

## “Grave Matters”

Historic Oakwood Cemetery  
Preservation Association  
Syracuse, New York

Spring, 2024 Vol. 32, No. 1

### Presidents Plot — Rick Naylor

Happy Spring! With recent warm weather the blossoms and blooms are coming quickly. Very soon Oakwood Cemetery will be putting on one of its most colorful shows of the year. It's a great time for a quiet stroll along the lanes enjoying the Redbuds, Yellowwood and Dogwood blooms, to name just a few.

We have a full slate of tours planned for May, June, July, August, September and October. They are always on the third Sunday of the month. The tours start promptly at 2 pm and go to 4. You never need a reservation to attend. Look for our Tour Today sign at the main entrance on Comstock Ave and follow the arrows to the parking and meeting location. The tours go rain or shine! Dress accordingly for the weather. We will cancel with a downpour or lightning! Check our Instagram and Facebook pages for updates or cancellations.

We are always looking for more volunteers to help. Are you interested in local history research or gardening? Would you like to help organize and work on events? Do you love public speaking or giving a tour? How about working behind the scenes with emails and our member database...? We would love to talk to you about how you can be more involved. Feel free to call me or send us an email.

I look forward to seeing you in Oakwood Cemetery and on our tours!



### Editor's Notes — Sue Greenhagen

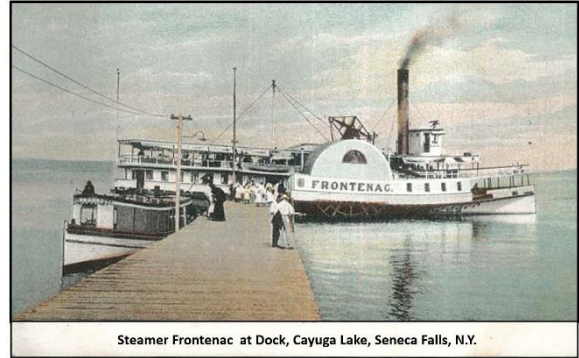


HOCPA's success as a preservation tool depends on people caring about Oakwood Cemetery, and people won't care if they don't know. One of our main tasks has been trying to reach as many people as possible, and to educate them as to what an historical treasure Oakwood is. How have we done this? Let me count the ways. We have used social media to share some of the great stories the “residents” have to tell. Just check Instagram and/or Facebook on any Friday for another chapter of Oakwood history. Go to our webpage at [hocpa.org](http://hocpa.org) for all kinds of information plus ways to contact us. If you have a question, comment, criticism or testimonial, email us at [HocpaOakwood@gmail.com](mailto:HocpaOakwood@gmail.com). Our walking tours, over the years, have introduced hundreds of people to an Oakwood they had perhaps never seen before. We also do “Tours by Appointment.” If you have a group (of any size) that would like a personalized tour, contact us. Can't come to the cemetery? We can come to you. HOCPA has a PowerPoint program called “Live Oaks & Dead Folks” which can travel to your venue, at your convenience. We have presented to many libraries, clubs, and organizations in the Syracuse area. The bottom line is we are making Oakwood Cemetery and its wonderful history available in many formats. We invite you to take advantage of everything Oakwood has to offer.

## The Burning of the *Frontenac* on Cayuga Lake<sup>1</sup> and Its Connection to Oakwood Cemetery

The steamship *Frontenac*, Queen of the many steamships in the Cayuga Lake fleet, was built in 1869 at a cost of \$50,000. That's equivalent to \$1.2 million today. She was a sidewheeler, three decks high, with staterooms and a dining room and she could accommodate 350 passengers. At 133 feet long and 22 feet wide, she was by far the largest vessel on the lake. Her top speed rivaled the local trains at 17 miles per hour.

At 1 o'clock on Saturday, July 27, 1907, she had 60 passengers and 12 crew members on board. The passengers, mostly women and children, were headed for the Village of Cayuga at the northern end of Cayuga Lake. Normally the *Frontenac* and her sister ships sailed a very specific round trip schedule between Renwick Pier in Ithaca on the south end of the lake and the village of Cayuga at the north end, with 15 stops in between. This weekend the *Frontenac* was on a special excursion. Instead of completing a round trip Friday night, she stayed at Cayuga, and set out Saturday morning. She met her sister ship, the *Mohawk*, at 11 o'clock that morning at Sheldrake, the half-way point on the lake. They exchanged passengers and the *Frontenac* turned and headed north. Their next stop was to be Aurora on the east shore of the lake. About noon, winds began to whip across the lake and the waves grew higher. The stop in Aurora was deemed too dangerous so the *Frontenac* continued northward. Heading into the widest part of the lake, the wind picked up and the waves grew higher. The Captain, Melvin P. Brown, ordered the pilot to hug the east shore. At about quarter after one, a 12-year-old boy noticed a small fire on the third deck. He called the Captain, but by the time the crew responded the fire was out of control, the flames fanned by the strong winds. The boat was steered toward shore and grounded at Dill's Cove two and a half miles south of Union Springs.



