

## *“Grave Matters”*

Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association  
Spring, 2013 Volume 21, Number 2

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### **President’s Message...**

Greetings to all on behalf of the HOCPA Board of Directors. Now that spring has finally sprung here in Syracuse, we can look forward to our annual spring cleanup day, *Scour the Past*, on Sunday, April 28th at noon. You are encouraged to join us at Silsbee Chapel with your rakes, shovels, gardening gloves and a strong back!

Sue Greenhagen and Darothy DeAngelo have arranged a grand variety of special tours for our summer enjoyment. They have developed quite a loyal following of fellow history buffs. These wonderful sisters never fail to entertain by making Oakwood's unique history come to life. The tour schedule is detailed in this newsletter.

I am grateful for our loyal cadre of Board Members who continue to meet, plan and work on various projects. We are also indebted to all the HOCPA members who through their financial support enable us to carry on with the never ending work of maintaining this wonderful community resource. Historic Oakwood Cemetery is a gem which is in need of constant attention whether it be to repair monuments or to cultivate the gardens.

This year we hope to focus more on the rebuilding of Silsbee Chapel. As many of you know, Joseph Lyman Silsbee was a mentor of Frank Lloyd Wright. We are having an expert in historic restoration assess the structure to determine what should be addressed first so that we might go forward with procuring grants from various agencies.

Things are happening in Oakwood Cemetery. Good things, interesting things, things that need to be done. Join us, be a part of it. See you at the cemetery...

*Connie Palumb*

### **Editor’s Notes...**

The snow has finally melted (well, most of it) and another cemetery season is set to begin. We kickoff on April 28th at noon with “*Scour the Past*.” This is our annual spring clean-up around the chapel area. Mother Nature tends to make a dreadful mess. Our monthly walking tours run May through September. Again this June the Onondaga Historical Association will put on their *Oakwood Visions* Ghostwalk. Tours by appointment are always available, and if you can’t come to the cemetery, the cemetery can come to you via a Powerpoint program called “*Live Oaks & Dead Folks*.” Read on for details of these many exciting events.

While we’re talking about “many exciting events,” it seems these events have a name - “cemetery tourism.” Oakwood Cemetery, established in 1859, is one of the oldest sites in Syracuse that you can actually tour. Some consider cemetery tourism a brand new idea, but HOCPA has been hosting tours for over twenty years. With nearly 160,000 burials in Oakwood and Morningside, there are many more stories to be told. As Darothy DeAngelo is so fond of saying, “Not everyone is famous, but everyone has a story.” So, check your calendars, mark your dates, and come along for some “cemetery tourism.”

### **Scour the Past**

Meet at the chapel on Sunday, April 28 at noon to help with a little spring cleaning. Bring a lawn rake, a pair of gloves, and a fair amount of elbow grease. For about two hours we’ll attempt to undo whatever Mother Nature has done over the winter. There are leaves to rake, twigs and branches to pick up, some gardening and just enjoying each others company. Please consider joining us to help get the chapel area ready for for the summer season

## The 2013 Schedule of Tours

HOCPA is proud to present the 2013 tour schedule:

- Sunday, May 19 - "Ladies First: More Women of Oakwood." Sue Greenhagen will introduce us to some of the women with fascinating stories to tell.
- Wednesday, June 19 - "Low Bridge: the Erie Canalmen of Central New York." Join guest guide Jeff Romano who will talk about those people who helped Syracuse thrive as a stop on the Erie Canal.
- Sunday, July 28 - "They Lie Forgotten: Oakwood, the Civil War and Gettysburg." A visit to the gravesites of those men (and a few women) who sacrificed so much in the War of the Rebellion. Tour to be led by Sue Greenhagen.
- Sunday, August 18 - "More to be Seen in Section Fourteen." Sue Greenhagen takes us to Section 14 to meet some of the residents there and to hear some of their stories.
- Sunday, September 29 - "Autumn in Oakwood." George Curry will lead a tour that looks at the flora and foliage of Oakwood in late September.

All tours start at the chapel. The Sunday tours start at 2 pm and our one Wednesday evening tour will begin at 6:30. The tours run, rain or shine, but we do tend to try to avoid thunder and lightning. Wear comfortable shoes. All tours are free. Any questions, call Connie Palumb at (315) 415-2954.

