MOUNT HOPE AND BUFFALO BILL CODY

By Milos Andjelic

Having the first of the great American Municipal Victorian cemeteries in the neighborhood gives an excellent opportunity for examining gravestones and funerary architecture. With the current size of 196 acres and 14-and-a-half miles of road winding through its unique and picturesque burial ground, Mount Hope is one of the most beautiful and enchanting cemeteries in America. When all the available plots in the old Buffalo Street burying ground were taken after a cholera epidemic in Rochester in 1832, the city acquired 54 acres of thick woods and inaccessible hills and valleys one-and-a-half miles from downtown. That became the nucleus for the cemetery that is in front of us today. Many citizens disliked the choice, but thanks to imaginative decisions on the placement of roads and sensitive clearing of trees by Silas Cornell, the city’s surveyor, that land became Mount Hope Cemetery in 1838.

Maybe more impressive than architecture of the cemetery is its permanent population. Some of the most prominent citizens are among 350,000 people that are buried in Mount Hope. Susan B. Anthony, who led the first women’s rights movement in America, and Frederick Douglass, a renowned antislavery movement leader are buried there. John Jacob Bausch and Henry Lomb, founders of one of the greatest optical companies in the world, too. The list also includes Dr. Hartwell Carver, the father of the transcontinental railroad; Adelaide Crapsey, the great imagist poet; George Ellwanger, who built the largest horticultural nursery in the world; Frank E. Gannet, founder of America’s largest newspaper chain; Myron Holley, the constructor of the Erie Canal; Lewis Henry Morgan, founder of the science of anthropology; Col. Nathaniel Rochester, founder of the city; Hiram Sibley, who founded Western Union and persuaded Czar Alexander to sell Alaska to the U.S.; Margaret Woodbury Strong, and many others.

What surprised me and attracted my attention was the fact that Buffalo Bill’s children are buried in Mount Hope Cemetery. How did it come to be that three children of the western showman are buried there? The story begins on February 26, 1846, in LeClaire, Iowa, where William F. Cody was born. His family soon moved west. In Fort Laramie, Wyoming, 12-year-old William met the Indian scouts Kit Carson and Jim Bridger. Learning from them, Cody developed his riding and scouting skills. During the building of the Kansas-Pacific Railroad in 1867-1868, he was hired by the railroad to provide meat for the workers. His skill as a buffalo hunter gained him the nickname “Buffalo Bill”. At 18, he joined the army and was assigned to work as a spy and scout serving for a time with General George Custer. The Fifth Cavalry became convinced that Bill Cody was their good luck charm.

Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show complement of Indians in full dress on both adults and children. The tops of their conical tepees appear above the crowd.

Portrait of the young Buffalo Bill Cody, signed “Yours Truly, W. F. Cody, Buffalo Bill”.

From 1868 to 1872 he was continuously employed by the United States Army, a record in the hazardous and uncertain scouting profession. He also began to develop his
career as an entertainer. Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill created the traveling melodrama that idealized the life of western cowboys.

Now married with Louisa Frederici, he was constantly moving with the entertainment circuit. In 1872, Henry A. Ward, geologist and University of Rochester professor, went on a buffalo hunt in Nebraska. His guide was Buffalo Bill. Ward was impressed by young Cody and encouraged him to move to Rochester. Cody lived here from 1873 until 1877 with his wife Louisa, daughters Arta and Orra, and son Kit Carson in a frame house at 10 New York Street. Unfortunately, his son died three years after the move to Rochester, at the age of five. Younger daughter, Orra, did not live much longer. She died of fever, aged eleven, in North Platt, Nebraska, where the family moved in 1883. Arta lived long enough to get married, but she didn’t outlive her parents either. She died of meningitis at the age of 28, in 1904. Seeing all your children die must be a terrible experience for the parents.

Douglas J. Davies in his book, Death, Ritual and Belief, wrote: “While death may be the annihilation of someone else’s life, the memory of that dead individual still forms part of the life and identity of the living. The loss of a child involves a partial loss of self, which cannot be compensated for it in any simple way—like amputation, parental bereavement is a permanent condition.”

Three of his kids are buried in Range 2, Lot 215. I was not able to find the information about his fourth child, daughter Irma Louise, who was born in 1883. Two stones (his son’s and younger daughter’s) are made of white marble and the third one is made of granite.

The white marble stones are heavily damaged due to acid rains in the past decades. Both of them are simple in design. First gravestone has the shape of a cube with the top side sloping. There are inscriptions on both front and back. The front has the name of Buffalo Bill’s son—Kit Carson (named after Buffalo Bill’s friend and mentor) and the back holds the following words:

**KIT CARSON CODY**

*son of*  
*W.F. & L. Cody*  
*born*  
*Fort McPherson, Nebraska*  
*died*  
*APRIL 20, 1876*  
*Aged 5 Years*  
& 5 Mos.

