



“Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery
Preservation Association
Syracuse, New York

Fall, 2022 Volume 30, Number 2

President’s Plot – Rick Naylor



Summer went by quickly and Fall is here. The Fall foliage was wonderful this year all around the cemetery. I think it was the best we’ve had in a few years. I hope you had a chance to enjoy it.

Judging by the number of brochures and walking tour guides we went through at the chapel, Oakwood Cemetery is getting more visitors than ever. Our monthly tours were a big success this year. May’s tour got started and ended quickly as we all took cover from a passing thunderstorm! The weather cooperated for the rest of tours, and we set new records for attendance at most of them. We had a special guest tour guide for our August tour. Mrs. L. C. Smith (she prefers to be called Flora) walked us around Section 65. We got to hear about her 2 brothers-in-law and many of her interesting neighbors. She ended the walk at her permanent residence, the L.C. Smith mausoleum and with some wonderful stories about her husband Lyman and their family. Thank you, Sue Greenhagen, for portraying Mrs. Smith. Our September tour lead by Diane Medvitz, took us to a very quiet part of Oakwood Cemetery that rarely gets visited on our tours. Diane shared wonderful information about the Colvin family and many other interesting folks that time has forgotten. The October “Tree Tour” lead by Professor Don Leopold, PhD, is always a well-attended tour. This year with the combination of great weather and beautiful Fall foliage we had well over 100 people attend. Thank you, Don and ESF for being a supporter.

We tried something new this year – a once a month Yoga session in the cemetery, June through September. The sessions were led by local physical therapist and yoga instructor Rebecca S Alexander Carey. We’re looking forward to working with Rebecca again for next year’s yoga sessions.

Oakwood Cemetery is participating with Wreaths Across America this year. The event is scheduled for Saturday, December 17, 2022, at noon. We will be sending out information via email to those on our mailing list on how to sponsor a wreath or volunteer for the event. Or for more information you can also visit www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org and search for Oakwood Cemetery, Syracuse NY.

The Preservation Association of Central New York awarded HOCPA the 2022 Jasena R. Foley Award. See page 3 for details. Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage (aka Sue Greenhagen) captivated the audience as she demonstrated Living History, Oakwood style. As a matter of fact, Oliva was seen recently in Oakwood Cemetery sharing her amazing life story of philanthropy and fighting for women’s right to vote. For a woman who’s been dead over 100 years, she keeps very busy!

None of what we do would be possible without the help and support of you, our sponsors, Oakwood Cemeteries Inc., their employees and Board members, the HOCPA Board members, our volunteers and fans. Thank you for all you do in making and keeping Oakwood Cemetery the amazing place it is.

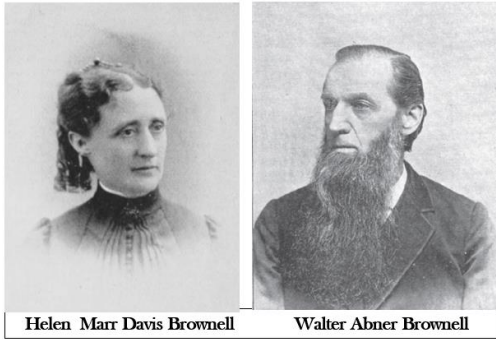
Editor’s Notes – Sue Greenhagen

Our loquacious President doesn’t leave me much space. I’ll say my piece in just a few words. I’ve been on the HOCPA Board since 2008 (I think), and it amazes me to see how far we have come. So many people have helped along the way. We’ve accomplished a lot but, you guessed it, there’s more to do. We issue a standing invitation to anyone interested in any aspect of Oakwood Cemetery. Join us in our efforts to preserve one of the true treasures of central New York. You can contact us at HOCPAOakwood@gmail.com, or you can call Rick Naylor at 315 263-7159. See you in Oakwood...



“Not everybody’s famous but everybody’s got a story.”

This proved very true in the case of the Brownell family in Section 49. Walking along, a small, grey monument comes into view. It says “Frank Martin Brownell.” No other information – no dates, although there was a lamb on the front. Find-a-Grave says Frank was the son of Walter and Helen Brownell, and that he died in 1878 at the age



