours? May opens up with a walk around the Civil War plot of Section 56 on Sunday, May 19. Leading the tour will be 19<sup>th</sup> century Syracuse undertaker, Austin K. Hoyt (aka Sue Greenhagen). A living history tour is a way of meeting our residents through the eyes of a contemporary, a person who may have known most of them personally. It’s fun for me to do, and most tour groups have enjoyed it. Just a reminder, if it’s hot, there’s no shade in that area, so come prepared. If it rains, come prepared.

On June 23, Diane Medvitz is going to introduce us to some of the great folks (and Syracuse icons) in Section 66. The tour is called “Patently Prolific: Inventors & Industrialist in Section 66.” Some of these people you may be familiar with, but I can guarantee that Diane will come up with some surprises.

The July 21 tour will be in Area 51 - wait a minute, I meant Section 51. No aliens, no ETs, just some downright interesting stories to tell. I’m going to tell you about a maritime disaster, a boxing fatality, a Black Civil War soldier, a nationally known art historian, and numerous freakish accidents. I can’t write fiction as good as some of these stories, honest.

On August 18, “The Hills are Alive...with the Stories of Oakwood.” Diane Medvitz will be singing (not literally) the praises of a few of the interesting residents in Sections 26, 43, 47 and 53. Bring your walking shoes and join us...

Don Leopold will lead a “Fallin’ for Oakwood” tour on September 15. Autumn presents a whole different look at Oakwood. So many trees, so little time...

Virtual tour number 3 is ready - “Live Oaks & *Still More* Dead Folks.” Contact Sue Greenhagen at [greenhsh@morrisville.edu](mailto:greenhsh@morrisville.edu) or 315.684.3418 to book a program. Also, tours by appointment are available.

We at HOCPA thank everyone for their support, whether it’s by a membership, attending a tour, or making a donation to the cause which is the preservation of a priceless treasure - Oakwood). See you at the cemetery...



### Voices of Oakwood: Mary Elizabeth Leavenworth

In 1950, a cache of letters was discovered in the attic of Elias W. Leavenworth's home at 97 James Street. The mansion was about to be demolished when Mary Wilkinson came across letters that Mary E. Leavenworth wrote to her mother-in-law from Washington, D.C., in late 1861 and early 1862. At that time Elias was serving on the Granadine Confederation Commission, and the couple was living comfortably at the Willard Hotel. On 19 February 1961, the *Syracuse Herald American* published an article written by Mrs. Wilkinson that included not only excerpts from the letters but also a portrait of Mary Leavenworth (at right). The letters discuss life in Washington during the early months of the Civil War. Social events were the order of the day and Mary Leavenworth talked of attending get-togethers with cabinet members on New Years Day, of meeting military personnel, and even bumping into fellow Syracusans Charles Sedgwick and Harvey Baldwin. Most interesting, however, were her comments on a party she and her husband attended on 11 February 1862 at the White House. She wrote:



“We attended the President’s party. Saw all the dignitaries, beautiful dresses of all kinds. Mrs. Lincoln was dressed in a white satin with a long train of half a yard or more in depth, with black and white flowers on her head, face and arms.

Our neighbor, Mrs. Baldwin, was there and had the honor of being noticed in the Herald paper as being noticed as one of the beautiful ladies. It was a great gratification to her, no doubt, to be so particularized, for most beautiful ladies know by their mirrors just how beautiful they are...

“[The ladies] crowded each other considerably, elegant dresses, point lace flounces, rich silks were jam-pressed, and some of the thin ones were torn. We were all invited to walk into the supper room and look at the beautiful supper table and its contents, but not to touch anything until the President should lead the way.

All the goodies were brought from New York, all sorts of birds, some on their nests with their feathers on, were as natural as life, represented as being cooked in various ways, but all made of sugar. Forts with flags of the Union flying from them, pyramids of candies with gauze birds of sugar of various colors, cakes etc.

The table did not please me as well as some tables I have seen at friends’ parties. The whole thing looked too dark, it all had a maroon-like color.

At 12 o’clock the President entered the dining room, and some of the dignitaries with him.

The crowd rushed in, filling it immediately. The doors were then locked until the inmates were feasted to their hearts content, when the door into the hall was opened and all left the room. Then another roomful was permitted to enter after the table was set in order, and so on until all had their supper. But before this took place we were home and in bed. Many left before the supper room was opened, others long before the first table was finished.”

Gossip was rampant in Washington, and every tidbit concerning generals was eagerly passed along. General Charles P. Stone’s situation became a “hot” topic. Mrs. Leavenworth wrote:

“We attended an elegant party at the McClellans on Thursday last... I saw then, that evening, General Stone, who was two days ago arrested and taken off to [Fort] Lafayette. He is a fine looking man, and Mrs. Marcy [McClellan’s mother-in-law] said he had been very much slandered, that he was a most excellent officer. How astonished she will be, and is, at the astonishing news that flew like wildfire about the city here, that he was arrested on General McClellan’s instigation and testimony.”

