

## “Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association  
Spring, 2014 Volume 22, Number 1

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### President’s Message – *Connie Palumb*

After this epic winter, it’s fun to look forward to the coming of Spring. As is our annual custom, we’ll be gathering at Silsbee Chapel for our spring cleanup day. Join us on Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup> at noon for “Scour the Past” and we’ll tackle the debris left behind by winter. Bring the children, grandchildren, gloves, rakes, brooms, and shovels along with lots of elbow grease and we should have a successful go at making the area around the Chapel attractive and ready for tours.

Speaking of tours, we have an intriguing lineup at the ready beginning on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Sue Greenhagen, with the help of her sister Darothy DeAngelo, has been researching diligently and planning our series for 2014. I know you look forward to joining us on Sundays at 2 pm for the monthly strolls around various parts of Oakwood. This year looks to be as engaging as ever and we are excited at the prospect of entertaining our loyal following of history “junkies.” The schedule is enclosed.

We are especially grateful to all of you who have been so generous with your financial support of HOCPA. We are indebted and appreciate all you do to support our mission which includes restoring Silsbee Chapel, a daunting task.

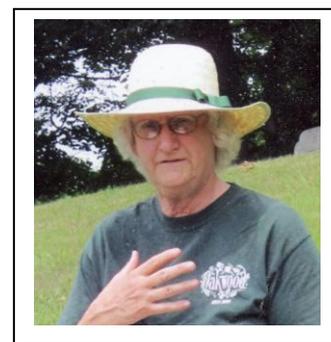
A few years ago we published a book, *Oakwood: a Special Place*, written by Barbara S. Rivette. The book has been so well received that we are reprinting 500 additional copies and plan to make it available at local bookstores, O.H.A., and, of course, on our tours.

We look forward to seeing you at the cemetery!



### Editor’s Notes – *Sue Greenhagen*

As I write this message, the ground is covered with snow, the temperature finally made it up to above freezing (by only a degree or two), and everyone I know is mired in the grips of a good old Syracuse case of “cabin fever.” As we all look forward to Spring, we can also look forward to our upcoming season at Oakwood Cemetery. The folks at HOCPA work hard to put together tours that are interesting and informative. What better place to learn about the history of the famous (and infamous) former residents of our community. If you’ve been on a tour and enjoyed it, come again and bring a friend. So many people view a cemetery as morbid and depressing. I’m sure our tourgoers would say our tours are anything but. If there’s a theme you’d like us to do or do again, let us know. We’ve been doing tours for a long time, but we need support and input to keep it going. Keep coming and keep thinking – we depend on you.



Like us on Facebook.



Oakwood is online at <http://localhistory.morrisville.edu/cemetery/>

## Tour Schedule - 2014

**May 18** - "Springtime in Oakwood" - Come celebrate SPRING on our first tour of the year. Take a nature walk through picturesque Oakwood Cemetery.

**June 29** - "Into the Mix in Section 56" - Sue Greenhagen again explores one section of the cemetery. Enter from Comstock, follow the signs and meet at the mausoleum.

**July 20** - Karl Orlick takes us on a leisurely walk we call "Meander Down Midland."

**August 17** - "A Stroll with General Leavenworth" - Scott Peal, Education Associate of the Onondaga Historical Association, brings to life the character of Elias W. Leavenworth.

**September 21** - "Here Come da Judge: Judges, Lawyers, & Other Legal Reprobates" - Sue Greenhagen takes us to visit members of our legal community.

All tours are free at 2 PM on Sundays, rain or shine (but no lightning).

