Thillman Peter Jacob Fabry, almost forgotten today, was such a craftsman, who also, in his day, was recognized nationally as a fine artist.

Fabry was responsible for the grand main staircase and decorative plaster ceilings in the George Eastman House. The architect who designed the staircase was Charles McKim of the New York City firm of McKim, Mead & White, but it was Fabry who carved the remarkable staircase. Fabry also created the decorative wall elements of the main hall in the Eastman School of Music. He carved the wooden Kilbourn Hall ticket office. The carved proscenium arch and walls in Kilbourn Hall are also Fabry's work.

When we look at beautiful buildings with handsome and intricate architectural details, we tend to credit the building's architect with their creation. But the architect did not apply chisels to the wood, trowels to the plaster, and gilding to the decorations to fashion those remarkable details. It was the work of a craftsman, whose name is often lost to history. And when the craftsman excels not only in the production of the details, but contributes to their design, the loss is even more glaring. Thillman Peter Jacob Fabry, almost forgotten today, was such a craftsman, who also, in his day, was recognized nationally as a fine artist.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church on East Avenue at Vick Park B contains myriad wood sculptures by Fabry: most notably, the pulpit, the lectern, and the figures on the ends of the hammer beams of the ceiling. On the hammer beams, seven different angels blow horns, wave palm leaves, sniff lilies, press hands in prayer, and engage in other activities. Hiram W. Sibley, son of Hiram Sibley of Western Presbyterian, also contained the highly prized work of Thillman Fabry.

The Monroe County Office Building, originally the county courthouse, was designed by Rochester architect, J. Foster Warner, and built in 1894-1896. It was the first example of Italian Renaissance Revival style in western New York. On the fourth floor of the atrium,

Thillman P. J. Fabry, renowned carver in plaster and wood.

Union Telegraph Company fame, commissioned Fabry to provide the architectural details in St. Paul's Church without the involvement of an architect. Sibley said to Fabry, "You are architect enough for me." That gave Fabry the freedom and initiative to create all of the charming and interesting carvings in the church.

In the Baptist Temple Building, downtown at Main and Franklin streets, Fabry produced a richly carved choir loft in Gothic Revival style that decorates the former sanctuary. At Blessed Sacrament Church, Monroe Avenue at Rutgers Street, Fabry carved an elaborate altarpiece with five full-size figures in ornately carved gothic niches. The central figure is Virgin Mary holding her baby Jesus. Mary's left hand and a portion of the sculpture are unfinished, because Fabry died while still working on the altar. The church decided to leave it unfinished as a tribute to the artist. Many other churches, including First Methodist and Central
100 feet above the main floor, there is an explosion of Italian Renaissance plasterwork created by Thillman Fabry. It is a tour de force composed of intricate floral garlands, scallop shells, shields, lions' heads, and circular grates, all in plaster and bronze.

Fabry also created ornamental work in the New York State capitol in Albany, where his architectural details are especially fine in the Senate chamber. The Hiram Sibley Building (1925), 311 Alexander Street at East Avenue, was designed by the Boston architectural firm of Shepley, Bulfinch, and Abbot, who engaged Fabry to carve interior architectural details. Some of Fabry's work has been destroyed because of demolition, such as Piccadilly Theater, which became Paramount Theater. And his charming work in the Eastman Dental Dispensary on Main Street is now largely stolen or vandalized. Also gone are his carved-wood and plaster contributions to Whistle's and Scrantom's retail stores, restaurants, and other commercial establishments.

