

“Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association
Spring, 2015 Volume 23, Number 1

President’s Message - Connie Palumb

Spring has finally arrived in all its glory as it inevitably does, regardless of our “coldest-on-record” winter. Our HOCPA Board of Directors made it through as well with minimal wear and tear. We are a hearty lot!

Tom Viau and company have completed phase one of the extensive masonry work at Silsbee Chapel. They have been hired to stabilize the two portico arches of the structure. This project requires repositioning, resetting, and remortaring any loose stones, of which there are many. Needless to say, it is a painstakingly difficult task which they are executing with great care and skill. Phase two will begin when weather permits.

After the chapel’s exterior is complete, we would like to tackle the interior. Once a handsome area used for nondenominational services, it is currently a mess. First and foremost it is in need of an extensive cleaning, and a new floor. It would be quite wonderful to restore the interior so that it could once again be used for a variety of activities.

Sisters Sue Greenhagen and Darothy DeAngelo have come up with a new and exciting group of summer cemetery tours for your pleasure. They have tailored these walks to be less rigorous with fewer hills and shorter distances for those of us who cannot ramble as we once did. They promise to be entertaining and well researched. Sue spends endless hours on her computer investigating those who are residents of Oakwood. Be sure to join us on Sunday afternoons this summer - you won’t be disappointed.



Editor’s Notes - Sue Greenhagen

I think we’ve all had enough winter to last us a while. Bring on the warm breezes and the smell of new-mown grass. As soon as the snow melts, it’s time to head for Oakwood Cemetery, and enjoy its landscaped beauty. That beauty, however, comes at a price. Although we commend the maintenance staff for all the work they do, there are some things that require the efforts of a dedicated group of people who really care about preserving Oakwood. That’s where HOCPA comes in. We depend on our membership to sustain us. Consider joining. We can really use your support. There’s so much to do.

Let me remind everyone that I’ve put together two PowerPoint programs that offer a virtual tour of Oakwood Cemetery. I call them “Live Oaks & Dead Folks,” and “Live Oaks & *More* Dead Folks.” I get to talk about some of the most interesting, famous, infamous, and just plain bizarre people we have in Oakwood. Don’t want to hike around Oakwood, up and down hills? Well, these programs take all the work out of touring Oakwood. They’re great for libraries, clubs, or any group, any size. Just contact me at (315) 684-3418 or greenhsh@morrisville.edu.

If you don’t mind walking around a bit, I also do “Tours by Appointment.” Again, it’s any group, any size. Also any time, any topic. Contact me. There’s so much history to be seen in Oakwood, please take advantage of these two services.



“Oakwood Memories”

HOCPA is inviting folks to submit stories about Oakwood. They can be stories of relatives buried there, or memories from childhood. The following was submitted by Judy Oplinger:

“My parents moved to a second floor flat on Oakwood Street (#160) backing up on Oakwood Cemetery in the 1930s and later were able to purchase it. Before I was born, they both enjoyed going for walks there, and my dad often skied there in winter.

I was born in 1942, and these walks in the cemetery continued. When I got older I spent a lot of time in the cemetery, both alone and with neighborhood kids – playing, sledding in winter, gathering horse chestnuts in the fall, catching tadpoles, reveling in the violets that bloomed in spring in the swamp on the other side of the fence. The horse chestnut tree is still there. The pond is not. A neighbor boy and I made an animal cemetery on the bank behind my house and buried everything dead that came our way.

We moved away when I was ten. When I got to college, I majored in biology (natural history particularly), and I think my experiences as a child with the cemetery in my backyard had a lot to do with it. I’m thinking the students in ESF’s Centennial Dorm, which replaced all the houses on my side of the street, are so fortunate to be able to look out onto the cemetery.”

In the News

Here’s a newspaper quote about Oakwood Cemetery:

“Oakwood in springtime is one of the most beautiful spots in Syracuse. After once passing the entrance it is hard to believe it a city of the dead, so quick is it with signs of the awakening summer.”

