A SIGN OF SPRING — GARDENERS AT WORK

Recently there's been a lot of activity in the Susan B. Anthony plot. The Garden Gate Garden Club of Pittsford has been joined by the Creative Gardeners of Penfield in caring for this plot as well as the Albert Hotchkiss, Col. Nathan Pond, and J. Foster Warner ones.

The clubs concentrated their efforts on the Hotchkiss and Anthony gravesites. The beds were extended, new soil added, rocks and a tree stump removed. Some men brought a Roto Tiller and a power chain saw to help with the work. Their efforts show. The group planted two purple Dapple Dawn lilac bushes on the Anthony plot. This is the only lilac variety with a variegated leaf.

Dwarf pansies, lamb's ears, and forget-me-nots were also planted. Additional plantings will be made as the two garden clubs' plan unfolds over time. They intend to use dwarf plants in this plot so the gravestones won't be overwhelmed by size. Annual and perennial varieties will be used, which were selected so there would be some color in the plot over the growing season. All were available in the Victorian period, but probably not in the dwarf size.

The other three plots will each have an individualized planting plan. Even though they are in the same section as the Anthony plot, the soil and climatic conditions are different due to location.

Other garden clubs have adopted cemetery plots as part of the Adopt-A-Plot program. The clubs and their adopted plot are:

- Lakeshore Garden Club — Schermerhorn plot.
- University Garden Club — U.R. plot.

The Friends appreciate their efforts and those of many individuals who have adopted plots. Anyone interested in participating in the Adopt-A-Plot program call 461-3494 for information.

BENCHES REPAIRED

The Friends arranged for the repair of two white benches that are located at the gravesites of Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass. As a result of age a leg had fallen off each bench. The legs have been reattached and the benches repainted.
Rochester Makes Baseball History
With the Demon Pitcher, Richard Willis

by Richard O. Reisem

with help from Baseball Historian Priscilla Astifan and
Researcher/Editor Jack McKinney

Thurlow Weed, a Rochester newspaper editor who went on
to become one of our country's foremost political bosses,
rote in his Rochester newspaper that baseball was first
played by adults around 1825 in the booming village of
Rochester. However, the first baseball clubs in Rochester
to be discussed on a continuing basis were formed in 1857-
1858, and by 1860, there were several principal clubs (Live
Oaks, Flour City, Lone Stars, Olympics, Genesee Valley)
and numerous minor ones. In those early days, all the
baseball clubs were amateur ones. (The first professional
team in America wasn't organized until 1869 when Cincin-
nati paid players salaries of $1400 a season.) The amateur
teams, however, spent a great deal of time perfecting their
game, and one of the outstanding players in those early
Rochester baseball years was Richard Bradfield Willis, the
demon pitcher of the Lone Stars.

In September, 1860, the big game for the city champion-
ship between the Live Oaks and the Lone Stars was
scheduled for play on an open field at the corner of Clarissa
and Troup Streets in the Third Ward. A huge crowd,
estimated at more than 2000, gathered for the event with
carriages, wagons, and carts parked along all of the
neighborhood streets.

The Live Oaks were favored to win. They had won almost
every game that they played that season. And they arrived
on the field very confident in their natty blue-and-white
flannel uniforms. The Lone Stars had a more spotty record.

To umpire the big match, the two teams had agreed to have
John W. Stebbins, who was a prominent local attorney and
highly accomplished ballplayer himself. In fact, Stebbins
professed to be as good a pitcher as the highly acclaimed
Richard Willis.

Willis, 23 years old at the time, was to pitch for the Lone
Stars on that fateful September day. He was and still is
considered the greatest amateur pitcher that Rochester
has ever seen. He had, it was said, 'an arm as hard as
marble,' and he was capable of such intense concentration
and effort that after his stand on the mound, he nearly
passed out and was carried to a tent where he was rubbed
down, and cold compresses were applied to his pitching
arm.

Richard Willis came to Rochester from England in 1845
when he was 8 years old and grew up in the city. He had a
particularly friendly, outgoing personality and had hosts of
friends here. He lived on Tremont Street, just a few blocks
from the ball field at Clarissa and Troup.

Now, Willis' not only threw a ball with great strength and
speed, but he had been practicing several new ways of
delivering a ball to the batter. Today was his chance to try
out his most innovative pitch.

The Lone Stars took their positions on the field, and Richard
Willis began to hurl his inventive pitch to the first Live Oaks
batter. The astonished batter saw the ball coming directly
at him at great speed and not toward home plate, and he
jumped back to avoid being hit. Then, as the ball neared the
destination of its 45-foot throw, it curved to pass directly
over home plate. Umpire Stebbins was astonished but
noted that the ball had arrived exactly where it was sup-
posed to. The Live Oaks batter, however, was stunned and
confused. Willis pitched again; the batter swung mightily,
but missed the ball that again curved and passed over the
plate.

