LIEUT. JOHN B. SNYDER RECEIVES HIS MILITARY HEADSTONE
108 YEARS LATE

By Richard O. Reisem

(The following article was prepared from information concerning John Snyder provided by Lynda Skaddan, great granddaughter of John B. Snyder.)

On May 4, 1864, General U. S. Grant launched his long-suffering army across the Rapidan River into the Wilderness of Spotsylvania, a dank and unpleasant 70 square miles of tangled brush, forest, and confusing ravines in northern Virginia. Awaiting the Union forces was General Robert E. Lee's reunited Confederate army.

The Federal columns thrusting through the Wilderness were threatened from the west by Confederate corps moving on the Orange Turnpike and the Orange Plank Road. The battle on May 5 was fought between those two corridors. Fighting raged with particular ferocity around a small clearing known as Saunder’s Field. During the day, a Union battery in the clearing was repeatedly taken and re-taken. Infantrymen from both armies sought shelter in a gully. Muzzle flashes in the woods ignited leaves, and fire spread to brush and trees. Soon the wounded were burning to death. The sound of cartridge boxes exploding could be heard over the crackling flames. The Union wounded who could be reached were carried back to surgical stations. The fragmented gains and losses in the woods that day yielded a frightful casualty count.

Two of the casualties were the brothers John and Andrew Snyder of the 140th New York Volunteer Infantry. Company G. Andrew was shot in the bowels and John was wounded in the leg. They had left their home at 77 University Avenue in Rochester, New York and enlisted to fight in the Civil War on September 13, 1862. The brothers had fought side by side, at Fredericksburg and Gettysburg, and now at Saunder’s Field.

At the Battle of the Wilderness on May 5, 1864, they were captured by Confederates and taken to a Confederate prison hospital in Locust Grove, Virginia, where John’s younger brother, Andrew Snyder, died the next day at age just short of 21 years with his older brother at his side.

After three days without having his wounds bandaged and given almost no food, John Snyder and two other Union soldiers managed to escape from the Confederate hospital/prison into the nearby woods. Traveling by night, they crossed the Rappahannock River and rejoined their camp at the Henry House near Falmouth. John Snyder continued to fight bravely to the end of the war, earning the rank of first lieutenant. After being hospitalized and treated for the wounds he suffered, John Snyder was honorably discharged from the army on June 3, 1865 and returned to his home in Rochester, where he operated a stove business.

In 1868, John married Louisa Binder. The couple had six children. After the war, John purchased a plot in Mount Hope Cemetery in Range 3, Lot 163, where he buried his brother Andrew, whose remains he was able to locate and move to Mount Hope. He buried his father in the plot in 1872, his
mother in 1884, an aunt in 1886 and where he himself was buried on September 10, 1901. His wife, Louisa, died four months after her husband John’s death and is buried beside him. But no one erected monuments on their gravesites, so they have been unmarked for 108 years.

Several years ago, John Snyder’s great granddaughter, Lynda Skaddan, took a tour of several battle sites in northern Virginia. The tour guide was Richard Chapman, a national park ranger at Fredericksburg. She mentioned to Chapman that she had a great-great uncle who died in the Civil War on what she believed to be May 4, 1864, which she could hardly read on Andrew Snyder’s barely legible headstone in Mount Hope Cemetery. Chapman was puzzled because there was no battle on May 4. He looked up information that revealed that Andrew Snyder from Rochester, New York was wounded in the Battle of the Wilderness on May 5, 1864 and died on May 6.

Soon after learning details of Andrew Snyder’s death, Lynda Skaddan retrieved an illegible microfilm copy of her great-grandfather John Snyder’s obituary. Lynda’s cousin got out a magnifying glass and translated the obituary, which revealed that John was wounded at the Battle of the Wilderness. It was shocking news; Lynda had never been told that her great-grandfather served in the Civil War. Her mother and aunts had never been told that their grandfather, John Snyder, had fought in the Civil War. It was never discussed nor were visits ever made to the Snyder plot in Mount Hope Cemetery. Lynda concluded that the war was apparently too horrible a subject to talk about in front of women in those early postwar days and that her mother and aunts had a deep-seated aversion to cemeteries.

After this remarkable disclosure that John Snyder fought in the Civil War, Lynda Skaddan, seeking more information, called the knowledgeable park ranger, Richard Chapman, in Virginia. He found that the Snyder brothers had enlisted together, fought together, were wounded together at Saunber’s...
Fiddler Joe Gresser played Civil War tunes beside the battle flag of the New York 140th Regiment.

Field, and that John Snyder had escaped the field hospital and rejoined his company.

Also, Chapman told Lynda Skaddan that she could contact the Department of Veterans Affairs in Nashville, Tennessee to apply for a military headstone for her great grandfather. Numerous applications, however, were ignored by the National Veterans Memorial program in Quantico, Virginia. Finally, in January 2009, after futile appeals for information in military files at the National Archives, Lynda and her sister, Jane Andersen, traveled to Washington, D.C. and made copies of those military files. These records, along with endorsement from the staff at Mount Hope Cemetery, eventually persuaded the government to provide an appropriate military-issue headstone to which every American military veteran is entitled.