Decorations are even simpler: tilted cross on the “Book of Life” on the top, sloping side of the cube. The cross, once considered a symbol of punishment and shame, has become a symbol of victory for Christians. It is tilted, the way it stood when Jesus Christ was carrying it. The inscriptions on the gravestone of daughter Orra are unreadable but the format seems to be the same as on the first stone. Decorations along the edges of the stone are destroyed as well. The third gravestone, of Arta Cody Thorp, is made of granite and it survived almost a century without any significant damage. Along with name, it has years of birth and death, 1866-1904, on the top of the stone.

Buffalo Bill experienced the Old West to its fullest. He herded cattle, worked on a wagon train, drove a stagecoach, mined for gold, rode in the Pony Express, scouted for the army, and even managed a hotel. He was one of the most colorful figures of the Old West. Buffalo Bill’s famous Wild West Show was produced and presented first in Rochester at the Driving Park Racetrack before traveling to Omaha in 1883 with real cowboys and real Indians portraying the “real West”. The show spent ten of its thirty years in Europe. In 1887, Buffalo Bill was a feature attraction at Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee. He used his fame and public attention for western causes, for the rights of Indians and women, and for conversation. He cautioned the government to “never make a single
promise to the Indians that is not fulfilled” and that “every Indian outbreak has resulted from broken promises and broken treaties by the government”. He once said, “If a woman can do the same work that a man can do and do it just as well, she should have the same pay.” He had spoken out against the hide-hunters of the 1870s and 1880s for slaughtering the buffalo “cruelly, recklessly”. In Wyoming and Colorado, he worked to establish game preserves and limited hunting seasons. Buffalo Bill put his wealth as well as his words to good use. Because so few of his investments (ranching, mining, irrigation, publishing, and town building) paid off during his lifetime, he died almost broke. But he had helped his West make the transition from a wild past to a progressive future. He expressed his ideas and feelings in an evolving autobiography that he wrote during his life. I would like to cite a part of his autobiography where he talks about the loss of his only son.

“For the season of 1875-76, Texas Jack and I reorganized our old combination, and made a very successful tour. While we were playing at Springfield, Massachusetts, April 20th and 21st, 1876, a telegram was handed to me just as I was going on the stage. I opened it and found it to be from Colonel C. W. Torrence, of Rochester, an intimate friend of the family who stated that my little boy Kit was dangerously ill with the scarlet fever. This was indeed sad news, for little Kit had always been my greatest pride. I sent for John Burke, our business manager, and showing him the telegram, told him that I would play the first act, and making a proper excuse to the audience, I would then take the nine o’clock train that same evening for Rochester, leaving him to play out my part. This I did, and at ten o’clock the next morning I arrived in Rochester, and was met at the depot by my intimate friend Moses Kerngood who at once drove me to my home. I found my little boy unable to speak but he seemed to recognize me and putting his little arms around my neck he tried to kiss me. We did everything in our power to save him, but it was of no avail. The Lord claimed his own, and that evening at six o’clock my beloved Kit died in my arms. We laid him away to rest in the beautiful cemetery of Mount Hope amid sorrow and tears.”

(Editor’s Note: The author, Milos Andjelic, is a student at the University of Rochester and wrote this essay as part of the course requirements for Religion 167, taught by Professor Emil Homerin, who is also a trustee of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery.)

Kit Carson Cody died in 1876 at age 5 years. His marble tombstone depicts a scroll embellished with a Christian cross. It is in Range 2, Lot 215.

Orra Maude Cody died in 1883. Her marble monument is next to her brother, Kit Carson Cody.

Arta Cody Thorp, the third child of William and Louisa Cody, is also buried in Range 2, Lot 215.

Buffalo Bill Cody is rarely seen without a hat, even at his advanced age. He was 70 when he died.
THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR TOUR: A DRAMATIC AND MUSICAL ADVENTURE

By Richard O. Reisem

On Saturday, August 11, at high noon on a salutary day, a large group of tour goers gathered at the north entrance to Mount Hope Cemetery for a tour concerning matters that happened 230-some years ago. It was the 2012 version of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery’s annual American Revolutionary War Tour. For this tour, the guides were the Friends eminent, longtime tour guide Dennis Carr, ably assisted by historians Steve Clarke and Robbie Dreeson.

The crowd was introduced to music of two centuries ago with a pre-tour concert by an eleven-piece Fife and Drum Corps. The military tone of the music got the group into a marching mood, and march they did over a substantial portion of the 196-acre cemetery to hear stories of New York State people buried in Mount Hope who contributed to the founding of our republic by defeating the British in the Revolutionary War. Over the undulating landscape, accompanied by the music of the fife and drum corps, the crowd climbed some of the highest elevations like Sections R and G and descended some of the deepest valleys in the glacially formed cemetery.

The day was warm but not oppressive. Representatives from the local chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution donned 18th-century costumes for the occasion. The Patriot militiamen wore either coats or waistcoats, breeches, and tricorns on their heads (a
Liberty cap, in one case). Most of that clothing was wool, so the day felt warmer for them. Guide Steve Clarke told me that he was wearing a beige sleeveless coat, brown breeches, and a white shirt, all made of cotton, which made the outfit more comfortable on hot days. The DAR women appeared in colorful, full-length hoopskirts. An SAR flag bearer carried a thirteen-star (Betsy Ross) American flag around the entire 2 1/2-hour tour.

