



“Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery

Preservation Association

Syracuse, New York

Fall, 2021 Volume 29, Number 2

President's Plot ... Rick Naylor



Here we are into the 4th quarter of 2021, and I don't know where the time has gone! We came into 2021 with a full schedule of tours and activities like any other year. Most were held with very good attendance and support by our members. The June tour was cancelled due to the record setting high heat index!

With the help of the ESF “Friends of Oakwood (FOO), The Crypt Keepers” student club, there were many Saturday clean ups performed. One memorable Saturday in March was the “Wreath Rescue.” The students spread out throughout the cemetery and removed old holiday wreathes and decorations from graves. There was a mountain of old wreathes! Another Saturday they were picking up cans, bottles, coffee and beverage cups and litter. More than a dozen large bags of trash in a few hours were collected!

We had a very good turnout for Earth Day clean up in April. Lots of leaves and limbs were hauled away from around the historic Chapel area and surrounding hillsides.

We celebrated Memorial Day for the first time in many years. American flags marked the graves in the Civil War Soldier's Plot. A Civil War Color Guard did a wonderful demonstration and added an authentic feel to the event. We welcomed Mrs. Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage (Sue Greenhagen) who shared a few wonderful stories about some of the soldiers that fought bravely in the Civil War.

The “dynamic tour duo,” Sue and Diane, hosted 3 walking tours and introduced the attendees to many interesting Syracuse residents of days gone by!

ESF Professor Don Leopold, Ph.D., hosted his annual tree walk with a record number of attendees. Everyone enjoyed learning about uncommon tree species and unique landforms within Oakwood.

For the folks that aren't afraid of ghosts. Vice President Paul and local Paranormalist John Harris hosted 2 walks to visit with the “Real Ghosts of Oakwood Cemetery!” Everyone was treated to chilling stories, as we strolled through areas rarely visited on our usual walks and tours.

You may have noticed some work being done at the chapel this past June. We hired Syracuse Sheet Metal to replace and repair the roof flashing and seal areas prone to leaks. This work was long overdue to help continue to stabilize this historic structure. The work was made possible by a generous gift from the estate of Haden Patten, a past HOCPA Board Member. Please keep an eye out for information on Phase 2 of the stabilization work.

This year the Board organized a couple new committees and is looking for people interested in volunteering on these committees. Anyone that has an interest in event planning, preservation, historical records and media, social media/website, membership, please contact us via our email: HocpaOakwood@gmail.com.

At the end of this year, we will say goodbye to one of our longtime Board Members and Treasurer, Carolyn Lawless. She is taking on increased responsibilities at work as a CPA and a busy family life. We'll miss Carolyn and wish her nothing but the best for her and her family.

I would like welcome our newest Board Member and new Treasurer, Chrissy Burd. Chrissy is a past Syracuse resident that recently decided to move back to the area. Welcome Chrissy!

Please keep checking our website, Facebook and Instagram pages for updates and upcoming events. Thank you for supporting HOCPA and being a huge fan of our beloved and special Oakwood Cemetery. To you and your family be healthy, safe and have a Happy Holiday Season!



Editor's Notes ... Sue Greenhagen

Sometimes you have to be careful what you wish for. In the past I've written a lot of newsletter articles myself, and I would constantly wish the Board members would contribute more. Well, they came through for me with flying colors for this issue. Even my Editor's Notes, which used to take up half a page, has been reduced to a short paragraph. Am I complaining? Heck, no! If you want to know what's *really* going on in Oakwood Cemetery, read on...

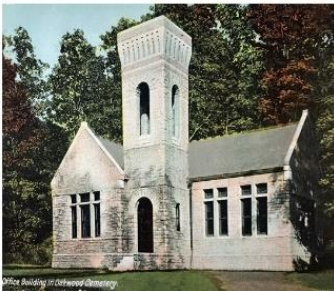
News from HOCPA's Preservation Committee ... John Auwaerter

HOCPA was founded in 1991 to assist Oakwood Cemetery in preserving its historic landscape, including the buildings, structures, markers, roads, topography, and vegetation. Many of the challenges back then remain today, especially in the oldest and most historically significant portions of the cemetery that are bordered by I-81 and the SUNY ESF and Syracuse University campuses. In recognition of these pressing needs, HOCPA formed the Preservation Committee earlier this year to undertake planning necessary to identify and address challenges ranging from deferred maintenance and vandalism to natural decline, and, increasingly, storms. The committee is also addressing the ways in which connections with surrounding institutions, local governments, and neighborhoods might aid in protecting and preserving Oakwood Cemetery.