### *Oakwood Visions Ghostwalk*

The Onondaga Historical Association invites us to discover a pathway into the past through the "old section" of Oakwood Cemetery and to meet some of the fascinating folks that now reside there and to hear their stories. The dates are Friday, June 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, and Saturday, June 15<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. The tours start at 6 o'clock each evening and leave every 15 minutes from the chapel area. For cost and reservations, please call Karen at (315) 428-1864 x312. Reservations are strongly advised.



### Looking Back

We had a very good year in 2012. Our tours were interesting and very well attended. We started off in May with "The Tree of Liberty: the Abolitionists of Oakwood." It was Congressman Amos Granger, in 1856, who spoke those words on the floor of the House, "Slavery in the Constitution! Sir, it would be like engraving wormwood into the tree of Liberty."

Our June tour was "A Nature Walk in Oakwood" with ESF professor Don Leopold. There are so many different variety of trees and bushes in Oakwood that ESF uses the cemetery as a laboratory for students. In July we had guest guide Jeff Romano lead us on a tour of the Salt Barons. Salt was an industry that helped build the Syracuse area, and many of those wealthy Barons are residents of Oakwood. In August we "delved" into Section Twelve. There were some very interesting stories, such as that of John Forey. John, while a soldier in the Civil War and stationed in Maryland, had occasion to have lunch with a local fellow and his mother one day. They turned out to be John Surratt and his mother, Mary Surratt. Mary Surratt was later executed as one of the conspirators in the Lincoln assassination.

For our final tour, Karl Orlick took the group around for a "Summer Sunday in the Cemetery." That day we had one of the hardest rainstorms of the summer, but it certainly didn't deter the tourgoers. They came with raincoats, boots, ponchos, umbrellas, and enthusiasm. A little rain couldn't dampen their spirit.

One of the most poignant moments of the whole summer happened during the August tour in Section 12. One of the gravesites we visited was that of George McFadden (1834-1889), a local manufacturer of brass musical instruments. Musician Jeff Stockham, leader of the *Excelsior Cornet Band*, was on the tour and he brought with him a cornet made by George McFadden. Not only that, but he played a period piece over the grave of McFadden on the McFadden cornet. That was a truly special moment...

## *Oakwood Speaks*

Our second book is still in the works: *Oakwood Speaks: Voices from the Grave*. Thanks to many of you who have already contributed your family histories and stories for inclusion. We look forward to receiving more interesting information about your ancestors as well. Please contact Connie Palumb (315) 446-3570 if you are interested.

### “Tales From the Crypt”



Last year, cemetery tourgoers had a chance to view for the first time in a long time, the interior of the Silsbee Chapel and the crypt in the back of the building. Entering from the side door, Karl Orlick led the group into the crypt. That room was the “holding area” for caskets of the dearly departed who departed when the ground was frozen. There’s room in the crypt area for around 200 caskets. We also got a look at the main room of the chapel. There’s a lot of dirt, some fallen bricks, and some ugly graffiti. HOCPA is weighing the possibility of having some interior restoration done in the chapel. It was designed by architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee and dedicated in 1879, twenty years after the cemetery was established. Made of Onondaga limestone, it is a beautiful building, inside and out.

### Who Knew?

One of the “regulars” on many of our Oakwood tours is Mary Amelia Dana Hicks Prang. That long-named lady was an artist and an educator, a truly talented woman. In 1856, Mary Dana married a lawyer named Charles Hicks but he died in a boating accident on Oneida Lake two years later. Mary Hicks was left a widow with a little girl. Mary took up teaching art in the Syracuse schools, and later went to Boston to study and work at the art studio of Louis Prang, a lithographer known as the “father of the American Christmas card.” She married Louis in 1901, and when he died in 1909, she went back to college and eventually earned a Masters Degree at the age of 85.



The question was posed, what ever happened to Mary’s little girl? That little girl’s name was Margaret and she has a story of her own to tell. It seems she inherited her mother’s artistic ability and after she graduated from high school, decided to attend Cornell University and study architecture. She graduated in 1879, the first woman to receive a degree in architecture in the United States. The story doesn’t end there, though. She was on her way to a very promising career, moved to Boston, met and married a German schoolmaster named Arthur L. Volkmann. In 1883, Margaret Hicks Volkmann became ill and on December 4 of that year she died. She was only twenty-seven years old.



If you visit the Dana family plot in Section 3, notice Mary’s headstone which reads, “M.D.H.P.” Then look for her extremely talented daughter’s stone. It reads, “M.H.V.” Everybody’s got a story...

