

“Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association

Spring, 2017 Volume 25, Number 1

President’s Message

Signs of spring abound as I look out my window on this sunny but frigid St. Patrick’s Day.

HOCPA has finally hired a professional grant writer to proceed with raising funds for the continuing renovation of Silsbee Chapel. We are hopeful that there may be substantial money available to Oakwood Cemetery because of our status as a National Register of Historic Places landmark. The entire Cemetery has been so designated as are many individual mausolea, monuments and the Silsbee Chapel. The Chapel is at a critical crossroads and there is urgency regarding its survival.

We welcome Paul Harvey officially to our Board of Directors. We highlighted Paul’s community involvement in our last newsletter. He is a tireless worker and has been instrumental in the development of the Morningside Cultural Trail which incorporates several points of interest in Oakwood, areas on the Syracuse University campus and the surrounding neighborhood. We are all energized by his presence!

Thank you once again for your very generous response to our “end of year” fund raising and membership efforts. We invite you to take a stroll through the cemetery (maps are available at the cemetery office on Comstock Avenue) or join us on a Sunday afternoon tour. The tour schedule is enclosed. Sue Greenhagen conducts most of the tours along with some guest tour guides. I promise you’ll be educated and entertained!

.... Connie Palumb



Editor’s Notes

.....Sue Greenhagen



I don’t know what window Madam President was looking out. From my window here in Morrisville (a.k.a. “higher elevation”) there is 2 ½ feet of snow on the ground, and *no* sign of Spring yet. But, hope springs eternal (pun intended). By this time next month our cemetery season will be started. First off is our clean-up on April 22 (rain date April 29). We invite you to join us from 10 am to noon to rake and pick up what Mother Nature *leaves* behind (another pun). Seriously, we could use the help – bring a rake, gloves, and elbow grease.

There are so many ways to support HOCPA, in addition to raking leaves. Consider becoming a member. That financial support will help us with our current goal of stabilizing Silsbee Chapel. The Chapel will take a major effort on our part. Also consider our tours, both walking and virtual. We will have our walking tours on May 21, June 18, July 16, August 20, and September 17. (See the article on summer tours.) The virtual tours are when we go to you with a PowerPoint called “Live Oaks & Dead Folks.” “Live Oaks” has been done for clubs, groups, organizations, and libraries. Contact me for info – greenhsh@morrisville.edu. Sharing what we know about Oakwood Cemetery is so important. If people don’t know about its history, and its wonderful residents, then its importance to the community is overlooked. Come join us, support us, and help us preserve and protect this treasure called Oakwood.

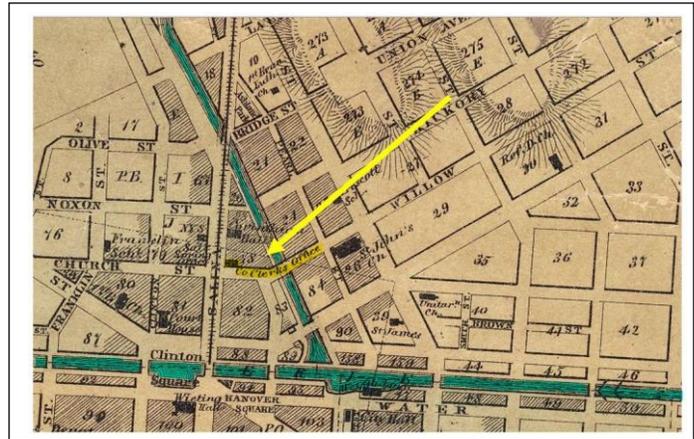
Voices of Oakwood...

There are two residents of Oakwood Cemetery, M. C. Hand and Paul Shaw, who have very interesting stories to tell about one of the major disasters in Syracuse history – the Gunpowder Explosion of 1841. Marcus Christian Hand (1818-1894) was an eyewitness to the event and wrote about it in his 1889 book, *Syracuse, from Forest to a City*. Paul Shaw (1811-1901) was a volunteer fireman and was injured in the blast.

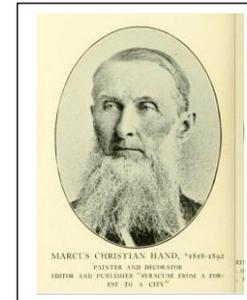
The event occurred at approximately 9:30 pm on Friday, July 20, 1841, in the area bounded by Willow Street, Salina Street and the Oswego Canal (see map at right). The epicenter was a hardware store/carpenter shop owned by Charles Goings. Unknown to firemen and the spectators that had gathered, the burning building contained at least two dozen kegs of gunpowder and the resulting explosion was heard over twenty-five miles away.

