



“Grave Matters”

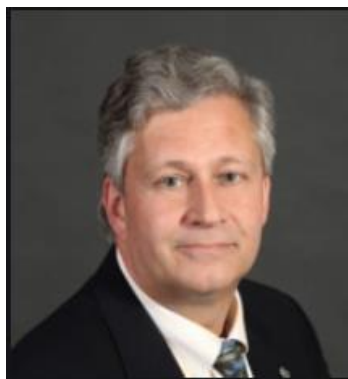
Historic Oakwood Cemetery

Preservation Association

Syracuse, New York

Spring, 2022 Volume 30, Number 1

President’s Plot ... Rick Naylor



The snow drops and crocus flowers are up, and the daffodils wait patiently for the sun to warm them open. If you have never been in the forest in the spring, you are missing out on the beauty of nature’s delicate blooms. You need travel no farther than Oakwood Cemetery to see this for yourself.

The saucer, star and lily magnolia trees are loaded with buds and will be blooming soon. Along Midland Avenue on the way to the chapel the redbud trees, one of my favorites, will be showing their purple glow. The hillsides are covered with “choir boys” or winter aconite with their yellow blooms and the white flowers of the bloodroot. The common name comes from the orange-red sap that can be made into red dye. In front of the chapel Letty’s Garden is coming alive with the colors of Spring. Come for a slow drive or a leisurely stroll and see what is blooming soon!

We have Sunday Tours planned for May, June, July, Aug. and Sept., usually the 3rd Sunday at 2pm. We’re planning more online lectures and events. We will certainly enjoy the beauty of Oakwood.

We’re also looking for volunteers that would like to work on events, planning, social media and clean up in the cemetery. You can send us an email at hocpaoakwood@gmail.com with interest or to get more information.

Please follow us on:

Facebook @ Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association; Instagram @ historicoakwoodcemetery

And our website www.hocpa.org

Rick Naylor, President



Editor’s Notes ... Sue Greenhagen

I’ve been editor the *Grave Matters* since the Fall of 2010. The topics we’ve covered seem endless. Just think, 60,000 burials over 160 acres spanning 163 years. Personally, I have learned so much through research, and I’ve been lucky enough to have this format with which to share all that knowledge. It’s been fun. I have to admit however, that this issue almost didn’t make it to press in a timely fashion. It all started Easter weekend. I was sailing along, one article after another, pictures, it was all good. Then on Easter evening I started to not feel great. By Monday morning, after taking a test, I was positive for Covid. It wasn’t horrible (I’d been vaxxed) until Tuesday morning when I woke up to 16” of wet snow on the ground and no power. No electricity, no running water, no heat, no telephone, NO INTERNET! This lasted for 4 days. But, the good news is, I’m feeling better and the newsletter has been completed. It’s pretty good if I do say so myself. We go from Charles Crouse’s mausoleum, to the Holmes family saga, to the Crypt Keepers, to some research tips, the list goes on. It’s, as they say, hot off the press and into your hands. Enjoy.





