THE TRAGIC DEATH OF HENRY LEE SELDEN
by Alex Woods

(with details about the monument sculptor by Th. Emil Homerin)

In Mt. Hope Cemetery, among the broken rows of graves that mark the homes of the deceased, and the circuit of overgrown paths that lead the way of the living, stands the figure of a small child. The young boy appears so lifelike—as though he could step out of the marble sculpture and courteously greet his many visitors. He is sharply dressed, and in his left hand, he holds a book. The look of an eager schoolboy is marred ever so slightly by the sad countenance on his face. Henry Lee Selden died the summer after his twelfth birthday. His life was cut off too soon. The death of a child is almost always unexpected and sad, but the circumstances of young Henry’s death were particularly tragic. These circumstances and the feelings and memories that remained with his parents were the driving force in the creation of such a remarkable memorial monument.

The visitors to Henry Selden’s grave are often saddened by the fact that his life was ended so quickly. However, as research progressed, the tragedy of Henry Selden’s death grew exponentially. With the assistance of Mt. Hope director Nancy Hilliard and her associates, the interment records revealed Henry Selden’s cause of death was drowning. Henry’s death, then, had been a most unexpected tragedy, as The Rochester Daily Democrat declared in a story on June 26, 1858, “Distressing Accident at the Bay — Drowning of Judge Selden’s Son.”

of age, and another young lad. The Judge drove to the Sand Bar, and went in the water to bathe, and to teach his son to swim. Going out where the water was waist-deep, near the old bridge, the boy was instructed to try to swim to his father. In doing so, he suddenly sunk from sight in deep water—probably stepping off where the water was ten or twelve feet deep. There was no other person nearer than half a mile. Mr. Wm. Prindle and others were upon the Bay, about that distance off, in a sail-boat, having a jolly-boat attached. Hearing the voice of Judge Selden calling for assistance, they at once got into the small boat and rowed to the place. But this took time, and the boy had been in the water twenty minutes before they arrived. It was then impossible to find the body, although efforts were immediately made, by diving and drawing a seine, to recover it from the water. The accident happened some time between 6 and 7 P.M., and at sundown, when Mr. Prindle came up, bringing information to Mr. Ward’s family, the body had not been found.

Selden family monuments from left to right: Susan Ward Selden (1808-1862), wife of Samuel L. Selden; Henry Lee Selden; Samuel Ward Selden, younger brother of Henry Lee; and Samuel Lee Selden, father of Henry Lee.

“The distressing news of the drowning of the little son of Judge Samuel L. Selden, in Irondequoit Bay, was received last evening. The Judge had gone to the Bay accompanied by his son, about twelve years

“Judge Selden, who has by this accident lost his only son, is greatly afflicted. He will have the earnest sympathies of every one, in this great bereavement.”

---

EPITAPH

VOL. 20  NO. 2  SPRING 2000

THE FRIENDS OF MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY
For a parent, the loss of a child is certainly a distressing matter, but the loss of Henry right before his father's eyes was devastating. Discussing the aspects of unexpected death in When Children Die, Loren Wilkenfeld writes, "The healthy child—vibrant, candid, bubbly—takes in life's wonders in innocent awe. He grows into adolescence and struggles through the awkward stages when his voice changes and his clothes just don't fit right... The image is one of optimism, of a life not without its difficulties but always with a positive future. That a child will encounter innumerable stumbling blocks as he grows is acceptable: that he may die along the way, unthinkable."
The death of a child was a terrible experience already suffered by the Selden family. After Henry was born in 1846, Susan Ward Selden gave birth to Samuel Ward Selden in 1847. Less than a year later, disease took young Samuel's life. The loss of a second son added to their grief, and a biography of the Selden family notes the impact of Henry's death on his father's life:

"His nephew, Lee Selden, describes the sorrow of Judge Selden's later years as follows; 'His honored judicial career was brought to a close by failing health and domestic affliction. In 1848 he lost an infant son. His only surviving child, a bright lad in his thirteenth year, was drowned before his eyes in Irondequoit Bay in 1858. From this shock he never recovered.'"

