

“Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association
Spring, 2016 Volume 24, Number 1

President’s Message...

In anticipation of Spring, we’re poised to hire a grant writer to build on the extraordinary work done by former HOCPA board member, Christine Lozner. We hope to raise significant funding through grants for the restoration of Silsbee Chapel.

As I mentioned in the Fall newsletter, we are extremely grateful to the cadre of SUNY-ESF students who worked diligently to clear the debris from the chapel’s interior. Another group is scheduled to continue performing their community service to Oakwood in the spring.

Paul Harvey, a dedicated community volunteer, has built a coalition of local government, educational, civic and volunteer organizations. Together, he and they have created the Morningside Cultural Trail, much of which is within the boundaries of Oakwood Cemetery. HOCPA intends to encourage events which will incorporate this wonderful trail highlighting history, culture and nature.

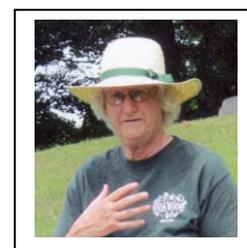
Many thanks to you all for your continued support of this community treasure, Oakwood Cemetery.



...Connie Palumb

Editor’s Notes...

We’re grateful that Old Man Winter took it easy on us this year. Now it’s time to come out of hibernation, and enjoy the wonderful spring weather, especially in Oakwood Cemetery. For over 150 years, people have been visiting Oakwood to take in the natural beauty of the landscape. The cemetery’s founders sought to make it a place where folks could escape the hustle and bustle, the dirt and clutter of the city. It has taken a lot of work to keep Oakwood as beautiful as it was intended to be. The Cemetery crew does a wonderful job in caring for those 159 acres. HOCPA has for over 20 years been working to preserve Oakwood, in ways the crew isn’t able. We have righted fallen headstones, repositioned obelisks, removed foliage growing out of mausoleum cracks, cut down brush that had overgrown plots. It takes a fair amount of elbow grease, but the result is well worth it. What’s that? You can’t get out there and cut brush, or whack those pesky saplings? How about simply becoming a member of HOCPA? We are an organization of well over 200 members, and the financial support we receive enables us to keep on workin’. In addition to all the little jobs we have, we’ve looked at the condition of Silsbee Chapel and it has been determined that we have more work in front of us. The chapel, which was dedicated in 1879, is in need of repair. It’s really showing its age. Those of you who have seen the interior are aware of the deterioration. We thank the students from SUNY-ESF who volunteered to help start the clean-up process. It’s a first step, but we’re looking forward to the day when a tour can actually go into the chapel and not have to worry about falling through the floor. We in HOCPA are a bunch of dreamers, but with the help of our wonderful volunteers and a committed membership, even dreams can come true.



...Sue Greenhagen

Student Assignment...

Students from West Genesee High School make the trek to Oakwood Cemetery every Fall as part of a class assignment based on Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. After going on the "Live Oaks & Dead Folks" walking tour and hearing about some of our famous (and infamous) residents, on their own they choose a resident of Oakwood and create an epitaph delivered by that deceased person. The students also research the person's life and write a short biography. What follows is a sample of an epitaph completed after a cemetery tour in 2015:

Karl Kritz

VIENNA was beautiful in the early summer,
as were the notes that rang from the boys choir.

Vienna was my home, but
music was my Love.

So I followed my Love to
the Land of the Free, the Empire State.

In Syracuse, my Love flourished into a
full fledged orchestra.

To me, the music was endlessly enchanting,
encompassing the soul, embodying emotion -
But the music was silenced when my heart was seized,
striking me down in my prime.

My only wish?

That my Love, the music, outlives me

Karl Kritz was the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra's first conductor. He came to Syracuse from Austria in 1961 after turning down a better job in Munich. He had always been fascinated with music and sung in the Vienna Boys Choir as a child in Vienna. He studied in Vienna, and had conducted in Nuremberg and in Berlin prior to 1937.

Vienna was beautiful, but Kritz wanted to live in America, so he moved to Syracuse, NY. He took to the ambitious task of starting an orchestra here in Syracuse. With the help of a grant from the Gifford Foundation, Kritz was able to put together a community orchestra in 1961, and was named its first musical director and conductor.

