

EPITAPH

THE FRIENDS OF MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY • VOL. 31 NO. 3 SUMMER 2011

JOHN HARRY STEDMAN: HIS BUSY LIFE AND WEIRD INVENTIONS

By Gregory R. Foster

As the sun began to set on the evening of October 31, 1922, a small group of men gathered around a newly installed gravestone in Section MM of Mount Hope Cemetery. At the head of the grave they placed a solitary candle, its flame flickering defiantly against the chilly autumn wind. Beneath the candle lay interred the late John Harry Stedman, prominent Rochester citizen and gifted inventor.

John Harry Stedman was born in Newport, Rhode Island, on November 15, 1843 to John R. Stedman and Hannah Wilson Brownell. Early in his childhood, John Harry's father died, and Hannah Brownell Stedman remarried to William H. Greene. Stedman attended Choules' School in Newport for his college preparatory education and enrolled at the University of Rochester in September of 1861. While in attendance, Stedman became a member of the Iota chapter of the social fraternity, Delta Psi. In 1865, he graduated from college with a bachelor's degree.

On October 3, 1877, under the ministrations of the Reverend Dr. Good (name faded in news clipping) in Utica, New York, Stedman took the hand of Alice Sherwood Wells in marriage. Born in Buffalo, New York on March 20, 1846, Alice Wells was the daughter of a prominent Buffalo citizen named Richard H. Wells. She graduated from the Buffalo Seminary and in 1875 came to Rochester with her recently widowed mother, Delia A. Wells. Alice Wells quickly became part of the most prominent social and intellectual circles of the



John Harry Stedman (1843-1922) was a prominent man around Rochester in social and business circles during the latter 1800s and early 1900s.



John Harry Stedman is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Section MM, Lot 90.



Stedman married Alice Sherwood Wells (1846-1906) in 1877. She was active in social and intellectual organizations, especially musical life in Rochester.

city. She was especially involved with the musical life of Rochester. She was the first president and co-founder of the Tuesday Musicales and sang in many local church choirs. Alice Wells was a communicant of the Church of the Epiphany, and she headed its missionary society as well. She was a member of the Homeopathic Hospital's Board of Managers and served as its secretary since its foundation in 1887. In addition to holding these distinguished offices, Wells was a regular contributor to the *Rochester Post-Express*, submitting columns of "Society News" under the initials "ICN". She died on October 7, 1906, survived by John Harry Stedman and her two brothers, Richard and Edward Wells.

Records of Stedman's post-college education and early career are conflicting. According to one document, Stedman obtained his master's degree in 1870. It notes, however, that Stedman was not granted his diploma but had to pay for it. According to another document, Stedman obtained his master's degree in 1875, but, it notes, he was never "examined" prior to receiving it.

From 1865 to 1873, Stedman engaged in "commercial pursuits". From 1873 to 1889, he worked as a heating contractor. Then, in 1889, he began his career as a transfer expert. (Stedman uses this term to describe his occupation during the later years of his life. The meaning is unclear. It may refer to a heat transfer expert, which would fit his work as a heating contractor, or he could have been a train/bus/streetcar transfer agent, which would explain his brief activity with the Ohmer Fare Register Company and, later, his invention of the streetcar transfer ticket.) According to the same document that lists these dates, Stedman worked as

the superintendent for a marble quarry from 1865 to 1874. Whether Stedman continued to work at the quarry during his first year as a heating contractor is unclear. Additionally, this document claims that Stedman began his work as a transfer expert in 1874. Again, whether he worked simultaneously as a transfer expert and a heating contractor is unclear. These documents, too, were filled out in Stedman's hand. Other records show that during 1888-1889, Sted-

man was president of E. H. Cook Company, 71 State Street, and from 1889 to 1890, he held the position of vice-president of Rochester Burner Company, 409 East Main Street. A passage from one of his obituaries states that "in his active days, Mr. Stedman . . . was president of the Forty-mile Power and Dredging Company, vice-president of the Great Northern Mines Syndicate, secretary and director of the Ohmer Fare Register Company, vice-president of Pacific Mines Corporation, director of Cave Creek Consolidated Copper Company, and vice-president of the Contact Bay Mines, Ltd."

