GIDEON COBB (1791-1864)
Early Rochester Pioneer, Brickmaker, and Developer of Monroe Avenue
by Warren Kling

Gideon Cobb was born in Pawlet, Vermont on June 26, 1791. He and his older brother William passed through Genesee Country in 1812 on their way to Aurora in Erie County, where they erected defenses against predicted imminent British/Indian attacks during the War of 1812. After completing that assignment, they journeyed back to Vernon in Oneida County near Rome, N.Y. That was where their friends, Dr. Matthew Brown and his brother Francis Brown, other partners, lived.

In Rome, Gideon and William operated an axe and scythe manufacturing business. Gideon was the traveling salesman for the business. In those days, he was called a peddler for those farm implements. He traveled throughout western New York, selling his wares out of an ox cart given to him by his father John.

In 1810, Francis Brown, his older brother Matthew, and other partners purchased 200 acres of land at High Falls just north of Col. Nathaniel Rochester’s 100-acre tract. The Brown Brothers named their tract Frankfort after Francis Brown. William Cobb followed his friends, Francis and Matthew Brown, to Frankfort. He started a forge, producing axes and scythes at High Falls. In 1813, Gideon joined his brother William, arriving at Brighton, where he met Oliver Culver, who was starting a construction business.

Gideon boarded with Oliver Culver and that year helped to establish the very first public conveyance in the area. Gideon and his four-ox team hauled a wagon loaded with either passengers or freight twice weekly. The route started at the mouth of the river at Charlotte, made a stop at Hanford’s Landing near the lower Genesee River falls, where today Lake Avenue and Maplewood Drive intersect across from Kodak Park. The wagon then continued to the final destination at the Four Corners of Col. Rochester’s tract. In 1814, Gideon was hired by Francis Brown to cut a road 3 rods (49.5 feet) wide in the dense forest between Frankfort and Rochesterville, thereby creating present-day State Street. His compensation for this work was a yoke of oxen.

A marble obelisk is the gravesite monument to the early Rochester pioneer, Gideon Cobb. From this site in Lot 48, Section I, one can see his former property, Cobbs Hill. Photograph by Frank A. Gillespie.
Meanwhile, brother William became active in civic affairs of the newly formed village. March 21, 1817 was an important date in the history of Rochester, for on that day the settlement by the falls was duly incorporated as the village of Rohnesterville by act of the state legislature. The Brown brothers’ tract, Frankfort, was consolidated with Col. Rochester’s tract at this time and became part of Rochesterville. The first election in the village was held May 5, 1817, and the first village board of trustees included Jehiel Barnard, Francis Brown, William Cobb, Daniel Mack, and Ewervard Peck. Francis Brown was elected chairman of the board.

Gideon had no interest in politics, being very busy with his business endeavors. He and his team of oxen became well known, cutting trees and pulling out stumps to make many roads in the area. With Oliver Culver’s help, he secured a large contract to clear North Street and open Monroe Avenue from the city all the way to Pittsford. In the process of clearing the forest to extend Monroe Avenue to the east, Gideon stumbled on a very important discovery. He found large deposits of clay a foot deep in this area, with sand beneath the clay, and realized the potential value of these deposits for brickmaking.

So in 1818, Gideon and his brother William decided to invest $1,960 to buy 140 acres of land along Monroe Avenue near Highland Avenue. It was with this purchase that Gideon and William formed a business partnership, which they called The Sand Company. It was on State Road, which was later renamed Monroe Avenue. The Sand Company had its office near two acres of land that became the Monroe St. burying grounds on June 10, 1827, the third public burial site in Rochesterville. Public School 15, 494 Averill Avenue, called the Children’s School Of Rochester, is currently located there.

An interesting aside concerns some of the early burial grounds around early Rochesterville. The first cemetery on the 100-acre tract, set aside for that purpose by Col. Nathaniel Rochester soon filled up and was exchanged for a much larger site on Buffalo Street (West Main Street), where all the burials were transferred. Another site, on the east side of the river, was provided by Enos Stone and located around East Avenue, near Cherry Street (Gibbs Street). When the East Avenue burial ground filled up, it was decided to remove the burials and transfer them to a newly purchased two-acre site off Monroe Avenue between Averill Avenue and Alexander Street. By 1872, all the burials from both the Monroe Avenue and Buffalo Street sites had been transferred to Mount Hope Cemetery, which had opened in 1838.

