MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY GARDENS

by Richard O. Reisem

English author Rudyard Kipling wrote in one of his famous poems: "The glory of the garden lies in more than meets the eye." His point was that a beautiful garden is the product of years of work and dedication - and a considerable amount of aesthetic taste and judgment as well. Kipling's words are particularly apt in describing the glorious gardens in Mount Hope Cemetery. These lovely patches of living color and texture are the work and dedication of a distinguished group of volunteers. Here are stories of their creations with quite a few gardening tips along the way.

Letitia McKinney's Little Jewel is a striking rock garden located to the right just inside the gates at the north entrance to the cemetery. It immediately grabs and holds your eyes with varied compatible colors and textures in both its flowers and leaves. A small, clipped Japanese maple tree forms a backdrop for the arresting display that blooms from early spring to late fall.

Letitia McKinney and Sally Tompkins share the planting and maintenance of the Yaky lot, where they filled gravesite troughs with colorful plants. Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.

At a meeting of the newly formed Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery in the spring of 1980, Tish's husband, Jack, volunteered her services as a gardener to rehabilitate one of the long-neglected rock gardens. There were five choices from which Tish could select. Anticipating the effort that would need to be applied, she chose the smallest one, which she later called the Little Jewel, in a spot that was mainly sunny - another advantage, she concluded.

Letitia McKinney's Little Jewel, a colorful rock garden by the entrance gates, incorporates a clipped Japanese maple tree as a backdrop. Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.

annually were included to maintain blooming throughout the season. So there are alchemilla and begonias among the several annuals.

The perennials among the rocks include more than two dozen different flowering plants, all carefully selected to achieve a harmonious, colorful whole. They are meticulously positioned between the rocks that lead to a large boulder topped with rose moss. The garden is worth a visit throughout the tour season. Maybe you'll have the pleasure of meeting Tish as she tends her garden. "I keep changing and rearranging the furniture," Tish said. The perfection she has achieved in the Little Jewel is amply evident today.

Tish has added the front yard of General Jacob Gould's, Egyptian-style mausoleum to her cemetery gardening projects, and she and Sally Tompkins together decorate the iron-fenced Yaky plot next to the gatehouse.

Sally and Bob Tompkins' Hillside Garden occupies a prominent site along the side of the steep cobblestone road that leads from the north entrance area up to Indian Trail Avenue. The rock garden faces the Florentine fountain.

Tish McKinney decided that she was not going to be a lone garden volunteer in Mount Hope. She enlisted her husband at the Rochester Civic Garden Center, Sally Tompkins, to adopt one of the other four available rock gardens. Sally persuaded city officials to provide six members of the Junior Honor Society who were in the CETA program that summer of 1981. Her husband, Bob, and a French schoolteacher also joined the group in removing what she
called "tons of grass and weeds, and an ovenabundance of one type of sedum." It was a hot day, but they continued, preparing the soil with peat moss, and by mid-afternoon, they had planted the perennials she had purchased at two nurseries.

In clearing the rock garden, Sally found some gas plants, which she saved. They are the only plants that remain from the 1981 restoration. Like Tish's Little Jewel, the Tompkins' garden is mostly perennials. This summer, there was a particularly abundant display of bright yellow flowers from the hardy prickly pear cactus plants.

Sally and Tish share the planting responsibilities in the iron-fenced Yaki lot where they fill 13 gravestone planting troughs with floral interest, including hosta, sweet woodruff, ivy, lavender, bergenia, and columbine.

Mary Olinger's Gatehouse Garden is the largest of the cemetery's rock gardens and is located in front of the historic 1874 gatehouse at the north entrance.

When Mary adopted this substantial rock garden five years ago, the hosta around the border of the plot had grown so tall it obscured the more diminutive plants behind it. So Mary dug up the hosta and distributed it around the foundation of the gatehouse, where it thrives today, and its height looks just fine in front of that massive stone structure.

Author and gardener Vita Sackville-West wrote, "Foresight is the gardener's text." What plants will look good in each spot and adjacent to what other plants. Rock gardens, by their very nature, invite a potpourri of plants, their incongruity unified by rocks. A tasteful mixture of interesting flower and leaf colors, foliage shapes and textures causes the viewer to linger and study the garden. Such contemplation, it can be argued, is particularly suited to a cemetery, which is probably why someone decided to place rocks gardens in Mount Hope in the first place.

Mary's rich palette of diverse shapes, colors, and textures is evidence of the keen foresight that Sackville-West wrote about. And successful gardens, Mary will tell you, require constant watching. "You have to take things out when they are too successful," she said. Taking out thriving plants not only reassures her of having created a flourishing garden, but removing some of the successful plants gives her a chance to share them with other gardeners.

