THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR AND MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY

By Richard O. Reisen

In the 19th century, America was very interested in acquiring Cuba, then a Spanish colony. Several U.S. presidents—James Polk, Franklin Pierce, and Ulysses S. Grant—made purchase offers to Spain, which summarily rejected all of them.

For decades, harsh Spanish rule created constant revolts in Cuba. By 1897-1898, America was particularly concerned about the atrocities that the Spanish rulers were inflicting on the Cubans, and President William McKinley sent the American battleship USS Maine to Havana to protect American citizens and interests in Cuba. When an explosion sunk the USS Maine in the Havana harbor, President William McKinley issued an ultimatum to Spain demanding that it surrender control of Cuba and declare its independence. Spain declined and the U.S. Navy blockaded Cuba on April 21, 1898. Spain declared war on April 23.

Despite the fact that the main issue was Cuba’s independence, the war was fought in both the Caribbean, namely Cuba and Puerto Rico, and in Spanish colonies in the Pacific, the Philippines and Guam. The war lasted 16 weeks with hostilities ending on August 12, 1898. The formal peace treaty, the Treaty of Paris, was signed on December 10, 1898. The United States gained almost all of Spain’s colonies, including the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. Cuba won its independence, but the treaty included the U.S. right to a perpetual lease of Guantanamo Bay.

One of the spoils of war ended up in Mount Hope Cemetery. It is the Spanish howitzer cannon from the Spanish admiral’s flagship, the Reina Cristina. The Spanish warship was sunk at Manila Bay, May 1, 1898. The trophy cannon was presented to Monroe County by the Honorable O. F. Williams and dedicated November 28, 1902. The cannon stands at the entrance to the cemetery’s
Spanish-American War plot, Section BB  
Single Graves, as a memorial to Monroe  
County members of the U.S. military who  
lost their lives in the war.

Rochester’s own special hero of the  
Spanish-American War was Elwell Step-  
phen Otis. He was born in Frederick,  
Maryland on March 25, 1838. Elwell was  
one of several sons of William Otis, who  
moved his family to Rochester, New York  
and became an owner and manager of the  
Rochester Brick and Tile Company.

Elwell Otis was graduated from the Univer-  
sity of Rochester in 1858. While a student,  
he was a member of Delta Psi fraternity. He  
continued his education at Harvard University where  
he received a law degree in 1861. After practicing law  
for a year, he joined the Union army as a captain in  
Rochester’s 140th New  
York Infantry. He was  
promoted to lieutenant  
colonel of the regiment in  
1863 and made full colonel  
in 1864, succeeding Colonel  
Patrick O’Rorke, when  
he was killed in the Battle of the Wilderness.

In 1869, Otis was ap-  
pointed lieutenant colonel  
of the 22nd U.S. Infantry,  
serving in the regular army  
in the campaign against the  
American Indians in the  
western frontier. The most  
famous battle in the Great  
Sioux War of 1876, of course, was the Battle  
of the Little Bighorn (Custer’s Last Stand)  
in which Lieutenant Colonel George Arm-  
strong Custer led a force of 700 men of the  
U.S. 7th Cavalry into a devastating defeat  
that killed Custer and 268 men of his  
battalion. In 1880, Otis was appointed colonel  
of the 20th U.S. Infantry, and it was  
Colonel Otis who defeated the Sioux and  
accepted the surrender of Chief Sitting  
Bull in 1881. He became a brigadier gener-  
al in 1893.

In 1898, Otis, now a major general, was  
sent to the Philippines to replace General  
Wesley Merritt and assume command of  
the VIII Corps in the Spanish-American  
War. He led the U.S. Army in the Battle of  
Manila and became the military governor of  
the Philippine Islands. He left the islands in  
1900 and two years later, when he reached  
the army’s retirement age of 62 years, was  
retired from the army, having had one of the  
most illustrious careers that any military  
man of the times could claim.

When Otis returned to America, Rochester  
claimed him as a local hero.  
June 15, 1900 was pro-  
claimed “Otis Day” in his  
honor. The eminent Rochester architect, Claude  
Bragdon, was engaged to design a triumphal arch,  
which was erected at the corner of Main Street and  
East Avenue. However magnificent, massive,  
imposing, and heroic the  
structure was, it was con-  
structed of elaborately  
carved plaster over a  
wood-frame skeleton. A  
throng of more than  
100,000 people gathered  
for the grand parade of  
government officials, civil-  
ian organizations, military  
units, and marching bands.  
The celebration continued  
for days with banquets,  
speeches, band concerts,  
and patriotic displays  
throughout downtown  
Rochester. The celebration,  
which not only honored  
General Otis but also the  
resounding victory of  
America in the Spanish-  
American War, is still consi-  
sidered the largest and most elaborate such  
event ever staged in the city.
“Otis Day” was June 15, 1900 with a huge celebration arch erected on Main Street at East Avenue. Passing through the arch is a marching band with dark jackets and white trousers.

In 1902, Otis retired to his home in Gates, where he lived quietly for seven years until he died on October 21, 1909 from painful angina. Rochester’s hero was buried on the pinnacle of the highest hill in the cemetery, which is Mount Hope itself. A huge granite monument was placed on Lot 46 in Section L with the name, “OTIS” prominently cut into both faces of the stone. There is an inscription on the west face of the stone that reads: “Not the last stroke but every stroke brings victory.” On the face of a smooth rectangle above the inscription there are four small holes in the corners of the rectangle to which a bronze tablet had originally been attached. That bronze plaque was removed because in 1929, the United States determined that the body of Elwell Otis should be exhumed and reinterred in Arlington National Cemetery. The inscription on that monument in Arlington Cemetery reads:

Elwell Stephen Otis
Major General United States Army
1838-1909

His Wife
Louise Bowman Otis
Died June 9, 1934

The name OTIS is prominently cut into a massive granite monument in Mount Hope Cemetery, but the man is no longer buried here.