A private cemetery also existed adjacent to land owned by Gideon Cobb at the top of Pinnacle Hill. This was the oldest Catholic cemetery in Rochester, a 12-acre parcel bought by the trustees of St. Patrick’s Church in 1838 for $1200. Originally purchased for all the Catholics of the city, the German Catholics from St. Boniface decided to establish a separate cemetery nearby. In 1860 the Catholic diocese purchased 15 additional acres at Pinnacle Hill from Gideon Cobb for $20 per acre. The Pinnacle cemetery remained the burying place for all the English-speaking Catholic congregations of the city until 1871. In that year, the Right Reverand Bishop Bernard McQuaid established a new Catholic cemetery off Lake Avenue, large enough for use by all of the Catholic churches of the city. Burials from the Pinnacle cemetery were transferred to this new Catholic Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

At age 28 years, Gideon Cobb finally met the woman of his dreams, Roxanna Worden. They were married in 1819, and moved into his small log cabin. That same year, brother William Cobb decided to pursue other business opportunities. Mills were expanding all over the country, and William’s expertise in the manufacture of mill irons was in demand. He became superintendent of a newly constructed mill near Louisville, Kentucky, where he died in 1826.

Gideon, meanwhile, was preparing to start a new business venture in 1820 near Cobb’s Hill. It was the first brick factory in the area and known as the Monroe Avenue Brickyard. In the years following the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, Rochester’s population skyrocketed, and Rochester became known as America’s first boomtown. By 1834, Rochester had officially become a city. Gideon’s business prospered due to the high demand for brick used in the construction of commercial buildings.

With his new-found wealth, Gideon decided to build a proper home for Roxy. They moved out of their log cabin and into the new home in the 1830s. The house, however, was no ordinary one. It was a magnificent 22-room Greek Revival mansion, located on a triangle of land on the south side of Monroe Avenue near Highland Avenue. The mansion was built like a fortress with a deep foundation, thick walls and beams made of hand-hewn timbers. To keep his wife cozy during the cold Rochester winters, each of the 22 rooms had a brick fireplace, stocked with a seemingly endless supply of wood from the nearby forest. The mansion stood on 300 acres of land now owned by Gideon, facing the high hill that became a landmark and point of reference for many early travelers journeying through the area, referred to quite simply as “Cobb’s Hill.” The rear wing of the mansion was built for use as a stagecoach tavern, which the Cobb’s operated for a few years. The tavern wing included a large baking kitchen, milk storage room, and a separate meat-grilling room, with a brick floor and large brick ovens.

Then in 1833, an interesting event occurred that led to the demise of the tavern. It seems that Gideon and his wife were attending a temperance meeting one evening in the brick schoolhouse which originally

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**EPITAPH**

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stood across Monroe Avenue from the Cobb home. The meeting turned into quite a rousing affair when the participants were worked up to a fever pitch by Deacon Fischer, in his best oratory, expounding on the evils of liquor. When the sermon ended, the charged entourage bolted for the door heading to the nearest tavern, which just happened to be the rear wing of Gideon Cobb’s home.

There, they proceeded to remove all the liquor with Deacon Fischer looking on like a proud parent. The kegs of liquor were smashed in the street. As if this was not enough, a fire was started, quickly turning into a blazing inferno, and lighting up the evening sky like the aurora borealis. Needless to say, Gideon Cobb never dared to open the tavern again.

Gideon and Roxy evidently planned to fill the 22-room mansion, for they had nine children of whom six reached adulthood. Lucinda, the oldest, became a schoolteacher in Brighton and died in 1914 at the age of 94 years. William H. died in 1904 at 75 years of age. Glory Ann died in childhood in 1832. James, a twin born in 1836, became a farmer who married but had no children, and his home, built of original Cobb brick, can still be seen at 1100 Highland Avenue. Shari II Margaret, twin sister of James, died at the age of 42. Maria and Sophia, both born in 1849, died quite young. A second daughter named Maria married and settled in Kansas. And finally the youngest child, son Frances, married and moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In his later years, Gideon became active in political and civic affairs. A few highlights include being elected superintendent of the poorhouse in 1838, selected as delegate to the Whig Senate Convention in 1844, and chosen to give the main address at the dedication of Brighton school No.8 in 1846.

On Thursday, September 31, 1847, Gideon attended a Pioneers’ Festival, commemorating the early settlement of Rochester. The event was organized by Enos Stone and Oliver Culver and held at the Blossom Hotel, one of the oldest hotels in the city. Each of the pioneers attending was asked to write his name, age, place of birth, year of arrival in Rochester, and some personal recollections of the early settlement. This would document for present and future generations the conditions that existed from the beginning of the settlement, and identify the people who prepared the way for what Rochester would become.