This quote appeared in the *Post-Standard* over one hundred years ago, 1901 to be exact. The “entrance” they mention is the old gate on the west side, now blocked off. The article goes on to describe the flowers that appear announcing the arrival of spring, white wake-robins, purple violets, and lillies of the valley. The trees are “feathered on all their branches with pale green fringe, and a hundred birds twitter and sing among them.” If it sounds idyllic, well, it is. When Howard Daniels was hired in the late 1850s to design a new cemetery for the city of Syracuse, he did so making Oakwood a “*rural cemetery*,” literally and figuratively. The rural cemetery movement began in the United States in 1831 with the opening of Mount Auburn Cemetery near Boston, Massachusetts. Cemeteries were meant to be what we would call today “green spaces.” They were built on the outskirts of towns and cities, away from the hustle, bustle, and dirt. It’s hard to imagine Oakwood on the outskirts of Syracuse, but back in the mid-1800s, it was. Based on natural drumlins, driveways were made to encircle the area, and many of the roads were given the names of flowers, like Daffodil and Carnation. It all added to the park-like setting. Hitching posts were available for visitors, since the cemetery regulations stated that no horse could be left unattended. The rules also said no vehicle could exceed three miles per hour. Visitors came, especially on weekends and holidays, to enjoy the bucolic setting. Oakwood still welcomes visitors today, not just to visit the resting place of loved ones but to enjoy the beauty of the cemetery itself.



Dogwoods in Bloom



Our Upcoming Season

HOCPA will start the season off with a clean-up day in April. At noon on Saturday, April 18, we'll meet at Silsbee Chapel to get the area looking spiffy. We always welcome volunteers. The month of May officially starts off our summer tour season, this year on Sunday, May 31. Our good friend, George Curry from ESF, will lead a tour called "In the Beginning..." The design of Oakwood is a story unto itself, and George Curry is the one to tell it. Our June tour will be "Here Come 'Da Judge" with Sue Greenhagen leading the way. If the title sounds familiar, it's because it was our season-ending tour last year. However, the tour was rudely interrupted, not only by a deluge, but as soon as we heard thunder we made a beeline for the Chapel. Our tours do not tolerate thunder and lightning. Hopefully, we can do a complete tour and learn more about Oakwoods legal eagles. In July we will turn our attention to a particular section, in this case, Section 13. In fact, we'll call the tour "Lucky Thirteen," and see who was lucky and unlucky in that section just off Dedication Valley. Our August tour is called "Odd Jobs: Syracusans at Work." We'll examine how folks made a living back in the 19th and early 20th century. In September we're going to revisit a tour from the 2009 season, "Musty, Mossy and Marvelous Mausoleums." These structures represented not only reverence for the dead but also status in the community. They are as interesting as their inhabitants.

So, briefly, here is the line-up for the summer season:

Saturday, April 18, Noon - "Scour the Past" Volunteers help clean up around Silsbee Chapel.

Sunday, May 31, 2 pm - "In the Beginning..." George Curry talks about the landscape design of Oakwood Cemetery.

Sunday, June 14, 2 pm - "Here Come 'Da Judge" Sue Greenhagen finishes a tour cut short by rain last season.

Sunday, July 19, 2 pm - "Lucky Thirteen" Sue leads a tour examining the lives and times of those buried in Section 13.

Sunday, August 16, 2 pm - "Odd Jobs: Syracusans at Work." Sue Greenhagen again leads a tour, this time looking at how folks made a living back in the day.

Sunday, September 20, 2 pm - "Musty, Mossy & Marvelous Mausoleums" Sue leads a tour examining some of the most interesting structures in Oakwood.

The tours begin at the chapel (follow the tour signs). Don't forget, we go rain or shine (but not thunder and lightning). All tours are free but donations are accepted. Please wear comfortable shoes.

Also this Season...

Scott Peal, O.H.A. Education Associate, is hard at work planning another Ghost Walk for Oakwood Cemetery. Living historians will bring to life some of the most interesting and in some cases, bizarre, characters we have in Oakwood. For more information and reservations please call Karen at 428-1864 x 312.

HOCPA Member Honored

HOCPA board member Darothy DeAngelo was honored at the 111th Annual Heritage Luncheon held February 21 at the Drumlins Country Club. She was awarded the Bronze Good Citizenship Medal "in recognition of notable services in behalf of our American principles." Making the presentation was Robert Gang, President of the Syracuse Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution. The luncheon was attended by 80 people representing various patriotic and historical organizations. Darothy and her sister, Sue Greenhagen, attended representing the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Darothy's "notable services" are many. She has been a member of HOCPA for many years, done tour guiding, and is responsible for many of those colorful tour titles. Who could ever forget "Dames, Damsels, and Dingbats?" She also belongs to the O.H.A. and the Pompey Historical Society and was the former historian of the Oran Community Church. She has also done many presentations on genealogy and local history. This award is well deserved. Congratulations, Darothy.