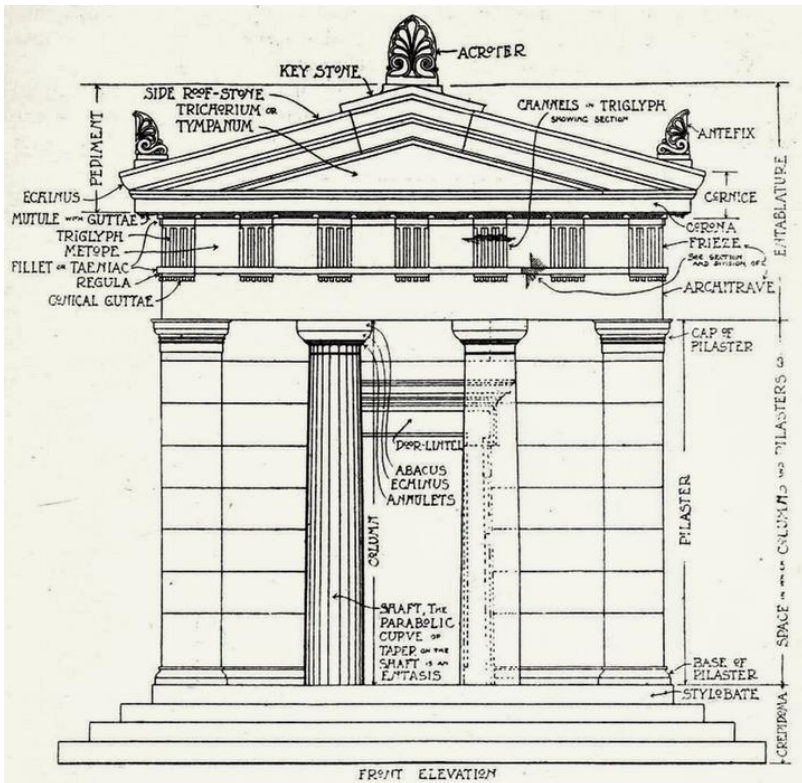
COL. GEORGE N. CROUSE.

Well Worth a Visit...

At left is the imposing mausoleum of George Nellis Crouse, Sr., in Section 55, Lot 1 of Oakwood Cemetery. When George died in 1897, his widow, Florence, left to travel in Europe. Before leaving, however, she contracted a young architect named Henry W. Wilkinson to design this mausoleum and Smith Granite Company of Rhode Island to build it. She oversaw the laying of the foundation, but unfortunately, she never saw the finished product. Florence died on 28 May 1900 in Paris, France.

An article in the *Syracuse Post Standard* of 17 June 1900 described the structure in great detail. Made entirely of Westerly granite, they called it a fine example of a Roman Ionic temple. It measures 12 feet by 19 feet, is 25 feet high and the interior is lined with Tennessee marble. There is a window in the back and a large bronze door at the entrance. The newspaper didn't know for certain what the cost of the mausoleum was but they speculated that it was "in the neighborhood of \$15,000." That would be equal to over half a million dollars today. It is rare that we are fortunate enough to have such a detailed description of the monuments in Oakwood Cemetery. The Crouse family was one of the wealthiest in central New York. George's second cousin, Jacob Crouse, claimed to be worth \$162,500 (\$3.6 million today) according to the 1870 federal census.

Before you go to see this mausoleum for yourself, take a look at the diagram at left. It's taken from the 1919 *Monument Dealer's Manual*, O.H. Sample, editor, and Allied Arts Publishing Co., Chicago. So many of the elements in the diagram appear on the Crouse mausoleum. From its stylobate to its acroter, this mausoleum is definitely worth a visit.



Tales from the Crypt (Keepers) ... Nicholas Timoshenko

Once again, the ESF Friends of Oakwood (commonly referred to as Crypt Keepers) have been working hard on several different projects in the Cemetery these past few months. Despite the seemingly unending snow and constant disruptive weather, the crew has already assembled almost 150 service hours this semester serving Oakwood. They have participated in several target areas, working with Cemetery staff to directly focus on regions most in need. Early on in the semester, the Crypt Keepers focused their efforts on collecting the wreaths made from natural materials, dispersed throughout the Cemetery's 160 acres. Trudging through over a foot of snow in some places, the dedicated volunteers managed to collect a majority of those wreaths in just the first volunteering session of the Spring semester. Next, our attention was turned to removing the great amounts of brush and tree limbs that came down from the windstorms earlier this year. One Saturday, a handful of volunteers focusing on the historic section of the Cemetery managed to collect several very large piles of brush that was full of broken tree limbs that had been scattered throughout that area. Most recently, the Crypt Keepers found a new project spot to work on—a section on the border of Oakwood and Morningside that is overgrown, covered in dead vines and tree limbs, peppered with brush, and in desperate need of revival. With Spring not in full swing just yet, the Crypt Keepers swept into action. Over the course of the past few weeks, we have made our way along this roadway, working hard to clear the area of the dead foliage and other Winter debris to make way for the new life Spring will bring. Our volunteers have been doing an awesome job, and on behalf of the officers of the club, I cannot thank them enough. These students take time out of their busy schedules that are filled with schoolwork, classes, and/or jobs, in order to devote some hours each Saturday, to make a difference, one step at a time. We look forward to a few more volunteering sessions that will wrap up this Spring semester and are excited to see what lies ahead for the Friends of Oakwood.