Twenty-six people were killed instantly, and many dozens injured. The fire was thought to have been set intentionally. M.C. Hand tells what he saw:

“...I was walking along North Salina street when I heard the cry of fire! fire! and at nearly the same time the church bells sounded the alarm. Soon after there came dashing along the street twelve or fifteen firemen dragging with the greatest enthusiasm their old style fire engine. The foreman with his speaking trumpet in his hand which he was swinging over his head hurrying his men forward by shouting in the greatest excitement “let her jump! let her jump boys!” and all the men at the same time shouting “let her go! let her go! The old machine seemed to bound over the rough cobble stones as though it scarcely touched them. This gallant company so anxious to save property from the flames, little thought that they were rushing into the jaws of death, that in a few minutes later their strong arms would lay powerless by their sides, and in a moment’s time, life with all its hopes and anticipations would with them be at an end. As I watched they turned from Salina into Willow street. I followed them and found the then narrow side-walk filled with a crowd of people, so I opened a gate and ran across the corner into the small lumber yard of Charles Goings, which was on the opposite side of the street from the fire. The street in front of me was densely packed. I was standing between two piles of lumber two or three feet apart and eight or ten feet high. I thought I would climb to the top of the pile and thus have a good place to see. At that moment a shout was heard at some distance away “powder! powder! there is powder there!” This seemed to produce but little effect as it was thought to be a joke. The firemen had taken position on the bank of the Oswego canal and had just commenced to play upon the burning building when all at once there came a terrific explosion. The burning timbers and roof were hurled hundreds of feet in the air, and for a moment revealed a sight so dreadful and grand that it left a never-to-be-forgotten impression on every mind that saw it. The position I had accidentally



1860 Syracuse Map by H. Wadsworth Clarke



and most fortunately taken had shielded me to a great extent from the effect of the explosion, and only those who were in places of comparative safety could describe the scene...Many were prostrate on the ground, some swept into the canal, others hurled against a tight board fence...The many who were prostrated seemed to all have the same sense of bewilderment and were moaning in the most pitiable voice, "where am I?" "what is this?" "what has happened?" The explosion had extinguished every particle of fire and the shrieks of the wounded and mangled, the low moans of the dying... produced such a scene that a portrayal of it would excel in horror any description of Dante's "Inferno..."

Mr. Hand goes on to describe in graphic detail the dead, dying and wounded. He then reports on the firemen he saw in the beginning.

"The fire company I saw rushing along the street in such hot haste were most unfortunate; their gallant foreman who swung his speaking trumpet and hurried his company forward was a much respected merchant, Hugh T. Gibson. A flying timber had struck him under the chin...The anguish of the mangled sufferers and the shock of this sudden bereavement filled the whole village with sorrow."



Paul Shaw was a volunteer fireman teamed with his business partner, John Kohlhammer. When they arrived at the fire, John took a hose, went up into a window aiming the hose on the blaze. Paul stood outside, steadying the hose. When the explosion occurred, John Kohlhammer was killed instantly. Shaw describes his experience:

"I heard nothing of powder being in the building, neither did I hear the explosion, nor did I know the extent of the disaster till the next day. My face and head were severely cut, my eyes filled with powder, all my teeth knocked loose, my body bruised and my face carried the powder marks all my after life. I was told I was carried eight rods [approximately 130 feet] by the force of the blast."

The Gunpowder Explosion of 1841 predated Oakwood Cemetery by eighteen years, and we are fortunate to have two Oakwood residents who were able to share what they saw and felt on that most momentous day in Syracuse history.

Do you have a story about or recollection of Oakwood? If you'd like to share, contact Sue Greenhagen.

Cemetery Definitions from *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary* ...

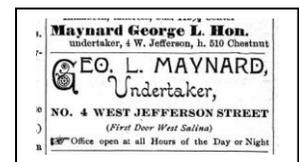
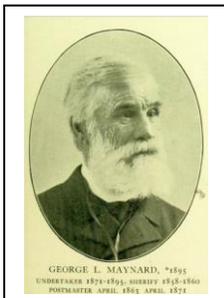
Relict – A widow; rarely, a widower.

Consort – 1. A companion or associate 2 A husband or wife; mate.

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Who's Who in Oakwood...

George L. Maynard was one of Syracuse's foremost undertakers. He was born on 9 October 1822. He also held the position of Onondaga County Sheriff from 1858 to 1860. From 1867 to 1872 he served as Syracuse postmaster. He began his career as an undertaker in 1871 and continued until he died on 4 January 1895. He and his family are buried in Section 47.



Research Tips:

New York State residents now have free online access to numerous research tools thanks to the New York State Library. Among the databases available are historic newspapers (including *The New York Times*), WorldCat, Sanborn Maps, HeritageQuest, and (best of all) Ancestry.com. Ancestry, however, is limited to New York resources. To use any of these resources you must have a borrower's card. Go to www.nysl.nysed.gov/apply.htm. Also, don't forget the New York State censuses, among many other state records, are available at <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1491284> (also free). If you have any questions, contact Sue Greenhagen greenhsh@morrisville.edu.

