HIGH DRAMA IN MOUNT HOPE
ACTORS RELIVE ROCHESTER INVOLVEMENT
IN THE TENSE DAYS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

by Richard O. Reisem

On three dates this summer and fall (August 7, September 25, and October 9), a unique outdoor theater event will occur in Mount Hope Cemetery. It is a special experience that shouldn't be missed.

The Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery and the Rochester Museum and Science Center Players will present A Circle of Friends: An Abolitionists' Tour of Mount Hope in 1860. The show involves dramatic episodes from the lives of Frederick Douglass, his wife Anna Murray Douglass, and his friends, including Mary Anthony (younger sister of Susan B.), Samuel Porter, the Rev. Thomas James, Amy Post (who had interesting experiences hiding slaves), and Jacob Morris. Harrowing tales from the abolitionist movement and other stories are all set in beautiful, historic Mount Hope Cemetery.

The time of the events described is 1860, just before the Civil War started in 1861, when anti-slavery sentiment was growing throughout the North after abolitionist John Brown was hanged. The entire play is based on real events and actual statements by the historic figures portrayed. Costumed actors and actresses play the parts of key Rochesterians who found effective ways to fight the slavery situation in America. Even the guides are costumed and take roles of actual Rochesterians living in 1860. Participants are invited to join actors in humming and singing a well-known abolitionist song as they stroll through the historic grounds of Mount Hope. Visits are made to various famous gravesites as the dramatic and sometimes heartrending story builds to its climax at the

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OLIVER CULVER
(1778-1867)
A ROCHESTER PIONEER

by Warren Kling

Oliver Culver was one of the earliest and most interesting pioneers of Monroe County, contributing to its growth and development in many ways. He was born in East Windsor, Connecticut on September 24, 1778. When he was five, his family moved to Orwell, Vermont and later to Ticonderoga, New York.

In 1796 at age 18, he started west on foot to work with his friend, Sam Spafford, and Sam's father, Amos, on a surveying job in Cleveland, Ohio. They were delayed in Schenectady having to wait more than a month for a boat to carry them west on Lake Ontario. Too restless to sit around, Oliver hiked as far west as Irondequoit Bay, arriving at the Indian Landing on Irondequoit Creek in March 1796. There, he hunted and fished, and his only human contact was with a family of squatters headed by Asa Dunbar.

Eventually, Culver got to Cleveland with a group of about 60 others. They all spent the summer surveying and clearing land before returning east. Culver was dropped off at Irondequoit Bay along with his friend, Sam Spafford. They spent the fall hunting and fishing and then, before winter set in, walked back east to Connecticut. The next spring they returned to Irondequoit and the Indian Landing and then on to Cleveland for summer work. Trips to Cleveland became routine for two years.

Culver liked to tell the story of an incident that occurred in these early days in Cleveland. Sam Spafford's father, Amos, obtained the first contract to distribute mail in the Cleveland area. On one occasion in the dead of winter when the usual mail carrier was sick, Culver put the 20-pound mailbags on his back and traveled on ice skates from Cleveland to Huron, covering the 40 miles in four hours.

He continued working in Ohio during 1797-1798, clearing six acres and planting corn on the present site of downtown Cleveland. He also worked on cutting a road from Cleveland to the Pennsylvania border.

Eventually, around 1800, Culver returned to the Indian Landing at Irondequoit Creek where Judge John Tryon had now built a store. Known as the city of Tryon, the area consisted of the Tryon & Adams store, an ashery, a tavern, a tannery, a blacksmith shop, and a shoemaker's facility. Culver and the Hatch brothers built the first sawmill in 1802 on nearby Allyne's Creek. To provide a suitable income, Culver not only ran the sawmill but also tended John Tryon's store, operated the ashery, cleared land, hunted, and trapped.

On one occasion, Culver and his friend, Sam Spafford, were inspecting traps near the mouth of the Genesee River at Lake Ontario. They caught three Indians trying to steal the traps, and a violent fight ensued. Culver received a severe tomahawk cut to his head, which nearly killed him. They did, however, save the traps, and Culver would show his scar and tell the tale to any ready listener.

Another incident occurred at Irondequoit Bay when Culver and Spafford spotted a bear swimming in the bay. They thought a bearskin would fetch a good price and pursued the bear in a boat, armed only with their hunting knives. The bear, however, turned out to be more than they bargained for. He weighed 400 pounds, and in the violent struggle, the bear almost capsized the boat. They did finally manage to kill it, and the skin did fetch a good price. The incident also provided an entertaining story.