In addition to the George Eastman House, many other residential structures display the genius of Thillman Fabry. One of them is the Edmund Lyon House, now the Rochester Academy of Medicine at 1441 East Avenue. Lyon acquired the house when his father, Harrison A. Lyon, died. Edmund decided to rebuild the existing Italianate frame house, changing it dramatically into a grand, 33-room brick mansion in 1910. It was a couple of years before federal income tax, so costs were not a problem. The two-year remodeling of the structure was designed by Rochester architect Edwin S. Gordon with interior design by Isaac Scrantom, president of Hayden Furniture Company. The living room was designed after a room at Knole House in Sevenoaks, Kent, England. (Knole House, one of England's great country houses, has 365 rooms and 52 staircases.) So there is a definite Jacobean architectural style to Lyon's living room, which has paneled wood walls of quarter-sawn white oak with detailed carving in the pilasters. The fireplace mantel also bears Fabry's special carving skills. The Jacobean ceiling is constructed of parget work—that is, molded decorative hard plaster in bas relief. Fabry created a Tudor rose motif in the ceiling plasterwork and repeated the design in the fireplace mantel. The pipes for an Aeolian organ are hidden behind an elaborately carved wooden screen by Fabry. Fabry's woodcarving skills are also evident in the intricate design of the main staircase. Columns, moldings, mantels, and arches in the solarium, dining room, hall, and other rooms present handsome architectural details by Fabry.
Another house that was decorated by Fabry plaster and wood carving is the Thomas W. Finucane House at 20 Portsmouth Terrace. Finucane was one of the leading building contractors in western New York. He was also a banker, an owner of gold and silver mines, the founder and president of a telephone company, the head of a large real estate firm, and a political and religious leader in the community. So when he built the Colonial Revival style house at 20 Portsmouth Terrace in 1894, money was not a problem. But he did not want the exterior of his house to appear ostentatious, thereby advertising his enormous wealth and lofty position. So the house has a modest exterior appearance, although it does display considerable bulk in order to provide 8,000 square feet of living space inside. But Finucane wanted to enjoy something entirely different inside and lavished money on an opulent interior.

Finucane turned to Fabry to create that opulence. It begins in the spacious entrance hall. The dramatic ceiling reflects Fabry's genius at plaster relief in geometric designs. The staircase incorporates design motifs typical of a 17th-century English country house. Because Finucane was an avid sailor, there are several sea motifs in this staircase that travels in three directions with two landings before reaching the second floor. The carved panels in the balustrade include depictions of dolphins and grapes. Dolpins represent hospitality because they would greet sailors at sea. Grapes, of course, suggest wine and conviviality. English Tudor roses are carved into the newel posts. In the long horizontal panels below the balustrade are carved bundled tobacco leaves, which symbolize good fortune. Above the niche on the stair landing, there is a representation of the god of the sea, Neptune. Stained-glass windows show family crests and hobbies, among other motifs. In the major rooms, Fabry created wonderful fireplace mantels and in the dining room, a large built-in, leaded-glass-fronted, wood-carved cabinet that looks like a separate piece of furniture with legs.

George Eastman built one of the most beautiful and largest theaters in the U.S. in 1922. It was designed by McKim, Mead & White, America's most famous architects of the time. The Eastman Theatre is elegant and dignified in every aspect, except perhaps for two washtub chandeliers. When George Eastman made a last-minute inspection of the new theater a few days before the grand opening, he noted that it was particularly dark at the rear of the mezzanine. Electrical wires dangled from the ceiling, but there were no chandeliers attached to them. He was told that the chandeliers had been ordered but not delivered. Eastman felt that light fixtures were needed for the grand opening. The contractor quickly turned to Thillman Fabry, who bought a pair of metal washtubs, added some decorative metal elements like tin leaves at the upper rim of the washtubs, metal roping around the base of the tubs, and a classical pineapple pendant hanging from the middle of the tub bottom. He then gilded the ensemble, creating attractive elegance from humble materials. The pair of light fixtures were fitted with electric bulbs, wired, and hung from metal chains, providing the light that Eastman requested.

The chandeliers, although considered by the architects to be temporary, were attractive enough to everyone else so that the order for the undelivered chandeliers was canceled. When the Eastman Theatre underwent a renovation in the 1970s, the fate of the washtub chandeliers was debated, and the designers decided not to replace them with professionally manufactured pieces, so they still hang proudly in the Eastman Theatre today.

Fifty years later, the name of the washtub chandelier artist was forgotten. An article in “Rochester Review,” Summer 1980, published by the University of Rochester, stated that “the two metal washtubs were metamorphosed into light fixtures by ‘an ingenious artisan’”. In the “Letters” section of the “Rochester Review”, Winter 1980-81, Marion Fleck...
Fabry was promoted to corporal in 1879 and was discharged from the army in 1881. He maintained that his time in the U.S. Army were the happiest days of his life, and all through the years after military service, he regaled his friends with stories of his adventures in Dakota Territory, Texas, and New Mexico.

While stationed in the Midwest, Fabry spent his spare time carving pieces of alabaster, which he found in the rock outcroppings. It was the beginning of his nonmilitary career as a sculptor.