On August 23, 1892, Stedman patented his "Stedman Time-Limit". The Time-Limit was an early version of the modern streetcar transfer ticket. This slip of paper would enable streetcar passengers to transfer from one car to another in a single, continuous trip, thus eliminating the hassle of having to purchase a new ticket at each stop. Stedman's ticket consisted of a calendar and a grid-like clock that were punched by the conductor to indicate the appropriate time and date of purchase. Below the calendar was a list of streetcar stops and transfer points, and above it was one or two rows of small faces. The conductor would punch the face that most closely resembled the passenger to indicate to the conductor of the next streetcar whether or not the passenger was the original purchaser of the ticket.



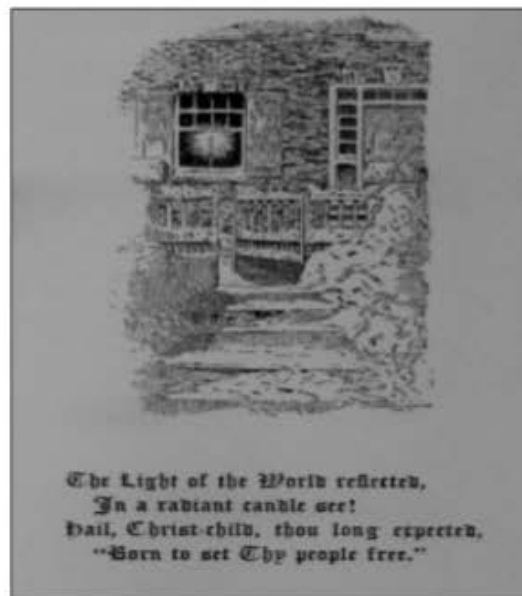
This early version of Stedman's streetcar transfer ticket depicts seven types of passengers. Later versions featured figures of different ages and ethnicities.



Stedman invented the fuzzy pipe cleaner, which is still manufactured today.



The Fuzzy Pipe Cleaner Muscle Man, constructed of Stedman fuzzy pipe cleaners.



A widely distributed leaflet promoted the custom of "a lighted candle set in the window on Christmas Eve will guide the Babe of Bethlehem to your home, that he may bring you happiness."

Stedman initially included only a few of these faces, but later editions featured figures of different ages and ethnicities with various headwear and hairstyles. However, this face-punching component of the Time-Limit eventually proved to be unnecessary and even troublesome because passengers would sometimes become belligerent upon finding out the conductor had

punched a face 10 to 20 years older than their own. So, the faces were scrapped altogether in favor of a simpler model that included just the date, time, and route number.

In the early 1900s, Stedman collaborated with his business partner, Charles Angel, to invent the fuzzy pipe cleaner. Little can be found about this particular commercial venture. The rights to the pipe cleaner were eventually acquired by B. J. Long Company, which is the premier manufacturer of pipe cleaners today. The sale of the pipe cleaner rights made Stedman a wealthy man.

In addition to his economic pursuits, Stedman was active in many of Rochester's local societies and organizations. He was a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the Associated Alumni of the University of Rochester, the Rochester Country Club, the Genesee Valley Club, the Society of the Genesee, the Rochester Historical Society, the Rochester Art Club, and the Rochester Automobile Club. Stedman was also a member of the Rochester chapter of the Empire State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, his Revolutionary War ancestor being William Brownell from his mother's side. Stedman also held positions as president of the Episcopal Church Home and vice-president of the Homeopathic Hospital.

In his later years, Stedman could be found surrounded by some of the most prominent Rochester figures of his time. The "Minutes of a Birthday Dinner", recorded on November 15, 1918 to

celebrate his 75th birthday show how well connected he was. Among his guests that evening were Hiram Watson Sibley, after whom the University of Rochester's library is named; Francis B. Mitchell, publisher of the *Rochester Post Express*; Josiah Anstice, a prominent Rochester banker and president of Josiah Anstice & Company; Judge William W. Webb of the New York State Court of Claims; J. Warren Cutler, accomplished businessman and president of the Rochester chapter of the New York State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution; Edward Griffith Miner, whose moniker the University of Rochester's medical library now bears; and John N. Beckley, city attorney and vice-president of the board of trustees of the Rochester Orphan Asylum.

