

Summer, 2007

NEWS *from* OAK HILL

The Newsletter of the Friends of Oak Hill Cemetery

Report of the Superintendent

For the Year Ended April 30, 2007

This past year at Oak Hill Cemetery has been challenging and fulfilling in equal measure. Even though much remains the same year in and year out, I find that there are new experiences almost daily because Oak Hill is a 19th century creation surrounded by a 21st century society. Roads built for horse and buggy are now abused by cars and heavy trucks. Infrastructures built well in 1849 have deteriorated. Some visitors do not respect the serenity of the grounds and question the need for restrictions and restraints.

My annual report this year is somewhat different from the usual format. Since I have now been the Superintendent for two years, I feel that a job report is in order. Please read Mr. Gill's report in which he details all of the events of the past year and urgent needs of the cemetery.

First and foremost, I treasure my work here. I feel that I have learned so much about the cemetery which differs greatly from my 21 years prior. I suppose that is because my late husband Joe and I "shared" the work, and there were some aspects of the job that he performed, and I was glad to "let" him do them, such as meeting



Main doors and gates of the newly refurbished Renwick Chapel.

with contractors and monument dealers, developing a database for a mailing list, and creating a twice yearly newsletter. Now all of these tasks fall to me and I learn something every day.

I am grateful to the Board of Managers—
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What's in a Name?: Oak Hill

Precisely what was the source of the name of the present Georgetown, D.C. cemetery remains a mystery. It may be obvious, perhaps not. It is on a hill that has oak trees. We don't know if the name *Oak Hill* was attributed to the land many years before it became a cemetery, if the name was selected by benefactor W. W. Corcoran, or the first president of the cemetery board John Marbury, or another. When established, Oak Hill Cemetery was sufficiently remote from the busy and active throng of the town to render it peculiarly fitted for the purpose to which it has been devoted. The property was covered by a grove of beautiful oak and other native forest trees which, as the ground was occupied by graves, gradually diminished in number.

An editorial in the *Georgetown Advocate* for November 3, 1846, was penned by a passionate citizen who demanded that the Corporation of Georgetown establish a new public, town cemetery, for the burial of Protestant dead. On June 7, 1848, when William Wilson Corcoran (1798-1888) purchased 12 1/2 acres from George Corbin Washington and his son Lewis W. Washington, of Jefferson County, Virginia, the property was described as being in *Parrott's Woods*, and part of a larger tract called *The Rock of Dumbarton*. Appropriately, the first burial in the new cemetery was for Eleanor Ann, only daughter of George C. and Ann T. Washington, who died at *Dumbarton* on April 13, 1849. When Corcoran conveyed land to the Oak Hill Cemetery Company for purposes of a cemetery, on May 1, 1849, the parcel had increased to 15 3/4 acres.

It is not until March 3, 1849, when the cemetery was incorporated by act of Congress of this



*William Wilson Corcoran, benefactor and founder
of Oak Hill Cemetery.*

date that the name Oak Hill Cemetery is inserted. A poem on the subject of the new cemetery appeared as front page news in the *Georgetown Advocate*, May 17, 1849, noting that upon strolling through Parrott's Woods, one would find "Oak Hill, thou bright and lovely spot..." In the *Georgetown Advocate*, June 7, 1849, an announcement described how town citizens now had a prospect of a comfortable resting place for the dead upon the Heights, in the grounds to be known as the Oak Hill Cemetery. The plans included the erection of a chapel and a vault in the central hollow.

Occasionally the cemetery office receives inquiries whether there is another Oak Hill. We don't know if people search for another cemetery by the same name, or if the inquirer simply has a reference to Oak Hill and doesn't know that it is

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our cemetery. There are other uses of the name that may be of interest.

An Oak Hill Cemetery can be found in Augusta, Fluvanna, Franklin, Nelson and Washington counties, and the cities of Danville and Fredericksburg, in Virginia, and Allegany and Frederick counties in Maryland. As a populated place, Oak Hill is located in Albemarle, Augusta, Grayson, Henrico, Page, and Pittsylvania counties, and the city of Roanoke, in Virginia, and in Garrett and Baltimore counties in Maryland.