Helen Marr Davis Brownell

Walter Abner Brownell

of nine months. Oddly, Frank’s gravestone is actually in Section 51. Frank’s father, Walter Abner Brownell, was born in 1838 in Jefferson County. He graduated from Genesee College in 1864, and began a career in education. While at Genesee he met Helen Marr Davis and they were married in 1865. Brownell took a number of teaching positions and principalships beginning with Red Creek Seminary. From there he went to Falley Seminary in Fulton, and then on to Fairfield Seminary in Herkimer County. At each institution Helen was employed as preceptress and teacher of French. In 1869 their first son, George, was born and Helen retired from teaching. In 1871 the family moved to Syracuse, and Walter began a 31-year career as

a teacher in the Syracuse School system. In October of 1877, a second son, Frank Martin, was born. In August of 1878, nine-month-old Frank came down with *cholera infantum*, a disease that was nearly always fatal. It would last three to five days, the victim suffering from vomiting, severe diarrhea, and a high fever. In August of 1877, in Syracuse at large, twenty-five children from the ages of 0 to one year died, and twenty of them died from *cholera infantum*.¹ Frank was buried in Section 51 with a zinc headstone bearing an image of a lamb, the symbol of a child. His parents may have seen that headstone in a catalog put out by the Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut. The price of this monument in the 1882 catalog was \$25. Today that would be about \$725. The Monumental Bronze Company was not officially incorporated until 1879, their prior name being Schyuler, Parsons, Landon & Company. The sales representatives in Onondaga and Cortland Counties was Wilson & Blye. Newell W. Wilson was a Civil War veteran who died in 1890, and is buried in Section 48, Lot 29. Alphonso W. Blye, left the partnership in the early 1880s, and took a position with the Middletown (N.Y.) National Bank. He died in 1898, and is buried in Section 22, Lot 80. The selling points of a zinc monument were highlighted in the catalog. Indeed, the monument were of pure zinc, sandblasted to give them a light gray appearance. That treatment resulted in the term “white bronze,” which was a copyrighted trade name, which salesmen were expected to use. The sales pitch was to have been that white bronze was less expensive, was more durable than marble or granite, that it wouldn’t change color, it was non-corrosive, and that, according to an 1875 newspaper ad, it will “forever remain the same.”³ Although the Monumental Bronze Company was in business until 1914, sales in central New York reached their peak in 1888, and were on the downturn by 1892.⁴ Oddly enough, neither Mr. Wilson nor Mr. Blye have white bronze markers.

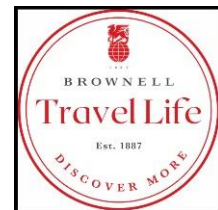


No. 15 Double Front, 30 in. high. Price, \$25.
Extreme size of slab, 11 1/2 in. wide, 4 1/2 in. thick. Bottom
Base, 10x15 in. square.
No lettering can be put on either base. The Tablets on
front and back are solid.

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Life went on for the Brownell family. In 1887, Walter Brownell began organizing overseas trips, the first being 10 people who went on an archaeological trip to Switzerland. (See picture at left.) “Brownell Tours” would become the first travel agency in North America. In 1900, his son, George Griffin Brownell, took over the company, and moved it to Birmingham, Alabama where he was a professor of Romance Languages at the University of Alabama.



When George died in 1931, his son, George, Jr., took over and ran the business for forty-five years. Brownell Travel is still in business today.

Helen Brownell’s career in education cannot be minimized. Accompanying her husband to his various positions, she used the education she had acquired to teach French. When she retired from teaching, she continued to mentor students and young adults. Her endeavors earned her a half page biography and portrait in *A Woman of the Century* published in 1893². In 1899, Dr. Brownell ran for mayor of Syracuse on the Prohibition Party line where he trailed far behind the winning candidate, James K. McGuire. In 1902, Walter Brownell retired after **(continued on page 3)**

teaching chemistry and geology in the Syracuse school system for 23 years. Just one year later, his health deteriorated, and a court declared him mentally incompetent. In December of 1903, Dr. Brownell was committed to the State Homeopathic Hospital in Middletown. He died there on 23 March 1904. Helen Brownell died on 11 December 1910 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where she was spending the winter with her son, George. She and her husband are in Section 49, Lot 8. Dr. and Mrs. Brownell and their sons Frank and George, Newell Wilson, and A.W. Blye may not be the most famous people in Syracuse, but they all certainly have a story worth telling.

1. "City Mortality," *Syracuse (N.Y.) Daily Courier*, 7 September 1877.
2. Willard, Frances E., and Livermore, Mary A. eds. *A woman of the century: fourteen hundred-seventy biographical sketches accompanied by portraits of leading American women in all walks of life*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Moulton, 1893.
3. Advertisement, *Syracuse (N.Y.) Daily Journal*, 3 November 1875.
4. Rotundo, Barbara. "Monumental Bronze: A Representative American Company." In *Cemeteries & gravemarkers: voices of American culture*, edited by Richard E. Meyer, 263-291. Utah State University Press, 5.