Over the past year, HOCPA has invested in roof, flashing and drainage repairs to the Silsbee Chapel, based on stabilization recommendations provided in a conditions report completed by Crawford & Stearns, Architects and Preservation Planners, that was jointly funded by Oakwood Cemetery and HOCPA. The Preservation Committee is hoping to fund raise and start on the additional stabilization recommendations by next spring. The work recommended is increasing ventilation, shoring up structural beams, repairing the porte-cochere roof, and providing access to the basement for the required work. Other committee work has included engaging students through the SUNY ESF Center for Cultural Landscape Preservation to identify tree stumps as part of planning for where new trees should be planted. The Preservation Committee helped to organize HOCPA as one of the I-81 Viaduct Project's consulting parties that provided input on potential effects of the project on Oakwood Cemetery. In October, HOCPA submitted a letter to New York State Department of Transportation on the preliminary plans in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, advocating for mitigation to the continuing adverse effects that I-81 has had on Oakwood Cemetery since its construction in the early 1960s.

Interested in helping with preservation issues at Oakwood Cemetery? Please let the Preservation Committee know! Contact John Auwaerter, Chair, at johnauwaer@gmail.com

One of the many preservation challenges at Oakwood Cemetery: The Romanesque Revival-style office building (1902), a gift of the Belden family and a matching design to the cemetery's original entrance gate. Far Left: A postcard view soon after the building's construction. Right: a spring 2021 view showing extensive vandalism and masonry deterioration. Since this photo, the cemetery has installed a fence around the building. The construction of I-81 in the 1960s that blocked the nearby main entrance gate has directly contributed to this building's decline.



NEW! Informational posters are being placed around the cemetery.

Why? For a number of reasons. We began doing it to celebrate our restoration efforts at places like the Shipman Mausoleum, where graffiti was removed and the entire tomb gated to prevent access by the homeless and young folks who used and abused it for years.

Then we added special places like the Sumner canopied tomb and the Lawrence obelisk to acquaint visitors to the rich histories connected to them. We have since added the Silsbee Chapel as we continue efforts to restore that building and the old Office whose future is uncertain. Our poster warns that it poses a danger to uninvited guests. Where are we going next? Why not visit Oakwood and take a walk around to find out for yourself?



The Crypt Keepers Just Keep Getting More Amazing Each Year ... Paul Harvey

Now in their fifth year they have become an official part of SUNY-ESF and even have their own budget! This last project was incredible. Oakwood Cemetery's Dan Glavin asked them to help remodel the main entrance on Comstock Ave (across from the Islamic Center). Hoping they could reduce the brush before

hiring contractors or using his already stressed workforce, Dan, HOCPA's President Rick Naylor and I were totally amazed. They totally cleared the front area in a few hours.

Check out the photos before and after!

The Real Ghosts of Oakwood Cemetery: A Paranormal Tour

HOCPA was proud to present "The Real Ghosts of Oakwood" on the weekend before Halloween. The walk was a guided tour of the ghosts actually reported at Oakwood Cemetery and was led by HOCPA VP Paul Harvey and local Paranormalist John Harris. A portion of the proceeds from this fund-raiser will be used for preservation projects.



Tour goers all enjoyed a spooky, historic tour through Oakwood Cemetery, visiting many of the locations where ghosts have been spotted. Descriptions of the phenomenon are often referred to as supernatural. All of the specific events were considered and discussed with Mr. Harris. The equipment often used to detect phenomenon was exhibited, described and used in actual attempts to contact whatever is the cause of these seemingly unearthly happening

This event had wonderful sunsets which added to the natural beauty of the strange walk. Paul Harvey, Vice President of the HOCPA Board, says, "Everyone loves Oakwood Cemetery and most of us are intrigued by the strange phenomenon called ghosts, spooks, shadows, poltergeists, cold spots and so on. What could be better than enjoying both on a pleasant fall evening as the leaves are changing color and the strange effects of the Autumn season are upon us?"