Stedman was also connected with the illustrious George Eastman. A letter from Stedman to Edward G. Miner in May 1910 reads as follows:

"Dear Ned,

"George Eastman is giving a party (J. H. Stedman instigator and promoter) and keenly desires your participation. Proposition: G.E., J.H.S., H.W.S., J.S.A., E.G.M., and another to start May 30, 1910 from "Kodak Mansions" at 10:30 AM on Packard for the High Banks of the Genesee at Mt. Morris—lunch there al fresco-cocobolohibulo-mithero—returning to Country Club at 4 PM so that any of the party desiring to do so may play _____ (illegible word) and participate in the Memorial Day Festivities.

"Will you accept the invitation and give us the joy of your company.

"Kindly wire reply to 61 E. Main St.

"As ever, Sted."

Stedman maintained a regular correspondence with Edward Griffith Miner. Miner's generous donation of material to the Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and preservation at University of Rochester's Rush Rhees Library has made accessible a number



Paying respects to John Harry Stedman are, from left, John W. Keller, Alfred G. Lamb, L. M. Weiner, and Johnny Baker, who, as a boy, was Buffalo Bill Cody's sharpshooter in the Wild West Show.



A candle burns at John Harry Stedman's gravesite.

of these letters. Stedman always began his letters to Miner with "Dear Ned", presumably a nickname of Miner's and ended them with "As ever, Sted". Ned and Sted conversation covered a broad range of topics.

In the summer of 1919, while vacationing at Loon Lake in the Adirondack Mountains, Stedman began to feel the first effects of his arteriosclerosis, and he retired to his bed at 24 Portsmouth

Terrace. On January 23, 1922, he wrote a farewell note to his friends and loved ones, expressing his appreciation for the friendships he had forged over the years.

"Dear beloved friends,

"Just now, when the ocean first separates us, I want again to say good bye. Once more. Good Bye or Farewell or adieu or adios or whatever word is tender and affectionate in benediction. And to whom else would I so long to express my kindest and most loving leave-taking as to my dear Ned and Helen, who for so long time have given me the hand of friendship and the heart of hospitality and all that

is most precious in human relations. I shall miss you more than you can realize. You go to pastures green and opening flowers. I slip a little deeper into the shadows. I shall follow you in my thoughts, my wishes and my prayers hoping for you all of life's richest blessing in health and happiness—every hour rich in peace. My heart goes out to you in fondest benediction for I love you.

"Steddy."

As the letter is being written, Stedman's handwriting visibly deteriorates, though his words remain clear. This particular note was likely written during one of his most severe bouts of illness.

EPITAPH

Published quarterly by the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, Rochester, New York 14620, a nonprofit member organization founded in 1980.
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Richard O. Reism, Editor
Frank A. Gillespie, Photographer
Dan Makczewski, Art Director
Lucille Makczewski, Editorial Assistant
Basic annual support: \$20
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The "Helen" of "Ned and Helen" referred to in the note is Helen Barnscombe Ranlet Miner, wife of Edward Griffith Miner, who married her on April 26, 1900.

Stedman resisted his sickness for another nine months, his strong constitution keeping him alive. During that time he insisted on fully dressing himself every morning in order to greet his visitors properly. On October 29, however, Stedman succumbed to arteriosclerosis.

On October 31, a funeral service was held for John Harry Stedman at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. It was conducted by the Rev. William A. R. Goodman, rector of the church, who led those attending in singing some of Stedman's favorite hymns. The honorary bearers at the funeral were William B. Farnham, John N. Beckley, William H. Noonan, Harper and Hiram W. Sibley, Edward Miner, William W. Webb, Francis C. Mitchell, Henry K. Knowlton, and Henry W. Matthews. The ushers were Thomas Spencer and Francis Macomber.

While Stedman affiliated himself with such iconic Rochester figures as Hiram W. Sibley, Edward G. Miner, and George Eastman, he leaves behind little to show for his connections. While Stedman had planned to divide his estate among such local institutions as the Homeopathic Hospital and the Genesee Valley Club, there were unexpected obstacles that his executor, Judge William W. Webb, had to face after Stedman's death.

Stedman had intended to divide his \$52,152 estate among his favorite local charitable institutions. His plan was to give \$10,000 to St. Paul's Church and \$6,000 to the Homeopathic Hospital. His housekeeper, Marie Madigan was to receive \$1,800, and sums of \$1,000 and \$500 were to be given to a number of other organizations. However, trouble arose less than two weeks after

Stedman's death when Webb was made aware of \$39,650.09 in claims against the estate, including a \$32,000 interest claim from Lincoln Alliance Bank. These claims ended up severely crippling Stedman's estate, and as a result, his beneficiaries received only a small portion of what they had expected to be given.