## A Look Back

What a great year 2013 was. On May 19<sup>th</sup> we opened up our tours with "Ladies First: More Ladies of Oakwood." From artists to teachers to army wives - we met some fascinating women that day. Our second tour was on Wednesday June 19<sup>th</sup>, and was called "Low Bridge: the Erie Canalmen of Central New York." Jeff Romano led the tour in his usual engaging style, telling us of those men who helped Syracuse thrive as a stop on the Erie Canal. On Sunday July 28 we had a tour called "They Lie Forgotten: Oakwood and the Civil War." Sue Greenhagen led the group from Section 3 through 8 and visited the gravesites of over forty veterans of the Civil War. Those veterans, on that day, were not forgotten. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, we found that there was, indeed, "More to Be Seen in Section Fourteen." We ended our season on September 29<sup>th</sup> with "Autumn in Oakwood." Don Leopold took us on a nature tour for the first time at the end of the summer and the landscape was beautiful. Our "Tours by Appointment" are quite popular. We had a return of students from West Genesee High School (two busloads!). The plan was to take them into the crypt, but it was discovered that we didn't have any lighting. The kids were great - they all turned on their cell phones and illuminated the interior. Ah, technology. The college kids from Syracuse University were back. Kids of any age really enjoy hearing about the likes of Dr. Kendall, the grave robber, Mrs. Sage, the richest woman in America, and Lonnie Yates, the "playboy of Syracuse."

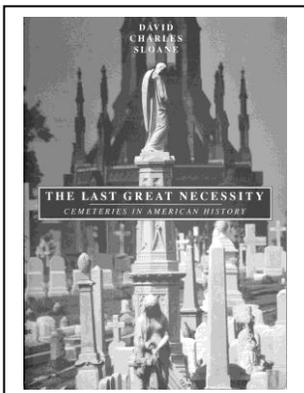
## Onondaga Historical Association's Oakwood Ghostwalks

Scott Peal, the Education Associate for O.H.A., brought living historians to Oakwood last June and they regaled tourgoers with a first-person account of some historical lives here in Syracuse. Who could forget Milton Price, the "Merchant Prince of Syracuse," complete with cash register and marketing schemes? This year's ghost walk will no doubt be just as good. The dates are Friday, June 13 and 20, and Saturday, June 14 and 21. Reservations are required. For more information, call Karen at 428-1864 ext.312.



## A Book Review, of Sorts

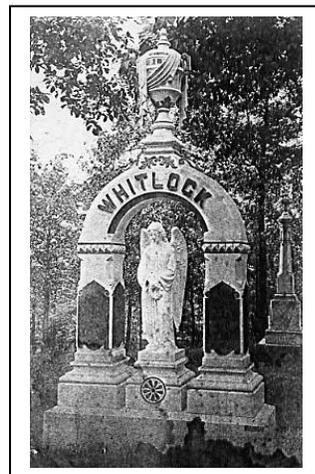
Most people don't go to their bookshelves looking for a good book on cemeteries, yet there is a book on cemeteries that you might find interesting. Its title is *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History*, and the author is David Charles Sloane. Mr. Sloane just happens to be the son of Jack F. Sloane who was associated with our own Oakwood Cemetery for over thirty years. Consequently the book features Oakwood quite prominently. In fact, the title is taken from Elias Leavenworth's speech at the dedication of the cemetery on November 3, 1859. There he reminded his audience of over five thousand that nature and the community had labored "diligently and successfully for the wants of the living...Water and gas, railroads and canals, a salubrious climate, a fertile soil, prosperous agriculture, commerce and manufacturing, have...filled our laps with plenty and made our homes the abodes of happiness and peace...But...we [have] forgotten what was due the dead." Leavenworth felt that "an



ample, permanent and attractive resting place for our dead, seems to be the last great necessity of our city.” And so Oakwood Cemetery, one of many rural cemeteries of that era, came into being. Sloane traces the history of cemeteries, from burying grounds to graveyards to churchyards to cemeteries to rural cemeteries to lawn park cemeteries to memorial parks. This social and economic evolution is described in great detail. Published in 1991 and republished in 1995, the book is available on Amazon or at your local library.