Steamer Frontenac at Dock, Cayuga Lake, Seneca Falls, N.Y.



An artist's rendition of the burning of the *Frontenac*, 27 July 1907.

There was no saving the *Frontenac*, so the crew set about saving the passengers. Life preservers were handed out to each passenger, and they were encouraged to jump into the water. If they hesitated, they were pushed overboard. The most dangerous place to enter the water was the side of the boat facing the open lake. Women would try to swim, being buoyed by their long skirts. The strong waves, however, some over 6 feet high, would push them back toward the burning boat. Those who jumped from the shore side found themselves in water just 4 feet deep, with numerous local people rushing to assist them. All in all, 8 people perished in this disaster, 6 women and 2 children. The quick action of the crew was credited with saving 52 of the *Frontenac's* passengers. The exact cause of the disaster was never determined<sup>2</sup>. The boat had passed the state inspection just one month earlier. It had new boilers installed earlier that year. The fire started small so it didn't appear to be an explosion. Could someone carelessly tossing a match have ignited it all? We'll never know for sure.

Among the fatalities was a young woman from Syracuse. Her name was Marietta Sullivan, but everyone called her "Etta." She was the stepdaughter of Edward Bostwick, one of the 12 original Syracuse mail carriers and a Civil War veteran. Born in 1875 in Syracuse, Etta had been employed as a legal stenographer by the Syracuse law firm of Stevens, Gannon & Michell for the past 4 years. This particular July she was just ending a three-week holiday and was sailing north on the *Frontenac* to meet her fiancé, Willis H. Michell, a junior partner in the law firm, in Cayuga. Witnesses said Etta was very reluctant to enter the water and had to be pushed. Once in the water she sank almost immediately. It wasn't until some time later that a rescuer in a powerboat recovered her body. Word of the disaster spread and Willis Michell hurried to the site, not knowing if Etta was dead or alive. When he arrived the bodies of the victims were lying on the beach, each covered with a shroud. Etta's left hand was uncovered and Willis saw the engagement ring



MISS MARIETTA SULLIVAN OF SYRACUSE.  
*Syracuse Journal*,  
29 July 1907



Willis H. Michell  
*Syracuse Journal*  
8 April 1932





on her finger, the one he had so recently given her. He was told that her face had been badly disfigured so he said to leave the shroud in place. He couldn't bear to see her like that. Etta's remains were brought back to Syracuse, and she was buried with the Bostwick family in Lot 22 of Section 51.

Willis H. Michell was not a native Syracusan. He was born on Long Island and grew up in New Jersey, the son of a Methodist minister. He graduated from Syracuse University in 1899 and was soon admitted to the bar. He joined a local law firm and practiced law in Syracuse for the next 54 years. He was a widely respected lawyer, holding many important positions in the legal community. In April of 1911, he married Frances Dossier. They had three children and were married for 43 years until Frances passed away in 1954. In 1925 Willis tried his hand at politics, running for Onondaga County District Attorney. As highly respected as he was he lost, garnering only 34% of the vote. Willis H. Michell died in 1954, and is buried with Frances in the Dossier lot of Section B.

Willis and Etta weren't the only ones involved with this disaster that had an Oakwood connection. There was 62-year-old Mary Chase Bruyn who lived on West Genesee St. in Syracuse. She was the last passenger to get off the burning boat, although she had to be pushed. She was burned by flying embers but survived. She was taken to a friend's home in Ithaca to recuperate and didn't return to her home in Syracuse until August 12. Mary died in 1922 while attending services at the First Presbyterian Church. She's buried in Section 6, Lot 36. Mary does not have a marker.