Christmas Eve Candles.

To the Editor of The New York Times:

May I remind you that a dear old tradition tells us that "a lighted candle set in the window on Christmas Eve will guide the Babe of Bethlehem to your home, that he may bring you happiness."

Christmas Eve falls on Sunday this year, and we shall all enjoy it the more for the peaceful interval between the preparation for the holiday and its celebration. We shall all be glad at home, too, when the sun goes down and the twilight falls, and every one of us can light a candle and place it in the window and know the joy of sending its kindly glow out into the darkness to guide the wandering feet of the Christ Child and to light a welcoming pathway for the Babe of Bethlehem to our home.

JOHN HARRY STEDMAN.
Rochester, Dec. 20, 1916.

The New York Times

Published: December 23, 1916
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With no estate to establish a legacy for himself, Stedman had no buildings named after him, no statues or parks in his honor, and no historical landmarks dedicated to him. His name, however, is not entirely forgotten. Stedman's most enduring legacy, which overcame the economic obstacle of his confiscated estate, was his reintroduction of lighted candles in windows during Christmas-time. Stedman first set out to resurrect this tradition in 1913. By 1914, he had recruited a number of households to take up the custom. According to Stedman "in the first year (1914) a few houses shown—the second over a thousand". In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* on December 20, 1916, Stedman explained the meaning of the old English Yule custom. "A lighted candle set in the window on Christmas Eve will guide the Babe of Bethlehem

to your home, that he may bring you happiness." That Christmas Eve saw the front window of nearly every Rochester home lit up. Soon, the tradition spread to neighboring towns, then states, reportedly making its way as far out as California.

At some point in his life, Stedman made the acquaintance of one Lemuel A. Jeffreys, a respected member of the Rochester funeral business. It is unclear exactly how Stedman met Jeffreys. It is possible that Jeffreys helped Stedman get a head start on his economic ventures. Both Jeffreys and Stedman worked in the hot-water heating industry for a time, and they may have met when their career paths crossed. Whatever the case, it is evident that by the time of Jeffreys' death in 1917, the two had formed a close bond. After working to revive the Yuletide tradition of placing a lighted candle in every house front window, Stedman made an agreement with Jeffreys that whoever of the two outlived the other would place a lighted candle at the grave of his companion every Christmas Eve until his own demise. Jeffreys died on March 24, 1917. For five Christmas Eves, Stedman illuminated his friend's grave with a lighted candle until Stedman, too, passed away on October 29, 1922.

Editor's Note: The author, Gregory R. Foster, is a student at the University of Rochester and prepared this essay as part of the course requirements for Religion 167K: Speaking Stones, which is taught by Prof. Emil Homerin, who is also a trustee of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery. It should be known that the Epitaph editor, with apologies to the author, changed the title of this article, which was originally more staidly and perhaps more respectfully called The Life and Legacy of John Harry Stedman.

MAJOR RENOVATIONS AT MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY'S NORTH ENTRANCE NEAR COMPLETION.

By Richard O. Reism

A generous Federal grant of nearly \$200,000 is creating an exciting area at the north entrance to Mount Hope Cemetery. The grant was obtained for the cemetery by U.S. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter. Among the myriad restorations and improvements this grant is paying for are:

- Reconstruction of a roughly circular carriage path around the Florentine fountain. Historic drawings of the cemetery and old documents clearly describe this carriage path that once existed as a very large approximate circle in the current lawn area around the fountain, but decades ago the evidence of that original path has been obliterated by earth and grass. The new path, which will be limited to pedestrian traffic, will be finished in the historic material that was also used in constructing the sturdy Erie Canal towpaths.
- Façade lighting will illuminate the gatehouse, old chapel, fountain, Gould mausoleum, and the Rau mausoleum. Altogether, a dozen or so ground lights and one light aimed at the fountain from a tree have now been installed. The effect should be dramatic for Mount Hope Avenue pedestrians and automobiles at night. Watch for the premiere performance when the sun starts to set at 8:00 o'clock or later sometime in August. Timers in the gatehouse will control the operation of the new lighting.
- The walls surrounding the Yaky plot, which is just to the right of the gatehouse, were originally constructed to make the plot level on the steep hillside. But these stone walls were in a



An original capstone is lowered into position at the steps leading to the Charles Rau mausoleum.