Fabry built a home for his family at 101 Southern Parkway, Rochester.

In his day, Fabry's artistry was in high demand, not only in Rochester, but also by notable architects like McKim, Mead & White in New York City, and prominent architects in Boston, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and Chicago. For 40 years, Fabry operated from a studio at 48 North Water Street. In addition to architectural elements like mantels, staircases, moldings, and ceilings, Fabry carved chairs, tables, benches, mirror frames, lamps, and plaques. At one time, he had as many as 20 assistants working in his studio. From Fabry's large family, his son, Fred, and daughter, Maude, both worked in his carving and plaster molding business.

Thillman P. J. Fabry was born in Treves, Germany on November 22, 1857. He emigrated to America in 1871 at the age of 14 years. He was brought to this country by a relative of his stepfather. He first settled in Providence, Rhode Island, where he was engaged in carving furniture for a furniture manufacturer.

In 1876, Fabry read about "Custer's Last Stand". (General George Armstrong Custer, a West Point graduate who served with distinction throughout the Civil War, lead the 7th Cavalry in an attack against an alliance of Cheyenne and Sioux Indians on June 25, 1876. Custer pitted his regiment of 647 men against thousands of Indian warriors. Custer and his central unit of 260 soldiers were killed to the last man.) The story of Custer inspired Fabry and, seeking adventure as well as food and "a roof over my head", he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He was sent to the Black Hills in South Dakota, then known as the Dakota Territory, where he served in Indian warfare. He fought the Sioux and the Apaches, and in peaceful times studied their culture and customs and became a friend of many Indians. He was appointed the regiment's hunter and sent out to kill buffalo and other game animals to supply the commissary.

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THE OLD
CHAPEL/CREMATORY
by Sándor Végh

Throughout my life I have come to appreciate and love Mount Hope Cemetery and what it has to offer. As a youth growing up in Rochester, I would frequent it often, marveling at the stones sprouting out of the rolling hills. The cemetery has become a place of perpetual mystery for me. With every visit I learn and experience something new. What secret have you around the corner for me today? Many years have passed and the cemetery still promises me something new. One of the biggest secrets for me is the old chapel/crematory. It is that gothic building you see at the north entrance of the cemetery just behind the fountain. You can't help but appreciate its presence. It has a medieval feel with gray, menacing gothic spires piercing the sky. At the same time, you can sense the building's character—solid, enduring, a reflection of bygone times. That's just the outside. If it could speak what secrets would it tell?

The story of the chapel is the story of Rochester itself. To get a better understanding, we need to turn back the clock. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln was in the White House; the country was going through some of its darkest hours as a nation divided. Although the Union was in jeopardy, Rochester was still experiencing record growth. It was the nation's first boomtown. Just 24 years old, the cemetery was growing at a phenomenal rate—not only from current burials, but also in land acquisition to accommodate the relocation of burials from other city cemeteries that were being abandoned. The public cemeteries at East Avenue and Gibbs Street, Alexander Street and Monroe Avenue (site of the current Monroe high school), and Buffalo Street, to name a few. With expansion on the minds of these Victorians, it became apparent that Mount Hope was in desperate need of a chapel. 19th-century Rochesterians took great pride in their town and cemetery, vowing it would have no equal in America. The site itself is located on an Indian trail—an old Iroquois path leading from Lake Ontario to Indian villages along the Genesee. The area was partially swampland and had to be drained—a monumental engineering task undertaken by Silas Cornell, creating a tunnel through the Indian trail esker (a glacial ridge left behind from the last ice age).

The old chapel was built in 1862 from a Gothic style design by H. Searle & Son.

The people of Rochester were proud of their Victorian cemetery and wanted to erect a chapel and vault that reflected the city's prominence and wealth. But first, the ambitious engineering project to drain the swamp area where the chapel was to sit commenced. City surveyor Silas Cornell supervised the job. A 500-foot tunnel was dug from the north entrance through Indian Trail esker to Genesee River. This tunnel was located just to the left of the chapel.