### Tours by Appointment

If you would like to schedule a tour of the historic section of Oakwood Cemetery, call Sue Greenhagen at (315) 684-3418. In the past we’ve had students from Smith Elementary School, West Genesee High School, and Syracuse University (see photo at right). We even had a couple from Michigan – they were researching a Civil War nurse and happened to be in the office at the right time, the same time Sue was. Everyone enjoys the stories of Oakwood Cemetery. Can’t make a scheduled tour? Schedule one of your own.



### “Live Oaks & Dead Folks”

Oakwood Cemetery, as beautifully landscaped as it is, is a tough cemetery to walk, especially the old section. If you don’t want to come to the cemetery because it’s too difficult to navigate, let the cemetery come to you. HOCPA has available a Powerpoint program called “Live Oaks & Dead Folks.” Meet a dozen residents of Oakwood, each with a story to tell. Live Oaks has been presented to clubs, organizations, senior citizens, historical societies, and libraries. Call Sue Greenhagen at (315) 648-3418 to schedule a showing of “Live Oaks & Dead Folks.”



## HOCPA Donors / Members - March, 2013

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

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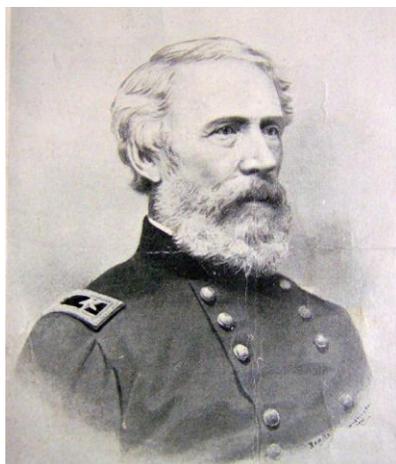
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Please make checks payable to **HOCPA**, and mail to:      **HOCPA, PO BOX 15065, Syracuse NY 13215**

## Oakwood All-Star: Major General Edwin Vose Sumner



It was March of 1863 that Edwin Sumner became a permanent resident of Oakwood Cemetery. It is often asked how a Civil War corps commander who never lived in Syracuse, came to be buried in one of the most picturesque spots in the cemetery. Actually, it's quite an interesting story...

Sumner was born in 1797 in Boston. In 1819 he joined the army and served until his death in 1863. He served in outposts throughout the United States and western territories. He fought in the Black Hawk War, the Mexican War, was involved in the Kansas-Nebraska flare-up, and finally commanded the Second Corps of the Army of the Potomac in the War of the Rebellion. It was in the Mexican War that he received the nickname "Bull Head" when a spent musket ball allegedly bounced off his head. Among his honors is the fact that he was chosen in February and March of 1861 to accompany President-elect Abraham Lincoln from Springfield to his inauguration in Washington. That spring he was detailed to accompany

the body of Colonel E. Elmer Ellsworth, the first Union officer to die in the Civil War, back to his hometown of Mechanicville, N.Y. During the war, Sumner served with distinction, but got caught up in the politics that was rampant in the army. At the Battle of Fredericksburg in December of 1862, commander Ambrose Burnside made the decision to launch a frontal attack on the Confederate position at Marye's Heights. The assault proved to be a disaster for the Union troops - over 12,000 men were killed, wounded, captured or missing. On the following day, when Burnside wanted to renew the attack, it was Sumner who said no. He realized that any further effort was futile, and would result in more losses. President Lincoln subsequently relieved Burnside of command and Sumner asked to be reassigned. It was decided to send him west, so in March of 1863 Edwin Sumner boarded a train for the trip west. One of his stops would be in Syracuse, at the Teall home at 61 E. Fayette Street, the home of his daughter, Sarah, who had married William W. Teall. Colonel Teall was serving on Sumner's staff and was with him when he arrived in Syracuse. The general was weary - he was sixty-five years old and the hardships of war had taken their toll. Years before he had been able to spend some time resting at the Teall compound on Frenchman's Island in Oneida Lake, but there was no time for rest in 1863. The weather was damp and cold, a typical March in upstate New York, and the General caught a cold which quickly developed into pneumonia. He did not recover. It was decided that the General would be laid to rest in the Teall family plot in Section 8 of Oakwood Cemetery. That is where you'll find the canopied tomb of the general and his wife, Hannah. Now you know how a Civil War general who never lived in Syracuse came to be buried in Oakwood Cemetery...



PO Box 15065  
Syracuse, NY 13215