On December 11, 1969, while conducting a concert with the orchestra at Henninger High School, Kritz suffered a heart seizure. He took intermission to rest, and returned after to conducting the concert. The next day he was in the hospital. On December 17, 1969, Karl Kritz died.

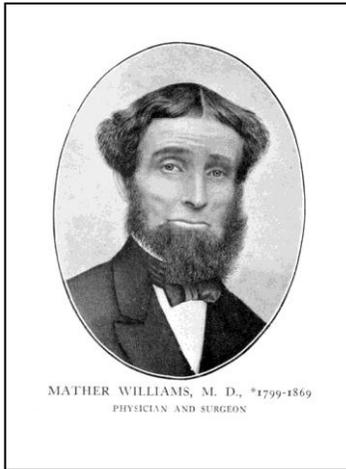
Oakwood, William Lilly and the Syracuse Soldiers' & Sailors' Monument

The large monument in Clinton Square sits next to what was once a section of the Erie Canal. The monument was dedicated in 1910 to the 12,000 men of Onondaga County who fought in the Civil War. The veterans wanted to memorialize the action they had seen in that war, and to honor those comrades who died in the war. One of the soldiers portrayed on the west group of the monument is Sergeant William Lilly at the Battle of Gettysburg. He's shown kneeling with a flag staff in his hands, mending the staff with straps and wooden slats. Lilly, a member of the 149th New York Infantry, survived Gettysburg but was mortally wounded in October of 1863 at Wauhatchie, TN. His remains were brought back to Syracuse where he was interred in Oakwood Cemetery. In 1870, the William C. Lilly Post of the Grand Army of the Republic was formed in his honor, and in 1882, the Augustus Root Post was formed. These two organizations of Civil War veterans represented most of the City of Syracuse, the Lilly Post members generally being from north of the Erie Canal, and the Root Post being mostly from south of the canal. Sergeant Lilly spent nearly 50 years in Oakwood Cemetery (south of the Canal) before being removed and reburied with his comrades in the Soldiers' Plot at Woodlawn Cemetery, up north of the Erie Canal.

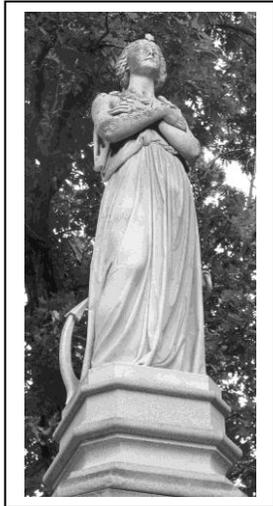
The Rest of the Story...

Mather Williams' Monument

One of the most striking pieces of monumental art in Oakwood Cemetery is located at the gravesite of Dr. Mather Williams in Section 14 (shown below left). Williams was born in Canaan, Columbia County, New York, in 1790. He studied medicine, began a practice in eastern Massachusetts, and eventually decided to head west.



In 1825, he hopped a packetboat on the Erie Canal, going all the way to Buffalo, but decided his best opportunity was in Syracuse. In the 1820s what was to become Syracuse was a very swampy and unhealthy place, and Dr. Williams developed a thriving practice. He was described as "very stately if not a bit pompous, although courteous and gentlemanly." There was money to be made in real estate at the time, and Dr. Williams took advantage earning himself a small fortune. By the time he died on 10 February 1868, he was a wealthy man. His monument in Section 14 is worthy of a man of his stature. Perched atop a grand pedestal is a life-size figure representing "Hope." We can recognize this allegorical figure by the star on her forehead and the anchor behind her. The anchor is the symbol of hope, and the star represents the crown of immortality. Dr. Williams could easily afford such a fine monument. In the 1860 federal census, his net worth was listed as \$140,000, which today is equal to about \$3.7 million. Shortly after Williams' death, his