The stone steps and forecourt walls had to be completely reassembled and reset into their original positions, because the entire area in front of the Rau mausoleum had collapsed.

serious state of deterioration. They have now been completely dismantled, new footings installed, and the original stones reset, this time with drainage weep holes to prevent moisture from collecting and freezing behind the walls. The wrought iron fence that surrounded the plot has been removed from the site for cleaning and repair of broken segments. It, too, should be replaced by the end of July.

• New stone entrance steps are in the process of being installed at the 1862 Gothic Revival chapel and attached 1912 crematory. Vegetation that has taken root in the masonry of the building will be removed and resealed with mortar. Some repointing of the stonework was also accomplished on the façade.

• The original obelisk on the Jacob Gould mausoleum to the right of the chapel cracked, dropping shards. It will be replaced with a new historically accurate obelisk that is being fashioned in Indiana of the finest limestone. It, too, should be delivered and set atop the distinctive, Egyptian-style mausoleum by August. The stone sidewalls of the mausoleum were bulging dangerously from the pressure of the hill behind them. These sidewalls have

been completely rebuilt utilizing the original stone blocks, but now with a layer of gravel behind them and weep holes installed in the mortar at the base to keep moisture from collecting behind the walls.

• The collapsing sidewalls at the Rau mausoleum were restored, with the addition of weep holes, a couple of years ago. It was a project undertaken and paid for by supporters and friends who are contributors to the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery. At the time, however, there were insufficient funds to restore the elaborate forecourt and steps leading up to this mausoleum situated considerably above the valley floor. All of the huge stone blocks that once formed the front wall of the forecourt and the steps were dispersed on the site, many of which had slid down the hill and become partially covered with earth. They have all been recovered, cleaned, and neatly reset and mortared to form the original elegant approach to this architectural masterpiece. Electrical façade

lighting will show off the remarkable quality of this handsome structure.

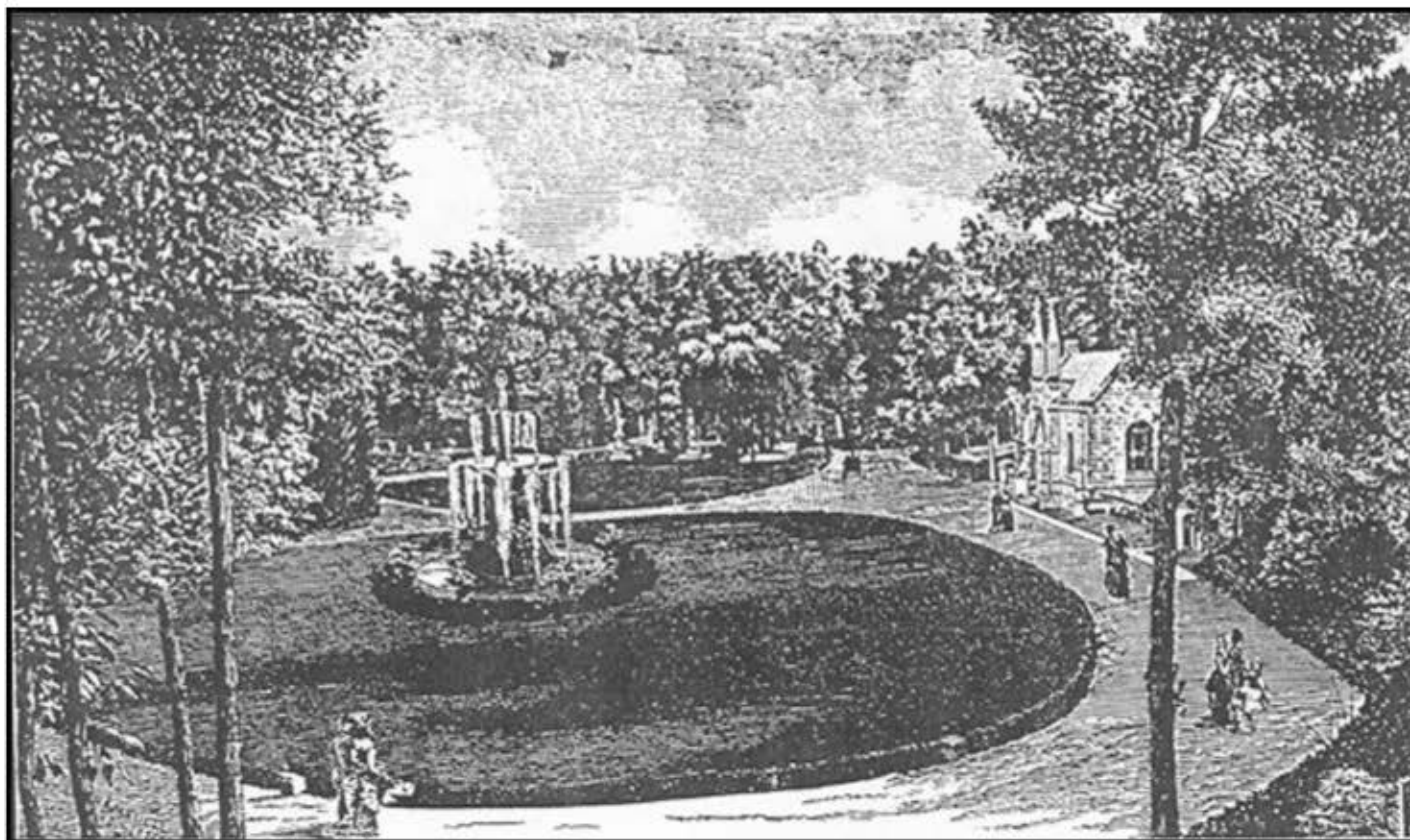
Friends president, Marilyn Nolte, and I have been frequent visitors to the construction site this summer. We have met the masons, the electricians, and others and have been enormously impressed by the efforts of the dedicated workforce under the direction of the project's primary contractor, Heaster Building Restoration, Inc., to deliver the best possible quality results. We think you will agree when you see the finished product yourself.