Crypt Keepers at Work

Top left: cleanup in front of Redfield in Sec. 3;

Top right: cleanup of brush and wreaths;

Right: with wreaths collected in front of the Chapel;

Below: cleanup of a section between Oakwood and Morningside



From the “Who Knew?” File ... Diane Medvitz

Oakwood exists because people die. Old age. Accidents. Disease. In the days before penicillin and other antibiotics children died at an alarming rate. In Oakwood over 500 deaths were caused by diphtheria, whooping cough and scarlet fever, and nearly 300 cases were attributed to cholera infantum. But one of the oddest causes of death, and indeed the smallest number of cases, is teething. Nineteen children, buried in Oakwood, have died of teething. How can this be explained?

Two doctors did a study of the teething deaths reported in Utah in a study in the Western Journal of Medicine, January 1992. These cases were the largest in number between 1866 and 1880, predominately during September, October and November. Symptoms reported in these children include diarrhea, distended belly, fever, lack of sleep. Even rickets was attributed to teething because they occurred simultaneously. Just as quickly as the numbers rose, they declined when a new cause-of-death entry was used: “cholera infantum.” Defined as “Summer complaint—An obsolete term for severe, prostrating gastroenteritis in infants occurring in hot weather and caused by unknown pathogens,” this didn’t seem much different than the symptoms for teething. Another possibility floated was Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) although the age of the children didn’t quite fit the comparison. Other reports to the Secretary of State in Michigan showed the largest number of cases between 1868 and 1895, the same time period as the Utah study and indeed the cases in Oakwood.

The conclusion reached by the doctors was that any attempt to equate teething to any other diagnosis was not successful. It was a medical mystery. It almost appears to be the diagnosis *du jour*.

So how does this manifest in Oakwood? The children who died of teething here were all under the age of two, and died predominately between July and September, the time that “summer complaint” occurred most often. Not much is known about these children, probably because of their young age and sadly only a few of them have markers.

One family affected by teething deaths were the Porters in Section 22, lot 193. Marcia A. Parkhurst was from Vermont where her father was one of eight Parkhursts who were original grantees of the town of Royalton. He was Captain of his own militia company and represented Royalton in the General Assembly in 1778. Marcia moved to Syracuse where she married William Adams Porter and had at least four daughters. Like so many parents in the 19th century they lost those four children to disease. One daughter, 26-year-old Annette, died of consumption. Fourteen-year-old Libbie died of an inflammation of the brain. Two other daughters, 8-month-old Marcia and 8-month-old Julia, both died of teething and are two of the eighteen buried in Oakwood. Marcia outlived these four daughters and her husband, all of whom were buried in First Ward Cemetery and then removed to Oakwood in 1868. She was not unlike other 19th century parents who tragically had to bury their children.

The Joys of Research ... Paul Harvey

Aye, ‘tis true ...there is much to be learned in every part of our community if we open our eyes and ears, listen to others and spend time at our libraries, Historical Association and on the Internet.

Recently this came home to me when researching for a proposed “Black History Trail” in Oakwood. I came across the Highgate family. Most history buffs know about Edmonia who was the first Black graduate of the city’s public schools and who went South to teach young Black children during the reconstruction period after the Civil War. Sadly, after a romance with a white educator she seems to have died of an abortion. But that’s not the end of the story. After doing research at OHA, I discovered that buried next to her are her father, Charles and her brother, also named Charles. What a story her brother had to tell. It seems he was the only Black member of the 185th NYS regiment. Then, thanks to a researcher at our public library, we tracked down more, much more, information.

