The Firemen’s Plot, originally purchased on February 4, 1843, was in Section F of Mt. Hope. Because a larger area was needed, the old plot was exchanged for the present one, whose dimensions are 100 feet square, and firemen buried in the old plot were moved to the new one.

In 1880, a Firemen’s Monument was erected at a cost of about $8,000, including grading. Today, the 50-foot monument, probably the tallest one in the cemetery, towers over the northwestern corner of the new section.

The contract for the monument was awarded to Rochesterian H. S. Hebard’s Steam Marble Works. Hebard was an old fireman and exempt, having served as a volunteer until a paid force was established. The monument, Egyptian in style, is carved from St. Johnsbury granite. On top is a statue of a fireman, 8 feet 9 inches high, standing with his coat over his arm as though returning from a fire.

Three semi-circular steps lead to the platform, and on each of the four corners is a granite urn. The monument rises from the platform in sections, and the shaft is broken by horizontal moldings. Above the die are an orb and wings, representing “Time and Eternity,” and just below the cap is a draped swag.

The original inscription on the base was “Fire Department.” Before the rededication ceremonies in 1984, a replica of the fireman’s badge and an additional inscription were added. It reads:

(Based in part on an article appearing in the Democrat and Chronicle, September 10, 1880).

The monument was first erected, there was a fine view of the Genesee from its base, but full-grown trees and adjacent university buildings now block that view. The monument, still in excellent shape, stands as a tribute to the firemen.
One day last summer, Jim Caffrey, who has rehabilitated a lot in Section K as part of the Friends’ Adopt-A-Plot program, was excavating around an old hydrant. About eighteen inches down, his shovel suddenly wouldn’t go any further, and, in finding out why, he unearthed a beautifully preserved grave marker—a medium sized square-cornered sandstone tablet. It bore the inscription: “Rice Eaton, died Jan. 17, 1834, aged 56 years & 11 mos.” Persons unknown, at a time indeterminable, apparently had decided that Rice Eaton’s monument would make a good splash panel under the nozzle of that hydrant.

This event was serendipitous, because the Friends’ research committee had only lately decided to produce an article on the old West Brighton Rural Cemetery (WBRC)—where, we now know, Rice Eaton was originally buried. But that’s getting a little ahead of the story.

It is known that in the years between 1828, when Mt. Hope Cemetery was begun, and the turn of the century, Mt. Hope received significant numbers of removals from at least four discontinued smaller burial grounds within the City of Rochester. These were the Buffalo Street Cemetery (transfers begun in 1859), Monroe Street (1872), the Society of Friends (Quaker) Ground (probably 1892), and the West Brighton Rural Cemetery (1893).

Each of these pioneer cemeteries has its story, but the WBRC was, by a hair, the closest geographically to Mt. Hope and it is the only one concerning which Mt. Hope has any amount of information in its own files and records. So this is where we begin what may turn out to be a series.

Depending on which source you read, it was either in 1817 or 1818 that a relative of Jacob Miller, a substantial Town of Brighton resident, was buried in Miller’s property on the east side of what is now Mt. Hope Avenue, a little south of the high hill across the road which had already been named Mount Hope and eventually became a part of Mt. Hope Cemetery. Some, like Edwin Scraton, say the relative was a young daughter, probably Cilmena, who died of fever; others have it that the decedent was killed by a falling tree.

Accounts agree, however, that Jacob Miller, in 1821, around the relative’s gravesite, laid out the one-half acre burying ground which was to become the WBRC. This was a part of Lot 23 in the first division of the Town of Brighton, and was the north corner of what is now the intersection of Mt. Hope Avenue with May Street.

It was in 1821, also, that Miller sold the part of Lot 23 containing the newly sub-divided burying ground to a Theodore Backus who, apparently by prearrangement, in 1824 conveyed the one-half acre to Chauncy Crittenden, Ely Miller, and Joseph Colwell as a committee of the Burying Ground Association. This would seem to have officially the inception of the WBRC.

In the 54 years following 1824, the newly constituted cemetery received the burials of many Brighton pioneers. Although any original records which may have existed seem to have been lost, there have been attempts by journalists and genealogists to reconstruct lists of the owners of lots. And, of course, many individual graves were marked and many of those monuments were legible to the end. There were 82 lots in four sections, and the total number of burials was about 200.