Oliver Culver boarded for some time at Orringham Stone's house (now the Stone-Tolan House). He lived very frugally, saving his money in order to buy 105 acres in
Olwa Culver House on East Boulevard is a particularly fine example of the Federal style of architecture, and the portion shown here was built in 1815.

Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.

what was then a part of Brighton, but which today is in Rochester along the north side of East Avenue from Culver Road west to Barrington Street and from Culver Road east to 1300 East Avenue. He paid $3 an acre and cleared some of the land, planting wheat near what is now Culver Road.

He has the distinction of having two Rochester streets named for him: Culver Road and Oliver Street, which is one block west of Culver. He also persuaded his brother, John, to purchase 150 acres which extended from what is now Goodman Street to Barrington Street along East Avenue. This land included the current site of the George Eastman House. The land was sold to Eastman by Charles Culver.

John Culver, however, did not initially stay in this area but decided to move back to Vermont. He returned in 1812.

At this point in his life, Culver had had no formal education. He did, however, value education highly. The nearest school at the time was a few miles away in Pittsford. So, when he was 24 years old, Culver helped to build a log schoolhouse near the Indian Landing. He hauled logs to the sawmill at Allyn’s Creek to be made into boards for the roof. And when the school was built, he attended it himself, even though he was older than the other students. His teacher was a man named Turner who was also a clerk at John Tryon’s store.

Around 1804, Culver began getting itchy to venture off on his own again. He started a trading company in partnership with John Tryon. Trading in furs — such as muskrat, mink, and bear — as well as rum, brandy, produce, white fish, and cattle, the venture took him as far west as Detroit. In Cleveland, he traded 75 barrels of salt for 15 yoke of oxen, which he then drove back east to Tryon.

For years, there was only dense forest and a narrow Indian trail from Orringh Stone’s tavern west. Col. Nathaniel Rochester persuaded the Northfield town council to clear a road from Stone’s place to the Genesee River. In 1805, the town appropriated $50 for the task and contracted Oliver Culver to clear it. He worked with Stone, Sam Spafford, and others to clear the land and lay a log road. It took about an hour to haul a wagon over the logs from Stone’s tavern four miles west to the Genesee River. At first, it was called Pittsford Road, later Main Street, and finally, East Avenue.

At the same time that he was building what was to become Rochester’s most elegant avenue, Culver also married Alice Ray and finished a house and barn on his property for which he had finally secured a firm title. Alice’s parents were Isaac and Tabitha Ray, who had built a home on Landing Road. Tabitha Ray was the sister of Israel Stone, one of the first settlers in Pittsford. In 1789, Isaac Ray and his cousin Simon Ray purchased for $30 all of the land that became half of the present village of Pittsford. Dr. John Ray lived in Northfield on what is now Church Street in Pittsford.

At the time that Culver built his house near East Avenue and Culver Road, there was only one other house to the west. This was the home of Col. Josiah Fish, who was running the old Indian Allan mill on the Genesee Falls. To the east, there were only four other families living in Brighton. Both Oliver Culver and his wife Alice loved this area and lived here for the rest of their lives.

They had four children, three sons — Henry, George, John R. — and a daughter, Caroline. Dinah Walker was a domestic servant who lived with the Ray family when Alice was born. When Alice married, Dinah also moved to Culver’s house and stayed with them until she died. She is also interred in the Culver family burial lot in Mount Hope Cemetery.

Culver loved water, felt at home on the Great Lakes, and this interest naturally turned his attention to boating. On one occasion, he paddled a canoe up the Mohawk River to Oswego and along Lake Ontario to Lewiston. In 1805, he paid $55 for a very unusual sailing vessel, which was a large canoe made of bark and carrying two sails. He filled it with over two tons of furs and set out to sail the Great Lakes, trading and selling his wares and returning to Tryon 15 months later.

In 1812–1813, he built a 40-ton ship called the Clarissa, named after the recently deceased teenage daughter of his friend, Caleb Hopkins. He built this vessel on the farm of Roswell Hart near the corner of Clover Street and East Avenue. It took 26 yoke of oxen to pull it to the Indian Landing into Irondequoit Creek. In those days, very large schooners had no difficulty
navigating up Irondequoit Bay and Irondequoit River, as the creek was called in those days, to Tryon City. The creek was, of course, much wider and deeper than it is today. It emanates from Mendon Ponds and flows 34 miles, dropping 416 feet to enter Irondequoit Bay.