But the feelings of loss and failure in protection were coupled with a belief in the continuity of life and hope for rebirth. These sentiments impelled the Seldens to memorialize their child with a grave monument with imagery and inscribed with verse. This monument was created by Robert Eberhard Launitz (d. 1870), one of the most celebrated sculptors of funerary monuments in America at the time. Born into the Russian aristocracy in 1806, Launitz received an excellent education and studied sculpture with an uncle in Italy. Launitz then immigrated to the United States around 1830, and soon established himself in New York City. A member of the National Academy of Design, Launitz completed several outstanding public cemetery memorials commemorating firemen and soldiers who fell in the line of duty, as well as more personal memorial portrait statues, including that of Henry Lee Selden.

Henry Selden's marble sculpture is approximately 69x29x13 inches and rests on a base of gray granite. The full-length and lifelike portrait of the boy captures his essence like a photograph and conveys feelings of sadness and hope. A prominent symbol on the stone is the morning glory, which decorates the entablature and grows over the tree stump that supports the boy, who holds a book. The morning glory is symbol of death and rebirth. This flower opens in the morning and dies the same evening and is often found on children's gravestones to represent the brevity of life. Flanking the base-relief of Henry are two wreaths suggesting victory and the continuity of life. Henry's right arm rests on a short tree stump, a traditional symbol of life cut off. The epitaph

\[\text{EPITAPH}\]

Published quarterly by the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, Rochester, New York 14620-2732, a nonprofit member organization founded in 1980.

Richard O. Reisem, Editor
Frank A. Gillespie, Photographer
Dan Maleczewski, Art Director
Joan Hunt, Distribution

Basic annual membership is $20. Call (716) 461-3494 for a free pocket guide to Mount Hope Cemetery and a membership application. See our colorful and informative web page: www.finsh.org
ROCHESTER'S SPEAKING STONES
by Th. Emil Homerin

In the Department of Religion & Classics at the University of Rochester, I annually offer REL 167: Speaking Stones, featuring Rochester's Mt. Hope Cemetery. This course focuses on religious beliefs and practice through the study of symbols and inscriptions on American gravestones. Students study funeral traditions and rituals, and explore the ways in which the images and words on gravestones help to resolve the loss of a loved one by forging symbolic connections between the living and the dead. As an important part of their research, students are required to select a gravestone or series of stones in Mt. Hope Cemetery and record, photograph, and document all images and inscriptions. Further, they consult the interment records at the Mt. Hope office and search for other relevant sources to illuminate the deaths and lives of their subjects. Students learn the proper methods and procedures for collecting and recording data essential to graveyard preservation, and have the rare opportunity to study and carry out unprecedented research in one of America's oldest Victorian cemeteries.

The article on Henry Lee Selden in this issue of the Epitaph is a fine example of my students' exciting and original work. Alex Woods investigated the young Selden's untimely death, its effect on the family, and their efforts to memorialize their son. While Mr. Woods was finishing his paper on the Selden monument, I discovered the sculptor's identity and other examples of his work, and I have added my findings to those of Mr. Woods in the essay. Other essays from Speaking Stones will appear in future issues of the Epitaph, and interested readers can also read additional essays and field reports by visiting the course web-site at www.courses.rochester.edu/homerin/REL167.

hints at the parents' failed protection of their son and their continued hope that he now lives in a better world:

He is not dead, this child of our affection,
But gone unto that school,
Where he no longer needs our poor protection.
And Christ himself doth rule.

The book in Henry's hand most likely refers to school, which is a lovely metaphor for the child's leaving his parents and going to heaven. Just as parents must let their child go on the first day of school, the Seldens have let their child go as he moves on. In the Selden family biography, this gravestone is mentioned in the account of Samuel Selden's death:

"Samuel Lee Selden died Sept. 20, 1876. He is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Rochester, N.Y. close to the little son whose death he so mourned. Young Henry Lee Selden's monument of white marble, bears a bas-relief statue of the boy, in the long trousers and short, close-fitting jacket of his day, carved from a daguerreotype which is still in the possession of the family. His features show intelligence and sweetness. So winning is he that his kinsfolk still look upon the stone with sorrow at the tragedy of his death."