HOCPA Wins Prestigious Award

HOCPA was honored to receive the Jasena R. Foley Award at the Preservation Association of Central New York annual awards ceremony on October 16. PACNY is Central New York's regional historic preservation advocacy organization, founded in 1974 around interest to save the Landmark Theater and create a city preservation ordinance. The award memorializes Jasena Foley, the long-time Town of Onondaga historian and Onondaga Historical Association board member. She was noted for her research and lectures on James Street history, including photo-documenting many of the mansions prior to their demolition.

As stated by PACNY, the Foley Award recognizes HOCPA's "careful stewardship of the historic cemetery, including passionate care for its built resources and designed landscapes." Pictured are Rick Naylor, HOCPA president, and Sue Greenhagen, HOCPA board member, at the awards ceremony that was held at the Oneida Community Mansion House.



Cemetery Humor

Leave it to Yankee baseball great, Yogi Berra, to come out with the following "Yogism."

Yogi's wife Carmen once asked, "Yogi, you are from St. Louis, we live in New Jersey, and you played ball in New York. If you go before I do, where would you like me to have you buried?" Yogi replied, "Surprise me." I don't know if he was surprised or not, but when he died in 2015 at age 90, he was buried in Gates of Heaven Cemetery in East Hanover, New Jersey.

Syracuse Book Club Tour

On May 26, Connie Palumb's book club convened at the L.C. Smith mausoleum and was greeted by Flora Burns Smith. Flora (Mrs. L.C. Smith) charmed us with the family history and enticing gossip, privy to only a few! Subsequently we were treated to a tour of nearby gravesites of leaders of commerce and industry from the early 20th century. Our last stop was the grave of Dick McPherson, affectionately known to most as "Coach Mac," S.U.'s greatly loved former football coach. We ALL had great stories to tell about Coach Mac and his family!

Many thanks to Mrs. Smith (aka Sue Greenhagen shown at right) for entertaining us on a lovely spring afternoon.



A New “Day,” so to speak – Holly Koenig

Like many of you, I have often strolled through Oakwood Cemetery, and when not admiring the trees, have stopped and wondered about many of the people interred there. One of these people is buried under a rather small, deteriorated marble obelisk sitting at the edge of Section 17, close to the large and expansive Wilkinson family monuments. If you are there when the sun is at just the right angle, you can read the inscription, “The grave of Jonathan Day MD, who died August 18, 1832, aged 32 years.” Who was this man, and how did he end up resting in this particular place, having died almost 25 years before the Oakwood opened?

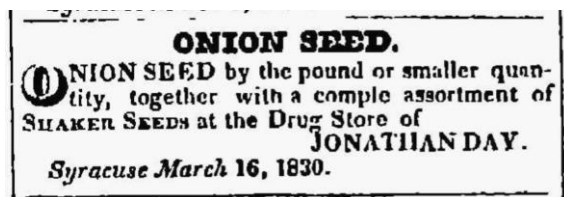


Jonathan Day was born about 1800 (possibly 1798), in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, probably in the town of Dalton. His father was Amasa Day (1770-1844), a farmer, and his mother was Lucy Spafford Bassett Day (1769-1805). We don’t know much of his early life – he may have obtained his education at the Berkshire Medical Institute, just a few miles from his hometown of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The Institute was founded in 1822, and had a reputation for being modern in its curriculum and having “radical ideas.” An apprenticeship with a local doctor would have been part of his training as well.

At some time, he married Eunice Pomeroy of Pittsfield, who was born in 1808, the daughter of the famous and wealthy patriot Lemuel Pomeroy, and great granddaughter of Major General Seth Pomeroy. General Pomeroy had the distinction of fighting at the Battle of Bunker Hill at the age of 70, and unfortunately, died in Peekskill, New York, of illness while on his way to New Jersey on assignment from General Washington.

In the 1830 census, we can find Jonathan Day living in the village of Salina, now the First Ward of the city of Syracuse, very near to the residence of John Wilkinson. Besides himself, the household was composed of a female 20-29 (probably his wife, Eunice), another female 30-39, and five children under 20. It is unknown who the older female was – both Jonathan and Eunice had older siblings, so she may have been a relative or possibly a servant. Dr. Day’s father, Amasa, left a will which grants his “three grandchildren, issue of his deceased son Jonathan” some money in 1844. Did two of the five children belong to the other woman? Or were they all Day children, two of whom died before their grandfather made his will? We just don’t know.