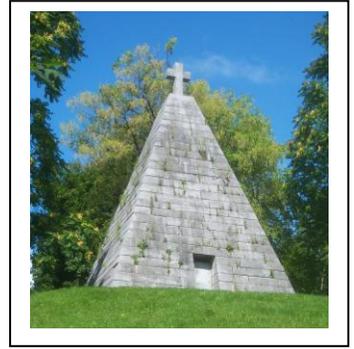


The “Inside” Story

One of the musings of visitors to Oakwood is to wonder what it’s like inside the large mausoleums that are scattered around the cemetery. Unfortunately, access to the mausoleums has had to be restricted, sometimes with chains and locks but mostly closed up with blocks and mortar. For example the Crouse mausoleum, pictured below, has large bronze doors that have been chained shut. We know, however, a little bit of what the interior is like from Annie Maltbie’s 1894 book, *Picturesque Oakwood: Its Past and Present Associations.* She writes that the interior is finished with “hammered and polished granite,” and the catacombs are Italian marble. She also mentions that the structure has stained glass windows. Built in 1884, the mausoleum cost around \$40,000 which in today’s money would be about a million dollars.

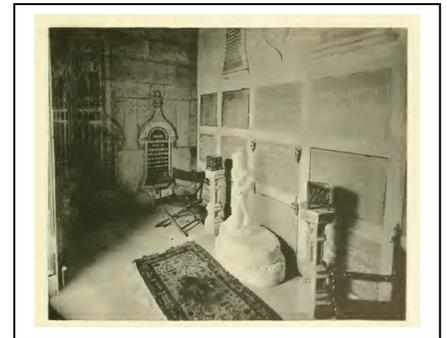


Moving on to the Cornelius T. Longstreet pyramid (right), we are lucky enough to have an actual photograph (below, right) of the interior. The entrance to the pyramid faces east and overlooks Dedication Valley. Imagine what it must have been like. From the Pine Ridge road, visitors would park their horse and carriage and alight, walk

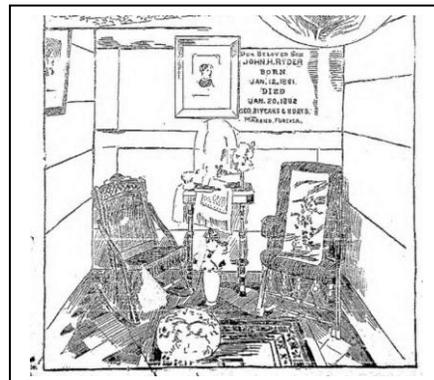


around the pyramid to the door, open it, walk down a couple of steps, and enter the main room. Thanks to the Maltbie book, we can take a peek right into the Longstreet tomb. There on the floor is a nice Oriental rug. Two chairs sit with tables next to them. A small statue greets the visitors. On the back wall are the catacombs of the Longstreet family. It must have been a pleasant change to enjoy the coolness of the pyramid compared to the scorching summer heat of downtown Syracuse.

Sometimes, just browsing through old newspapers can offer a surprise or two about Oakwood Cemetery. Recently an article was discovered in an 1897 issue of the *Syracuse Herald.* It described not only the interior of Philip S. Ryder’s hillside tomb in Section 11, but it also talked of Mr. and Mrs. Ryder’s reason for spending time at the tomb. In 1882, their 21 year-old son, John H.



Ryder died. His remains were placed in the tomb, and the interior was appointed to be as “cheerful as a parlor.” The Ryders would go to Oakwood as often as possible to spend time with their beloved John. He was just beginning a literary career when he was stuck down by typhoid fever. He had already had some of his work published in *Puck* magazine. As the newspaper drawing shows, there were two chairs, one a rocker for Philip, the other for his wife, Olive. There they would sit and read or just pass the time. John’s portrait hung on the wall. On a table in the center was a white dove in a large glass case. Bouquets of flowers were placed on the table and on the floor. An Oriental rug can be seen in the center of the room. As the newspaper headline read, “Cheerful, Not Sad Is the Mausoleum Where John H. Ryder Lives.”

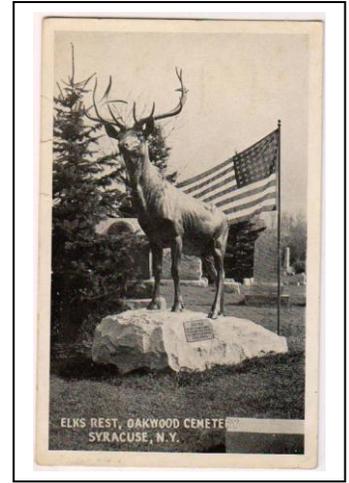


The Ryder family mausoleum, left, and its interior, right.