There were passengers on board who had been attending a three-week summer school at Glenwood. The Prang Summer School of Art was for teachers who wanted to study art education. The sponsor was the Prang Educational Company, established by Louis Prang and Mary Dana Hicks. Louis, a well-known European lithographer, and Mary, a well-known Syracuse art educator, were married in 1906. Mary is buried in Oakwood in Section 3. One of the attendees of the Prang session, Charlotte Brigham, was a music teacher in the Solvay Junior Senior High School. Her injuries were serious but she fully recovered and went on to teach both music and art until her retirement in 1931. Charlotte died in 1941 and is buried in Section 14, Lot 1. She does not have a marker.

The burned-out hulk of the *Frontenac* sat 200 feet from the shore of Cayuga Lake for the next thirty-six years. In 1943, as part of the scrap metal drive of World War II, the steel skeleton was salvaged for the war effort. The *Frontenac* disaster was bracketed by two other maritime tragedies. On June 15, 1904, the excursion boat, *General Slocum*, caught fire on the East River in New York, and 1021 people, again mostly women and children, died. Six years after the *Frontenac*, on April 15, 1912, the *Titanic* sank in the North Atlantic, costing over 1500 lives. Although the *Frontenac* disaster was not of the magnitude of the *Slocum* or *Titanic*, it will forever hold its place as the worst maritime disaster to occur on New York's Finger Lakes. It heralded the beginning of the end of steamship travel on the lakes. As you walk around Oakwood Cemetery, perhaps you might pause for a moment in Sections 51, B, 6, and 14 to remember Etta, Willis, Mary, and Charlotte.



The remains of the *Frontenac* after the fire.

<sup>1</sup> Stinson, Donald J. *The Burning of the Frontenac*. Interlaken, N.Y., Heart of the Lakes Publishing., 1985.

<sup>2</sup> *The Syracuse Journal*, August 2, 1907.



Burritt Chaffee  
1850 - 1899

### Cemetery Iconography

Oak leaves on a gravestone symbolize strength, longevity, and/or authority. Shown at left is the gravestone of Burritt Chaffee. On it is a frond of oak leaves with acorns. Chaffee was Oakwood's second superintendent, taking over from George Gardner in 1887 and serving for 12 years. It's rather ironic that Chaffee, despite the oak leaves, died of typhoid fever at the age of 49.

**The Rev. Samuel May and his wife Lucretia Coffin May's headstones repaired.**

During a walking tour in the Oakwood Cemetery in the fall of 2022, it was brought to my attention, as a member of the congregation of May Memorial Unitarian Universalist Society, which was named for the Rev. Samuel Joseph May, that the headstone of Lucretia Coffin, wife of the Rev. May, had been damaged and the top of the stone was disconnected and leaning on its base. At the time, I also noticed that Rev. May's stone was leaning slightly backward. We, at May Memorial, feel at great respect for our namesake, the great abolitionist and women's rights activist, Samuel May. When I shared the state of the gravestones with the congregation, a special fundraising effort was undertaken to have the stones repaired and the Lutz Monument Company was retained to make the repairs. Although the funds were secured by December 2022, the repair work had to wait until spring, 2023. Today, anyone walking by Section 17, Lot 1 in the cemetery will see the repaired stones of Rev. May and his wife Lucretia Coffin standing on the knoll.



The before and after pictures of the headstones of Rev. Samuel May (on the left) and his wife, Lucretia Coffin May (to the right). They have been repaired and are now upright.

Submitted by Cynthia Carrington Carter.



**Things to watch for in Oakwood.** That large gray football-like structure tucked into the crevice of this monument is the nest created by the social wasp, *Dolichovespula maculata*, otherwise known as the Bald-Faced Hornet. These wasps create their nests by chewing and regurgitation of wood fibers. The queen of this species mates in the fall, overwinters in the ground, then emerges in the spring. She builds enough of the nest to lay her first clutch of eggs which hatch into other female workers who then carry on the building process. The workers will often be seen visiting flowers from which they obtain nectar for energy, acting as pollinators. They are also predators of caterpillars which they will chew up and regurgitate to feed developing larvae. As they are large, they can be important controls for the Gypsy Moth (*Lymantria dispar*) and the Eastern Tent Caterpillar (*Malacosoma americanum*). The wasps are generally quite docile when going about their business but can get very aggressive if they sense danger to their nest. In late fall, new queens will fly out of the nest, breed, then hide until the following year. The remaining members of the hive will die, and the nest will not be reused. The best thing to do is leave them alone, and they will leave you alone!



Picture shows a Bald-Faced Hornet's nest attached to the anchor of Captain Samuel Austin's monument in Section 36. Also pictured is the wasp itself.