Henry Selden's monument is well known to the visitors of Mt. Hope Cemetery. It is located among the graves of the prominent Ward family in Section G. Henry's gravestone stands between his younger brother's stone and that of his mother, who died just four years after Henry; his father's grave stands nearby. This prominent Rochester family was full of tragedy still conveyed by their speaking gravestones.

(Editor's Note: The author, Alex Woods, is a University of Rochester student and prepared this essay as a course requirement for REL 167: Speaking Stones.)
EDWIN SCRAMTOM WRITES A LETTER THAT IS OPENED 127 YEARS LATER
by Richard O. Reisen

The first person to buy a lot in Colonel Nathaniel Rochester’s 100-acre tract was Hamlet Scramt, who arrived in the practically nonexistent village of Rochesterville with his wife and six children on May 1, 1812. Edwin was Hamlet Scramt’s third son, who developed a gift for writing that led to his involvement in later Rochester’s burgeoning newspaper publishing business.

Edwin Scramt was born in Durham, Connecticut on May 9, 1803, so he was just about 9 years old when he arrived here with his parents and siblings. He started his association with publishing in 1816 when he became an apprentice at the Rochester Gazette. By 1826, he was publishing the Monroe Republican, a successor to the Gazette. Having scholarly interests without the benefits of a formal education beyond grade school, Edwin Scramt established a literary magazine, the Rochester Gem, which became extraordinarily successful in the pioneering village.

In 1833, Scramt decided to give up his literary pursuits, sell his magazine, and enter the mercantile, auction, and land agency business with his brother-in-law, Levi W. Sibley. He was kept very busy selling goods and property at auction, as well as being engaged in the manufacture and sale of woolen and cotton goods.

By the early 1870s, boomtown Rochester had grown so enormously that a new city hall was needed. Andrew Jackson Warner, Rochester’s premier architect, designed a massive Romanesque Revival building situated directly on the Erie Canal (now Broad Street). When the cornerstone was about to be laid in 1873, the city fathers determined that a time capsule should be placed in it, and that one of the items should be a letter from a prominent Rochesterian to the mayor at the end of the 20th century. The man selected to write the letter was Edwin Scramt. He was chosen because he came from a prominent family that founded the city; he had lived through the entire period from the community’s infancy, through boombtown years, to the present; and he was an accomplished writer.

Scramt and his wife were members of Brick Presbyterian Church since 1830. He was an elder and also a singer in the church choir. His wife died three years before he wrote the time-capsule letter, but four grown children were around to encourage the endeavor. Modesty very much personified this quiet, retiring, unostentatious, but highly respected man.

The capsule was retrieved from the old City Hall cornerstone on the last day of November, 1999 and carefully opened at the Rochester Museum and Science Center. In it, among many other treasures, was the following letter from Edwin Scramt:

“To the Mayor of Rochester, that will be, when the corner stone of the City Hall that is laid to-day, will be opened, in the twentieth century;

“Honorable sir:—I feel a desire to be introduced to you and feel some embarrassment in doing it, because I must be the author of my own letter of introduction, for I remember while I am writing it here and now, that you are among the unborn great of American citizens, and that when you read this, I shall long have been a citizen of that clime and country to which all the hosts of earth are constantly voyaging, but from which ’no traveller returns.’ . . .

“Well, sir, if you are a little perplexed at this letter of introduction and say, ‘Who in the world can this be that speaks to me both in time, and from beyond time, and before my time?’ I refer you to the documents in the historical society of Rochester. . . . where you will find that in the early part of the nineteenth century, I was in the midst of the great city of which you are now mayor, and I was then also, strange to tell, in the midst of the unbroken forest— and where you see now that ancient and venerable pile of buildings, known for over a century as ‘Powers’s block,’ I resided with my father in a solitary log house. At that time remnants of the American Indians were our only neighbors, as you will find by history, and also that long since every tribe of them all have passed away.