Culver also built lake vessels. One was called Lady Culver and another, Lavanchia. In 1822, he got into the canal boat business, building the first canal packet boat in the area west of Palmyra. His was the fourth canal boat launched on the Erie Canal.

The town of Brighton held its first town meeting in Orringh Stone's tavern on April 5, 1814 and elected Oliver Culver as the town's first supervisor to serve until 1816. He was given the added responsibility of being its first coroner.

Culver's businesses were booming, and in 1817, the Erie Canal Commission hired him to construct a mile and a half of the canal including three locks in Brighton. He employed Hamlet Scrantom, the first settler west of the Genesee River, as sales agent in this construction business. Culver was subsequently awarded a large four-year contract to build 10 locks in Lockport and one in Tonawanda.

After the completion of the Erie Canal, Culver started another venture, this time in flour milling. He bought the old Norton Mill in Honeoye Falls in 1827, rebuilding it from a wooden building into a more permanent stone structure.

Even though Culver's business enterprises consumed much of his efforts, he somehow managed to find time to be active in political and religious affairs. He became involved in state politics and served in 1820-1821 as an assemblyman in the state legislature where he was instrumental in the formation of Monroe County. From 1838 to 1841 and again in 1844, he repeated terms as Brighton town supervisor.

Culver, along with Nathaniel Rochester and Silas O. Smith, was a founder of St. Luke's Episcopal Church and served as vestryman in 1817. St. Luke's on Fitzhugh Street was rebuilt in stone in 1824 and survives as the oldest public building in Rochester.

Oliver Culver's home, which still graces the city, was originally situated in the dense woods near the northeast corner of East Avenue and Culver Road at the site of the Sloan House today. The Sloans were in the plumbing supplies business. As it turned out, Culver's house became a work in progress. Building commenced in 1805 when he married Alice Ray, and they moved into the house that December after the rear section was completed. On December 14, 1806, their first son Henry was born. In 1815, the handsome Federal style front section was completed, serving for a time as a tavern.

This home was owned by Culver and his descendants for 129 years. The last Culver to own the house was Cornelia Ely, Oliver's granddaughter and youngest daughter of Caroline Culver Ely. Cornelia married Howard A. Smith in 1887, and in 1906, Smith relocated the front section of the house to a newly opened, secluded street, East Boulevard, where it stands today.

The house is architecturally noteworthy and is often cited as a distinguished example of the Federal style. Architect Carl F. Schmidt wrote, "The main entrance is one of the most successful to be found anywhere in the American colonies, and the house is unquestionably the best example of Post-Colonial architecture in the Genesee Valley." In another article entitled Colonial Work in the Genesee Valley, the prominent Rochester architect, Claude Bragdon, wrote that the Culver house "was originally a tavern. This fact accounts for some peculiarities of its arrangement and construction; the second floor of the main part being principally given over to one large room, the ballroom, which extends the entire length of the front of the house, with nine windows, facing in three directions, and two fireplaces, one on each side of the entrance. The ceiling is high and domed, and the floor set clear of the joists so as to make it springy for the dancers and to facilitate the execution of 'pigeon wings,' which were a principal feature of old-time dances."

The house, which is located at 70 East Boulevard, is currently the home of Miss Elizabeth Holahan, president of the Rochester Historical Society. She has owned the house since 1945 and has extensively restored it to its earlier grandeur. Oliver Culver's portrait hangs in the front hall. This elegant home is historically significant and detailed blueprints of its design were made by the Department of the Interior and are kept in the Library of Congress.

Culver's wife, Alice, died June 22, 1860, having survived her youngest son, George, who died at 14 years of age on October 13, 1836 and John R. who died May 20, 1840. Caroline was the only child living when Oliver Culver died in 1867, and she was then married to Lorenzo D. Ely.