Oak Hill was President James Monroe's home in Loudoun County, Virginia. There he wrote his noted message to Congress, delivered in December 1823, known as the "Monroe Doctrine." The estate took its name from a group of oaks planted on the lawn, one each from the then existing states, each tree presented to President Monroe by a congressman from the state represented. Mrs. Monroe, the daughter of Lawrence Kortwright, died there on September 23, 1830.

Oak Hill was the Fauquier County, Virginia home of John Marshall, Chief Justice of the United States, which dated back to 1773. Thomas Marshall sited his house on a grove of oaks on a low hill near the southeast corner of his trace which he called Oak Hill, or in his will, The Oaks. A post office nearby was named Oak Hill as early as May 1807.

Oak Hill was an attractive farm house and small village near Drayton, in Montgomery County, Maryland. The name was derived from two very large white oak trees standing on the highest hill in the manor. James Stephenson and Elizabeth C. Beall were married there on May 5, 1835.

Mrs. Mary E. Moran, wife of Samuel E. Moran, and eldest daughter of Mr. Benjamin Burns, of Washington City, died at *Oak Hill*, in Prince George's County, Maryland, on February 26, 1833. On September 17, 1850, Mrs. Eleanor

D. Hardesty died at the residence of her daughter, Mrs. Eleanor A. Marshall, at *Oak Hill*, in Prince George's County, Maryland.

Mr. Hugh Murray, died January 28, 1835, at his residence, *Oak Hill*, in Charles County, Maryland.

On January 16, 1835, Benjamin F. Higgs, died at Oak Hill, his family residence in Fairfax County, Virginia. In October of that year, Horatio C. Winters married Caroline B. Fitzhugh, daughter of the late Richard Fitzhugh, at Oak Hill, in Fairfax County, Virginia. Also married there in 1838 were Dr. Benjamin F. Rose and Elizabeth F. Higgs, and in 1843, William F. Lee, of the Hermitage, to Caroline Higgs. Meade Fitzhugh died at Oak Hill on August 26, 1845.

Mrs. Mary Cannon, consort of Luke Cannon, of Prince William County, died August 15, 1816, at *Oak Hill*, near Dumfries, Prince William County, Virginia, in her 47th year. Capt. Nathaniel R. Cannon, aged 63 years, died August 26, 1836, at his residence, *Oak Hill*, near Dumfries. Miss Penelope, daughter of the late Maj. Luke Cannon, died at *Oak Hill* on November 14, 1841. On October 7, 1850, Abraham Waldron and Maria Witbeck, both of Prince William County, were married at *Oak Hill*, near Occoquan, in that county.

On October 3, 1834, Mrs. Mary Carter, who was for many years a member of the Baptist Church, died at *Oak Hill*, the place of her residence in Spotsylvania County, Virginia.

Oak Hill is an early post office in the vicinity of Hilltop, Fayette County, West Virginia, situated both on a hill and near a large oak tree.

Thus we see that the name Oak Hill is cherished by many and perhaps always symbolic of the presence of majestic oak forest trees.

Wesley E. Pippenger

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Superintendent's Report

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John W. Gill, David C. de Vicq, Wesley E. Pippenger and George G. Hill. They ask for my input in almost every phase of caring for Oak Hill. I appreciate their respect for my opinions. They also realized that I needed an assistant in the office. Now that we have so many options for burials, we have many more funerals, phone calls and other activities related to serving more people. Each day we receive a great number of telephone calls and visits from lot holders and researchers. Dorrie Hall performs many tasks and is especially adept with using the computer. She has done many projects with our Vice President David de Vicq with charts and boxes with beautiful results. My aversion to computer matters can fortunately be countered with Dorrie's skills.