## Written in Stone

As we look around Oakwood Cemetery, we admire the landscape, the rolling hills, the beautiful trees, the swirling driveways. We should also look at the tombstones themselves as things of beauty, indeed, works of art. The stone carvers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries probably didn’t consider themselves artists, yet they created art. Armed with four things, a mallet, a chisel, patience and strength, they could take a piece of rough natural stone and turn it into freestanding statuary or decorative embellishments on stone. Many American stone carvers came from Italy. Some of Syracuse’s artisans came from Germany. Monument companies advertised in the city directory or in the city newspapers. They employed not only carvers but cutters, dressers, polishers, and setters. Three establishments were located on Oakwood Avenue, all within a few blocks of the western (original) entrance to Oakwood Cemetery. They worked in limestone, marble and granite, the latter being the most difficult. Two of the most well known carvers were John Esser and Sidney Stanton. Esser was born in Germany in 1838. At age eight he and his parents came to America where he learned the trade of sculptor and carver. In 1863 he came to Syracuse where he went into the monumental works business. Among his works in Oakwood Cemetery are the Whitlock angel (Section 4) pictured at right, the medallion of Judge James R. Lawrence (Section 10), and the Lewis Redfield portrait bust in Section 3. Esser used his own daughter as the model for the Whitlock angel. The John A. Green mausoleum, one of the most elaborate in the cemetery, was designed by architect Horatio Nelson White. The carved stonework that adorns the mausoleum was done by John Esser, who died in 1905. An ad of his in an 1878 *Syracuse Daily Journal* says, “J.C. Esser Monumental Sculptor 120 Harrison Street.”



Sidney Stanton carved elaborate and distinctive decorations onto tombstones in a style known as the “Stanton Style.” Stanton & Son (Sidney Senior and Junior) were in business from the 1840s until just after the turn of the century. Stanton Senior started his business in Cazenovia, later moving into Syracuse. Among their works at Oakwood Cemetery are the Denison family monument (pictured) in Section 3 and the James Crouse obelisk in Section 13. Stanton Senior died in 1890 and his son died in 1922. They are both buried in Oakwood (Section 10).

## This ‘n That

Scour the Past - Our annual spring cleanup will be at noon on Saturday, April 26. Come and help us out as we try to undo Mother Nature’s mischief around the Chapel. Bring a rake, gloves, kids and some elbow grease.

Tours by Appointment - We offer tours to any size group, on any subject, in any area of the cemetery. Call Sue Greenhagen at (315) 684-3418.

Live Oaks & Dead Folks - Can’t make it to the cemetery, too hard to walk around? How about a virtual tour featuring some of our most interesting residents? This program is suitable for libraries, senior citizens, clubs, organizations, or anybody interested in Syracuse history. Call Sue Greenhagen at the above number.

Live Oaks & More Dead Folks - “Live Oaks” has been so popular that we just had to do a sequel, so we bring you a program of *more* dead folks, the interesting kind, in Oakwood. Again, call Sue Greenhagen.

Oakwood Speaks: Voices from the Grave - HOCPA has received some very fine contributions for our second book, *Oakwood Speaks*. If you have a family story we could include in this book, contact Connie Palumb at (315)446-3570

## Jacob Crouse's Boulder

This article is reprinted from our 2008 newsletter. It's a fascinating topic worth repeating.

In March of 1992, Jerome Dewitt Barnum wrote us [HOCPA] about his famous ancestor, Jacob Crouse. "The seventy to eighty ton boulder stands on a concrete foundation and weighs about 160,000 pounds; the weight of an average locomotive. It was brought to Oakwood from its resting place in Split Rock where it rested six feet below and three feet above ground...It is thought that the glacier carried it from the Canadian highlands north of Lake Ontario to Split Rock...Teams of horses, rollers and a capstan and rope were used during its six mile journey. Crowds gathered to watch its progress. A saloon keeper offered money to the contractor to let the boulder rest for a spell in front of his shop. The journey lasted more than eight weeks with time out during the winter."