At high noon on Sunday, November 15, 2009, Lieutenant John B. Snyder had a proper memorial service in Mount Hope Cemetery, after his official military headstone had been delivered and installed. In the background flew an American flag with the appropriate number of state stars at the time of the Civil War, and near the gravestones of John and Andrew Snyder there was a huge New York 40th Regiment flag that was carried into battle during the war. Brian Bennett, author of Sons of Old Monroe: A Regimental History of Patrick O'Rorke's 140th New York Volunteers, read from his book about the Snyder brothers in the Civil War. Joe Gresser played Civil War fiddle tunes. Several women with faces veiled and wearing Victorian mourning apparel placed wreaths, fresh flowers, and rosemary on John and Andrew Snyder's graves. A group of men in Civil War uniforms loaded their heavy muskets and fired a military salute. It was a special event, 108 years late.

Infantry riflemen in Union uniforms fire a salute to the fallen Union soldier, John Snyder, at the reenactment in Mount Hope Cemetery on November 15.
Isaac Post (1800-1872) and Amy Kirby Post (1803-1889) are buried in Range 2, Lot 121 and are credited with assisting the largest number of slaves to escape to Canada. They are the subject of Caitlin Powalski's lecture on April 18. Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.

LECTURE SERIES
AT PUBLIC LIBRARY
OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

From January through May, five lectures will be presented, one a month, on a variety of historic subjects at the Rochester Public Library’s Kate Gleason Auditorium in the new downtown library building on South Avenue. All of the lectures are on a Sunday afternoon at 2:00 p.m., and the public is invited to attend. Parking is free in the parking garage adjacent to the library. Here is the schedule:

Sunday, January 17, 2:00 p.m.: Richard Reisem, local author and Friends of Mount Hope trustee, will present a slide lecture, Buried Treasures in Mount Hope Cemetery. A third of a million Rochesterians have taken up permanent residence in Mount Hope Cemetery. Memorializing these people are fascinating monuments that decorate the undulating landscape created by glaciers. The sculptures, the Victorian symbols, the funerary poetry, the glacial terrain, and the people buried in it—all present a captivating story.

Sunday, February 21, 2:00 p.m.: Pat Corcoran, Friends of Mount Hope trustee and cemetery tour guide, and Peggy Weston Byrd, a Friends of Mount Hope volunteer, will present an interesting report on Epidemics in 19th-Century Rochester.

Sunday, March 21, 2:00 p.m.: Don Hall, Friends of Mount Hope trustee and cemetery tour guide, will present a program titled Missing Mansions: East Avenue, Then and Now. Rochester’s East Avenue remains one of the best-preserved gateway streets of any city in America. Still, many millionaires’ homes that once lined the avenue have disappeared. Through use of historic and contemporary photographs, Hall contrasts the vanished East Avenue with the present, including adaptive reuse of original fine residences.

Sunday, April 18, 2:00 p.m.: Caitlin Powalski, an advanced-degree student at University of Rochester, will present I Take Thy Hand: Isaac and Amy Post, Spiritualism, and Progressive Reform in 19th-Century Rochester. The program explores the lives of Isaac and Amy Post, leading social activists at the height of Rochester’s Progressive Era, and studies their role in abolition, women’s rights, temperance, nonviolence movements, and their rejection of Quaker faith in favor of Spiritualism.

Sunday, May 16, 2:00 p.m.: Dennis Carr, Friends of Mount Hope trustee and cemetery tour guide, will present a lecture, Mischief, Murder, and Mayhem, which reveals Mount Hope Cemetery permanent residents who bent, broke, or enforced the law.
In 1897, the prominent Rochester architect, J. Foster Warner, designed a gateway to Mount Hope Cemetery that incorporated seven marble piers and associated iron fencing located at the south cemetery entrance at 1133 Mount Hope Avenue. (This is the entrance that is now opposite the Distillery restaurant.) Elaborate iron gates were attached to the piers to define a central vehicular entrance and exit and pedestrian entrances at both ends of the vehicle passageways. Two additional piers accommodated a curved iron fence that connected to the cemetery’s perimeter fencing. The intricate gateway to Mount Hope Cemetery was built in 1898.

In his building designs, Warner was very particular about the quality of the building materials. Only the best and sturdiest iron fencing and the finest marble were permissible in a Warner construction project. He directed that “said marble be of the dark building marble, Patent Hammered, ten (10) cut, 1/8 inch joints, perfectly square and true faced, sharp corners, sound and free from iron, with Lewis holes.” The order with such detailed specifications was delivered to Gouverneur Marble Company in Gouverneur, New York. The marble was to be delivered “in good order and securely boxed.”