She pays a lot of attention to foliage color, such as inserting rust-colored barberry among green-leaved plants. She cautions, "Don't hide the rocks. I make that easier to accomplish by selecting dwarf varieties."

Her approach to weeding bears noting. She said, "If you don't like weeding, put in more plants, especially those with thick leaves, such as hosta, that don't let weeds survive." That's a Victorian plant that she uses liberally.

Besides the gatehouse rock garden and foundation planting, Mary tends the Frederick Douglass lot. There she places low-growing plants, such as creeping evergreens and low annuals, so as not to overtake the flat monument on Douglass' grave.

John Pearsall's Florentine Fountain Garden is one of the most spectacular floral displays in the cemetery, and it is not a rock garden. It is a perennial bed that surrounds the perimeter of the fountain basin in the north entrance.

Old cemetery photographs showed palms planted along the section of the fountain basin facing Mount Hope Avenue. But such plants, John noted, had to be taken in during the winter. "They were probably supplied and tended by the Ely Wagner and Barry Nursery across the street," John said. It was too impractical an idea to be perpetuated.

So John looked to Monet for inspiration. That meant selecting a limited color palette and massing flowers for dramatic impact. He selected yellow, pink, and blue for his palette, and he designed a garden that blooms all through spring, summer, and fall.

In spring, there are fern peonies and tulips; later, iris, hardy lilies, and foxglove. Summer brings phlox, brown-eyed Susan, daylilies, dahlias, bee balm, goose-neck loosestrife, hollyhocks, crocosmia, peacock gladiolas, astilbe, false dragonhead, cone flower, lady's mantle, yarrow, coreopsis, and monkshood, with monk's foot blooming in late summer and fall. The list reveals the drama that John achieves, which

**EPITAPH**

*Published quarterly by the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, Rochester, New York 14620-2752, a nonprofit member organization founded in 1980.*

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is exactly what he wants: a display that makes a statement all the way to Mount Hope Avenue itself.

When John attended a horticulture conference at the George Eastman House recently, he learned that adding a few white flowers here and there enhanced the colors of other flowers. Looking back at Monet’s garden paintings, he noticed the dabs of white among the clusters of colored flowers. You will see the same effect in John Pearsall’s Florentine Fountain Garden.

Just behind the fountain garden is the old 1862 Gothic Revival chapel where several volunteer gardeners have improved the cemetery landscape. Ed Rosenberg planted flowers in front of the chapel, and Pat Corcoran cleaned up the area to the south of the building, creating a lovely garden that is enclosed by stone walls and a freshly painted wrought-iron fence. To the right of the chapel is Tish McKinney’s Victorian garden in front of General Jacob Gould’s mausoleum. Since Gould was not known in life for warmth and friendliness, Tish refers to him as “grumpy old Mr. Gould.”

Mary Olinger edges her large and lovely rock garden by the gatehouse. Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.
**Pat Corcoran's Ubiquitous Gardens.**

They're everywhere. Pat, whose energy is boundless and whose dedication is total, has planted so many areas of the cemetery that it is difficult keeping up with her accomplishments. This is just her second year of gardening in Mount Hope, and she avows she is only an amateur, but the breadth of her work is phenomenal. How, you may well ask, does she ever plan to maintain all of these planting projects? The fact is, she doesn't plan to.

Her approach is to find an appealing or especially needy site, clean it up, and do what she calls "temporary planting," a treatment that makes the site attractive but perhaps not quite as finished as potentially it could be. Then, she tries to find appropriate volunteers to adopt the garden and continue its maintenance.

She took one of the five neglected rock gardens, which is in front of the cemetery's office, cleaned it up, and planted annuals. Then she persuaded the garden professionals at ARC to adopt it and install a proper Victorian garden, which they will start in the forthcoming months.

Pat Corcoran, a retired teacher of English to foreign-language students in the Rochester public school system and now an adjunct supervisor of student teachers at SUNY Geneseo, finds that summers provide opportunities for her to do volunteer work outdoors. "Everyone wants to be outdoors in the summertime," she says.

"In teaching," Pat says, "you wait 20 years to see the results of your efforts, but in volunteer gardening, your results are almost immediate." Earlier this summer, she undertook the restoration of the fifth rock garden in the cemetery. It is located on Hope Avenue just north of Sylvan Waters. Since a forest of trees makes it shady almost all day, she consulted Tish McKinney concerning what could be planted in this patch of ground that was then totally occupied by poison ivy. Tish provided a comprehensive list of shade-loving plants, which are now growing happily in the cleared area.
A broad diversity of rock-garden plants decorate Mary Olinger's garden in front of the historic 1874 gatehouse. Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.