Friends of Oakwood ... Nicholas Timoshenko

Friends of Oakwood (commonly referred to as Crypt Keepers) has been working hard on several different projects in the cemetery these past few months. With the helping guidance of Oakwood's Executive Director, Dan Glavin, we've worked on areas such as the L.C. Smith Mausoleum plot, the Haggerty plot, and most recently the borderline between Oakwood and the ESF campus.

We tackled the Lyman Cornelius Smith mausoleum cleanup, where the Crypt Keepers worked hard to beautify and preserve the plot. Brush was trimmed, leaves were raked, overgrowth was cut, and shrubs/trees were pruned (using proper techniques learned during our tree pruning workshop last Spring!). Along with the LC Smith cleanup, a group of Crypt Keepers assisted in the planting of 8 bare-root trees near the Civil War section (Section 56S). Once these projects were completed, our attention turned to the borderline between Oakwood Cemetery and the ESF campus. This area was largely overgrown, with neglected tombstones half or fully buried beneath vegetation. A total of ten tombstones were uncovered on one Saturday when a few Crypt Keepers noticed tiny spots of stone peeking out from underneath trimmed grass. Additional heaps of brush and overgrowth were removed from areas covering tombstones.



From the end of August 2021 to early November 2021, Crypt Keepers have already accumulated over 250 service hours in Oakwood. It has certainly been an honor and pleasure to serve as the President of Crypt Keepers this year, and to see the impact these hardworking student-volunteers have had on Oakwood. We look forward to wrapping up this semester and seeing what lies ahead in 2022 for the Friends of Oakwood.



Syracuse Garden Club Tour ... Connie Palumb

Mrs. Flora Smith (Sue Greenhagen portraying Mrs. Lyman C. Smith) greeted a hearty group of SGC members inside her husband's mausoleum on a dreary October morning. We were regaled with colorful accounts of the residents' lives, all members of the L.C. Smith family.

From there we toured the gravesites of several "Movers and Shakers" of the early 20th century. We enjoyed learning Syracuse history via a most delightful outing with Sue Greenhagen. She promised to lead another excursion for us next year.

Please remember that tours by appointment are available for all size groups. Contact us by email at HocpaOakwood@gmail.com



The Murray Grove Story ... Hilary Donohue, Tree Committee

On October 23, the ESF Friends of Oakwood student volunteer group along with HOCPA members and Kat Korba, our arborist guide, planted eight trees in an area of Oakwood now known as Murray Grove. This planting project was initiated by the family of the late Letty Murray. Letty was and still is an Oakwood and HOCPA celebrity. Letty, shown at left with family members, helped found HOCPA in 1991 and led many efforts to preserve and beautify Oakwood Cemetery.

Letty's family including her children and grandchildren donated time and funds towards planting trees in the area near Letty and her husband Gil's burial plots. I heard from multiple family members that the only time they ever saw Letty visibly upset was after the 1998 Labor Day storm downed 1,000 trees in Oakwood Cemetery. Now Letty has inspired the planting of three Koosa Dogwoods (the first of this type in the cemetery!), three Swamp White Oaks and two Red Maples. The student volunteers, seen planting a tree at left, also considerably pruned two existing trees in this Murray Grove area. A beautiful Magnolia tree was freed from a giant invasive buckthorn and an Amur Maple bush is feeling a lot lighter now that it has been cleared of grapevines, buckthorn and dead branches.



We at HOCPA hope this will be the first of many planting projects in Oakwood. It is time to replace the beautiful trees lost to the Labor Day storm. Thank you to our arborist and tree-loving friends and the energetic, committed ESF students helping out at Oakwood every Saturday.

The new trees are along the border of sections 35 and 56, just up the hill from the Civil War section. We encourage Oakwood visitors to go take a look!

Oakwood Cemetery Civil War Event Honors Black Soldiers

On Saturday, September 25, HOCPA held a ceremony to dedicate headstones for four Black Civil War soldiers. Their gravesites had been without markers for over 100 years. The soldiers honored were Asa Dennison (11th U.S.C. Heavy Artillery), Jeremiah Davis (4th U.S.C.T.), James Hale (51st U.S.C.T.) and James Jameson (54th Massachusetts Infantry). Davis and Hale were both born slaves, Davis in Maryland and Hale in Mississippi. Dennison was born in central New York, and Jameson was for over 60 years a barber in the city of Syracuse. The National Anthem and the Black National Anthem were sung by Dashe Roberts. Among the speakers at the event were State Senator Rachel May, Syracuse Deputy Mayor Sharon Owens, Rev. Nitch Jones, and Sue Greenhagen representing the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil



War. Local reenactors provided the Honor Guard, and the Mattydale American Legion fired a salute. Jamie McGill blew Taps.