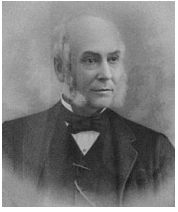
Charles was also one of the most valiant members of the regiment. At the siege of Peterburg he was severely wounded five times and each time carried off the battlefield and told the wound might cost him his life. After his first wound and disregarding the doctor’s advice he charged back into the fray and was wounded four more times. Finally, at the end, he was told he had to have all his limbs amputated or he’d surely be dead. Charles would have none of it and said he’d rather be dead than an amputee and that he would be all right. Amazingly, at first, he seemed to recover but then infection set in and eventually he lost the battle. The wonder, of course, is how this superman became a member of a white regiment. Here’s the rest of the story. His father died when he was 15, so Charles got a job at Thurber’s Bakery on James Street. He was eventually promoted to foreman. His crew, mostly Germans, enlisted in September of 1864, and they urged Charles to enlist also, which he did. He would die of his wounds just one week before Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Court House.

Interestingly, there was another sister, Caroline, who traveled South with Edmonia, sharing her mission. Both seemed to have become involved in a system called *placage* which allegedly was the source of Quadroon Balls in Louisiana where wealthy white men romanced and sometimes wed young Black women. Caroline met a better fate as she met, married, and had at least six children with a white State Senator from Mississippi. One of the six, Angela Morgan, became a noted singer, newspaper journalist and eventually a somewhat famous poet. Caroline herself lived into the 1920s and is buried in London, England.

There is more, much more but if you’re interested, work on the Black History Trail continues and the discoveries keep coming. We are also working on new trails, including an Abolition Trail, a Women’s History Trail, and many more.

The fun is just beginning!

“But that I was a Journeyman to Grief”



Those words, spoken by Bolingbroke in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, might well have been spoken by Samuel Newell Holmes. In the mid to latter half of the 19th century, he was just one of many lawyers practicing in Syracuse. He had a family, a nice residence, and was living an average middleclass life. Turns out his life wasn’t as uneventful as we might expect.

He was known as “Judge” Holmes, although he never held a judicial position. Born in Oswego County in 1823, the youngest of ten children, he married Mary E. Beach in 1844, and began the study of law in Ballston Spa. He was admitted to the bar in 1850 and moved his wife and three daughters to Syracuse. He was admitted to practice law before the United States Supreme Court on March 4, 1861. He had just gotten his paperwork, walked into the Senate chamber, and wound up taking a seat behind President-elect Abraham Lincoln on the inaugural platform. Lincoln took the oath of office, gave his address, and turned to shake hands with those around him. Samuel Holmes claims to be the fourth person to shake hands with the newly sworn-in President.

Holmes was a staunch Republican, although he never sought elective office. His contribution to politics was a 60-page booklet published in 1867 called *Holmes’ Patriotic Songs for Coming Campaigns*. Among the ditties he penned were *Treason’s Fate*, *Democrats’ Last Ditch*, and *Election and Death to “Copperheads.”*

Then there are the relatives. According to the Holmes genealogy, Samuel was a distant cousin of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. A lesser-known cousin was a fellow named Samuel C. “Stub” Newell, one of the mischief makers behind the Cardiff Giant hoax in 1869. Some local men actually fooled the scientific community into thinking a petrified “giant” had been discovered on Stub’s farm.

The 1870 census shows Mr. and Mrs. Holmes and their five daughters living at 510 Catherine Street. Judge Holmes’ estate is valued at \$16,000 (over \$350,000 in today’s money). They were living comfortably and life was good. It would not remain that way.

On 23 June 1874, the ladies of the Central Baptist Church at the corner of Montgomery and Jefferson Streets held an ice cream and strawberry sociable. There was to be a “Little Old Folks” concert with the children dressed up as old folks. The children were downstairs, preparing for their show, and about 500 people were in the theater area on the second floor. At about 9:30 pm, the floor collapsed. Three of the Holmes sisters were in attendance. Two of them, 25-year-old Theodosia and 12-year-old Olive, were injured in the collapse. The eldest daughter, Grace, a 26-year-old teacher at the Townsend School, died from her injuries.