No attempt was made to polish the stone. The inscription "CROUSE" was cut on one side. It rests in an area on a triangular plot of ground at the junction of three cemetery roads.

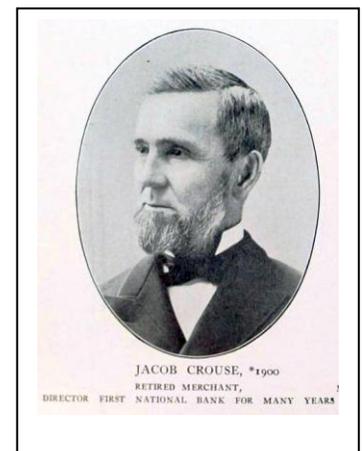
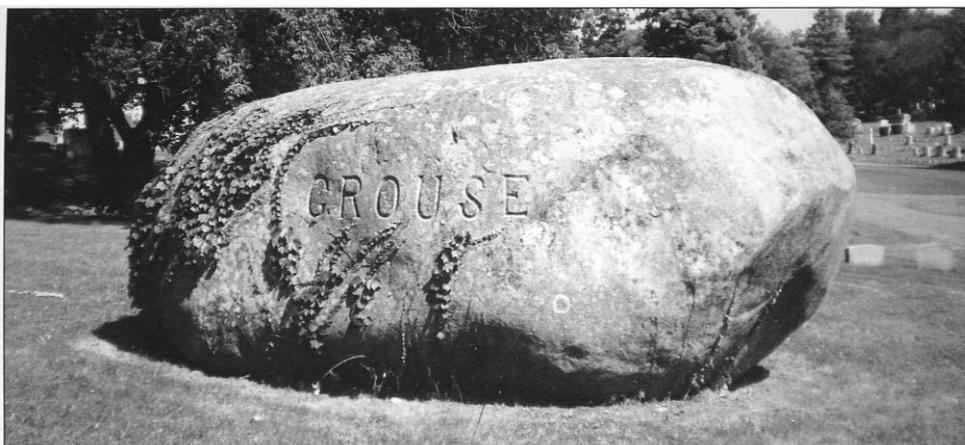
Jacob Crouse, prominent in the area, is closely associated with the growth and development of Syracuse. His opinion was highly valued in questions concerning the city's general welfare. He came to Syracuse in 1858 to join his uncle, John Crouse, in the wholesale and retail grocery business. In 1868, along with George and James Crouse, he organized a grocery house under the name, "Jacob Crouse & Brothers." The firm proved very prosperous with Jacob finally retiring in 1883.

The popular belief about him was that wherever you chose to stand and "spit," that land belonged to him. Although some regarded him as a "miser," he built a brick church for African Americans on West Fayette Street, gave sums of money to Syracuse University, and bought and gave to the University the library of the German historian, VonReinecke.

Let me add a few notes about this "monumental" feat. The year was 1904, and Charles Crouse was looking for a suitable monument for his father, Jacob, who had died in 1900. The boulder he found would be nearly impossible to move because of its size, so a granite-moving company from Barre, Vermont, was contracted to move the stone to Oakwood. The price was \$4500, which in today's money is over \$110,000. They soon realized that they didn't have a crane that could lift it onto a railroad car. They decided in February to pull it on a sled drawn by forty teams of horses. The horses could pull it but the load couldn't be steered or controlled on the narrow roadway so the project was tabled until the middle of April. The rock was moved, as described above, at the shockingly slow pace of 900 feet per day. It arrived at Oakwood Cemetery on June 18 and was placed in its present position. The newspapers had followed its progress all along the way including various pictures for their readers. There are other rock and boulder memorials in Oakwood, but none is of the size or has the story like the Crouse Boulder. Below is a picture from *Oakwood: a Special Place* by Barbara Rivette showing what the boulder looks like today. To the right is Jacob Crouse. Well, I told you it was fascinating.