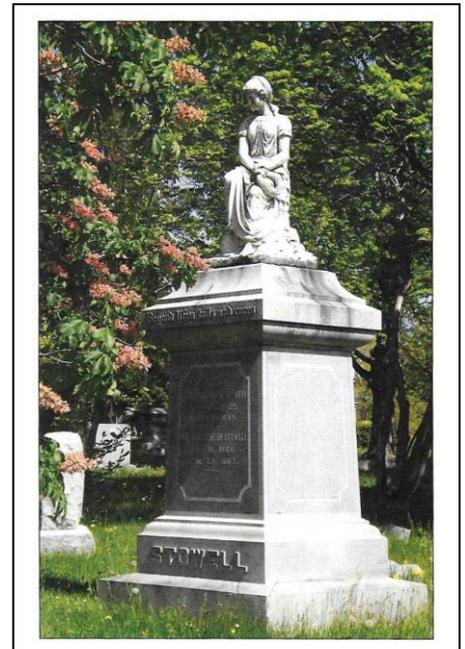
monument was highlighted in H. P. Smith's *History of Oakwood Cemetery* written in 1871. There we learn the monument was the creation of James Sharkey of Brooklyn. The Sharkey Monument Works had been in business since 1843 and was just one block from Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetery. He later did work for Henry Denison (Section 3) and the Baum family (Section 24) in Oakwood. Among his New York City clients were Louis Tiffany, Levi Morton, and Civil War Major Robert Anderson.

Now, you might think you've already heard the "rest of the story," but there's still more. Dr. Williams, as was mentioned, was a very wealthy man, and when he died in 1868, the *Syracuse Daily Courier* reported that he had bequeathed \$5,000 to The Home, \$4,000 to the Onondaga County Orphan Asylum, \$8,000 to the St. Vincent de Paul Orphan Asylum, \$500 to his hired man, and \$10,000 to his house keeper. That last bequest is rather interesting. In today's money that bequest would be worth about 1.8 million dollars. Who was this lucky house keeper? In fact, according to various census records, her name was Clara Elizabeth Stowell, born in 1825 in Otsego

County. She lived with Dr. and Mrs. Williams at their home at the corner of Burnet Avenue and Beech Street. By 1875, seven years after the doctor's death she was living with her younger sister, Lucinda, and two young nephews. One of those nephews, W. Winton Stowell, studied medicine at Syracuse University, and in 1887 was studying in the office of Dr. Gregory Doyle. Young Stowell had suffered from consumption (tuberculosis) and on 23 June 1887, just five days after his 21st birthday, he passed away. At his gravesite in Section 39, Clara placed a beautiful monument (at right) in his honor. The saying on the front of the monument reads, "Beyond life's toils and cares." Clara Stowell never married. She passed away on 19 March 1899 at the age of 74, and is also buried in Section 39.

Two little ironies emerge from this story of Dr. Mather Williams and his faithful house keeper, Clara Stowell. When she died, Clara lived at 315 *Mather* Street, and her nephew's first name was *Williams*.

And now you know the rest of the story...



Summer Walking Tours...

HOCPA has put together another great line-up of tours for the 2016 season. Mark your calendars:

- **Sunday, May 22** - "Spring has Sprung" Don Leopold will walk us through a most beautiful time of year in Oakwood - Spring. The landscape is truly an integral part of Oakwood's character - come enjoy it with us. Meet at the Chapel on the west side of the cemetery.
- **Sunday, June 26** - "Iconography of Death - Funereal Signs and Symbols in Oakwood" The headstones and monuments of Oakwood are often a story unto themselves. Join Sue Greenhagen as she leads a tour that will look at these often overlooked pieces of the Oakwood story. Meet us at the Chapel.
- **Sunday, July 24** - "All's Fine in 59" Sue again leads the tour, this time to visit the fine (and not so fine) folks up in Section 59. Come, be amazed at the stories these folks have to tell. Meet us at the Mausoleum near the Comstock Gate.
- **Sunday, August 21** - "The Fortunes of Oakwood's Smith Families & Their Neighbors" Dennis Connors, Curator of History at the Onondaga Historical Association, will lead a tour investigating one of the most prominent, and common, names in Oakwood - Smith. We'll meet at the Mausoleum near Comstock Gate.
- **Sunday, September 25** - "Well, I'll Be" Sue Greenhagen will take the tour to Section B, and recount some of the great stories of the residents therein. Meet us at the main entrance on Comstock Avenue.