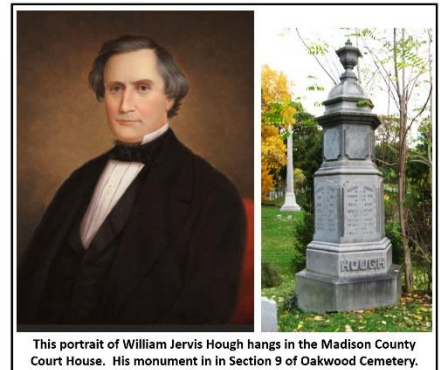
Submitted by Holly Koenig



**“Something to Think About - If you could spend 10 minutes talking to any ‘resident’ of Oakwood Cemetery, who would it be?”**

A “resident” of Oakwood Cemetery is my 3rd great-granduncle, William Jervis Hough, resting in Section 9, plot 19. I have so many questions I would ask him. His sister, Olive Hough-Warner was my 3rd great-grandmother and is buried in Christ Church Cemetery in Manlius, New York along with my 3rd great-grandfather, Sylvanus Warner. My first question would be about William's childhood and what it was like growing up in New York. How did he decide to become a lawyer? What made him want to run for Congress in 1844, in which he served one term, 1845 to 1847? I would also like to ask him about being of English descent as it is believed his Hough family were a collateral branch of the Houghs of Leighton, in the County of Chester, England. And, I have many questions pertaining to his father, Benjamin Hough and his mother, Mercy Jervis-Hough. Spending 10 minutes talking to a distant relative would be a great challenge—so many questions and so little time.

Submitted by Joan L. Warner.



This portrait of William Jervis Hough hangs in the Madison County Court House. His monument is in Section 9 of Oakwood Cemetery.



**ESF Friends of Oakwood - Submitted by Alissa Altweis, President**

Hi All! This semester has been off to a slow start due to the winter weather, but we have still gotten lots of work done. Since last semester, our main focus has been removing European Buckthorn on the Northern border of the cemetery. We have made good progress with clearing it out, and we even had a collaboration with the ESF Timbersports team to help us get rid of some of our bigger stumps. We have also started a collaboration with the Onondaga Earth Corps, even hosting their outreach coordinator at one of our meetings.

Our other project for this semester has been removing garlic mustard, we have only been able to do one meeting so far but once the weather looks up we can continue. We have many exciting plans for the rest of the semester, including our Earth Week celebrations on April 27th.



- 1. Pile picture of European buckthorn and garlic mustard removal.
- 2. Nick (on left) and Connor tear down European buckthorn.
- 3. Alissa (on left) and Josie work on European buckthorn removal.
- 4. (Left to right) Brielle, Annie and Parker pull garlic mustard.
- 5. Pile picture of European buckthorn removal during a snowstorm.

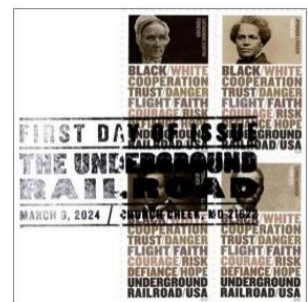


Thank you all for your continued support and we hope to finish the semester strong.



**USPS Honors Oakwood Resident - submitted by Diane Medvitz**

The efforts of 10 operatives who escaped slavery or assisted others to do the same have been enshrined on a block of 10 stamps issued by the US Postal Service. Included in this group is Oakwood’s own Jermain Loguen (1809-1872), known as “King of the Underground Railroad.” Born in Tennessee, he escaped to Canada before settling in Syracuse. With Rev. Samuel May, he formed a Vigilance Committee to assist anyone arrested under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and was indicted for his part in the Jerry Rescue of 1851. Reported to be one of the most openly operated stations in the state, if not the country, it was estimated that about 1500 freedom seekers passed through his home at East Genesee and Pine Streets. He is buried in Section 6, Lot 55 with his wife Caroline and several children.



On March 9 the Postal Service conducted a first day ceremony at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center in Church Creek, Maryland. Designed by Antonio Alcalá, the 10 stamps honor Harriet Tubman, Catharine Coffin, Frederick Douglass, Thomas Garrett, Laura Haviland, Lewis Hayden, Harriet Jacobs, William Lambert, and William Still in addition to Loguen. Below each portrait are eight lines of text: BLACK/WHITE; COOPERATION; TRUST/DANGER; FLIGHT/FAITH; COURAGE/RISK; DEFIANCE/HOPE; UNDERGROUND; RAILROAD/USA. On the verso is a map, courtesy of the National Park Service, showing general routes and a short biography of each person. Initially with only four portraits, it was expanded to ten to represent the variety of people involved, for whom a history is known and a portrait exists.