Additionally in 1830, Jonathan Day ran an advertisement in the *Onondaga Standard* for some items he carried in his “Drug Store,” so we know he sold medications along with seeing patients.¹ And like many drug stores today,



other things were carried besides items strictly for treating illness. The advertisement lists “Onion Seed, by the pound or smaller quantities” and a “complete assortment of Shaker seeds.” The Shakers were a religious group founded in Watervliet, NY, in the mid-18th century. (

As well as making good quality furniture, they were known for producing fine vegetable and grain seeds, which would have

been eagerly sought by local farmers and gardeners.

We don’t know what Dr. Day’s medical practice consisted of, but we do know he attained a stellar reputation and was described as “prominent” in the area. When cholera threatened the county, his expertise was sought by his fellow physicians and he was appointed the first Medical Director of Onondaga County.

Cholera, a virulent infectious disease, is caused by a type of bacteria, *Vibrio cholerae*. The agent is spread by sewage contamination of drinking water, and once an infection begins in a location, it can be readily transmitted person to person. It causes primarily severe intestinal distress with dehydration. In about 50% of untreated profoundly symptomatic patients, death can ensue in a matter of hours. Cholera was mostly confined to central Asia until about 1817, after which it spread across Europe, finally reaching England in 1830. By 1831, it had reached port cities in Canada and eventually New York City in spring of 1832. It was only a matter of time until it reached Syracuse.

At that time, the germ theory of infection was in its infancy, but the physicians of Onondaga County were aware that it had something to do with poor sanitary conditions and could be caught by exposure to other sick people. Quarantine protocols were initiated by attempting to restrict travelers on the canal. Guards were actually posted to search barges and lime was spread around the area streets. Dr. Day was even sent to Montreal to assess the situation there and hopefully learn something. These preparations, unfortunately, were to no avail, (continued on p. 5)

and cholera entered the area on July 17, 1832, killing as many as 300 people. Jonathan Day treated a number of these people, including the Reverend Nathaniel J. Gilbert, pastor of the First Baptist Church where the funeral of the first victim was held. Dr. Day also treated Phebe Gilbert. Unfortunately, Reverend Gilbert succumbed on July 20, 1832, (Mrs. Gilbert survived) as did Dr. Day himself. It was on August 18, 1832, that Dr. Day himself died of cholera. He was only 32 years old. Reverend Gilbert was buried in the Franklin/Water St. Cemetery. When that cemetery closed in the early 1870s, his body and that of his wife, who died in 1864, were removed to the Gilbert family plot in Section 6, Lot 148 of Oakwood Cemetery. Likewise, Dr. Jonathan Day was removed to Oakwood where he rests with the Wilkinson family.

By August 28, 1832 Mrs. Day had filed papers with the court to settle her husband's estate. At that time, women were not automatically entitled to receive their deceased spouse's assets. Oscar Strong and John Wilkinson were named as executors, charged with paying debts, collecting monies owed, and distributing the remaining assets (hopefully to her). We know she returned to her family home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where she married George Davis in 1852. She died in 1885, and is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn. In 1932, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Onondaga County Medical Society, Dr. Jonathan Day's contribution was acknowledged and he was named a "martyr" for his role in the cholera epidemic of 1832.

1. *Onondaga Standard*, Syracuse, N.Y., 24 March 1830.

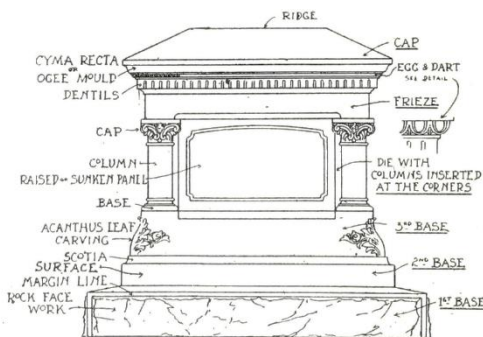


Notable Oakwood Tour

As part of the 2022 New York Statewide Preservation Conference held in Syracuse on September 23-24, Rick Naylor, Sue Greenhagen, and John Auwaerter led a tour of Oakwood Cemetery to a group of about 20 conference attendees. The conference theme was "Shifting Landscapes," and the Oakwood tour was one of three Saturday morning field sessions along with a tour of West Onondaga Street and Arts & Crafts Architecture in Syracuse. Attendees, most of whom had never been to Oakwood, came from across the state and included members of the Friends of the Woodlawn Cemetery (Bronx), Landmark Society of Western New York,



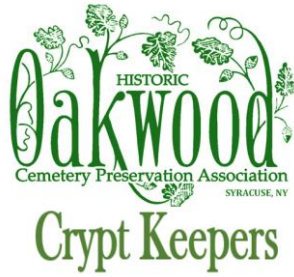
Preservation Association of Central New York, and the New York State Historic Preservation Office. Rick and John talked about the design of the cemetery landscape, notable monuments and memorials, the impact of I-81, and the challenges of maintaining an historic cemetery. The highlight of the tour was an appearance by Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage, widow of Wall Street tycoon Russell Sage. Mrs. Sage regaled the tourgoers with a short history of her life, and also introduced them to some of her neighbors. She was able to present Oakwood on a personal level, which certainly complemented the nuts and bolts of cemetery preservation.