Four small holes show where a bronze plaque was mounted on the smooth stone rectangle. It was removed in 1929 when the body of General Otis was reinterred in Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, D.C.
MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY
NORTH ENTRANCE AREA RENOVATION UPDATE

By Richard O. Reisem

A Federal grant, obtained for the City of Rochester by U.S. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, has financed a number of improvements in the north entrance area of Mount Hope Cemetery. Work on the project began in the spring of 2011, continued through the summer, and neared completion in September. It involved excavation for underground electrical cables to provide façade illumination of the gatehouse, chapel, Florentine fountain, and Gould and Rau mausoleums. Excavation and construction of a carriage path that originally existed in the central lawn area was also accomplished. A considerable amount of masonry work involved rebuilding the Yaky plot foundation wall, stone entrance steps to the 1862 chapel, stone repair to the side walls of the Jacob Gould mausoleum and installation of a new Indiana limestone obelisk atop the mausoleum, and reconstruction of the stone forecourt and steps of the Charles Rau mausoleum. Missing pieces in the Yaky plot historic perimeter cast-iron fence were acquired and welded in place, and the fence was cleaned and painted. Finally, installation of in- and above-ground electrical lighting fixtures was made throughout the area. The principal contractor for the multifaceted project was Heaster Building Restoration, Inc., under the leadership of William Heaster. A number of fine subcontractors contributed to the myriad improvements. The excellent workmanship throughout is evident in the accompanying photographs.
The 1862 Gothic Revival chapel has new limestone steps, replacing the badly deteriorated original steps.

(Upper right) The Egyptian style Jacob Gould mausoleum now has a new Indiana limestone obelisk replacing the original damaged stone, which had dangerously split and could easily fall.

The forecourt and steps to the Charles Rau mausoleum were found partially buried in the hillside. They were dug up, cleaned, and positioned to create a small courtyard in front of the mausoleum with steps leading up to the grass area.
The 1875 cast-iron Florentine fountain is now illuminated by a spotlight high in the tree in the background. The spotlight cable will be painted to match the tree trunk. The fountain itself will be repaired and repainted next spring.

The new carriage path, built like Erie Canal towpaths, replicates the original one that encircled the fountain. This path, however, will only be used by pedestrians.

Cast-stone bollards block vehicle traffic on the new carriage path. The bollards are exact replicas of existing bollards in Mount Hope Cemetery.

Five inground spotlights illuminate the façade of the 1862 chapel. This one is buried in the asphalt roadway and can withstand the weight of heavy vehicles.

Several spotlights on the architectural structures in the cemetery are aboveground units like this one that lights the gatehouse tower.

While we were taking all these photographs, we caught the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery President Marilyn Nolte and trustee Dick Miller cleaning out a clogged drain in the north entrance area, proving that the Friends have a working board of trustees.
STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS REPAIRED ON 1912 CHAPEL

On September 15, two sections of stained-glass windows on the west façade of the 1912 chapel were reinstalled after being cleaned and re-leaded. The work was done by Pike Stained Glass Studios, Inc. The reason for removing the windows was that the stone frame of the windows had deteriorated to the extent that the old frame needed to be removed and a new cast-stone frame installed. The new frame was constructed by Heaster Building Restoration, Inc.

Replacing the frame meant that the stained-glass windows had to be removed during the reconstruction process. The windows were just shy of being a century old. Valerie O’Hara, president of Pike Stained Glass Studios, Inc., said, “Once a stained-glass window section that is this old is removed, it is an opportune time to re-lead it, so it will last another 100 years.”

Here is the interior of the 1912 Gothic Revival chapel, looking from the altar to the west entrance. The large window on the end wall contains the sections that were removed while the deteriorated stone frame was repaired. Those sections can be seen covered in plywood. In the foreground of the scene is the platform for caskets, which an elevator in the basement raised to the sanctuary level for funeral services. Photo by Donald S. Hall.

A section of a restored window is raised to the installation level; the window is protected by a wooden crate. Addam Deon hands the window to David Young, the installer. Photo by Donald S. Hall.

Valerie O’Hara, president of Pike Stained Glass, climbs ladder to inspect final window installation by David Young. Photo by Donald S. Hall.
Tanvi Asher (third from the left) knows how to produce sophisticated fashion photographs. Shoot them in Mount Hope Cemetery. Tanvi heads the firm Excessary based in Rochester, New York, where she creates handmade signature scarves, handbags, and women's accessories. In the photo from left: Kaci Smith (model wearing Tanvi's apparel line), Shevaune Ray (makeup artist), Tanvi (designer and maker of Peppermint apparel), Laura Dimonte (model wearing Peppermint apparel), Sarah Peterson (the photographer), Fawn Brokaw (designer and maker of Fawn Ray designs), Taylor Prier (model wearing Peppermint apparel and Fawn Ray cape), and Cecily Calver (model wearing Peppermint apparel and Fawn Ray headdress). Tanvi selected the 1875 cast-iron Florentine fountain as a backdrop for some striking fashion shots that were made on Sunday, September 11. The photo shoot was in preparation for a fashion show/sale at Thread Boutique, 654 South Avenue, on October 8. See more at shoppeppermint.etsy.com and fawnraydesigns.blogspot.com.