



## *“Grave Matters”*

Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association  
Summer, 2012 Volume 21, Number 1

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### President's Message...

Greetings to all from the HOCPA Board of Directors. Our spirits are lifted as Summer is in full swing in Oakwood Cemetery.

Please join me in welcoming two new members to our Board: Terry Ferguson and Julienne Oldfield. Terry is a veteran teacher in the Syracuse city schools with an avid interest in history. He has some imaginative ideas for fundraising events. Julienne Oldfield is a long time community activist. She has been a conscientious advocate for world peace over the years.

Would you enjoy testing your writing skills? In 2012 we plan to publish another book, Oakwood Speaks: Voices from the Grave. If you have an interesting story to tell about our cemetery or a relative who is buried in Oakwood, we'd love to hear from you. We are accepting up to six typewritten pages plus one or two photographs (which will be returned). Please send your article to Connie Palumb, 102 Bradford Lane, Syracuse, NY, 13224.

This year we hope to partner with SUNY-ESF students who will help to improve the quality of roads in the older sections of the cemetery. A group called “Engineers without Borders” will collaborate with Oakwood to fulfill their community service obligation.

Once again, Darothy DeAngelo and Sue Greenhagen have arranged a wonderful tour schedule which is enclosed. Please join us for a delightful hour and a half on a Sunday afternoon for some fun-filled history. This year we have scheduled one tour on a Thursday evening for those of you who have other weekend plans.

Many thanks to you all for your continued support of our work. Through your generous contributions we have been able to make considerable improvements on Silsbee Chapel and to many toppled or damaged historic monuments.

### Tour Schedule - 2012

Our dates for tours this summer are all in place. Here they are:

**May 20** - “The Tree of Liberty: the Abolitionists of Oakwood.” Veteran guide Sue Greenhagen visited the gravesites of many who were involved in the anti-slavery movement in Syracuse, and especially the famous “Jerry Rescue” of 1851.

**June 24** - “A Nature Walk in Oakwood.” Don Leopold, Professor of Environmental and Forest Biology at SUNY-ESF, lead a tour that looked at the greenery of Oakwood.

**July 26** - “The Syracuse Salt Barons.” Jeff Romano returns to lead a tour about those men who were instrumental in making Syracuse a true “Salt City.” This tour will take place on Thursday evening, July 26, at 6:30 pm.

**August 19** - “Let's Delve into Section Twelve.” Sue Greenhagen again takes us through one section of Oakwood, looking at the people there and the stories they have to tell.

**September 30** - “Sunday in the Cemetery.” Karl Orlick, a fountain of knowledge about Oakwood, will lead a tour describing the interesting and unusual aspects of Oakwood Cemetery.

All tours begin at the Chapel. Sunday tours begin at 2 p.m. Enter at the Comstock Avenue gate and follow the tour signs. Tours take place, rain or shine, but we do cancel if there's thunder and lightning. Be sure to wear comfortable shoes. For more information, call Connie Palumb at 415-2954.

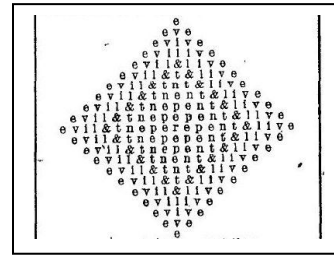


## Lester Tucker's Headstone Repaired

In Section 14, there's a unique headstone belonging to a little boy who died in May of 1869. Lester Tucker was just one month shy of his fourth birthday when he passed away. The headstone is of a small chair, a cape draped over it and a small child's shoe. Over the years the base has settled unevenly and the chair finally tipped off the base. This past year HOCPA has worked on getting the base stabilized and the chair back where it belongs. The picture below on the left shows the headstone before repair, and the right picture is of the repair.



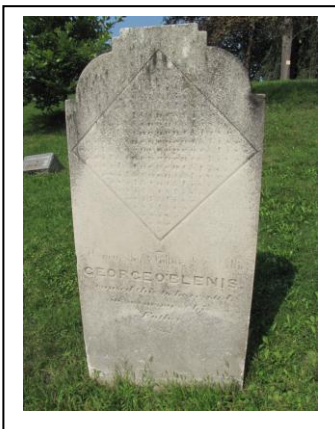
headstone himself, using cement of his own mixture. He firmly believed that his headstone would far outlast all the granite and marble stones in the cemetery. The monument was erected around 1880, and George wouldn't let any of the cemetery workman help him with it. George had been born in the Town of Salina, but as a young man he went south and settled in Louisiana. After the Civil War, George returned to Syracuse where he died in 1884. His wife, Julia, died in 1893.



This is what the O'Brien diamond originally looked like.

## A Mystery Solved!

While walking down the hill from Section Three into Dedication Valley, many have noticed a very odd headstone belonging to the O'Brien family. The stone was actually erected by George W.