Three of the earliest pioneers attending were Oliver Culver who arrived in 1805, Silas O. Smith in 1809, and Enos Stone in 1810. Gideon, who arrived in 1813, reminisced that when he and most of the other pioneers arrived, not many inhabitants were to be found. Much of the area was presumed to be an irreclaimable swamp, suitable as a resort for frogs and muskrats. Cobb stated that he started the first public conveyance in the area shortly after his arrival, a service that operated for two years. During that time, Oliver Culver’s wife, Alice, usually cooked provisions to sustain him on his biweekly trek from the Four Corners, through the wilderness, to the mouth of the river. He told of sleeping often under the workbench at Willis Kempshall’s and of the time he fell into the river, struggling for hours before anyone happened by to give him assistance.

Gideon and his son William, as well as other investors, consolidated several small brickworks in the vicinity to form the Rochester Brick and Tile Manufacturing Company, incorporating it in February 7, 1853 and later opening an office at the Four Corners in the Powers Building when it was completed. Trustees of R.B.&T. included Gideon and William Cobb, Stephen and William Otis, Azariah Boody, and others.

The company prospered, producing over 12 million bricks per year in 1855, shipping bricks and drain tile to numerous locations in the U.S. and Canada. Many early buildings in Rochester were built of brick from R.B.&T., including the second Monroe County courthouse designed by A. J. Warner in 1850, built at a cost of $60,000; the Ellwanger and Barry Building, still standing today on State Street; St. Mary’s Church; the County Penitentiary; Gideon Cobb’s 22-room mansion, of course; along with his son James’ home, and the Hagaman homes.

William Otis and his son Ira, and including Ira’s son Raymond ran the R.B.&T. company for many years after the death of Gideon Cobb. Eventually, however, all good things come to an end. The land on the former site of the original R.B.&T. off Monroe Avenue was sold when the clay to make bricks was depleted. That land was then purchased by a housing contractor, who built the Brighton housing subdivisions of Bel-Aire, Home Acres, and Roselawen. The R.B.&T. moved from its Monroe Avenue location to Fishers, N.Y. in 1913 and went out of business on July 10, 1953.

Similarly, Cobb’s Hill, in the possession of the family for about 86 years, was sold to the City of Rochester by Edna Cobb, widow of Gideon’s son, William, who died in 1904. The city wanted to ensure a fresh supply of drinking water for future generations by constructing a 144-million-gallon water reservoir on top of the hill.

Work began on the reservoir in 1905 and was completed in 1908. In 1912, George Eastman and others donated funds to purchase the nearby woods around the reservoir for a public park. In the following year, Mayor Hiram Edgerton, during the Civil War Semi-Centennial, proposed changing the name of Cobb’s Hill Park to Lincoln Park, but fortunately, the public would not hear of it. There was a perception that Mayor Edgerton, whose family were brickwork contractors and in the construction business, may have had an ulterior motive in suggesting the name change.

Gideon Cobb’s mansion at Monroe and Highland, stayed in the possession of the Cobb family for over 100 years. Mrs. Mabel Cobb Wickman, a great granddaughter of Gideon Cobb, was the last of the Cobb clan to occupy the premises. She petitioned the city for a zoning variance to turn the mansion into apartments in 1936 but was turned down because the Rehabilitation Commission inspectors found rotted cornices, foundations that needed bolstering, severely cracked and crumbling walls, broken windows, a leaking roof, rotting pillars, and other decay. Mrs. Wickman could not afford to repair the extensive deterioration to the property, which was then condemned and acquired in a foreclosure proceeding by
the Home Owner's Loan Corporation.
Unfortunately, the mansion remained vacant for many years becoming quite an eyesore and was eventually demolished in 1956.

This early pioneer, Gideon Cobb, began modestly as a peddler of axes and scythes, started the first public transportation system in the area, and cleared the forest to make several of the roads we travel on today. His hard work and ingenuity led to the creation of a successful brickmaking enterprise, which lives on in the edifices of many historic downtown buildings. He secured a place in history with his contributions to the early beginnings of Brighton and Rochester. His name is remembered by local residents who visit one of the most scenic locations in the city while jogging, walking their dogs, picnicking, sledding or just relaxing on top of the hill named for him.