Of the over 840 Civil War veterans buried in Oakwood Cemetery, 25 are Black. Two, Jameson and Charles Creamer, served in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. Two, Charles Highgate and Riley Ham served in local white regiments, the 185th NYSV and the 3d NY Light Artillery respectively. Highgate was wounded at Quaker Road, VA, on March 29, 1865, and died four days later. Thanks goes to the many volunteers who helped with this research, including members of the Onondaga County Civil War Round Table, the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Our research has shown that over 70 veterans of the Civil War buried in Oakwood are without headstones. HOCPA has begun the process of rectifying that situation. Those veterans deserve no less.

History's Mysteries – Hugh T. Gibson ... Diane Medvitz

To paraphrase the old riddle, who is buried in Gibson's tomb? Very visible in Section 50 with a beautiful iron gate and the name Hugh Tilford Gibson on the lintel, this mausoleum would lead the viewer to think that Hugh Gibson is indeed buried there. And who was he?

Gibson was first found in an article in the *Daily Albany Argus* dated May 10, 1832, when the New York State Governor signed an act authorizing Hugh Crookshank and seven others with the Crookshank surname to change that name to Gibson. No reason was given for the change. According to his daughter's obituary he conducted a tavern in Albany but within a few years he relocated to Syracuse, operating the Syracuse House on the present site of the Onondaga Savings Bank in Hanover Square.

He had been identified in differing newspaper articles as a merchant at Gibson & Tefft and as a salt manufacturer. In either case it is known that he was a volunteer foreman of Engine Company No. 3.

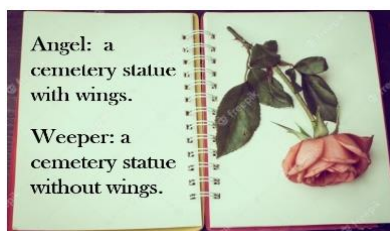
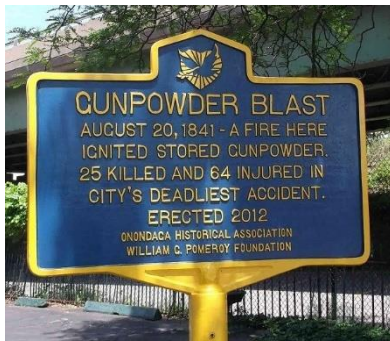
Following the opening of the Erie Canal, construction began on a canal to join downtown Syracuse to Oswego, connecting at the site of present-day Weighlock Building. On the night of Friday August 20, 1841, a fire broke out on the roof of Charles Goings' building, completely engulfing it in flames. Fire engine companies were called and seemed to be containing the fire. Within minutes a tremendous explosion took place, which could be heard 26 miles away, completely demolishing the building and snuffing out the fire.

Gibson, along with John Dunford (attorney age 23) and Ezra Hough (druggist age 25), were first on the scene with the engine company and therefore nearest the fire. When the building exploded, they were among the first killed. A sliver of wood sliced Gibson's throat under his chin and severed his head. He was found in the canal and identified by the pants he was wearing. He was 40 years old and left a wife and two children. In fact, most of those injured and killed were young volunteer firefighters. Today an historic marker can be found at the intersection of Warren and Willow streets.

Gibson's wife Susan married Andrew Thompson in 1844 but nothing is known of her, and she had no additional children. Gibson's son Marven died just a few months after his father at age three. His only surviving child was Julia, who inherited money from both parents and property from her father. She lived in the house he built at the southeast corner of Fayette Park after clearing the forested land.

The Gibson mausoleum was ordered from the Smith Granite Company in May 1895, after the death of Susan Thompson, at a cost of \$9150. We can assume Julia designed the building in blue Westerly granite with Hugh's name on the lintel. Today it would cost nearly \$295,000 but apparently Julia had the funds. A *Syracuse Herald* article following her death described her as "eccentric," believing that making a will would hasten her death. She had also kept every scrap of paper she received in fifty years, which contained a letter from a cousin, the only clue to any relative who would inherit the entire estate.