Marilyn Nolte's Civil War Gardens are personal memorials to a number of Union soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the Civil War. The individual gravesites she tends are dispersed throughout Mount Hope Cemetery, but Marilyn's attention to them unites their graves in a purposeful recognition of fallen soldiers' ultimate sacrifice for our country's unity and civil rights. She has adopted some 20 lots of Civil War burials. Also, she plants flowers in almost every empty urn, no matter whose it is, that she passes.

Marilyn Nolte tends one of 20-plus sites where Union soldiers killed in the Civil War are buried. She also gives an annual Civil War tour of Mount Hope Cemetery. Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.

Marilyn is also relentless in pursuing physical improvements to the cemetery. In fair-weather months, which she defines as March to December, she comes to Mount Hope after each work day to spend about four hours improving the cemetery in some way. And she's around on weekends as well.
on the down-slope side of the road, Pat Corcoran is there setting plants to keep erosion at bay.

The Bible tells us that God created the first garden - in Eden. Every imaginable tree, flower, fruit, and vegetable grew there, the good book says. Mount Hope Cemetery - with its arboretum, natural flora, and manicured gardens worked by all of these wonderful volunteers - must certainly qualify as a junior version of that first one.

ALPHONSE KOLB, RENOWNED SCULPTOR
by Julie Ratz

Alphonse Anton Kolb, Elfiieda L. Reichelt Kolb, and Kathryn M. Yohann Kolb are buried in Mount Hope Cemetery. They were laid to rest in Section BB, steps away from the Odd Fellows plot and the Firemen’s Monument, overlooking the Hill Court residential area of the University of Rochester. Their stones immediately catch the eye of passersby due to the intricate and detailed bronze plaques on both stones. These sculpted works reveal a great deal about the lives of the deceased and what they meant to the artist who made them.

Alphonse Anton Kolb was born near Heidelberg, Germany on December 5, 1893. As a child, Kolb discovered that he had a gift for modeling in clay. He studied art and sculpture in Munich, Germany and immigrated to the United States in 1913. Kolb became a U.S. citizen in 1918.

He was a sculptor, designer, and engraver and worked for Bastian Brothers Company, striking metal dies for medals, plaques, and buttons for nearly 50 years. Kolb worked in clay, bronze, steel, wood, silver, and gold. His works ranged in size from dime-size coins to plaques several feet high. His many works include designing and sculpting the medal for Rochester’s centennial in 1934, another medal commemorating the 1,000th meeting of the Rochester Numismatic Association, and also the medal marking the association’s 50th anniversary in 1962.

He was also responsible for a 1928 tablet on the Broad Street side of Old City Hall, honoring pioneers who came to this area on canal packet boats. Kolb is credited with a 1932 plaque on the west side of Wilson Boulevard at the University of Rochester, bearing the words of The Genesee, a song honoring the Genesee River, written by Thomas Thackeray Swinburne, a UR graduate. In 1938, Kolb designed and sculpted the Civic Medal, which is awarded annually by the Rochester Museum and Science Center for community service. In 1955, Kolb was himself the recipient of this award.

At the age of 65, he retired. He and his second wife, Kathryn, traveled for a time, but after her death in 1968, he decided to return to work. “I can’t be without my work,” Kolb said, “it’s the best thing for me.”

Kolb was also a coin and medal collector and had a rose garden at his home. He was a lifetime member of the American...
Numismatic Association, the Rochester Numismatic Association, and the Albany Numismatic Society. As a member of the local association, Kolb designed and struck dies for the medal awarded to each outgoing president of the organization, bearing that person's likeness. Kolb held this responsibility from 1920 to 1976 and was himself president of the organization in 1931.

Alphonse Kolb was first married to Elfrieda L. Reichelt until her death in 1945. He later remarried, this time to Kahryn M. Yohann. Alphonse Kolb did not have any children by either marriage, although he was survived by nieces and nephews in Germany. Kolb suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died on March 30, 1983 at the age of 89.

Alphonse Anson Kolb's gravestone is one he shares with his second wife, Kahryn M. Yohann Kolb. The inscription is located on the opposite side of that memorializing Kathryn. It reads: ALPHONSE A. KOLB, SCULPTOR 1893-1983. It is very simple, stating his name, profession, and years of birth and death. This simplicity is in stark contrast to his wives' memorials, which are very personalized and seem to hold a great deal of meaning, both in terms of who the deceased were and what they meant to Kolb.