Henry Searle, of H. Searle and Son, was chosen to design the chapel. Henry Searle was a reputable architect based in Rochester. He designed many buildings in Monroe County, such as the Monroe County workhouse, city hospital, and Corinthian Hall. He added a third story to the original Rochester Savings Bank on the southwest corner of West Main and the people of Rochester were Fitzhugh streets. H. Searle and Son moved to Washington D.C. in 1865 and had an illustrious career there, which included a plan for completion of the Washington Monument, which had been designed by Robert Mills but delayed because of the Civil War. Although Searle's plan was not used in the Washington Monument, it brought him much recognition. In Washington he was also known for designing a Howard University building. In 1879, he moved to New York City where he again gained acclaim as an acoustician through his development and patterning of highly original designs for the control of sound in assembly halls and other public areas. Among these commissions are the Senate Chamber in the state capitol in Albany and the Union League Club in New York City. Henry Searle's son, Henry Robinson Searle died quite young at the age of 46 years in New York City in 1882 from tuberculosis, which was prevalent in those days, especially in New York. Searle, Sr., died in 1892 and both his and his son's body are buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Section A, Lot 81.

Construction of the chapel began in the spring of 1861 and was completed at the end of that year. The cost of construction was covered by funds from the Mount Hope Fund, which was raised through the sale of lots. The total cost for the structure was $10,500. The building itself was a prime example of its kind and was well received in an article from June 20, 1861:

"Plans and drawings for these works were made by H. Searle & Son, architects, after a minute inspection of all the structures of this kind of any note in the country. A glance at the drawings and specifications is enough to assure us that we are to have something at Mount Hope that will excel in everything but outlay of money, anything of the kind in the United States."

The construction of the chapel vault was begun in 1861. It was warmly received by the city, as is reflected by the
Moving to Rochester after the army, he pursued his artistic leanings and became a member of the Alembic Club, a group of artists, journalists, and other professionals. Many of his Indian war stories were recited at Alembic Club meetings, where Fabry would get rapt attention. He was also a member of the Corner Club, the Rochester Art Club, and the Masons.

In 1912, when he was 54 years old, Fabry bought the second lot sold in the newly opened Home Acres in Brighton. Before moving, the Fabry family lived at 128 Conkey Avenue. His lot was located on Southern Parkway at No. 101. By this time, he was nationally famous as a wood and plaster sculptor. He hired a 22-year-old local architect, Carl R. Traver, to work with him in designing one of the more unusual houses on Southern Parkway. The house, with its decorative half-timbered second floor over the entrance projection and the shallow-pointed arch of the entrance itself, signal American Tudor style. There is stucco cladding over concrete walls and a red tile roof, so this is a solidly built, fireproof structure. Above the stone surround of the entrance, there is a trapezoid-shaped plaque that was hand-carved by Fabry. Above that is a vergeboard attached to the gable. It, too, was carved by Fabry.

In the vestibule, Fabry created a plaster ceiling in a floral pattern. The hall ceiling is also decorated with a geometric plaster design. And in the living room, the ceiling reminds you of the ceiling in the George Eastman House. In the barrel-vaulted ceiling of the dining room, Fabry created bands of decorative plaster in low relief. The staircase in the front hall is a tour de force—all carved in heavy, dramatically detailed, Germanic style, reminiscent of staircases in his native country. The fireplace mantel in the living room is similar-ly exquisitely detailed with lions’ heads peering from the shelf brackets.

The present owners of 101 Southern Parkway, Tom Petrillo and Bill Reamy, maintain all of these wonderful sculptural works of Thillman Fabry in pristine condition.

Thillman Fabry died on August 6, 1926 at age 68 years. He is buried in Range 3.

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Thillman Fabry died on August 6, 1926 at age 68 years. He is buried in Range 3.
Union and Advertiser on June 30, 1861: "The chapel is gothic in style. This style came out of medieval Europe and was very popular throughout Victorian times. It was known for its vaulted ceilings, buttresses, and arched doorways. The chapel was completed and opened in the spring of 1862. It was quickly put to use. The vault was designed to house bodies in winter when the ground was frozen and it was difficult to dig graves. Record numbers of bodies accumulated in the holding vault because of the war. The vault itself was dug into the Indian Trail esker. It is in the back of the chapel, accessed through an enclosed hallway. The crypt is built in Romanesque style with rounded arches sitting on solid square columns. The style of the vault is far more primitive than that of the chapel. It appears to be much older than the chapel, which is an intended effect. It is as if the chapel was built upon the remains of an ancient catacomb.