One of the early stops on the tour visited the gravesite of Colonel Nathaniel Rochester, the founder of the eponymous city. Early in the Revolutionary War, Rochester was appointed a major in the North Carolina militia; in 1777, he was appointed Colonel of the North Carolina militia and Commissioner in charge of founding and managing an arms factory to supply weapons for the army. That factory was built in Hillsborough, North Carolina. He moved to Hagerstown, Maryland in 1780, where he acquired an estate and operated a number of businesses, including a grist mill and a nail and rope factory. He was interested in acquiring frontier land in western New York, which ended up with the purchase of 100 acres on the Genesee River near High Falls. There in 1811, he laid out the streets and established plots of land for municipal, church, business, and residential use. Naming the place Rochesterville, he offered the plots for sale and began building what was soon to become the nation’s first boomtown.

The tour ended at the DAR plot where the war heroes, Lieutenant Boyd and Sergeant Parker, are buried. The flagpole is new, having been recently installed by a joint project of the DAR and the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). About 60 people attended the Revolutionary War Tour to hear stories about New Yorkers who fought in the war. The man in the broad-brimmed hat with his back to the camera is Steve Clarke, one of three tour guides.

Another tour stop of special interest was the gravesite of Alexander Millener, who lived 103 years. He was General George Washington’s drummer and led American troops into countless battles against British forces in the Revolutionary War. Later in life, he was a resident of Adams Basin on the Erie Canal near Rochester. His drum is part of the collection of the Rochester chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. He was the leader of Memorial Day parades in Rochester for decades. His monument in Range 2 of the cemetery is a classically detailed molded zinc replication of a small house.

The tour ended at the DAR plot where a number of Revolutionary War soldiers are buried, including Captain Lieutenant Thomas Boyd (1756-1779) and Sergeant Michael Parker (died 1779), who served in Major General John Sullivan’s army that was sent by General George Washington to the Genesee Valley to destroy the Seneca Indian nation that was aiding the British in the Revolutionary War. On a scouting mission, Boyd and Parker were captured and their compatriots killed in the historic Groveland Ambuscade. On the evening of September 13, 1779, the two young Americans were systematically tortured by the Indians throughout the night until their mutilated and dismembered bodies finally succumbed in the early dawn. A musket salute
to their memory was staged as the final element of this amazing tour.

The Revolutionary War occurred from 1775 to 1783, so young soldiers in the war would be in their 60s when Mount Hope Cemetery opened in 1838. When they died at an advanced age, they were buried directly in Mount Hope Cemetery. But in the case of Lieutenant Thomas Boyd, Sergeant Michael Parker, Indian guide Honyost Thaosabwato, and others in General John Sullivan’s army killed in the 1779 Groveland Ambuscade, they were buried elsewhere before being transferred to Mount Hope Cemetery.

The flagpole at the DAR plot was recently replaced with a new one. The project was a joint effort of the local chapters of the Sons of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Other DAR chapters also contributed funds, as did the Empire State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. Organizer of the flagpole replacement project was SAR member Brenton W. Downing of Fairport, NY. The president of the Rochester SAR chapter is Michael Tunison of Conesus, NY, and the registrar of the chapter is Stephan P. Clarke, who was also a tour guide at the Mount Hope Revolutionary War tour.

A three-musket salute completed the tour after which the long march proceeded back to the gatehouse, where lemonade and cookies were served.

TORCH LIGHT TOURS
REVEAL SINISTER AND WEIRD STORIES OF MOUNT HOPE PERMANENT RESIDENTS

On the Torch Light Tours—which were presented Saturday, October 20, and Tuesday, October 23—groups of 25 tour goers start from the gatehouse every 10 minutes. Tickets are timed to start six times an hour from the first tour at 5:45 p.m. to the last one at 8:00 p.m. The group pictured, the second of the evening, has arrived at the first of ten stops at 6:05 p.m., when it is still light enough to see their faces in the fading daylight. The tours are one hour and 15 minutes long, so by the end of the tour, this group will be lighted only by torch lights like the one near the center of the picture. At Stop 1, tour guide Joan Hunt describes the famous heinous High Falls murder. Similar sinister and weird stories are revealed at other stops on this tour, which is scheduled annually to occur close to Halloween.
By 6:30 p.m., day has become night and torch lights illuminate the paths. The center lights are along the cobblestone road that leads from the north entrance area to Indian Trail Avenue. The lights along the upper level to the right illuminate a sidewalk that leads to Stop 1 seen in the photo on page 6. The cluster of lights at the far left are around the Charles Rau mausoleum, which also has electrical ground fixtures to brighten the façade.
Early in September, a thunderstorm with particularly high winds brought down more than 25 trees in Mount Hope Cemetery and tore large branches off many more. Early the next morning, crews worked in the cemetery to clear roads of debris, but the main trunk of a historic oak tree was still around awaiting heavy equipment when this photo was taken in the early afternoon of the same day. The oak tree, situated just north of Grove Avenue, fell fortuitously mostly on lawn and road areas, causing minor damage to monuments.