A backhoe digs out topsoil for the eight-foot-wide carriage path, which will be covered with a special stone material that was used to construct Erie Canal towpaths in the 1820s.



A worker rakes the excavated carriage path to level the ground before the hard surface is laid.



This historic engraving shows the original carriage path that surrounded the fountain. Over the years, this path has disappeared and ended up as grass lawn. As part of the cemetery's current renovations, the carriage path is being restored.

SALES SOAR FOR NEW UNDERGROUND RAILROAD BOOK

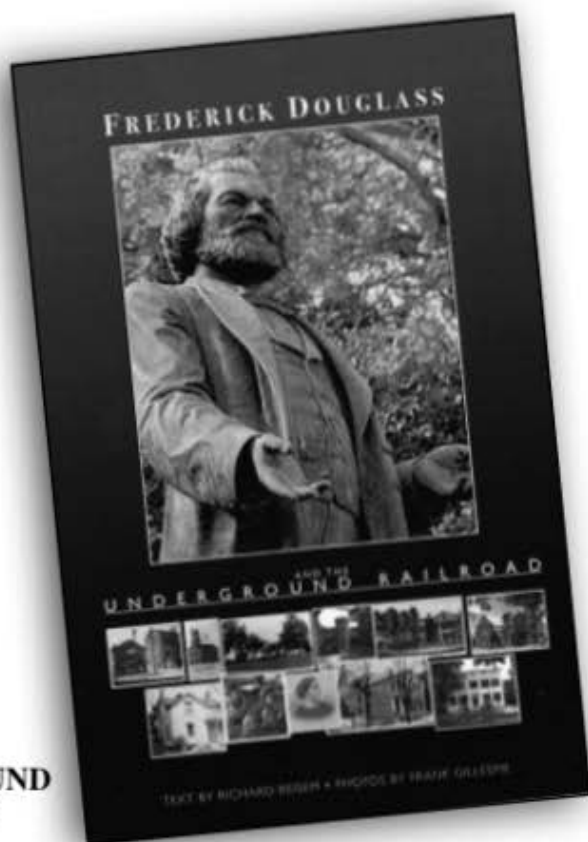
A new book published by the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery titled *Frederick Douglass and the Underground Railroad* has been achieving record sales since its introduction last fall. The book is written by veteran local author and historian, Richard Reisem, and is profusely illustrated with historic maps, portraits, and Underground Railroad stops, as well as contemporary photographs of existing UGRR buildings and sites by Frank Gillespie, who created the stunning professional photos for the coffee-table book, *Mount Hope: America's First Municipal Victorian Cemetery*.