Elfrieda L. Reichelt Kolb was born in 1877 and died February 6, 1945 at St. Mary's Hospital. The cause of death was listed as "cerebral accident," more commonly known today as a stroke. She was 58 years old. Virtually no information is available about the life of Elfrieda Kolb. What little there is pertains mostly to her relation to her husband and his position within the community. Regardless of the lack of documented information on Mrs. Kolb's life, a great deal can be learned from her gravestone.

The stone itself is granite and stands about 4 feet high, 2 1/2 feet wide, and 6 inches thick. In the uppermost region of the face of the stone is the family name, Kolb. Beneath the family name is a bronze plaque designed by her husband, Alphonse. It measures 18 inches wide and 12 inches high, depicting a man and a woman in a boat being pulled by cherubs. Included on the plaque is a poem entitled "Love's Symphony." It 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."

The image of the man and woman in a boat being pulled by cherubs suggests that "love guides life." The man and woman in the boat are presumably Alphonse and Elfrieda. The image could represent their life, guided by love, or it could be indicative of their future meeting after death. The scene has a somewhat surreal quality, which might indicate that this is the artist's perception of heaven.

The German phrase under the plaque - "O. schöne Zeit, O. selige Zeit, Wie Liegst du Fern, Wie Liegst du Weit," - loosely translated is "Oh, beautiful times, Oh, blissful times, How distant and far away they are." That it is written in German reveals something of the couple's heritage. Although there is no information about whether the Kolbs were married in Germany or in the United States, the use of German on the gravestone affirms their common heritage. The "beautiful" and "blissful times" refer to Alphonse and Elfrieda's time together on earth as husband and wife. That she is "distant and far away" indicates that she is no longer with her husband. However, she is not referred to as being dead or gone, but simply as being far away. This suggests that she has gone somewhere else, but is not gone forever. Perhaps it is believed that she and her husband will later reunite or find one another after death. This belief must have brought comfort to Elfrieda's grieving husband.

Kathryn M. Kolb was born in 1887. On May 9, 1968, at the age of 80, she was killed in a car accident. She was the second wife of Alphonse A. Kolb. Aside from her relation to her husband and his position within the community, there is no other information available about the life of Kathryn Kolb.

As with his first wife, Alphonse Kolb designed his second wife's gravestone, creating a personalized tribute to his departed loved one. The bronze plaque bears Alphonse's signature and displays Christ wearing a crown of thorns and carrying the
cross. Under this image is the word “CRUCIATUS,” which is Latin for torture, torment, suffering, or severe mental or physical pain. The image of Christ bearing the cross exemplifies this torture and suffering. This is a stark and somewhat disturbing image to find on a gravestone. The concept of death as being torturous is not often found on contemporary stones. Much more popular is the notion that death is peaceful and restful rather than torturous. Perhaps this image represents the way in which Kathryn Kolb died. As was mentioned above, she was killed in a car accident. Perhaps Mrs. Kolb’s death was not a swift, merciful one, but a drawn out, torturous trial. Because the stone was created by her husband, the imagery and caption might indicate his feelings about her death.

“Cruciatus” might refer to his feelings that life without his wife would be torturous. Also, it represents Jesus Christ, who died for humanity’s sins that, through him, they might have eternal life.

Below the bronze plaque and “IN MEMORIAM / KATHRYN M. YOHANN KOLB” is the inscription: “TO LIVE IN HEARTS WE LEAVE BEHIND IS NOT TO DIE.” These lines are from a poem entitled Hallowed Ground by Thomas Campbell (1777-1844). The fifth stanza of the poem reads:

“But strew his ashes to the wind
Whose sword or voice has served mankind
And is he dead, whose glorious mind
Lifts thine on high?
To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die.”

The same idea was expressed by Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900-1944): “He who has gone, so we but cherish his memory, abides with us, more potent, nay more present than the living man.” In other words, those who have died are not really gone if they are remembered by the living. This, too, offers comfort to the bereaved.

On the base of the stone is the inscription, “FOREVER YOUR DEVOTED ALPHONSE” indicates who designed the stone and what relationships were important in the life of both the deceased and the bereaved. The Alphonse referred to in the inscription is her husband, Alphonse Kolb. This inscription indicates that he was very dedicated to her, and he felt it important that both the deceased and all those who saw the inscription know this.

(Editor’s Note: The author, Julie Radz, is a University of Rochester student and prepared this essay as a course requirement for REL 167, Speaking Stones.)