Culver left a will that directed his executors to establish a family cemetery behind his home on East Avenue in an area where some of his family were already buried and where he thought future descendants could also be laid to rest. Caroline and her husband, however, wisely decided that this may not be a prudent idea and purchased a family lot in Mount Hope Cemetery, relocating the previously deceased family members to this lot. And it is here, in Section C, Lot 55, where Oliver Culver's grave can also be found. He was one of Rochester's most distinguished early pioneers, having been a road builder, shipbuilder, coroner, mailman, businessman, politician, and community leader.
On a cool but sunny day in late April, almost 100 employees from Eastman Kodak Company descended on Mount Hope Cemetery to spend a day raking leaves, pruning trees and shrubbery, and painting posts. They were part of the United Way Day of Caring program, which sent hundreds of volunteers to places throughout Rochester for a massive daylong effort in spring cleaning and sprucing up.

An early snowfall last autumn prevented leaf-raking in the cemetery from being completed before winter set in, so that became the major activity of the Kodak volunteers.

Nancy Hilliard, cemetery manager, and her grounds-maintenance staff coordinated the day’s activity. They also cooked lunch (hamburgers and hot dogs) for the hungry crowd. Friends trustee Dick Miller passed out wire brushes and cans of paint and supervised the post painting. And Friends trustee Frank Gillespie photographed all the action and also helped cook lunch. By the time it was served on the lawn by the Florentine fountain, the energetic efforts on the part of the dedicated Kodak volunteers saw many of them doff their sweatshirts even though the temperature was still a bit chilly.

The wonderful result of the work of these fine Kodak people was a beautifully manicured landscape in Sections G, N, and W, which represents a considerable acreage in the cemetery. And a lot of guard posts along Indian Trail Avenue were scraped and painted as well. Many people have commented this summer that Mount Hope has never looked better. Our thanks go to the nearly 100 generous Kodak volunteers for helping to make it so.
NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

If you are a keen observer of the news, you may have noticed that you are hearing the name Mount Hope Cemetery more often in recent years, and that the news has been very good. There was the gathering of the descendants of Nathaniel Rochester, when the Rochester family reunion held a special observance at the cemetery, hosted by the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery.

You may have read about the success we've experienced in encouraging bluebirds, the official New York State bird, to take up residence in Mount Hope as a result of our coordinated effort with the Vets 2B 4H Club and Cornell Cooperative Extension. Last summer, we had one family of bluebirds, plus chickadees and house wrens.

Or perhaps you were one of the more than 100 participants at last year's Heritage Day celebration, learning more about many notable permanent residents of Mount Hope who worked tirelessly for the causes of women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery. Possibly, you were present to celebrate the 160th anniversary of the dedication of Mount Hope as we re-enacted portions of that original dedication ceremony, complete with brass quintet, mounted honor guard, bagpipe, and more.

If you have visited the cemetery recently, you may have noticed the beautiful adopted plots and the many upright grave markers all across this historic place. You also would have appreciated the many newly painted posts providing street names and section or range identification. Each of these activities and improvements speaks directly to the mission of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, which is to preserve, restore, and educate Rochesterians and visitors about the unique cultural resource that is Mount Hope Cemetery.

This mission is accomplished through the hard work of as few as one or two volunteers on a project that is especially meaningful to them, or it may be accomplished by drawing a large number of Friends and volunteers together, who coordinate their efforts for maximum effect. Our success at accomplishing our mission is greatly enhanced by the relationships we have nurtured with the City of Rochester, and with organizations such as the Susan B. Anthony House, Memorial Art Gallery, Landmark Society, and others.

This year, you can witness the fruition of a relationship that has been in the works for more than a year. We are honored to be working with the Rochester Museum and Science Center to bring to life an important piece of Rochester's and our nation's history. This project is a direct result of the Friends living our mission, so to speak, and important to both the Friends and the RMSC.

Victoria Schmitt, RMSC cultural heritage program specialist, agrees. She wrote: "The Rochester Museum and Science Center is pleased to collaborate with the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery in the original presentation of A Circle of Friends: An Abolitionists' Tour of Mount Hope in 1860. This interactive play and walking tour features a dramatic episode from the life of Frederick Douglass on the eve of the Civil War. Douglass, his wife Anna Murray Douglass, and Rochester friends who helped them operate the Underground Railroad locally, all come to life on ground they tread while living.

"With this dramatic performance, the RMSC Players have left the Rochester Museum and Science Center campus to go on location for the first time. We cannot imagine a more auspicious location than beautiful, historic, park-like Mount Hope Cemetery, a nationally recognized treasure right here in Rochester."