“My youth was spent here in the forest; my manhood was among its streets in the busy mart of trade. My three score years and ten are, while I write this, in the midst of an elegant city of 70,000 people and over - a Flour city of the Genesee - a Flower city also in the midst of nurseries and fruit fields of hundreds of acres, and a city of manufactures and of extensive trade. . . .

“Go you to that noble cataract of the Genesee, which I first saw in May, 1812; there, in that early day the Indians who left on the coming of civilisation, went with Hotbreads, their chief, and bade the cataract and their hunting grounds around these parts a last view, and followed the deer towards the Rocky mountains. They were then ‘like the mighty oak with a worm at the root - dying out.’

“The boulevard Ontario, built in the latter part of the nineteenth century to Charlotte, doubtless in your day will be the ‘Champs Elysees’ of Paris, or the Hyde Park in London. That locality, the finest, most stirring, business-like and beautiful ward of the city you now preside over, when I saw it first was an arena for wild beasts; and its inlets and the mouth of the Genesee were but a habitation of bull-frogs.

“If you fish in Irondequoit bay, lined on all sides with splendid summer residences, with their towers and balconies that overlook the land and lake, and with their terraced gardens and vineyards and their wealth of flowers that burden the atmosphere with perfume and glory, recollect that I fished there so long ago that one fisherman, and a poor fellow at that, owned all the domain and the water there, and hoped, in vain, that in his lifetime he could sell it all for a farm.

“But time is relentless, and goes on forever with its obliteration, and lest you should fail to search out who it is that addresses you, go to your beautiful Mt.
Hope, where so many hopes wait to spring to fruition. Look for me there! In the tableland just below the observatory you will find me resting in hope beside one of the sweetest and most loving companions that a good God ever sent to bless a home and household, and between us there is an iron dog, sitting with his head and eyes watching the setting sun; and in his mouth he holds a metal tablet on which is inscribed:

"Watching the sun set - waiting for the sun rise."

"Lest the tooth of time may have obliterated it, I write it here; and if you think, when you arrive at our graves, that we have been sleeping in a long night, recollect that the "voice of the archangel and the trump of God shall be heard, and the dead shall hear His voice and come forth."

"But I trust we shall both find the "sweet fields beyond the swelling flood that are dressed in living green" - and will you bring this letter with you there and ask for the writer. I shall be most happy to make, there, your acquaintance, and shall want to hear all about my beloved home, my earthly city of Rochester!

"Under all circumstances, I am yours,

EDWIN SCRANTON."

If you'd like to pay a visit, the Scranton gravesite is in the north side of Section I, off Fifth Avenue, in the "tableland" beyond a short cul-de-sac. His iron dog, unfortunately, was stolen several decades ago. (An "iron" dog, as described by Edwin Scranton in his letter, has been spotted locally. Let us hope that this momentous letter may inspire the dog's return, as occurred with "Carlo" last fall.)

---

A FESTIVAL OF SPECIAL THEME TOURS FROM JUNE TO OCTOBER

By Fran Coleman

As we do every year, the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery stage six special theme tours, one a month, from May through October. Keep this calendar, or note them all, so you don't miss any. All tours are free to members, $3.00 for nonmembers, and $5.00 for entire nonmember families.

• MAY 13, 1:00 P.M. The Back Forty covers the less traveled section of Mount Hope Cemetery visiting such notables as Stanley Fox, Titanic passenger; Alexander Millener, George Washington's drummer boy; and many others. You'll have to catch this one next year.

• JUNE 10, 10:00 A.M. Bird Walk. This brand new tour this year focuses on the many types of birds that inhabit Mount Hope Cemetery. Kevin Griffith (see separate story in this issue) will lead the tour. Tour starts at the old north gatehouse opposite Robinson Drive. To enjoy this tour, you will need to bring binoculars.

• JULY 1, 1:00 P.M. The Great Tree Tour. Landscape architect Ed Olinger will take you on an unforgettable tour of the great tree collection in Mount Hope Cemetery. Tour starts from the old north gatehouse opposite Robinson Drive.