The importance of classical architecture was not lost on the Victorians. The cemetery itself served as more than a repository for the dead. It was an important social center, as is reflected in an article in the Union and Advertiser dated June 1, 1862. It announced that 58 young ladies attended by seven young gentlemen were to have a picnic dinner at Mount Hope. And the newspaper saw no impropriety in the event and thought that anyone who might be upset by the announcement was unjustified.

Aside from a minor improvement to the turrets above the entrance door, which were completed by Andrew J. Warner, father of J. Foster Warner and contemporary of Henry Searle, no major additions were made to the chapel until 1912, when a crematory was added and the chapel was renovated.

J. Foster Warner was chosen as the architect for the crematory. He had a long successful career. He was the first president of the Rochester Architectural Society. Some of his notable works include the Granite Building in 1890-1893, the Monroe County Courthouse in 1891-1896, Ontario County Courthouse in 1910, Rochester’s East and West High Schools, Aquinas Institute, bank buildings and a number of elegant residences. The style of the crematory was consistent with the chapel, namely, Gothic Revival. Extensive renovation was done to the inside of the chapel when the crematory was added. Warner is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery in Section C, Lot 107.

Cremation started to become popular around the time of the Civil War. The war itself led to many bodies being cremated. The idea of cremation continued to gain popularity until present. George Eastman, one of the most famous Rochesterians, was cremated in the Mount Hope crematory. George Eastman’s ashes were moved from Mount Hope to Kodak Park where they reside today at a memorial in the entrance on Lake Avenue. Many people choose cremation over casket burials in the ground and elaborate mausoleums. On Saturday, March 1, 1913, the retorts received their first client at a cost of $35. That year, 53 people were cremated. By the time of its closing on June 18, 1974, 12,905 people had been cremated there.

The chapel/crematory was closed in 1974 due to environmental concerns. The crematory no longer met clean-air standards. (A new crematory was built contiguous to the cemetery office at the south entrance to Mount Hope.) Over the years since then a few attempts have been made to renovate the building, including a notable try at restoration by Paul Knoke. Paul’s plan was to convert the building into an antique musical instrument repair shop and performance hall, but he lacked funding and the project never got off the ground.

For many decades, the chapel represented a sense of achievement and pride as one of the first of its kind. In more recent times, the chapel has become a symbol of what once was. One can only hope that the architecturally significant structure, now in a state of abeyance, can one day be restored and put to new uses. In the efforts to revitalize our community, we should not forget those who lie in Mount Hope Cemetery and their contribution to our city. It would be a shame to see this unique window into the past vanish from the landscape of our children. It is, after all, our responsibility to preserve it.

(Editors note: The author, Sandor Vegh, who, at age 37 years, is going back to school studying anthropology. He grew up in Rochester and today works as an artist and is also a musician.)
CEMETERY BLUEBIRD 
TRAIL REPORT

By Sheryl M. Graczewski

Last spring, the bluebirds were the first to arrive and two pairs started building nests in the cemetery birdhouses in mid-April. These bluebird pairs had two successful broods apiece with a total of up to 19 fledglings. We supplied the bluebirds with some mealworms for the first brood, even though it was not excessively cold. One of the bluebird pairs had laid five eggs that disappeared in between the two successful broods. A third bluebird pair nested in one box, perhaps after nesting elsewhere first, but their brood of four chicks was destroyed when they were just six days old, probably by wrens.

The chickadees arrived at the end of April. There were originally six chickadee nests in boxes, but when wrens arrived early in May, they destroyed all but two chickadee nests, including some with eggs. The wrens occupied up to nine of the boxes at one time. There were two successful chickadee broods and probably 14 successful wren broods. Surprisingly, there were no house sparrows interested in the boxes.

We were also delighted to find a red-tailed hawk nest and observed it as the chicks grew. We found one flicker cavity, but suspected many more by the numbers of flickers seen in Mount Hope Cemetery.

At the end of the season, we removed an old box that will be replaced by a new box before this spring. We decided that the last old box along Elmwood Avenue is still in good condition, so we will continue to monitor it. There was very little vandalism, only owl graffiti on one box and some slight shifting of some of the boxes.

(Editor's Note: The Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery provide financial support for the bluebird trail project, which is managed by our volunteers. If members of the Friends are interested in participating in monitoring the boxes, call 461-3494 and leave a message. The bluebird is the official bird of New York State.)