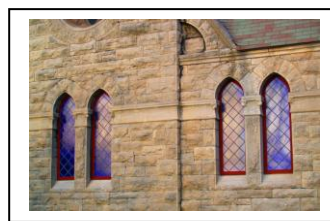
O'Brien in honor of his father, John E., who died in 1813. On the front is a diamond shape with marks within. No one has been able to decipher the "chicken scratches," that is, until now. Published in the Sandy Creek News of 21 January 1904 was an article entitled "A

Curious Inscription." It gave the results of a contest run by the New York Granite Company offering a prize for the oddest epitaph or inscription on a headstone. The winner of the contest, and a twenty dollar gold piece, was Edwin Soule of Sandy Creek. He entered the O'Brien headstone and won. The best part of the article was that the "chicken scratches" have been explained. In the center of the diamond is the letter "r" from which "repent & live" can be read up, down, backward and forward. According to George W.'s obituary, he made the

## O.H.A. Ghost Walk

The Onondaga Historical Association's "Icons of Oakwood Ghost Walk" was a huge success again this year. They were completely sold out on June 15, 16, 22 and 23. Living historians introduced attendees to some of our more interesting characters, among them Henry Denison, Mary Amelia Dana Hicks Prang, General Edwin Vose Sumner, Adelaide White and a very strange woman who claimed to be the widow of D. Edgar Crouse. The weather was perfect and everyone had a great time.

## This 'n That



Karl Orlick has placed plywood windows in the Chapel's west wall. The originals were stained glass, but due to vandalism, we have had to close the window

openings. The plywood is painted to recreate the glass and, from a distance, looks real. Nice work, Karl.

Don't forget that we have a website. Sue Greenhagen created a page at the following: [localhistory.morrisville.edu/cemetery/oakwood.html](http://localhistory.morrisville.edu/cemetery/oakwood.html) If you have any input about the website, contact Sue at [greenhsh@morrisville.edu](mailto:greenhsh@morrisville.edu) Included will be tour schedules, historical notes of interest, photographs, membership forms, and general news about various HOCPA projects. It's still under construction but at least we've started to jump into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## More This 'n That

On March 22, Melissa Chessher brought her 16 S.U. Magazine Journalism students to Oakwood for our tour called “Live Oaks and Dead Folks.” Sue Greenhagen took the group around, introducing them to such luminaries as Amos Granger, Mary Prang, Dr. Kendall, General Sumner, Lonnie Yates, and a few other notables. It was a beautiful day, and a good time was had by all.



The following notice appeared in *The Auburn Weekly Union* sometime in the year 1860. The physician in question was Dr. William E. Hoyt. His home was located at the corner of Oakwood Avenue and Renwick Avenue. Dr. Hoyt died on January 18, 1889 at the age of sixty, and is buried in Section 1.

**“COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.”—A physician, of Syracuse, states in an advertisement that his office is “next house to Oakwood Cemetery.” He means to have things handy, in case of accident at all events.**



**What Does This Mean?**  
The symbol that, at first glance, looks like a dollar sign, is actually the letters “IHS.” They are the first three letters of Jesus’ name in Greek and they stand for *in hoc signo* which is Latin for “by this sign, we conquer.”

Seen in the White family plot in Section 12 and the Denison plot in Section 3.

## Volunteer of the Year

Our volunteers are the heart and soul of HOCPA, and none has worked harder than Amy Hamilton. Her special project was cleaning the vines growing on the mausoleum of John Crouse. The former mayor would be pleased, I’m sure, with the way his final resting place now looks. Thanks, Amy.



## A Look Back...

What a season we had in 2011. Our Sunday tours totaled 138 participants. May’s tour, “Howard Daniels’ Landscape Design,” was conducted by ESF’s George Curry. Oakwood Cemetery was designed as part of the “rural cemetery” movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In June, O.H.A. Executive Director, Gregg Tripoli, led us “From City Hall to Cemetery Hill.” We were introduced to some of the many mayors who now reside in Oakwood. Our July tour was led by Sue Greenhagen who focused on one section of Oakwood with a tour called “Pot-pourri in Section Three.” In August, Jeff Romano, President of the Preservation Association of Central New York, took us on a tour called “Street Wise; or Street Whys.” If you ever wondered how those streets got their names, Jeff helped us connect the dots. We closed the season with “Forever Young: the Wee-ones of Oakwood.” Sue Greenhagen led a tour that was very poignant. She told of those children and young people who died much too young, from accidents to the Influenza of 1918.

Darothy DeAngelo and Sue Greenhagen (the cemetery sisters) conducted special tours, including tours for West Genesee High School English students, and a writing class from Syracuse University.

Our tours are such a wonderful historical experience, after all, cemeteries are our great outdoor museums. As Darothy is fond of saying, “not everyone is famous, but everyone has a story.”



## “Scour the Past”

On Sunday, April 22, volunteers from HOCPA met at Silsbee Chapel to scour the past. Mother Nature has a way of creating a mess every winter, and it's up to us to get in there and clean up after her. It's important that the cemetery look as good as possible for the first tour at the end of May. Armed with rakes, gloves and some old-fashioned elbow grease, a hard-working group of volunteers did a great job in getting the chapel area spruced up.



## Virtual Tours

HOCPA is now offering “virtual tours” of the cemetery. Sue Greenhagen created a PowerPoint presentation called “Live Oaks and Dead Folks” that highlights several residents of Oakwood. She and Darothy DeAngelo have taken the show on the road to clubs, historical societies, senior citizens, and anyone who may not be able to actually walk around on a real tour. If you know of a group that might be interested in a virtual tour, have them contact Darothy at (315) 682-6312.