Over the last 112 years, the impressive south entrance has survived with a few minor nicks and scrapes. The pier to the far right near Mount Hope Avenue was hit by an out-of-control truck a few years ago, and although it suffered damage (now repaired), the truck came out in worse condition. Remember, these piers were designed by Rochester’s preeminent architect and made of strong, long-lasting, top-quality construction materials and craftsmanship.

The postcard illustration depicts the entrance as it looked in the early 1900s, when the “dark building marble” appears to be painted white. They are not white today. The current cemetery office is depicted with its wrap-around porch, and Mount Hope Avenue reveals the trolley track that it boasted in those days.

Two gentlemen in coats and hats await the trolley at the south entrance to Mount Hope Cemetery in this early 1900s postcard photo.

THE SEVEN PIERS
AT THE SOUTH ENTRANCE
TO MT. HOPE CEMETERY

By Richard O. Reisem
FLYING SQUIRREL FOUND IN MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY

By Sue O'Neil

In the spring of 2008, Leland Brun, a wildlife rehabilitator, was called when a baby screech owl was found sitting on the ground by a tree in Mount Hope Cemetery (Epitaph, Vol. 28, No. 4, Fall 2008). He rehabilitated the deserted baby owl and raised it before releasing the owl as an adult. While visiting Mount Hope, Leland Brun speculated that flying squirrels were also living there, but being nocturnal and dwelling in trees, they are rarely seen. While there have been sightings of deer, turkeys, red foxes and other wildlife in the cemetery, there have been no reports of flying squirrels.

Flying squirrels don't really fly; they glide. They have extra skin stretching from their forearms to their hind legs that allows them to glide over 200 feet. In winter, they live in large groups of eight to twenty in tree cavities usually made by woodpeckers. They are omnivores and eat acorns, berries, fungi, insects and small mice. There are two species of flying squirrels in New York. The northern flying squirrel is 10-14 inches in overall length and has brown fur on its back and a gray belly. The southern flying squirrel is smaller, measuring 8-10 inches and has gray fur with a white belly.

On Tuesday, December 8, I was walking my dog along Indian Trail Avenue and saw a small dead animal curled up in the road. It was bigger than a mouse but smaller than a chipmunk, with large eyes (suggesting that it was nocturnal), beautiful thick gray fur, which reminded me of a chinchilla, and a flat furry tail. I pushed it onto a pile of oak leaves just off the side of the road. That evening I looked through one of my field guides to identify the rodent, and while scanning the pictures, I found it: a southern flying squirrel. I was so excited that I went back the next morning to see if it was still there. It was! I gently uncurled it to find the telltale loose skin on its sides. This confirmed that flying squirrels indeed are present in Mount Hope Cemetery.
Valerie O’Hara, head of Pike Stained Glass Studios, will present a program on stained glass at the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery annual meeting. This 10- by 8-foot stained-glass window in the wine-tasting room at Sonnenberg Gardens in Canandaigua was created by Pike Stained Glass Studios in 1911.

FRIENDS OF MOUNT HOPE
ANNUAL MEETING ON
APRIL 13, AT 7:00 P.M.
BRIGHTON TOWN HALL

The Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery will hold its annual meeting at Brighton Town Hall, 2300 Elmwood Avenue, on Tuesday, April 13, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. The guest speaker will be Valerie O’Hara, president of Pike Stained Glass Studios. She will present a fascinating program with visuals describing the art and craft of creating stained-glass windows. Her presentation will include famous stained-glass windows in the western New York State area. As is traditional at Friends annual meetings, there will be a lavish selection of food and beverages. There is ample free parking at Brighton Town Hall. This is one event that you should not miss.
WINTER TOURS OF MOUNT HOPE OFFER ESCAPE FROM CABIN FEVER

In 2010 the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery will offer three opportunities to experience the beauty of the cemetery in winter with Saturday guided walking tours, 60-90 minutes long, depending on weather conditions, on three Saturdays: January 16, February 20, and March 20.

The tours will be led by Don Hall, Friends trustee, and begin at 1:00 p.m. at the south cemetery entrance, 1133 Mt. Hope Avenue, opposite the Distillery restaurant. Admission is $4/person; free for members of the Friends of Mount Hope. The tour route is entirely on flat, routinely paved roads. In addition to general information about the cemetery, tours will include, among others:

- Alexander Millener, George Washington’s drummer boy in the Revolutionary War,
- the 1912 Gothic Revival chapel designed by famous architect, J. Foster Warner,
- Edward Crone, who died in a Nazi prison camp and inspired the character, Billy Pilgrim, in Kurt Vonnegut’s novel *Slaughterhouse Five*,
- the cemetery’s second tallest monument erected by the Union Pacific Railroad in memory of Hartwell Carver, who promoted the construction of the transcontinental railroad,
- James Vick, who developed a racetrack on East Avenue into a horticultural nursery that eventually became Vick Park A and B.