Almost five years to the day, tragedy again visited the Holmes family. On 20 June 1879, youngest daughter, Olive, and her fiancé, Alfred Sanford, went boating on Onondaga Lake with sister Amy Holmes and her friend Arthur Howes. Olive and Alfred, in their own boat, made the fateful decision to stand up and change places. The boat tipped over, and the couple went into the water. Arthur attempted to swim to them but they went down before he got to them. They were gone. Olive’s body was not recovered until July 3.

Fate wasn’t done with Samuel Holmes yet. Just two years after losing Olive, his wife Mary, unexpectedly suffered a stroke on 12 March 1881, and died. The *Syracuse Daily Standard* said of her, “Mrs. Holmes was an estimable lady, whose many rare traits of character endeared her outside of as well [as] within her own household.” She was only 57 years old. Daughter Theodosia and her husband, Charles Sandford, lost their daughter, also named Theodosia, in 1890 at the age of eight.

Judge Holmes, retired from law, did some public speaking on various topics and took part in all the major political campaigns trotting out his scintillating compositions. He died on 30 May 1900, having endured more bereavement than anyone should ever have to.

Mary and Samuel Newell Holmes now rest in Oakwood Cemetery, Section 22, Lot 192. Their toils and troubles are over.

Reading Iconography

Have you ever “read” a headstone? Not the words, the symbols. This monument in Section 14 has several interesting features that we can read. The figure on top is a **column which is broken off**. Like the tree trunk monuments, it symbolizes the end of a life. The column is quite short meaning the owner may have died young. On two sides of the monument are flower arrangements. One is a **bouquet of lilies** which represents purity or the Resurrection. The other side shows a **bouquet of roses**. Roses represent beauty, or death in the prime of life. At the top of the bouquet is a bud, and hanging next to it is a broken branch. The bud is a flower that

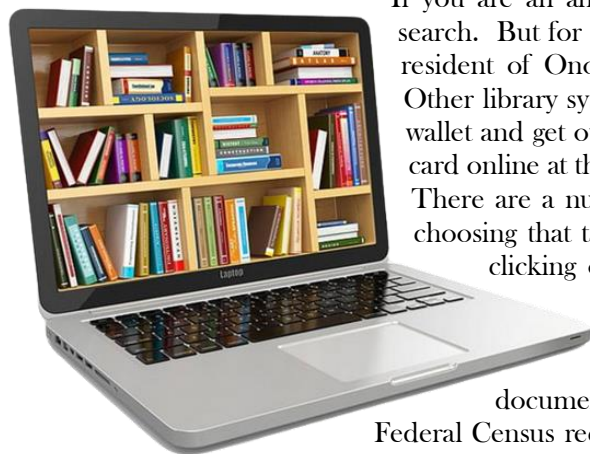


hasn’t reached maturity, and the branch again symbolizes a life cut short. It seems we have read this stone fairly accurately. It belongs to Sarah Forbes Clary, wife of Orlando Ware Clary. In 1861 she died at the young age of 24 in Oswego where her husband was a partner in a coal business. Orlando was the son of early Syracuse physician Lyman Clary.

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If you are an amateur genealogist, you are familiar with online resources to aid in your search. But for the rest of us a little primer on search tools might be helpful. If you are a resident of Onondaga County you have online resources available to you FOR FREE. Other library systems in New York state also provide these resources. First, take out your wallet and get out your library card. If you don't have one, you can apply for a temporary card online at the "My Account" tab at WWW.ONLIB.ORG. Click on the research tab. There are a number of resources there but the "Online Database" is your focus. After choosing that tab click on "Genealogy" and you will have nine FREE databases. After clicking on one of those tabs you must enter your library card number and your PIN to access the database you chose. Then you are on your way.