## Tours by Appointment

For those who can't attend our regularly scheduled tours, HOCPA can arrange individual tours for any number of people, on any topic, at any time that's convenient. If you're interested, give Darothy a call at (315) 682-6312.

## Did You Know...

... that the huge pyramid overlooking Dedication Valley, the mausoleum of Cornelius T. Longstreet, is not the original structure?



The picture to the left is from an 1871 book by H. P. Smith called “History of Oakwood Cemetery,” and shows the original structure. Sometime between 1871 (when Smith's book was published) and 1881 (the year Longstreet died), it was determined that the first

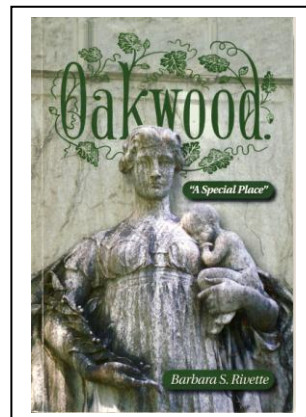
mausoleum was not sound due to the heaving of the foundation. It was torn down and a new, large (71 feet tall) pyramid was built. The foundation was built deep so as not to be affected by frost, even up on the hill where it is located. A stairway led down into the interior, and some amenities were placed there, such as carpets, chairs, and tables, all with the vaults of the dearly departed in the wall.

...that when John J. Crouse, the 23d mayor of Syracuse died on February 10, 1886, aged 52, his estate was valued at \$1.5 million. At today's value, that comes to approximately 35 million dollars. Not bad for a wholesale grocer. By the way, he won election as mayor in 1876 by all of 204 votes.



## Oakwood: A Special Place”

Town of Manlius Historian, Barbara S. Rivette was commissioned to write a book on Oakwood Cemetery in celebration of the cemetery's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The book has been out for a couple of



years and all who have read it are very impressed. For 150 years people have loved Oakwood, the serenity and beauty, the artwork of the many monuments, the history that the cemetery tells. It's all there in Barbara Rivette's book. If you would like a copy, contact Connie Palumb. Her

number is (315) 446-3570. The cost of the book is \$20.

## HOCPA Donors / Members – March, 2012

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

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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: Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage

Mrs. Sage might well be the most famous person you've never heard of. At the time of her husband's death in 1906, she became the richest woman in America. Her husband happened to be Wall Street tycoon Russell Sage, and his estate was valued at around fifty million dollars. In today's money the estate would be slightly over a *billion* dollars. That's a pretty heady sum for a woman of that era.

Olivia (she preferred Olivia rather than Margaret) was born in Syracuse in 1828. Her parents were Margaret (Pierson) and Joseph Slocum. The family was of modest means, living in a house at 47 W. Genesee St. Her father did have some financial setbacks, and at times money was very tight. Olivia became a teacher after graduating from the Troy Female Seminary in 1846. She was of delicate health, however, and for the next twenty years taught school irregularly. In 1869, at age forty-one, she married former Troy resident Russell B. Sage. He was a widower in need of a wife. Much business was carried on at social functions and Mr. Sage was not receiving the invitations to social events that a married man would get. Olivia realized that she was getting on in years (she was forty-one years old), and that she was surely headed for spinsterhood. So the marriage was of benefit to both of them. It was not, however, what you would call a "marriage made in heaven." They were of opposite tastes and likes - Olivia liked Oriental rugs and Russell would bring home buffalo skins and throw them over the furniture; he liked dogs, she liked cats; she wanted fine art on the walls, he wanted railroad pictures. Olivia one upped him when on their first Christmas together, her gift to him was to move her mother into their Fifth Avenue apartment.

When her husband died in 1906, she began a career as a philanthropist. By the way, Mr. Sage is not buried in Syracuse but is buried in Oakwood Cemetery, Troy, with his first wife. Olivia always kept Syracuse close to her heart. She would make bequests, often on the occasion of her birthday or that of her parents. Many went to Syracuse causes - the First Presbyterian Church, the Onondaga Orphans Home, the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A., the Syracuse Home for Aged Women, the Hospital of the Good Shepherd, and Syracuse University. She donated the money to build Slocum Hall on the campus in memory of her father. She also purchased Yates Castle as a new teachers college. She gave \$1,000 toward the Soldiers' & Sailors' Monument located in Clinton Square. On a national scale, she endowed the Russell Sage Foundation in 1907 with 10 million dollars. In 1916, she gave one million dollars to establish the Russell Sage College in Troy. She supported educational institutions, libraries, museums, and charitable groups. Of course she was besieged by those seeking a portion of her wealth. To one fellow who claimed to need money to keep one jump ahead of the bill collector, she said, "Keep jumping."

Chancellor Day of Syracuse University led the funeral services on a cold November day in 1918. Olivia is buried in Section 3 next to her parents. A small group, including her brother Joseph, were in attendance at Oakwood Cemetery. We shouldn't forget Olivia. She was an amazing lady.



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