Your membership in the Friends makes all of these projects possible. I encourage you to take the time to enjoy the fruits of your membership and bring your family and friends for future events in this great cultural resource.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and live out our mission.

Eric Logan
President

IN MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY

by Alan William Gray

the green earth's children lie below
the wild daisies' dance
obelisks tower over
gentle nymphs at prance
a lullaby in violet in
the pale morning's trance
somewhat punctured by the point
of the stone soldier's lance.

white-cross markers on the carpet
of the wild forest floor
untamed colors of the flowers growing
by the tomb's grey door
gaining very little in the shade
and begging for so little more
give them rain and time, and someday
through the stony walls they'll bore.

powdered starlight
scattered at the rising of the moon
lies upon the petals
and seems to cling upon the tomb
sparkled renaissance of fate
driven from the living womb
plays a weary concert
never heeding all the prayers from my loom.

iron smelt in arches
and implanted in the ancient grass
forms the face of shadow
and protects the living from their past
if the world recovers
in time to set its compass to the mast
inspired lies of gods may be
revealed in the dawn's dim cast.

along the paths to crystal ponds
the daisies dot the hay
and droplets in the spiderwebs
reflect the crystal rays
if you can see yourself as clearly
on this shining day
you may not find your answers
but you have already found your way.
FIRST WEDDING IN
MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY

by Richard O. Reisem

After 161 years of operation, Mount Hope Cemetery was the site of its first wedding on Saturday, June 12. Rebecca Noelle Long married Bruce Culbert Faw in front of the 1875 Florentine fountain in the north gate entrance area. As the couple kissed after their wedding vows, the great bell in the nearby gatehouse rang merrily instead of mournfully for five cheerful minutes.

About 100 guests attended the outdoor wedding at 10:30 a.m. on a warm, sunny Saturday. From the top of the Florentine fountain, a cast-iron statue of a woman held aloft a Victorian spout from which water shot up and fell into a bowl, which overflowed into a lower basin, and then spewed from six lions' mouths into the ground-level pool, creating the pleasant sound of falling water. The water and a chorus of chirping birds provided all the music that the beautiful wedding needed.

Then, like a silent motion picture in slow motion, an elegant Rolls Royce, that had once belonged to the King of Sweden and had carried Princess Grace of Monaco to her wedding, entered the cemetery's north gate and without a sound, for which Rolls Royce engines are famous, carried the bride to the wedding site.

The hushed crowd watched the bride, escorted by her mother and father, walk a grassy path lined with fresh flowers to meet her soon-to-be husband at the base of the fountain. There by the fountain surrounded by blooming perennial flowers (dazzling peonies, delphinium, hardy lilies, bearded iris, Stella d'Oro daylilies, and coreopsis), the Rev. Nancy Reinert, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Caledonia, performed the wedding ceremony.

The bridegroom read an epitaph engraved in bronze on the Kolb monument in Mount Hope Cemetery. It is titled Love's Symphony and reads:

"When hearts and eyes have spoken, lips confess, then comes joy softly as the vagrant breeze; when love guides life, then is life truly blest, and earth is filled with heaven's symphonies."

Two years before this event and on a similar warm, sunny day in summer, Bruce Faw, a trustee of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, led a Sunday afternoon public tour of the cemetery. At the time, he was a relatively new tour guide not yet fully confident of his task. A young woman, Rebecca Long, rather casually decided that she'd like to take a tour of Mount Hope to pass the lovely afternoon. The sight of her stopped Bruce cold in his tracks. So stunned was he by Rebecca's lovely presence that he stumbled and muttered, forgetting his lines. But he could not forget Rebecca. He managed to get her phone number after the tour, and the rest is history. It was only logical that they should be married where they met, in the incredibly beautiful, historic park that is Mount Hope.

When the ceremony on June 12 ended and the gatehouse bell rang, the attendees applauded energetically, a rare response indeed in this hallowed place. The married couple boarded the Rolls Royce; the groom didn't even need to remove his top hat since the King of Sweden had ordered the headliner to be constructed with room for his own top hat. As silently as it had arrived, the Rolls departed for the reception party at the Genesee Valley Club. It was an historic day, in more ways than one.
FIRST WEDDING IN MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY.

The wedding couple take their vows in front of the 1875 Florentine fountain. See story on page 7.