I find that I think about Oak Hill long after the day is over. Every day I walk or ride around the grounds to assess what improvements we are making and where we fall short. Lot holders have been very understanding. Our groundskeepers try to keep all areas well-maintained. However, with unpredictable weather changes and large numbers of funerals, they sometimes are not able to keep every part of the cemetery in pristine condition. When I visit other cemeteries or historic attractions such as Mt. Vernon or Monticello, I note how the grounds are kept and how drainage is managed. I look at the types of drains used to channel water, which if not done correctly will have disastrous results. Our Vice President David de Vicq worked closely with Joe in these matters as David is a civil engineer, and David continues to educate me in what we need –so my "training" continues.

My endeavors in the area of landscaping are somewhat difficult for me. I am not very creative when trying to envision how to landscape



The Oak Hill Cemetery Board of Directors at a recent meeting in the Renwick Chapel: (clockwise from top) Ella S. Pozell, Superintendent; John W. Gill, President; David C. de Vicq, Vice President; Wesley E. Pippenger, Secretary; George G. Hill, Treasurer

an area. Fortunately, my son Joseph has an inherent ability from his late father to "see" how an area will look even before we order the plant material. He likes to do special projects while my diligent crew of four does other tasks. They, too, however, are quite adept at planting and maintaining the grounds. Brian Williamson, our head groundskeeper, has been here 19 years; Mainor Pinar-Torres and Jose Guzman 17 years; Abraham Mejia 4 years. Their record of service speaks volumes. I have not had the headache of "revolving door" employee searches.

The best part of my job is dealing with lot holders and new purchasers. Talking with many people daily is very rewarding as they often express their admiration for the exquisite beauty of the cemetery, how well it is maintained, and how being here has a different feeling from many of the newer memorial parks. I think the intricate carving on so many of the stones, the topography, the trees and winding roads create an image that quickly goes into the heart bringing tranquility.

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Despite its beauty, Oak Hill, as you know, has its share of challenges all of which entail great financial outlay. The condition of the roads is a worry to the Board and me. At various times, patching has been done, but cranes and heavy trucks used to bring in materials for our projects have taken their toll. Some paving will be done in the near future and at great cost.

Our beautiful old trees are a paradox. Stately beauty hides potential disaster. Tree removal is extremely costly and that is provided we can get anyone to give us an estimate. Access to dead or dying trees is sometimes just not possible. In March, a 105- foot tree fell on North Hill near mausoleums. As our Vice President David de Vicq stated in our fall newsletter "Reacting after Mother Nature drops a tree may be less expensive than removing one still standing, it is a very risky gamble."

In addition to the support from the Board of Managers and lot owners, my other office assistant Cherie Cannon, who works for the cemetery when Dorrie and I are away, is very knowledgeable about almost every aspect of Oak Hill. Her many years of experience mean that I am confident that the cemetery is in good hands when I am away.

I also have a dependable neighbor Bob Tobin who takes care of the security of the cemetery when I am away and assists me with many situations when I am in town. He, too, is very knowledgeable about all aspects of keeping the cemetery secure.

The two years have passed quickly. I look forward to the challenges of each day and feel much gratitude that out of a tragedy, I have been afforded a unique opportunity to be a part of the history of one of the truly magnificent cemeteries in the Garden Cemetery Movement.

Respectfully submitted,
Ella S. Pozell

Report of the President

For the year ended April 30, 2007

The President of Oak Hill Cemetery herewith submits his Report for the year ended April 30, 2007 and Report of the Superintendent.

There were 49 interments during the fiscal year bringing total interments to 19,247.

I am very happy to report that all construction projects are now complete, and the cemetery has a substantial inventory of casket and cremation sites.



Another Oak Hill Roadway in need of upkeep.

The Board is pleased with the design of the new cremation sites. Urns are placed in granite enclosures

on either side of the stairway. Inscriptions are placed on the lid of the niche; thus, families and visitors do not step where interments have been made. Purchasers have enthusiastically embraced the new design which we plan to continue.

The prime location in the cemetery – around the Renwick Chapel – is now a new cremation area. Ninety-six walkway sites are available. Lorton Construction Co. and Mark Sanders have created burial spaces with a well-designed granite border which enhances the beauty of the chapel.

The outlay of funds to finish these projects was \$162,000, and it will take a period of time to realize a profit. In the meantime, we must
continued on next page

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turn our attention to pressing needs of the cemetery which will require significant funding. Here, again, our annual appeal will, hopefully, reduce our deficit.