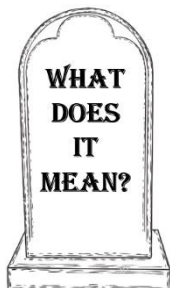
So, who is buried in Gibson's tomb? Susan and Julia's names appear in the records. Hugh's marker still remains in Rose Hill Cemetery as does his son's; his name is not found in either the interment records or the lot book. It does not appear that he was removed to Oakwood by Julia. So why does his name appear on the mausoleum? Perhaps we will never know.



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

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Stones placed on a headstone remind people that someone they care for was visited, mourned for, respected, supported and honored by the presence of others who've visited their memorial. The Hebrew word for pebble is also a word that means "bond." By placing a stone on the headstone, it bonds the deceased with the visitors.

A coin left on a headstone lets the deceased soldier's family know that somebody stopped by to pay their respects. If you leave a penny, it means you visited. If you served with the soldier, you leave a dime. A quarter is very significant because it means that you were there when that soldier was killed.



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\$10 Lillian Oakwood Gardner Level. Lillian was the infant daughter of George Gardner, the first superintendent of Oakwood. She was born in 1863 in the Superintendent's cottage, but lived only 10 months. She is buried in Section 4, Lot 107 with her parents and two siblings.



\$25 Elias W. Leavenworth Level. Elias Leavenworth, known as the "Father of Oakwood Cemetery," was one of its founders, and its first President. He was also twice Mayor of Syracuse, and served two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.



\$50 Herbert H. Franklin Level. H. H. Franklin was the founder of the Franklin Automobile Company, producing the first automobile air cooled engine in 1902.



\$75 James J. Belden Level. James J. Belden, a former congressman and mayor, was for 36 years a trustee of Oakwood. He donated the funds to build the entrance arch and the cemetery's greenhouses.



\$100 Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage. Mrs. Sage was the widow of Wall Street tycoon, Russell Sage. When he died, she became one of the wealthiest women in America. She then devoted her life to philanthropy.

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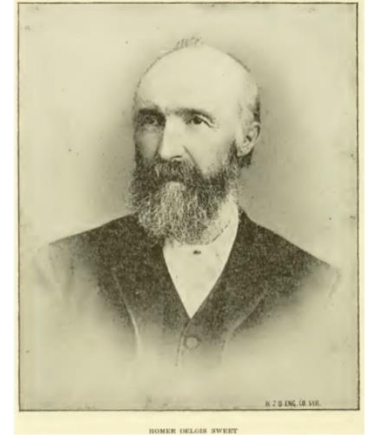
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OAKWOOD ALL-STAR - Homer DeLois Sweet

Anyone who has done historical research on 19th century Onondaga County has no doubt found an atlas published in 1874 very useful. It was created by Homer D.L. Sweet, the older brother on noted engineer John Edson Sweet. The Sweet family was from the town of Pompey, where Horace Sweet had a large farm on what we know today as Sweet Road. His son, Homer, attended local schools, and then he couldn't quite decide on a profession. Among his early jobs were farmer, store clerk, schoolteacher, singer, sailor – well, finally he became a surveyor's apprentice. In 1857, he worked on *French's Gazetteer*. In 1862 he officially became a civil engineer. In 1874 he published *Sweet's new atlas of Onondaga County, N.Y.: from recent and actual surveys and records*. This atlas is so noteworthy because it includes property owners' names, and shows the location of schools, churches, cemeteries, and local businesses. Homer Sweet died in 1893 at the age of 67. He is buried, along with his parents, and five siblings in the Sweet family plot of Oakwood Cemetery (Section 10, Lot 17).



The Who Knew File



George Brown's story is right out of my "Who Knew" file. He was born in 1806 in Massachusetts and came to Central New York in the 1840s. The census says he had settled in Syracuse, on the South side, in the 1850s. His occupation was that of driving a stagecoach between Onondaga Hill and Syracuse. In the 1870s he took up well drilling, and according to his obituary, he was pretty good at it. He was married to a woman named Laura who apparently died in the 1870s. The 1880 census shows him remarried to a woman named Mary whose occupation was as a dressmaker. He had at least three children - John, George, and William. In 1889 he retired from well drilling and moved out to Solvay. He died on 13 February 1899 and is buried in Section 48, Lot 224. This must seem like a very humdrum story. However, the kicker is that George Brown was the nephew of John Brown, the Harpers Ferry John Brown. Yes, THAT John Brown. I mean, really, who knew?

Address correction requested.



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