Once again, HOCPA offers you a chance, as you stroll through Oakwood, to dazzle your friends and bemuse everyone else. Here is a diagram (at left) of a monument from the 1919 *Monument Dealer's Handbook*. It shows every single element that a monument could have. As you pass the monument of William H.H. Smith in Section 14, notice, for example, not only the artwork, but also the extensive detail that this monument shows. And every detail has a name thanks to our "never leave home without it" handbook.



A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words (and We Can Do Both)



Partners in our work include the ESF students led by the 50 member Crypt Keepers (aka “FOO”-“Friends of Oakwood”), the Orange Seeds from Syracuse University, and individual students who wander in wanting to help. Most of our local community groups enjoy and help out also.



One of our special events this past season was a series of yoga classes. (left)

And who says there aren't spirits in Oakwood. (right)





**YOU ARE INVITED
TO BECOME A SPONSOR OF
THE HISTORIC OAKWOOD CEMETERY
PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION**

The five levels of sponsorship are:



\$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.

SPONSORSHIP FORM

- _____ \$10 **LILLIAN O. GARDNER LEVEL**
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- _____ \$50 **H. H. FRANKLIN LEVEL.**
- _____ \$75 **JAMES J. BELDEN LEVEL.**
- _____ \$100 **MARGARET OLIVIA SLOCUM SAGE LEVEL.**

Name _____

Address _____

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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

Genevieve Spafford Searls – Oakwood All-Star

Genevieve Searls holds the district honor of being the first policewoman appointed in the City of Syracuse. The momentous event took place on April 1, 1914 under the auspices of Mayor Louis Will. Mrs. Searls had a background in social worker having served in that capacity for the S.P.C.C. (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children). In March of 1914 she took a Civil Service test for hospital worker and scored 98.5. She then took the police test and was the top score out of 16 candidates. Her appointment made her the second policewoman in New York State, the first being Nellie McElroy of Rochester, appointed the year before.



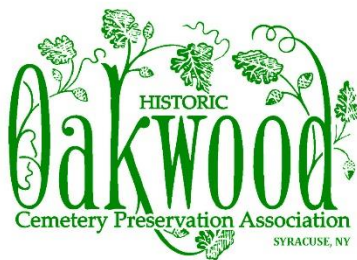
Genevieve Spafford was born on November 5, 1874 on Howlett Hill. On October 30, 1891, she married Dean Richmond Searls from Batavia. Searls was in Duluth, MN, when he developed blood poisoning from an abscess. He died on June 15, 1892 and was buried in Grand View Cemetery in Batavia. His widow turned to social work and then, at age 40, became a Syracuse policewoman. She had a reputation of being kind to the poor and less fortunate, a trait that served her well in her dealings with the public. Her very first assignment was to monitor for objectionable content a movie at the Bastable Theater called “The House of Bondage.” She reported back to the chief that there was “probably too much kissing.” Her first arrest involved an intoxicated gentleman just two weeks after her appointment. She made her first solo arrest later that year during the State Fair. She was on South Salina Street and she arrested a vendor selling “inappropriate flags.” Upon getting to the police station, the vendor remarked, “Think of it. Getting pinched by a nice lady like that.”

During her 23 years on the job, she advocated for recreational opportunities for young people, for helping young women on the fringes of society, and for finding meaningful jobs for those women. When she retired on January 1, 1938 due to a lingering illness, little did she know that she had only two years to live. She died of a stroke on November 21, 1939. Her funeral was a tribute from her fellow police officers. They made up the escort, honorary bearers, and active bearers as she was laid to rest in Oakwood. Genevieve Spafford Searls is buried in Section 63, Lot 20.



NOVEMBER 2023, 2017, 2006, 1995, 1987						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

It’s almost time to roll out next year’s calendars. Wait, you don’t have to go out and spend a lot of money on a brand new 2023 calendar. Some of us save those old calendars because we love the pictures, the theme, whatever. Look for the years 2017, 2006, and for you hard-core savers, 1995 and 1987. Because recycling is always a good thing.



H.O.C.P.A.
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