Oakwood Elegy

Students from West Genesee High School visit Oakwood Cemetery every Fall after having studied Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. They then chose an Oakwood resident and compose an epitaph that that person might have written. Here is the latest sample of their work:



Mary Dana Hicks Prang

A voice of blue-violet
Painting the world
With the importance of the brilliance of creativity.
The voice of blue-violet
With the resilience of a warrior
Fought for the education of the beauty of the Earth.
With the birds' lilac chirps and the wind's teal whisp
Each stroke of a paintbrush was a stroke into the world of art,
And added to our brilliant world.
My voice of blue-violet trained brains to extend above and beyond.
My love of flaming red burned the passion of others.
My legacy is a rainbow delicately brushed
Across the blue-violet hued sky.

Mrs. Prang (1836 – 1927) was born Mary Amelia Dana. In 1856 she married Syracuse lawyer Charles Hicks and they had a daughter, Margaret. In 1858, Hicks was sailing on Oneida Lake when a storm came up, his boat was destroyed and he drowned. Mary found herself a widow with a toddler to raise. She took up teaching art in the city school system, and she eventually attained the position of Superintendent of Art Instruction. A theory she advanced was the “color of sound.” As a child, she had asked her mother what color her voice was. Her mother said it was blue violet. Many years later Mary was in New York City for a lecture when she walked past a psychic's parlor. The window advertised palm reading, crystal ball reading and the color of sound. She went in and asked the psychic to tell her the color of her voice. He listened to her recite the alphabet, and then calmly said, “Your voice is blue violet.” In 1879 she moved to Boston to study and work with lithographer Louis Prang. In 1900 she married Prang who passed away in 1909. Mary actually went back to college graduating with an Associate degree in art in 1916, and then, in 1921, was awarded a Master's Degree in Education from Harvard University. She was then 85 years old. She died in 1927 and is buried in the Dana family plot in Section three.



Oakwood Cemetery Civil War Soldiers' Census Update ...

The OCCWRT Census Project has identified 764 Civil War veterans buried in Oakwood Cemetery (so far). There are still more obituaries to research and then there are the “Smiths” and the “Joneses,” and other very common names. We have been keeping track of those veterans that do not have headstones, and (again, so far) we have identified 37. The Veterans Administration will provide a headstone, free of charge and delivered to the cemetery. Oakwood has agreed to set the stones when they arrive. The Daughters of Union Veterans, Julia Hibbard Tent # 71, has sent in the first request to the VA for a headstone for the grave of Captain James A. Allis, Company I, 3d N.Y. Cavalry. After the war, Allis worked for the city in the Department of Public Works. He was also the distribution agent for the Veteran Relief Fund. “Cap” was always concerned for the welfare of his comrades and their widows. One Thanksgiving he received an anonymous \$20 and a letter thanking him for once buying the donor a dinner. Instead of keeping the money, he went out and bought turkeys for some widows who, as he said, “hadn’t seen a turkey in a month of Sundays.” Allis died in 1920 and is buried with his wife and family in Section 22.



2017 Tour Schedule...

Looks like another great season for Oakwood walking tours. Here's the line-up:

Sunday, May 21 – “Oaks & Other Trees of Oakwood Cemetery” Don Leopold. The trees of Oakwood are varied and very special. Students at ESF use the cemetery as an outdoor lab. Find out what Oakwood has to offer and what makes our trees so special.

Sunday, June 18 – “Follow the Yellow Brick Road...to Section 24” Sue Greenhagen. Join us as we meet the folks of Section 24, and, yes, that includes the Baum family.

Sunday, July 16 – “Doctors, Dentists, and Quacks” Sue Greenhagen. The doctors and dentists of Syracuse were widely respected members of their professions. At least most of them were. Come and hear the stories of these men, *and women*.

Sunday, August 20 – “What’s Old is New in Section 52” Sue Greenhagen. Folks from all walks of life make up the residents of Section 52, and they can’t wait for you to hear their stories.

Sunday, September 17 – “A Surprise Ramble with Karl” Take a walk with our rambler-in-chief, Karl Orlick. He’s a teller of tales who loves to share.

Our tours are free, but donations are gratefully accepted. The August tour will meet at the Columbarium near the Comstock Street entrance. For all other tours, follow the signs from the Comstock Gate to the Silsbee Chapel on the west side of the cemetery. Tours go at 2 o'clock, rain or shine, but we cancel in case of thunder and lightning. Dress accordingly, including comfortable shoes for walking. Any questions, contact Connie Palumb (315-415-2954) or Sue Greenhagen (315-684-3418).



