Mount Hope Cemetery
Subject of New Coffee-Table Book

“A Stunning Photographic Survey and Definitive Study.”

A handsome new oversized book to be published in March, 1994, will be the only major photographic survey and social history of America’s first municipal Victorian cemetery, namely, our very own Mount Hope.

Professional photographer Frank Gillespie has prepared 80 beautiful black-and-white photographs that cover the highlights and many discoveries in the 200-acre, 155-year-old cemetery. Most of the photographs will be reproduced in full-page size, 9 x 12 inches, and there are ten double-page photographic spreads, 12 by 18 inches. The photographs will be printed in duotone for extra tonal depth and clarity.

Frank Gillespie is of the Ansel Adams school of photographic shooting and printing. He works with large-format (6 by 7 centimeters) negatives to achieve exceptional sharpness and unusually rich, deep tones particularly suitable to the subject material in Mount Hope Cemetery. Over a period of several years, he has photographed the cemetery with the sensitivity and insight that only an accomplished artist can bring to the romantic splendor of Mount Hope. He spends days in his darkroom achieving precisely the optimum effects for each photograph.

The book also contains a comprehensive history of the cemetery and many stories, anecdotes, and biographies relating to the cemetery and its third of a million permanent residents.

The text has been prepared by Richard Reisem, a founder of the Friends of Mount Hope, cemetery tour guide, and writer of other works on historic architecture. With the help of cemetery experts such as Jack McKinney, Betty Schmidt, and Stephen Thomas, Reisem has accumulated a particularly fascinating collection of anecdotes relating to Mount Hope, including the first definitive and complete grisly story of Lieutenant Thomas Boyd and Sergeant Michael Parker, captured by Seneca Indians in the Revolutionary War.

The book will be available to members of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery in a special prepublication offer to be announced in the next issue of this newsletter. Basically, single copies will be available at $30, a 25 percent discount. Three or more copies will be available at $25 each for a 38 percent discount. After publication in March, 1994, the book will sell for $39.95.
One of Rochester's foremost nineteenth-century portraitists was Grove S. Gilbert. He was born in Clinton, New York, on August 5, 1805, and graduated with honors from Middlebury Academy about 1825. Before settling in Rochester and opening his studio, he taught school in LeRoy, New York and Niagara, Canada. During this period in his life, he began painting his first portraits.

Gilbert was largely self-taught, yet his peers acknowledged his artistic genius. In his time he painted most of the leading citizens of Rochester. But he was never one to be satisfied with his work and methods. Throughout his career, he experimented with different techniques and his art evolved through this experimentation.

Gilbert was asked to submit a portrait for an exhibition sponsored by the National Academy of Design in New York. It was so much admired by other artists that one submitted Gilbert's name as a nominee for honorary membership in the academy. In 1848 he was unanimously elected to that position.

As was customary in the nineteenth century, aspiring young artists often studied under established ones. Gilbert, a self-effacing man, was different. While he allowed young artists to watch him paint, he never formally instructed them. He did not believe he had any theory or method to impart to his students. Dellon M. Dewey, who sat for a portrait by one of Gilbert's students, summed up the reasons for his reluctance to teach. "He did not know how he produced effect himself, hence he could not communicate it to others." (History of Monroe County, New York, 1877)

His interests ranged into fields other than art and even strayed into politics. Jane Marsh Parker, in Rochester: A Story Historical, wrote of a conversation she had with Gilbert. He said that he had only voted once, for himself, in 1848 when the abolitionists entered his name as nominee for state assembly on a separate slate. Since there were only 13 members in the group, all were named to fill the offices on the slate. Gilbert must have forgotten that in 1841 he appeared on the nominee list for assessor by the same party. And, true to his beliefs, he used his home as an
Underground Railroad stop for escaped slaves.

When Gilbert died in 1885, the newspapers briefly reported the fact, an action which elicited letters to the Democrat and Chronicle from his friends, annoyed by the scant recognition given him. It is from these letters that a portrait of the man emerges, drawn by those who knew him well.

An unsigned letter dated March 24, 1885, said:

He was eccentric in many respects; held peculiar views upon religion and kindred subjects.... But those who knew him well would never permit any of his peculiarities to lessen their appreciation of his honesty, candor, and great professional ability.

In an undated, lengthy letter of praise, Myron Peck wrote:

The criticism often made on Gilbert's portraits is, that they are not "striking likenesses;" and on him as a man, that he was governed by his moods and tenses (sic) of feeling; that he was without practical ideas and had not the tact to see that his financial success depended on this subordinating his individuality as a man and artist to the popular taste and feeling. If he had done this, he would have shown himself less of a genius. He was impatient of criticism and suggestions, and often said he must act as he felt, speak as he was convinced, and paint people as he saw them, and not as they saw themselves or wished to be seen by others.

Lastly, on March 30, 1885, Caroline Hills wrote:

Ardent in his feelings, strong in his convictions and impatient of anything that seemed to him like unwarrantable restraint, his studio-talks to his sitters may have sometimes startled the strictly conventional hearer; but there was always food for thought in his most unpremeditated and casual remarks. Had he associated to a larger extent with artists of his own calibre, and had he become familiar with the best work of the modern schools, it would have aided him in artistic growth; and this he sometimes reluctantly acknowledged.

What remains of Gilbert's portraits? Five are in the mayoral collection of the City of Rochester. Others are in the possession of the Rochester Historical Society. And some may still be in the attics or on the walls of the subject's descendants.

Gilbert died on March 23, 1885, and was buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery just a short distance off Indian Trail.

Statues in Mt. Hope

As you drive through the cemetery, notice the various statuary styles. Most are of women dressed in long, flowing, classical robes. The graceful pose of the woman in this statue catches the eye.
Cemetery Tours

The regular Sunday tours ended on October 31. They will resume on May 1, 1994. Special tours are available throughout the year. Call 461-3494 and leave a message for information. You will be contacted.

Mt. Hope Slide Show

The Friends have a narrated slide show about the cemetery, which is available to groups and organizations. Call Ellie Klein at 473-0778 for information.

Annual Meeting

Remember that the annual meeting will be held on Sunday, December 5, at the Garden Center at 3 p.m. There will be a social hour, a brief business meeting, and a portrayal of Susan B. Anthony by Gretchen Sepik.

THE FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY

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FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY
791 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, New York 14620-2752