Enter at the Comstock Avenue gate and follow the tour signs. All tours start at 2 o'clock. We go, rain or shine, but we cancel if there's thunder and lightning. We try to limit the tours to 2 hours or less. Please wear comfortable shoes. All tours are free, but donations are accepted. If you have any questions, call Sue Greenhagen at (315) 684-3418.

Morningside Cultural Trails

Cultural Trail maps are now available. This project includes seven trails, three of which are in Oakwood: Oakwood History Trail (1.2 miles), Oakwood Tree Trail (0.6 miles), and the Morningside Cultural Trail (5 miles). A map of these self-guided walking tours is available at morningsidetrails@gmail.com.

Spring Clean Up...

Seems every spring we have to come along and clean up what Mother Nature has left around the Chapel over the winter. On Saturday, April 30 from 10 am to noon, we'll be at it again. We invite anyone interested to come out and give us a hand. It's important to get the Chapel area ready for tours, and that means raking leaves. Bring a rake, gloves and elbow grease and help us out.

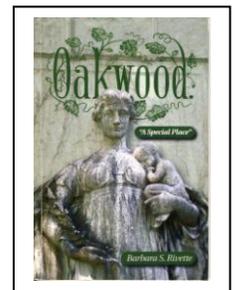
Who's in Oakwood, anyway?

The roster of all those 60,000 burials in Oakwood cemetery are now online in the form of a PDF file. A number of county cemeteries are online at www.nortonresearch.com/3401.html. The information provided includes full name, section number, lot number, date of interment, and interment number. All of us researchers are very grateful for the Norton webmaster's work.

Mugs, etc.



The HOCPA Board is always working to raise money for the projects we feel will help preserve Oakwood for future generations to enjoy. Help us by visiting: <http://localhistory.morrisville.edu/cemetery/oakwood.html> Look for our online gift shop where our mugs and Barbara Rivette's book, *Oakwood: a Special Place*, are available.

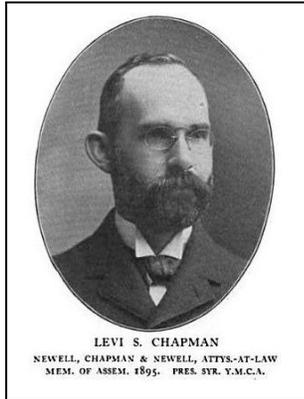


Memories of Oakwood...

We've asked folks to submit articles recounting their recollection of Oakwood Cemetery in days gone by. The story in this newsletter was submitted by Lucia Beadel Whisenand about her grandfather, Levi Snell Chapman:

"As a child I had the good fortune to live in my grandfather's house at 321 Westcott Street. At that time he was only in Syracuse from May through October, but although he went to the office every day, he was always very interested in what was going on with all of the extended family, and various friends who lived and visited on Westcott Street. We used to have 12-15 people for dinner every night.

Born on October 15, 1865, along with his twin, Ella, Grandfather grew up in Fayetteville. His father, Nathan, was an attorney and after graduation from Syracuse University in 1889 where he was elected a



member of Phi Beta Kappa, he read law with his father. In 1891 he was appointed clerk to the Board of United States General Appraisers in New York City. In 1893 he returned to Syracuse and began the practice of law, which he continued until his death. A specialist in corporate law, he was active in what we now know as mergers and acquisitions. He had many interests outside of his practice. He was a trustee of Syracuse University for over 50 years. His was the idea of building the Mizpah Hotel to support the First Baptist Church. He convinced his boyhood friend, George Maxwell, to contribute the funds to Syracuse University to build the Maxwell School. Mr. Maxwell died during the Great Depression and his legacy was much diminished, but Grandfather at the depth of the Depression invested the funds so that the million dollars necessary to start construction of the Maxwell School were in hand. He chaired the Building Committee.