The Battle at Balls Bluff, 21 October 1861, was a Union defeat, and much of the blame was placed on General Stone. He was arrested and spent 189 days in confinement. Formal charges were never filed, and when released he resumed his career with General Nathaniel Banks in the deep South. Mrs. Leavenworth continued:

“I called to see Mrs. Sumner yesterday morning, did not find her at home, but the general invited me in... He was very much astonished to hear of General Stone’s arrest – said his son, Sam, had been with him over there, and passed some weeks in his (Stone’s) regiment with him. They supposed of course he was loyal. The general intends to go out to camp tomorrow taking Mrs. Sumner and Sam with him.” On February 27, 1862, Mrs. Leavenworth wrote:

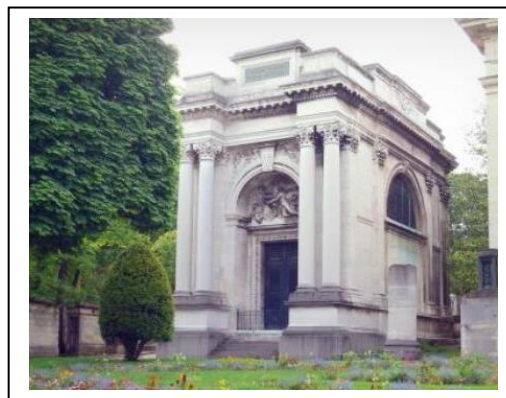
“I think of you all every day and wish we could be with you. Soon you will see us, Providence permitting. All the gaiety of the place has ceased pretty much. Great changes taking place constantly at Willard’s. All the gay parties have departed, the parlor looks thin.”

The Leavenworths soon returned to Syracuse and their mansion on James Street. Mary Wilkenson’s discovery of Mrs. Leavenworth’s letters offers us a rare glimpse of early wartime in Washington, D.C. Mary Elizabeth Leavenworth died on 18 April 1880 and is buried in Section 13, Lot 1, alongside her husband, Elias.



### Seeing Double?

Visitors to Oakwood who enter off Comstock Avenue are greeted by one of the most well-known of all the mausolea in the cemetery. The Lyman Cornelius Smith mausoleum was built at the direction of Burns Smith, Lyman’s son. An article in *The Weekly Recorder* (Fayetteville, N.Y.) of 5 April 1912 said he would erect a family mausoleum to the memory of his father. The projected cost would be \$100,000 (that’s \$2.5 million in today’s dollars). Most interesting is that Burns Smith wanted the structure patterned after the mausoleum of French statesman and historian, Adolphe Thiers (1797 to 1877). The similarity is striking. Smith’s is below, left, and Thiers’, which is located in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, is at the right.



Lyman Cornelius Smith’s place in the history of Syracuse industry is unquestioned. He began the manufacture of breech-loading guns in 1877. His company produced the first hammerless shotgun in 1886, and in 1889 the gun business was sold to Hunter Arms Company. In 1886, Smith, with three of his brothers, began the manufacture of typewriters. The company was known as the Smith Premier Typewriter Company. L.C. Smith was also involved with steamship manufacture, steamship lines, steel mills, railroads, and banking. He died in 1910 and it was two years later that his son saw to the construction of the mausoleum we see today. The Smith family mausoleum is located in Section 65, at the Comstock Avenue entrance to Oakwood Cemetery.



## Take Me Out to the Ball Game: O. Robinson Casey

Look out the window – is that a robin bob, bob, bobbin’ along? Sure, there’s still a little snow here and there, but that doesn’t matter. Time to shut down the hot-stove league – baseball is back in central New York. Syracuse has been a hot-bed of baseball since before the Civil War, indeed, ever since baseball came into being. The first organized team was the Syracuse Base Ball Club which played its first game in 1858. The Central City Base Ball Club formed just after the Civil War, and was followed by the Syracuse Stars in 1873. Although the Stars were out of business due to bankruptcy in 1929, folks continued to talk of the stories, highlights, myths and legends of the old-time teams. Perhaps the greatest national story of baseball was the publication of a poem on 3 June 1888 entitled, “Casey at the Bat.” It was written by a sportswriter named Ernest Thayer and first appeared in the San Francisco *Daily Examiner*. As Thayer wrote, “...there is no joy in Mudville – mighty Casey has struck out.” Who, people asked, was this mighty Casey?

Various ballplayers of that era put their names forward, eager to take credit as being mighty Casey. One such player was Orrin Robinson Casey, known to all as Bob Casey. He was born in Canada in 1859, and came to Syracuse around 1878. He played ball in Syracuse for two seasons before signing a contract with the Detroit Wolverines. When Thayer’s poem was published, Bob Casey thought he fit the bill. He was nearly six feet tall, a solid 190 pounds, and a pretty fair hitter. His fielding, however, left a lot to be desired – in one season he played in nine games and had twelve errors. Surprisingly, he was known as a “star third baseman.” Casey cited a game played in Minneapolis in 1885 as THE game immortalized by Thayer. With his Detroit team trailing, Bob Casey came to bat with runners on, and a chance to win it. Alas, Bob Casey did strike out, and that was enough to elevate him to legendary status. Ironically, Ernest Thayer himself stated categorically that he had no specific player in mind when he wrote the poem. Bob Casey’s legend as “Mighty Casey,” however, lived on long after his death in 1936. He is buried in Section 32, Lot 97.