Gideon Cobb must have loved lofty locations for he owned land at both Pinnacle Hill, the highest elevation in the city of Rochester at 750 feet, and Cobb's Hill at 663 feet above sea level. His final land purchase in 1848, 16 years before his death, assured him personally of a lofty location in perpetuity. It is at the top of Mount Hope in the cemetery of the same name. An observation tower, called the “Fandango,” once stood at this second highest elevation in the city of Rochester, 675 feet above sea level. People came from miles around to ascend its steps for a wonderful view of the surrounding countryside, including a view of the famous local landmark, Cobbs Hill. Here, you will find the modest, marble Cobb obelisk in Lot 48, Section I.

The author wishes to thank:
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• Mary Jo Lanphear, Brighton Town Historian, for research material on the demolition of the Cobb mansion and information on the Rochester Brick & Tile Company.
Additional References:
• History of the Cobb Family, by Phillip Cobb 1923
• Rochester Republican, October 12, 1847
  (Warren Kling is a trustee of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery and a Delphi Energy executive.)
Resting quietly with his family in Mount Hope Cemetery is George Henry Harris. Who was George Harris? For 17 years, George managed the Reynolds Arcade for Mortimer Reynolds, who was the son of Abelard Reynolds, Rochester's first postmaster and founder of the arcade.

But George Harris was so much more than that. Some said he was Rochester's Henry David Thoreau. Blake McKelvey, for example, said he was Rochester's most capable amateur historian. He wrote the first 15 chapters of William F. Peck's semi-centennial history of Rochester, entitled The Aboriginal History of Rochester. The Senecas, who made him an honorary member of the Wolf Clan and called him "Ho-tar-shan-nyoh," the Pathfinder. For his contributions to science, he was named a Fellow of the American Academy of Science. Harris compressed an amazing number of experiences in his short life, which spanned only 50 years.

Harris' grandparents settled in Rochester in 1810 on what was to become Mount Hope Avenue near the present site of the University of Rochester. His father was involved in construction, which meant many moves for the family. They lived in Charlotte, west Greece, Rochester, Hinsdale, Buffalo, and Green Bay, Wisconsin. George was born in west Greece in 1843.

When George was a young lad in Rochester, his family lived on the hill overlooking the bend of the Genesee River at the present site of the University of Rochester. George spent many hours roaming the banks of the river, fishing and following old Indian trails. He found several artifacts, including an ancient spear point, which triggered several events that launched Harris in his pursuit as pathfinder.

One wintry evening when George and his mother were gathered around the family fire, two Indians knocked on the door and said they needed shelter for the night. This was not unusual in those days. The visitors prepared meals from food they carried with them, and after their dinner, they prepared to sleep on the floor by the fire. The older Indian noticed the ancient spear point and volunteered to tell George how it had been used. The Indian was led to the woodshed where he selected a shaft to which the Indian attached the point. Encouraged by George, the Indian made a bow and arrow.

One day when George, still a child, was walking along the river, he spied several Indian children in a canoe without paddles, drifting dangerously toward the rapids. The river was at flood stage, and large trees and logs were being carried down the stream. Huge masses of ice crashed over the rocks of the rapids. George raced ahead to a flat rock that jutted from the bank forming a cove where he often fished. Through sign language, George directed the Indian boy to use his foot as a rudder. Then George picked up one of his fishing spears. He threw it, pierced the bow of the canoe and guided the canoe to safety. Then, he collapsed under the strain. When he recovered consciousness, he found his father and Tall Chief, who turned out to be the Indian who had stayed at his home, gathering up the children. The older boy in the canoe, about Harris' age, was Tall Chief's son, Onoto.

As a result of this experience, the two fathers set up exchange visits. Onoto visited the Harris home and was equipped with a set of pioneer's clothes. George spent time at Tall Chief's encampment and was fitted with a deerskin outfit. During these visits, the boys began to teach each other their languages. This started George on a lifelong study of the Iroquois language and the pursuit of Indian trails and customs.

When George was 13 years old, his family moved to Green Bay, Wisconsin. Although frail, the lad spent a year in the forest and along the streams where he became an expert with a rod and line, rifle, and canoe. Since he lived only a few miles from the reservation where the Oneida Indians had been dispatched from New York State, he continued his interest in Indian lore.

In 1858, George became an apprentice to a watchmaker for three years, and the rest of the family returned to Rochester. Fortunately for George, the watchmaker had an excellent library of history and literature, where George spent many hours. Returning to Rochester in 1861, Harris had a brief military career in Pierce's Military Academy and as a sergeant in the 54th Regiment stationed in Elmira.