Batter after batter from the Live Oaks team fouled the
pitches off and struck out. Even the Live Oaks' power hitters
were failing to reach first base. What was this demon pitch?
The crowd, which consisted largely of Live Oaks fans,
began increasingly agitated and started to hurl abuse at
Stebbins who called Willis' pitches strikes. Each ball that
Willis threw seemed to come right at the batter and then
veer at almost the last moment to go over home plate. Willis
was throwing a curve ball, the first in the history of baseball.
And the Live Oaks team and their fans were having none of it. By the fifth inning, the protests were so loud that the Live Oaks coach and his whole team left their bench and ran out to deal with Umpire Stebbins. The crowd of Live Oaks fans were right behind, screaming for revenge.

Poor John Stebbins feared for his life, bounded away, and jumped over the right-field picket fence where he found the carriage of his legal associate and rode away from the screaming crowd.

The Rochester community was buzzing the next day about Willis and his demon pitching. The Lone Stars had conquered the formidable Live Oaks with a baseball that swerved at the final moments of its travel.

Now, the Lone Stars and Willis faced the invincible Buffalo Niagaras for the regional title. The game was played on September 22, 1860, in Rochester. The Niagaras had seldom been beaten and rarely by a Rochester team. Richard Willis never once let up on his cannonball, curveball delivery, which led to a 32 to 10 victory for the Lone Stars. It was the worst defeat the Buffalo Niagaras had ever sustained. Afterward, Willis was presented a gold pen and case by his club.

What Willis had accomplished soon became the subject of scientific inquiry. A thrown ball was not supposed to curve sideways; it was only supposed to curve downward as a result of gravity. Local astronomer Lewis B. Swift decided to disprove that a baseball could be made to swerve horizontally. A public demonstration was set up at a downtown building with a long, straight brick wall. Swift positioned himself at the end of the wall behind the catcher. Willis pitched from the other end of the wall in a direction parallel to the wall. The ball followed the wall for most of its travel and then remarkably swerved to hit the end of the brick wall. Swift had to admit that, indeed, the ball did curve horizontally. Cheers and applause from the great crowd greeted the conclusion. And so the curve ball, a pain to batters ever since, was born.

William Arthur "Candy" Cummings is credited with introducing the curve ball in 1867 in Brooklyn when he played for the Fulton Hercules team. Cummings alleged that he learned how to throw it by tossing clams at the Fulton Fish Market. But he really had Richard Willis to thank for introducing the spin to a baseball that made it curve.

Just 8 years after the historic Live Oaks and Buffalo Niagaras games, Richard Willis became ill with consumption (tuberculosis). Many people attributed the cause of his illness to his athletic intensity. Two hours before his death a year later, Willis called his wife, Louise, to his bedside at their home, 80 Tremont Street, and asked her to bring his two young sons — Harry B., who was only 3, and Rodney M., just over 1 year old — so that he could say goodbye to them. He then similarly said farewell separately to his mother, relatives, friends, and neighbors. He assured them all that he was not afraid to die and thanked each person for contributing to his happiness in life. He was 33 years old when he died on September 21, 1869, one day before the anniversary of his spectacular win over the Buffalo Niagaras 9 years before.

Unfortunately, it appears likely that he gave his disease to his wife, Louise, because she died of consumption almost exactly 3 years later, on September 23, 1872. Son Rodney M. died of marasmus on November 12, 1869, just 7 weeks after his father's death. (Marasmus is a wasting away of the body caused by inadequately assimilated food. In Rodney’s case, this inability may have been the result of intestinal tuberculosis.) Son Harry B. Willis died on August 21, 1894, at the age of 28 years. The whole Willis family is buried in Section S, 68 feet due west of the John Quin column.

**CEMETERY EVENTS**

On February 20, the anniversary of Frederick Douglass’ death was observed with a gravesite ceremony. The Friends of Mt. Hope invited everyone to the North Gatehouse for refreshments and a social hour. Many returned to the gatehouse and stayed to talk with other people.

On March 29, members of the Friends gave three slide presentations of “Notable Women Buried in Mt. Hope,” as part of the Women’s History Month observance. Over 80 came between the hours of 5:30 and 8:30 p.m. to hear and see the presentation.
From left to right are First Vice President Dennis Carr, President Shirley A. Stephens, both officers of the Friends, and Monroe County Executive John D. Doyle. They were present for the Women's History Month event. Shirley made one of the presentations.

NEW MEMBERS


Cemetery Tours

The regular Sunday tours resume on May 7 at 2 and 3 p.m. They will continue each Sunday until the end of October. Special tours are available at any time during the year. For information call 461-3494 and leave a message.

THE FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY

Membership Categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting</td>
<td>$35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron</td>
<td>$50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefactor</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Membership</td>
<td>$500.00 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired/Student</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY

791 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, New York 14620-2752