Every lot owner and every visitor know the terrible condition of our roadways. In fact, part of a road has been closed because it is too dangerous. Patching in some areas has kept total ruin at bay, but the Board has now decided that we cannot postpone mandatory paving without dire consequences. Through the fall and winter our Vice President David de Vicq met with a paving contractor both of whom spent hours evaluating our road system. If all paving currently planned were done at once, we would expend \$342,000.

We have decided, however, to pave in increments and to ask for your assistance in helping defray the cost. Lot holders in each area will receive an appeal letter prior to commencing. We hope that you will be able and willing to help us in this endeavor.

The care of our trees continues to place a heavy burden on our finances. As I have mentioned in numerous reports and newsletter, some of our stately oaks are of great concern to us. Dead or dying trees are often too large for removal without using a crane, but a crane cannot reach them. In such a situation, the tree can fall, which is what happened to a 105-foot oak in March. It was earmarked as a tree that needed removing, but we could not get a reasonable



*Recent tree damage on the
North Hill*

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estimate. One estimate stated that a helicopter would be used to remove the tree! We still have five VERY DANGEROUS trees to be dealt with at some point.

Sales of our book, *Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown, D.C., Monument Inscriptions and Burial Data* have been very good. Two hundred copies were published in November, and we now have 55 copies remaining.

The lexan, installed to protect the windows from vandals, has now been removed from the Renwick Chapel windows. It had been in place since 1987. Once removed, it revealed damage to the windows, but I am glad to report that the windows have been repaired and repainted, and the Board thinks the beauty of the chapel has been greatly enhanced. This, in turn, will make the Chapel more appealing to lease for weddings and services.

Although my report is rather discouraging, we must remember that the cemetery is now 158 years old, all of the regular lots have been sold, and the only income from lots comes from those we sell in pathways. Because of the age of the trees, their upkeep is a great burden.



*Congratulations to
Jose Guzman on his becoming
a U.S. citizen!*

Having said this, we should be thankful that we have one of the most beautiful cemeteries in Washington, and it is up to all of us to do all that we can to maintain it as best we can. Therefore, it is imperative that each of us give all that we can.



*Workmen remove lexan panels covering the
Renwick Chapel windows.*

My fellow Board members have worked hard on behalf of the cemetery this year which is my 35th year on the Board, and I thank them for their efforts.

I want to especially thank Ella Pozell, who has done a superlative job as Superintendent after the loss of her husband Joseph Pozell.

I also want to thank Dorrie Hall, our assistant office manager, who has greatly added to the efficiency of the office.

Our groundskeepers continue to work competently to maintain Oak Hill in a manner in which we are all proud. The Board of Managers is especially proud that Jose Guzman who has been at Oak Hill 17 years has now become a citizen of the United States. We congratulate him for working to attain this milestone in his life.

Respectfully submitted,
John W. Gill

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Contributions to Oak Hill Cemetery
as of June 11, 2007

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Mr. & Mrs. Thomas L. Poore – in
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Cemetery Hours

Office and grounds: 9:00 am to 4:30 pm, M-F, closed Saturdays and National Holidays. Sunday (grounds only) 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm, weather permitting. Please observe rules posted at gate.

Board of Managers

John W. Gill, *President*
David C. de Vicq, *Vice President*
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George G. Hill, *Treasurer*
Ella S. Pozell, *Superintendent*

We need your help. If you currently reside in an apartment or townhouse, please contact us with your correct "Zip+4" number. This will help ensure that you continue to receive our mailings.

Cemetery Publications

Available in the cemetery office

"Oak Hill Cemetery"

A brief history – contains a map of the cemetery, list of notable people buried in Oak Hill and a brief history of our founding. \$3.00

Oak Hill Note Cards

Set of eight note cards featuring four scenes of Oak Hill Cemetery through the seasons. Envelopes included. \$5.00

*"Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown, DC
Monument Inscriptions and
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Two volume set. \$150.00

OAK HILL CEMETERY

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