• AUGUST 12, 1:00 P.M. Architecture Tour. Dennis Carr will show you the many fine architect-designed structures and monuments in Mount Hope, and you will visit gravestones of a number of famous Rochester architects. Tour starts from the old north gatehouse opposite Robinson Drive.

• SEPTEMBER 16, 1:00 P.M. Civil War Tour. Marilyn Nolte and her Civil War costumed cast will relive famous events of the Civil War involving Rochesterians. This tour was exceedingly popular last year. It starts from the cemetery's main office opposite the Distillery.

• OCTOBER 14, 1:00 P.M. Fall Colors Tour. City Forester Emeritus Bill Knapp conducts this very popular tour each fall when the cemetery is ablaze in fall foliage color. The tour starts from the old north gatehouse opposite Robinson Drive.

All of the tours occur on a Saturday and last about two hours. Refreshments are served after each tour. These are all walking tours, so wear comfortable shoes and clothing. The tours will be held in rain, sunshine, or anything in between.
Free Sunday afternoon guided walking tours of Mount Hope Cemetery are now offered through the last Sunday in October. Knowledgeable tour guides offer history, Victorian gravestone symbolism, geological and horticultural facts, and interesting anecdotes on a leisurely 1 1/2- to 2-hour tour. Tours start at 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. Refreshments, also free, in the old north gatehouse follow the tour. Wear comfortable shoes and clothes.
GUIDE TRAINING PROGRAM

by Warren Kling

A formal training program for new Sunday tour guides occurred during March and April, 2000. Five people completed the classroom program, which consisted of five modules and 15 hours of classroom training. The modules included:

1. Background, planning, and preparation,

2. Preliminary review of Mount Hope book and geological significance of Mt. Hope,

3. Elements of a good tour; Victorian cemeteries and symbolism,

4. Continued review of Mount Hope and tour guide handbook,

5. Tour practice.

Although I produced the program, I want to thank JoAnne Belle-Isle, Jean Czerkas, Laurel Gabel, Frank Gillespie, Bill Knapp, Richard Reisem, and Nancy Uffindell for their participation and support. The Friends also thank Francis Audio-Visual, who donated the use of an overhead projector. The course provided a helpful sharing of knowledge and information with experienced guides. There was also a clarification of misnomers concerning a tour guide’s duties. Four of the original nine trainees decided that being a tour guide was not for them, and chose instead to contribute as gatehouse receptionists during Sunday tours.

Congratulations go to five graduates: Brian Burkhart, Lydia Crews, Joan Hunt, Susan Jaschik, and Dawn Short. After investing considerable time and effort in class training, they are ready to audit three tours with experienced guides, practice their own tour with a regular guide, and begin their own Sunday tours.

New tour guides complete course work under instructor Warren Kling, upper right. Counterclockwise from upper left: Brian Burkhart, Dawn Short, and Lydia Crews. Missing from the photo are Joan Hunt and Susan Jaschik. Photograph by Frank A. Gillespie.
RMSC PLAYERS RETURN WITH DRAMA IN MOUNT HOPE

If you missed last summer's performances of A Circle of Friends: An Abolitionists' Tour of Mount Hope in 1860, you have another chance to experience this popular and informative show on Saturday, July 1. There will be two performances, one at 10 a.m., the other at 11:30 a.m. The play involves dramatic episodes from the lives of Frederick Douglass, his wife Anna Murray Douglass, and his friends. Costumed actors and actresses play the parts of key Rochesterians who found effective ways to fight the slavery situation in America.

Advance reservations are required. Adult admission is $10, children 3 to 18 years, $5. For further information and tickets, call (716) 271-4552, extension 342.

The Moorish style gazebo at the north entrance to the cemetery received a new finial in May to replace the previous one which was deteriorated. The new finial was lathe-turned from mahogany and painted with several coats to withstand extreme weather conditions. The restoration project was financed by the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery.

THE FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY
791 MT. HOPE AVE.
ROCHESTER, NY 14621-2752

Non-Profit Org.
U.S.Postage
PAID
Rochester, NY
Permit No. 150