After the Civil War, George drifted west where his brother was an Indian scout. George worked as a railway mail clerk and then returned to Rochester. He wrote, "I resigned a lucrative position in Omaha at the entreaty of my good parents who desired the presence of one of their children in their latter days. In order to be near them, I became a common laborer at Mount Hope Cemetery at the moderate drain on the grave funds of a dollar and a half a day. My father, who was assistant superintendent of the cemetery, appreciated my act, and the dying blessing of a sainted mother rewarded me for the sacrifice."

Cemetery Superintendent George Stillson must have recognized his abilities. Harris studied surveying, drafting, and landscape gardening under Stillson's guidance. In 1872, George married Julia Hughes, who was a school principal. They moved to Peterborough, Ontario, Canada where George laid out and beautified the Little Lake Cemetery. His next assignment was a two-year superintendency of the Elmwood Cemetery in Detroit. In 1877, he brought his wanderings to an end as he moved to Rochester and managed the Reynolds Arcade for Mortimer Reynolds.

The arcade housed offices of lawyers, the telegraph office, the post office, art studios, retail shops, the Athenaeum and its library, a lecture hall, and business offices. Automobile inventor, George B. Selden, had his office in the arcade. Daniel Webster delivered lectures here. It was the business and cultural center of Rochester in the nineteenth century.

(To be continued in the next issue.)
EDWIN, CLARA, AND THE STRASENBURGH PLANETARIUM
A Personal Recollection

by Donald S. Hall

The first time I met Clara Strasenburgh (Mrs. Edwin) was in 1968 very shortly after I moved to Rochester from North Carolina. I had just been appointed Education Director of the Strasenburgh Planetarium, which was under construction at the time. My boss and creator of the planetarium, Ian McLennan, told me that the Strasenburghs, our donors, were going to abandon Rochester for the winter months, and McLennan wanted me to meet Mrs. Strasenburgh before they left. I was 28 and very nervous.

What would she think of me? Would she be a grande dame? Would I be uncomfortable in the presence of such an important and wealthy woman? We arrived at the door of the Strasenburghs comfortable, but not pretentious, home on Oak Lane in Brighton. Ian rang the bell and seconds later a woman, who resembled my own mother in many ways, opened the door and said, "Hello, Ian. This must be Don. Come on in." I was immediately comfortable with Mrs. Strasenburgh.

Our conversation was pleasant and largely centered on me. Clara, as I later came to call her, was concerned that I was having trouble finding a house to buy. She mentioned that there were several homes for sale in her neighborhood that I might like. Never mind that her neighborhood was quite unaffordable to a young guy working for a not-for-profit corporation. One of the charms of both Strasenburghs was that they acted as if they had no concept of how wealthy they were in comparison to the rest of us. Clara told me, some years later, that she never prepared beets, even though she liked them, because they took too much gas to cook.

It was months later, after the Strasenburghs returned from their winter away from Rochester’s cold and snow, that I met Edwin. He was a quiet, gentle man, less likely to be heard from than his wife, and it was difficult for me to imagine him as a captain of industry because of his unassuming ways.

Edwin’s father was a druggist who had his store on West Main Street in Rochester. In addition to selling medications in the front room of the store, he manufactured his own compounds in the back. This was the beginning of the company that would become known as Strasenburgh Laboratories on Jefferson Road in Henrietta. Much of that building is incorporated into the Fisons Building at the same site. The labs changed hands several times shortly before and during the time of the planetarium construction. I predicted to the Strasenburghs that they would be remembered more for their gift of the planetarium than for the business that made it possible. I was surprised not that my prediction came true, but how quickly it happened.

When the Strasenburghs sold the labs, they suddenly had a great deal of liquid assets on their hands and were looking for something to do for the community - a way of giving back to Rochester a thank-you present to mark the success of the family business. Their first thought, and a logical one, was to add a wing to a local hospital.

However, in listening to the wise advice of their lawyer, the late George Hawks, they became intrigued with the idea of a planetarium. The time setting was the early 1960s, and the Space Age was upon us. The whole world was watching the "space race" between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Hawks was a board member of the Rochester Museum Association, a kind of "friends-of" organization for the museum, which would soon become the Rochester Museum & Science Center. He was aware of the Hoffmeister Report, which had been done for the museum a decade earlier. The report recommended that the museum ought to be presenting physical science to the public, and a good way to do that would be with the addition of a planetarium.