Ancestry Library has multiple records including probate and church records, directories and passenger lists. Fold3 contains military records, documents and stories. HeritageQuest Online contains a complete set of U.S. Federal Census records and local histories. Newspaper Archive.com are full text newspaper articles from nine states including 23 newspapers from Syracuse as early as 1809.

Remember when searching that you should try alternate spellings of names (Catherine and Katherine) and it is helpful to put in a date range rather than an exact date unless you are certain. Also remember that the more information you provide in the search boxes the less results you will get because it will try to match all that information. All your results can be saved to your computer for use later. These are *your* tax dollars at work.



Epitaph – A short piece of writing or a poem about a dead person, especially one written on his or her grave stone.

How many epitaphs are to be found in Oakwood Cemetery? Has anyone ever collected them? Seems like a workable project for folks who like to wander the landscape. I suggest that the next time you're in the cemetery, whenever you see an epitaph, write it down. Then submit it to us at HocpaOakwood@gmail.com. If we can collect enough, perhaps we can publish them or at least put them on our website. The one famous epitaph I know of is that of Lester Tucker in Section 14. At the bottom of his monument (shown at left) are the words, "Not lost, but gone before."

Epitaphs date from the time of the ancient Egyptians. The word epitaph is from the ancient Greek, *epitaphios*, meaning a funeral oration. Let's start looking. Maybe we'll find some as good as "That's All Folks" (Mel Blanc) or "The Beat Goes on" (Sonny Bono).



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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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Oakwood All-Star ... Frank A. Sherff

If anyone should be remembered for a life of public service, it would be Frank Sherff. His was a career that few could rival. He was born in Saxony, Germany, in 1847. In 1852 the Sherff family, parents and three children, emigrated to America. Frank served in the Civil War enlisting in Company B of the 22d N.Y. Cavalry. His unit served under General Philip Sheridan, the third Division being commanded by George Armstrong Custer. Frank, through 1864 and early 1865, was involved in the Battles of the Wilderness, Cold Harbor, and Cedar Creek. When he mustered out of the service he returned to Syracuse. He married an Irish immigrant named Margaret Hurley, and in 1873 joined the Syracuse Fire Department, first as a teamster and then as a tillerman. The tillerman steered the back of a ladder truck. On 16 March 1879, a daughter, Margaret, was born. On 21 July of that year, as a member of the Hook & Ladder #1, Frank, while moving a ladder, had the spike on one end jammed through his foot. Another accident, one which would end his fire career, occurred on 11 February, 1885. Frank was driving the hook and ladder sleigh down Montgomery Street as a steamer sleigh was racing down Mulberry. Turning onto Adams, Frank saw an accident about to happen with the steamer at Mulberry and Adams. Pulling the horses to the right momentarily avoided a collision. The back end of the ladder sleigh, however, fishtailed and struck the steamer. Frank and the driver of the steamer, Christopher Fralich, were thrown off onto the pavement. Fralich later died of his injuries. According to the *Syracuse Standard*, Frank "was thrown beneath the right hind wheel which squeezed, rolled, and forced him along over the snow for a distance of fifteen or twenty feet." The horses, which were unhurt, responded to Frank's yells and stopped. Although not seriously injured, Frank was done as a fireman. Just two months after the accident, Frank, at age thirty-eight, was appointed to the Syracuse Police Department. He served in that department for 27 years, mostly as a turnkey (officer in charge of jail keys), before finally retiring in 1912. Actually, he was forced to retire because he had reached the mandatory retirement age of 65. Police Chief Martin Cadin said, "He has an enviable record during the long term of his service as a policeman and was one of the most dependable men we had." In 1913, he was dealt two tragedies. In March his wife Margaret died and in October his 34-year-old daughter Margaret died. Both are buried in Oakwood. In December, Frank married his second wife, Mary Howard, a long-time friend of the family. They lived quietly until 14 January 1918 when Frank died. Members of the Police Department were his pallbearers as he was laid to rest in Section 52, Lot 19 of Oakwood Cemetery. His widow, Mary, died in 1931 and is buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.



Address correction requested.



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