The years passed. Monroe County had been born in 1821. Rochester became a city in 1834 and in 1874 annexed the part of Brighton containing the WBRC. There was another meaningful event, too. In 1841 the trustees of the Society of Friends (Quakers) purchased a one-
acre parcel contiguous with the WBRC on the east, behind it, and began the second cemetery at the corner of today's Mt. Hope and May. The Quaker Cemetery, as most called it, endured until 1892 when it was removed, largely to Mt. Hope Cemetery, and the land was sold.

Our West Brighton, meanwhile, had fallen victim to a familiar syndrome. It filled up, maintenance was neglected, and Mt. Hope became a very attractive alternative. It was officially closed in 1878 and by 1890 had become so unkempt as to be, for the community (now the city) an eyesore. In 1893, pursuant to an enabling act of the state legislature, the city acquired the land and had the bodies removed. Under the law, lot owners were compensated for land taken and for all removal and reinterment costs, the total expense of the entire project not to exceed $1500.

As typically happens in such mass removals, lot owners who cooperated took the majority of the remains to Mt. Hope, and a few to other cemeteries, under arrangements made by themselves. Others, where cooperation was absent, descendent owners could not be found, or remains could not be identified were transferred to Mt. Hope by the three city commissioners overseeing the removal. To this end, on December 28, 1893, the purchased lot 175 in Section W and the remaining bodies were reinterred there. A 1957 survey of 175W, results of which are in the Mt. Hope records, found 16 legible markers. There are fewer today.

The city in 1945 acquired the former Society of Friends' acre in a tax foreclosure, and in 1967 sold the entire 1.5-acre parcel to a builder. An apartment complex occupies the land today.

And what of Rice Eaton? We know, from an article by the genealogist-journalist Anah B. Yates, published by the Rochester Post Express on October 14, 1911, that he was really Rice Eaton, Sr., a son of Ebenezer Eaton, a soldier of the Revolution. Ebenezer is buried in Mt. Hope in an Eaton family plot, Lot 28, Range 3. But there is no cemetery record to show that his son was ever placed there. So where does Rice's marker really belong?

We shall probably never know. With few exceptions, removals from other cemeteries were not listed in the interment index, and he does not appear in any of the lot drawings for Section K. Only another serendipitous discovery might give us the answer.

(Elizabeth Schmidt aided in the research.)

MT. HOPE'S GARDENS

Visitors using the north cemetery entrance can't help but notice the beautiful flowerbeds near the gate and in the fountain area. Take time, also, to climb the hill near the gatehouse and look at the plantings in the plot enclosed by the iron fence.

As you drive through the cemetery, you see plantings on graves providing splashes of color that brighten their area. Most graves, of course, are planted and maintained by families, but our Adopt-A-Plot program also accounts for some. This year 25 graves were adopted by individuals, families, and organizations. Altogether about 35-45 people were involved. It takes time to organize the program and hours of work to cultivate, plant, water, and weed the gardens and plots. The Friends thank the many volunteers involved in these efforts.

CEMETERY TOURS

Cemetery tours end on Sunday, October 28, and will resume again on May 5, 1991. Special tours can be arranged at any time by calling 461-3494 and leaving a message.
SYMBOLISM IN MT. HOPE

The sun dial is frequently found in old English cemeteries, but is not commonly used in the United States. It represents the endless passage of time.

SLIDE PROGRAM

A slide/tape program about Mt. Hope is available for groups, schools, and organizations. Call Ellie Klein at 473-0778 for arrangements.

THE FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY

NAME ____________________________

STREET ____________________________ZIP ______

CITY & STATE ____________________________

TELEPHONE ____________________________

I cannot join, but would like to contribute $ ____________

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THE FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY

791 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, New York 14620

NEW MEMBERS

Mr. & Mrs. Clayton E. Hunt, Jr., Betty Linville, Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck, Kerry Schauber, Dale Edwyrd Suess

BOARD MEETING

Members may attend Board Meetings. They are usually held at the gatehouse on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. Call 461-3494 and leave a message to be sure to time and locations.

Get up-to-date information on Friends of Mt. Hope activities.

Use The Talking Phone Book.

The Friends of Mt. Hope Cemetery
Call 427-7777
ROCHESTER TALKING PHONE BOOK

THE FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY

Membership Categories:

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- Supporting $35.00
- Patron $50.00
- Benefactor $100.00
- Life Membership $500.00 or more
- Retired/Student $5.00

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