HOCPA Donors as of Spring, 2017

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

Charles Amos, John & Katherine Auwaerter, Elisabeth Barker, J. Thomas & Silvia Bassett, Augusta Baum, David & Elisabeth Beebe, Carol Biesmeyer, William & Katherine Billingham, Susan Boland, June Bomberger, Richard Bowman, Maxwell Brace III, Barbara Brown, Robert & Kathleen Brown, Mary Buckley, Michael Burns, Joseph & Marcia Caldwell, Laurie Chase, Stephen & Ann Chase, Jeffrey Comanici, Dennis & Amy Connors, Sharon Coulter, George Curry, Darothy DeAngelo, Linda DeStefano, Eloise Diamond, Florence Douque, Rita Ann Downing, Rebecca Eiholzer, John & Anne Endries, Peter Erichsen, Susan Estabrook, Malcolm & Karen Fekete, Donna Fifield, P.B. Price Gardner, Kathryn Gemmill, Margaret-Rose Gioia, Elizabeth Glass, William Goodwin, Judith Grabau, Sue Greenhagen, Jeanne Greenhalgh, Gary Greenough, Amy Hamilton, Wendy Happek, Mary Louise Hartenstein, Margaret Hastings, Christian Huddleston, Mary Iversen, Clyde & Susan Jones, Paul Kalska, Anne Kemper, Anne King, Russell & Joan King, Carolyn Lawless, Gelene Lewis, Greg Lewis, William Little, Thomas Long, Eugene & Christine Lozner, Coy Ludwig, Alison Mactavish, Gerald Mager, June Mann, John & Candace Marsellus, Diane Medvitz, Merle Melvin, John & Penny Mercer, Eileen Miller, John & Shirley Mills, Francis & Alice Morigi, Elisabeth Murray, Jean Murray, Letty Murray, Patricia Musengo, Jon & Jane Nelson, Linda Nolle, Judith Oplinger, Timothy & JoDean Orcutt, Karl Orlick, Andrea Oshea, Connie Palumb, David Palumb, Haden Patten, Dorothy Pease, Michael & Marny Peterson, Carol Porter, Trina Powers, William Racey, Lisle Rath, David & Linda Rezak, William Rezak, Barbara Rivette, Nicholas Rizzo, David Robinson, George & Doris Rodormer, Patrick Rummel, Gary Russell, William Saar, Mr. & Mrs. Salisbury, Arlene Simms, Dominic Smith, Daniel & Nancy Smothergill, James & Barbara Snell, Robert & Helen Stanton, James Stathes, Gregory Stauf, Jamieson Steele, Paul & Olga Suholet, Peter & Martha Thompson, Neil & Suzanne Thornton, Doreen Todorov, Cynthia Tracy, Susan Vanmaarseveen, Paul & Clara Votra, Maritia Walper, Peter & Cheryl Ward, James & Marcia Wooster, Joanne Zinsmeister-Yarwood.

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

... Milton S. Price

Milton Price, the “Merchant Prince” of Syracuse, was a true character. He was born in New Woodstock in Madison County in 1823, migrated to Chittenango where he was a bartender and clerk at Captain Davey’s hotel, and then worked at James Crouse’s grocery. After moving around, he came to Syracuse in 1858 where he went into the dry goods business with Henry H. Wheeler. Mr. Wheeler retired a few years later, and Milton S. Price was on his own. A handsome and immaculately dressed gentlemen, wearing the ever-present plug hat, Price’s eccentricities became legendary. Riding down the street on his white horse, he would use his cane to crush other men’s top hats. As they vociferously complained, he would offer them a ten-dollar bill (twice the value of the hat). He would throw children into water, and then tell them to tell their parents to take them to his store for a new outfit.



It certainly got customers into his store. Once he tipped over a vendor’s cart (loaded with sweets) and told the children gathered around to help themselves (and to tell their parents how generous Mr. Price is). He would occasionally drive his carriage into the store, creating a sensation and frightening patrons. He was known to ride his horse into a saloon and proceed to make shambles of it. He would then pay the proprietor double the value of the damages. Everyone in Syracuse knew who Milton S. Price was.

As great a businessman as he was, not all was positive for Price. He had married a young lady name Rhoda A. Lynn in 1842 with the Rev. Samuel J. May officiating. Their only child, Willie, died of typhoid fever in 1861. He was only seven years old and the Prices were devastated. On 8 February 1887, Price fell on the sidewalk in front of the Globe Hotel and broke his hip. He had already been hampered by a broken leg suffered as a youth. Rhoda died from malaria on 13 October 1888. Less than six months later, on 9 April 1889, Milton S. Price died. His legacy is that he was a successful businessman larger than life. *The Syracuse Standard* wrote the day after he died, “...his life left its imprint on the community that knew him so well.” He was, indeed, the “merchant prince.” His public relations stunts surely worked – we’re still talking about him today, aren’t we?



address correction requested

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