**EIGHTY-TON BOULDER POSES PROBLEMS**—How to move this 80-ton boulder from Terry Rd., west of Syracuse, to Oakwood Cemetery was a problem which intrigued all of Central New York back in 1904. This photo shows the boulder, chosen as a memorial to Jacob Crouse, loaded on a sled manufactured by Charles Schlosser's Sons, wagon manufacturers. It was to have been pulled by teams of 80 horses. This plan was abandoned and the giant rock was moved by a different method. The man in the picture wearing sealskin cap and winged collar, and the Split Rock boys are unidentified.



JACOB CROUSE, \*1900  
RETIRED MERCHANT,  
DIRECTOR FIRST NATIONAL BANK FOR MANY YEARS

## HOCPA Donors / Members - March, 2014

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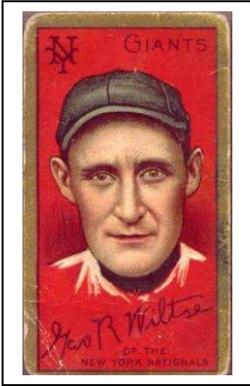
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Please make checks payable to **HOCPA**, and mail to:    **HOCPA, PO BOX 15065, Syracuse NY 13215**



## Oakwood All-Star: George LeRoy “Hooks” Wiltse

Our Oakwood All Star is an All Star from the world of baseball. George Wiltse was a left handed pitcher who played in the major leagues for eleven season, mostly with the New York Giants. Born in 1879 in Pecksport, Town of Eaton, Madison County, he was the youngest of nine children (seven boys!). His family, Henry and Sarah and children, moved to Syracuse around 1897 and George took a real liking to the game of baseball. He made his pitching debut with the Utica Actives at the age of 17. In 1902 he was playing on a team from Scranton which quickly disbanded, and George signed with a team from Troy. On June 19, 1902, George Wiltse came back to Syracuse to pitch against the Syracuse Stars. Although Troy lost the game, George pitched well, and chipped in with three hits. One of his teammates happened to be Johnny Evers, famous as the Evers of “Tinkers to Evers to Chance.” George was signed for the 1904 season by the New York Giants where he made a big impression as a rookie when he won his first 12 decisions. That record wasn’t broken until 1976. Wiltse played on five pennant winning teams - 1904, 1905, 1911, 1912, and 1913. Along the way he earned the nickname “Hooks,” some say because of his outstanding curveball, others say it was because he was such a good fielder. In 1905, the Giants won the World Series over Connie Mack’s Philadelphia A’s. Although Wiltse didn’t pitch, he claimed his winners’ share of the prize - \$1,142. While in New York, he teamed with baseball immortals Christy Mathewson and manager John J. McGraw. Another teammate, Fred Merkle, became known as “Bonehead Merkle,” after committing a costly baserunning error in a 1908 game against the Chicago Cubs. George Wiltse was coaching first base at the time.

Perhaps his most amazing feat as a pitcher came in 1906 when he struck out four batters in one inning. After striking out the first two batters, the third batter struck out but the catcher dropped the ball so the batter was safe at first. The fourth batter of the inning also struck out, ending the inning. By the way, Hooks struck out all three batters the next inning, too. That’s seven strikeouts in two innings. In 1908 he pitched a 10 inning no-hitter, winning 1 to 0. Not bad for a kid from Pecksport.

George ended his major league career in 1915. His totals were 139 wins and 90 losses with a total era of 2.47. From 1915 to 1926, he played in the minors, although he spent one season as a pitching coach with the Yankees (1925). When he finally left the game, he came back to Syracuse where he sold real estate for a while. He was also a deputy assessor from 1934 to 1944. George Leroy “Hooks” Wiltse died on January 21, 1959. He is buried in Section 72 of Oakwood Cemetery.



*address correction requested*

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