“Elks Rest,” the Rest of the Story

One of the most well known statues in Oakwood Cemetery is the life-size elk in Section 52. It’s a bronze sculpture sitting atop a rough-hewn granite boulder. What is it all about?

Back in 1885, Elks Lodge #31 was established in Syracuse. The official title of the organization is the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, B.P.O.E., commonly known as the Elks. In 1921, the Elks took title to a 52-grave plot in Oakwood on the north edge of Section 52 along Midland Avenue. The plot had been donated by Miles C. Hencle, Secretary of the Lodge, as a tribute to his mother Eliza Hencle. Interestingly enough, both Miles and his mother are buried in Baldwinsville, their hometown. According to the *Syracuse Journal* of 19 April 1921, George E. Campbell who passed away on 3 February 1921, would be the first Elk buried in the plot, as had been his dying wish. It was not until June 14, 1925, that the statue of the elk was dedicated in that plot. Hundreds of Elks from across the state attended the dedication. At right is a postcard commemorating the event. The plot was named



“Elks Rest,” a commonly used name for that special cemetery section reserved for members of the Elks.

The statue itself was created by a sculptor named Eli Harvey. Harvey was born in 1860 in Clinton, Ohio. As a young man he studied art, and later traveled to Europe to study there. By 1900, he decided to specialize in animal sculptures, and in 1904 he was commissioned to create the “Elk at Rest” statue to be used expressly by the Elks organization in cemeteries and at their lodges. Harvey is shown at left with his sculpture of a bear that became the mascot of Brown University. Harvey worked from a studio in New York City and in the 1920s moved to Alhambra, California, where he died in 1957. He is buried in Springfield, Ohio.



The first sculpture of the elk was cast in bronze in 1905 by one of the leading art foundries in the United States, the Gorham Manufacturing Company of Providence, Rhode Island. All subsequent elks were also cast by Gorham, including ours in Oakwood Cemetery.

And that’s the rest of the story...

HOCPA MEMBERSHIP FORM

_____ New Member _____ Renewal

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Donations are deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

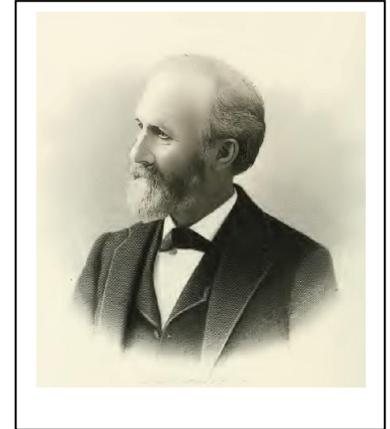
Please make checks payable to **HOCPA**, and mail to: **HOCPA, PO BOX 15065, Syracuse NY 13215**

Oakwood All-Star – John Edson Sweet

Our All-Star this time is not exactly a household name in central New York, but maybe he should be. His accomplishments as an engineer are truly impressive.

He was born on 21 October 1832 in the town of Pompey, and spent his early years working on his father's farm. He attended local schools, and gradually began to show an aptitude for anything mechanical. At the age of twelve he constructed a small violin. (He also loved music.) In 1850 he was apprenticed to John Pinkerton of Syracuse to learn the carpentry trade. He soon obtained a position in Elijah Hayden's architectural firm. While mostly pushing a broom he was also allowed to study architectural plans. He became involved with the skills of carpentry, joining, building, and making architectural drawings. His first patent was for a nail-making machine. In 1861 the *Rural New Yorker* published Sweet's plans for a premium-winning barn that was built on the family farm in Pompey. He traveled in Europe, worked as a draughtsman, and began patenting mechanical inventions. In 1873 he began his connection with Cornell University which lasted six years. He came back to Syracuse and organized the Straight Line Engine Company. In 1880 he helped found the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. He was also the first president of the Engine Builders Association of the United States. As the years went by and his many mechanical improvements were accepted as standard, "he became universally recognized as an authority on matters of engine construction and his advise and opinions were sought by inventors throughout the country" (*Syracuse Herald*, 9 May 1916). When he died in 1916, he was the last of a family of five brothers and two sisters. One brother, Homer D.L. Sweet, was the compiler of the 1874 Atlas of Onondaga County. The family homestead, located on Sweet Road in Pompey, burned in 2005.

That's not quite the end of the story. In early 1944 a Liberty Ship was christened the "J. E. Sweet." By the beginning of June it was docked in England preparing to transport American soldiers to the beaches of Normandy. The final crowning glory for John Edson Sweet was that his namesake ship took part in the Allied D-Day invasion of Europe...



address correction requested

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