With John Marcellus he started Morningside Cemetery in 1909 after purchasing the Comstock Farm. He had a great concern with planting the cemetery with outstanding tree, such as the American Beech at the entrance to Morningside illustrates. Morningside is now merged with Oakwood Cemetery. A portion of the Comstock property was donated to Syracuse University for student housing during World War II and there is still student housing along East Colvin Street for University students.

One of his great loves was the YMCA. From all reports, Grandfather was a talented fundraiser and he managed to raise the funds necessary to build the downtown Y, and he was President of the Board for many years. As the only girl grandchild I unveiled the portrait of Grandfather at the Y.

Grandfather Chapman had sparkly blue eyes and a warm smile. He was always interested in all the people around him. People came to him for advice and counsel all his life. He was generous with his time and his talents. He lived his life to the fullest with love, compassion, and wisdom."



HOCPA MEMBERSHIP FORM

_____ New Member _____ Renewal

_____ Senior/Student \$5 _____ Individual \$15 _____ Family \$25 _____ Patron \$100 _____ Corporate \$200

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

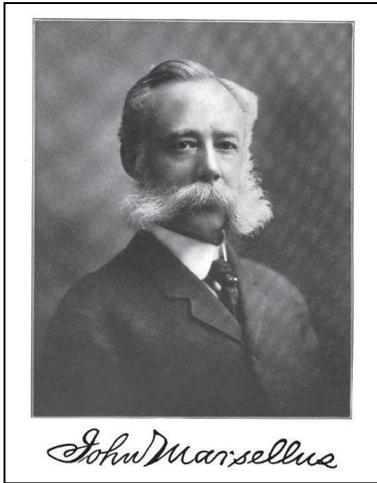
Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization.

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: John D. Marsellus

One of the names most closely associated with the City of Syracuse is the name Marsellus--as in Marsellus Casket Company. Founded in 1872 by John D. Marsellus, the company, for 131 years and four generations, was manufacturing the "Rolls Royce" of caskets. The company's golden reputation was world-wide. Many celebrities and dignitaries are buried in a Marsellus casket, including former Presidents Truman, Kennedy, Nixon, and Reagan, and their wives.



John Marsellus was born in 1846 in Schenectady. He attended school there for a time, including studying at the Schenectady Classical Institute. In 1865 he went to New York City where he was a clerk in a notions store. He then went to work in a store that was a dealer in undertaker's supplies. The undertaking industry was developing rapidly after the Civil War, and Marsellus saw that the custom of local cabinet makers making coffins was outdated. He settled in Syracuse where he opened his own casket company. The caskets were made by hand and were of very high quality. In 1886, his business was doing so well that a larger factory was needed. Marsellus oversaw the construction of a huge plant that was over 70,000 square feet and 4 stories high. By 1890 the company was manufacturing "coffins, caskets & undertakers' sundries."

Although he retired from the company in 1917, Marsellus was active in Syracuse affairs. He was an early member of the Chamber of Commerce and its president in 1898 and 1899. He was always promoting the industrial growth of Syracuse. He also maintained an interest in the YMCA. For 45 years he was on the Board of Trustees. He helped found Morningside Cemetery. He was a member of the New York State Historical Society, the Onondaga Historical Society, the Citizens Club, the Rose Society--the list goes on and on. He was a life-long Republican, and as President of the Chamber of Commerce, had once invited Governor Theodore Roosevelt to speak at the Chamber's annual dinner. Roosevelt, who was also invited to Buffalo and Rochester's dinners, declined all three. Marsellus wrote him that declining the other two cities was proper since they didn't help elect him, while Syracuse had done much for him. Roosevelt accepted saying he was "obliged" to come to Syracuse. A man of genial and friendly nature, John D. Marsellus was always a strong advocate for the city he loved so much. He died on 27 August 1941 at the ripe old age of 95. His was a life well lived.

OHA Ghost Walk

The Onondaga Historical Association's Ghost Walk in Oakwood Cemetery is coming up on June 17 and 18, and on June 24 and 25. More information at: <http://www.cnyhistory.org/events/ghostwalk/> or call Karen at (315) 428-1864 x312. This is always a great event.



address correction requested

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