The Underground Railroad book relates early slavery in New Netherland and colonial New York and contrasts the treatment of slaves by the Dutch versus the English up to the period when Railroad activities began in the late 1820s and 1830s.

The book tells the riveting story of Frederick Douglass' eventful life starting with his birth to a black slave mother and white plantation supervisor father,

and proceeding through brutal whipping as a slave, fantastic luck and determination in learning to read and write, fortunate help in planning a disguised escape, and the harrowing adventure of the escape, traveling from Baltimore to New York and barely surviving many near catastrophes. Even in his enormous success as an abolition orator, he often faced imminent danger, such as on board a ship to Britain and escaping by minutes an arrest in Philadelphia by U.S. marshals.

Also revealed are the reasons that Frederick Douglass chose Rochester, New York as his home. Finally, there are the stories of the many Rochester abolitionists who risked prison and appalling fines, working with Frederick Douglass in undercover and surreptitious ways to ensure eventual freedom for escaping slave fugitives. The stories of the brave Rochester abolitionists demonstrate how clever they were and how scary, heroic, and heartwarming their lives became. There are hundreds of happy endings in this thoughtful, valuable book.



Specifications:

- 100 pages
- Four-color cover
- 64 photographs, 3 maps, gravesites of 35 abolitionists with GPS locations in Mount Hope Cemetery
- Complete Index and Bibliography

Price: \$10.

If you have not yet obtained this outstanding book, here is a list of retail outlets:

Center at High Falls

60 Browns Race, W-F 11:00-5:30,
Sat 12:00-5:30, Sun 1:00-5:00

Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery

791 Mt. Hope Avenue,
Sat 1:00-3:00, Sun 2:00-4:00

Greece Historical Society

595 Long Pond Road, Sun 2:00-4:30

Landmark Society

133 S. Fitzhugh Street, M-F 8:00-5:00

The Library Store, Rochester Public Library

Mount Hope Cemetery office

1133 Mount Hope Avenue
M-F 8:30-3:30, Sat 8:30-noon

Susan B. Anthony House

17 Madison Street, T-Sun 11:00-5:00

Wegmans

Calkins Road Store, 745 Calkins Road

• Chili-Paul Store, 3175 Chili Avenue

• Hylan Drive Store, 650 Hylan Drive
(Marketplace)

• Latta Road Store, 3177 Latta Road

• Lyell Avenue Store, 2301 Lyell Avenue

• Mt. Read Store, 3701 Mt. Read Blvd.

• Pittsford Store, 3196 Monroe Avenue

You can also order the book online at:

Fomh.org (Friends of
Mt. Hope Cemetery)

Landmarksociety.org



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HISTORIC MOUNT HOPE STREETCAR

In a recent issue of the *Epitaph*, we showed a photograph of a decorated traffic-light control box at the corner of Mount Hope Avenue and Cypress Street. A citywide program engaged local artists to paint the boxes with inventive depictions that relate to the area where the control boxes are located, and that Mt. Hope/Cypress box announced: "Emergency Mt. Hope Cemetery Zombie Station."

Now, another control box, this one in front of the Mount Hope Cemetery office at 1133 Mount Hope Avenue, has been painted to show the historic horse-drawn streetcar that once traveled the avenue. The Rochester City and Brighton Railway was established on May 20, 1862. And the first streetcars on the Lake View and Mount Hope Avenue route commenced regular runs on July 13, 1863. The schedule was planned so that streetcars passed certain points on the route every 15 minutes from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

In 1870, an epizootic, foot-and-mouth disease, spread across the United States, killing or disabling the majority of horses, thereby crippling streetcars. Only four of every 100 horses owned by the Rochester Street Railway Company were fit for use. The epidemic inspired the inventor George B. Selden to complete his work on the internal combustion gas engine, which he believed could become a dependable alternative to horsepower.

But Selden was beat to the marketplace in 1890, when motive power for streetcars was changed to electricity.

ROR