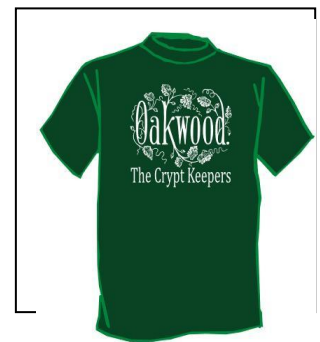
Actually, there’s more to Bob Casey’s story than just baseball. In the off season he clerked in a general store that sold supplies to the crews of packet boats on the Erie Canal. In making deliveries he noticed how inhumanely the mules pulling the boats were treated. Over the years, he never forgot what he had seen. On 10 January 1891, the Central New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formally incorporated. Orrin Robinson Casey was appointed Superintendent, a position he held until his death on 28 November 1936. He was often described as a kind, compassionate man, with a hearty laugh. His work with the S.P.C.A. was commendable, but perhaps his obituary in the *Syracuse Herald* said it best, “An immortal, but nevertheless, shadowy and legendary figure of American baseball history, slipped forever and entirely into the realm of the dim and misty past...” Play ball!



## The Oakwood Cemetery Crypt Keepers: by Paul Harvey

The Crypt Keepers are a recent addition to our community. The group currently consists of Girl Scout Troop #10186, Boy Scout Troop #1, SUNY/ESF students from the Community Service Department, the families and friends of these groups and the members of the HOCPA Board. We are expecting new members soon including alumni from ESF and local seniors.

The Crypt Keepers do regular landscaping and light maintenance, and help with ideas for, and the work behind, new developments and improvements. After participating in three activities or events, each crypt keeper receives an official T-shirt. The shirts, needed tools and refreshments are funded by HOCPA. Membership is open to any interested groups or individuals by contacting any HOCPA Board member.



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

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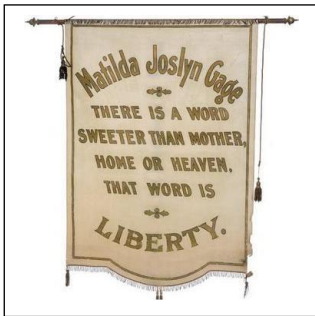
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## Oakwood All-Star: Blanche Weaver Baxter

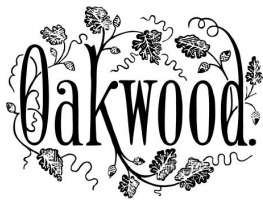
June 16, 2019, marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of New York State's ratification of the proposed 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. That amendment would guarantee women all across the nation the right to vote, a right they had been agitating for since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. On June 16, Governor Alfred E. Smith called a special session of the state legislature to vote on the amendment. It was ratified unanimously and New York joined five other states of the thirty-six needed for ratification. It was not until 18 August 1920 that Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify and make the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment the law of the land. It was a long and arduous battle. As Blanche once said about the suffragettes, "they were ridiculed and driven by howling mobs from place to place."

The work of the women of central New York cannot be overstated. One of the hardest workers was Blanch Weaver Baxter. Born in Cicero in 1856, she attended school in Syracuse, and in 1878, headed for New York City to take up a career in acting. Her stage career lasted thirty years. She was married in 1894 to William D. Baxter and they had a daughter, Ramona, in 1895. Blanche's stage experience served her well as she became a leader in the Women's Suffrage movement. Since the 1840s women in New York had been agitating



for the right to vote. Blanche wrote, spoke, handed out leaflets, whatever needed to be done. And she marched. In May of 1914, at the first suffrage parade held in Syracuse, it was Blanche Weaver Baxter who carried the banner pictured at left, proclaiming the words of her aunt, Matilda Joselyn Gage. Blanche's name was prominent among the Syracuse suffrage icons: Dora Hazard, Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, Hannah Pease, Marie Jenney, Marion Wilkinson, and so many others. To these women, New York State, and indeed, America, owes a debt of gratitude. Every time a woman walks into a voting booth, she should remember what these pioneers did.

Blanche didn't rest on her laurels after the franchise was won. Always interested in art appreciation and education, she held classes for children at the Museum of Fine Arts, the forerunner of the Everson Museum. She also established the Syracuse Little Theater. When she died on 4 November 1947, the *Post-Standard* the following day allotted just one short paragraph to her contributions to the suffrage movement. One banner seen in the early parades perhaps sums up her attitude, "This is what comes of teaching girls to read." She is buried in Section 27, Lot 30. She does not have a headstone.



*address correction requested*

**H.O.C.P.A.  
PO Box 15065  
Syracuse, NY 13215**