These Forever Stamps are now available at your local post office.



**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.

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Please make checks payable to **HOCPA**, and mail to:  
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### Oakwood: Then & Now



Let's take a look at Dedication Valley, as it was then ("then" being 1894) and as it is now. This 1894 picture was published in Annie C. Maltbie's *Picturesque Oakwood*<sup>1</sup> along with 42 portraits of Oakwood "residents" and 59 scenes and monuments. The view, looking northward, has four main landmarks - the Buckeye Tree to the left, the Wicks' arch, the Baker monument, and the James Crouse obelisk. Those elements haven't changed over the 130 years since that photo was taken. But that's not all in this picture. Take a closer look and you'll notice a short black post in the front. Since the date is 1894, this was no doubt a hitching post. Visitors would have arrived in carriages, and this is where they would secure their horse. Difficult to discern, but definitely there, are wagon tracks in the dirt. Keep looking and you'll notice cobblestones on the edge of the roadways. These were the stonework gutters that were placed to aid drainage off the hillsides. The contractor hired for the paving work was Welcome Scott, a Civil War veteran, who died in 1902 and is buried in Section 50. These gutters were neglected over the years resulting in the large washed-out ruts in many of the roadways.

So, the moral of the story is don't be satisfied with what is obvious in any picture, but to search the picture high and low, always looking for those little things that will tell you "the rest of the story."

<sup>1</sup> Maltbie, Annie C., ed. *Picturesque Oakwood*. Syracuse: Fred C. Hills, 1894.

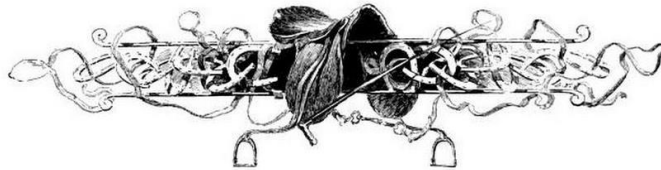
Accessed at <https://archive.org> on 18 April 2024.

### Augustus Root - Oakwood All-Star



Augustus Root is the very definition of a hero. Were he here today, he would probably say he was just another Civil War soldier, doing his duty, answering his nation's call in a time of peril. At the time of his death in 1865 he was a Lt. Colonel of the 15<sup>th</sup> NY Cavalry. His regiment was part of the Army of the Shenandoah, and the 3d Division was commanded by Major General George A. Custer. Root was so beloved and respected by the men who served under him that when the Grand Army of the Republic formed Post No. 151 here in Syracuse in 1881, they named it Root Post.

Augustus Root was born in 1833 in Elbridge, but as a young man moved west to Geneva where he ran a drug store. Just one month after the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter, Root enlisted as Captain of Co. K, 12<sup>th</sup> NYSV. He left a wife and 2 children behind. In September, 1863, he was commissioned a Major in the 15<sup>th</sup> NY Cavalry, and then was almost immediately promoted to Lt. Colonel. In service with the 12<sup>th</sup> NY and the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, he was wounded 4 times. When Grant undertook the Appomattox Campaign in March of 1865, the war's end was in sight. The Union forces pushed and pressured General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. On the evening of April 8, in the village of Appomattox Court House, Root rode out with some of his men to pursue nearby Confederates. The adversaries exchanged gunfire, and there, in the dusty streets of that village, Root was shot and killed. It was the very next day, April 9, that General Lee signed the surrender papers in the front parlor of Wilbur McLean's house. Lt. Colonel Root was buried in the dooryard of a Mr. Dixon, and it was not until December 17, 1865, that local undertaker John Ryan returned the colonel's remains to Syracuse for burial. Root was buried in the Masonic plot in Section 12 where he remained until May of 1890. It was at that time that the Colonel was reinterred in the Soldiers' Plot of Section 56 of Oakwood Cemetery. The Soldiers' Plot was donated to the Root Post by the Oakwood Cemetery Association in 1881. The monument with the Sentinel watching over his brethren, was dedicated on May 31, 1885. On Memorial Day, May 31, 1890, Col. Root's grave, located right in front of the monument, was specially decorated with wreaths and flowers. Augustus Root, like his more than 200 comrades resting beside him, lies in a patriot's grave. He did his duty, wholly and faithfully, that the Union might be preserved.



*Address correction requested.*



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