Hawks introduced the Strasenburghs to W. Stephen Thomas, museum director, who whisked them away for a tour of the planetariums in Boston and New York City. Upon their return to Rochester, the Strasenburghs asked Thomas, "What does a planetarium cost?" Thomas quickly telephoned the directors of the planetariums they had just visited and came back with the answer, "A million and a half dollars." With little more thought, the Strasenburghs said, "Yes" to the idea and, working with Hawks, set plans in motion to fund this civic gift.

A Planetarium Planning Committee was appointed, headed by the late John Leermakers, head of the Kodak Research Laboratories. The committee members visited planetariums throughout the U.S. and repeatedly were given the same advice by other planetarium directors: "Hire your planetarium director now, and let him create your planetarium. This work needs to be done by a professional and not, with all due respect, by a civic committee." This advice had been given dozens of times before, but this seems to be the first time that a committee of civic leaders listened. In 1965, the Rochester Museum Association hired Ian

Many visitors think that the Edwin G. and Clara Strasenburgh monument in Lot 229, Section MM, resembles a pharmaceutical bottle cap. It was designed by Clara, who found at the time of her husband’s death that the monument design he had commissioned was too ostentatious. Photograph by Frank A. Gillespie.
McLennan, who had been the director of the Queen Elizabeth Planetarium in Edmonton, Alberta, to be the director of the Strasenburgh Planetarium. Local architects - Waasdorp, Northrup, and Kaelber - were selected to design the planetarium, with the late Carl F. W. Kaelber, a senior partner, in charge.

Groundbreaking for the planetarium was held in late winter of 1967. During the next 18 months, the foundation was dug, concrete poured, steel erected, and equipment installed. The plans were more grand than anyone had envisioned, and twice, the Strasenburghs gave more money to the project, for a total of $2.4 million. This planetarium was going to be different from all the others. It had been created by professionals and would present shows such as had never been seen in a planetarium before. And it was all possible because of the personal interest and generosity of Edwin and Clara Strasenburgh.

The Strasenburghs were both alive for the first 10 years of operation of the planetarium bearing their name. How wise it was of them to give the gift during their lifetimes so that they could have the fun of seeing the dream realized.

Edwin Strasenburgh, born in 1892, predeceased his wife in 1977. In a visit that I had with his widow after Edwin's death and shortly before hers, Clara Strasenburgh told me, "You know, Don, the planetarium has turned out to be so much more than we ever thought it would be." What a reward that statement was for me, because their gift had been the largest private gift ever used to build a planetarium. It was obvious that they got more than their money's worth.

Clara Strasenburgh had a stroke shortly before her death. It left her partially paralyzed on the right side of her body and not in full control of her emotions. During my visits to her home, she would embarrass herself by becoming tearful with little, or no, provocation. One day she confessed to me, "Don, I've done a terrible thing." I inquired as to what that was, and she said that she had never liked the design of the monument that Edwin had commissioned for their gravesite in Mount Hope Cemetery and that, after his death, she had scrawled the elaborate, baroque, and somewhat pretentious (she thought) monument design and substituted a design of her own, which is an unostentatious marker that many think resembles a bottle cap of one of Strasenburgh Laboratories product containers. The marker in Lot 229, Section MM, certainly fits these two lovely, gentle, and generous people.

Clara Strasenburgh died on October 19, 1978, one year and one month after her husband's death. They had three sons, two of whom, Edwin (Griff) and Robert are buried with them. Their third son, David, survives his parents and brothers. The elder Strasenburghs had 12 grandchildren.

(Donald S. Hall is retired from the Strasenburgh Planetarium, where he was director for 25 years, succeeding Ian McLennan.)

RAVINE AVENUE RESTORED BY VOLUNTEERS

by Richard O. Reisem

Ravine Avenue curves upward alongside a high bank on the right and an increasingly steep bank on the left in the historic area of Mount Hope Cemetery. When the road was first built, it was cut into the hillside of Sections C, L, and F. To prevent erosion into Section L, the stone roadway was pitched downward toward the upside of the hill and a scupper was built to carry water coming down the hill, as well as water flowing down the road, into a catch basin at the bottom of Ravine Avenue.

Over 163 years, the upper bank eroded, filling the scupper with enough earth that the scrub growth on the hillside expanded into the drainage ditch. That, in turn, caused water to redirect its course and spill over the downside of the hill and erode it. Eventually, the water caused the roadway itself to collapse into the eroded downside of the hill. A
number of years ago, therefore, Ravine Avenue was closed to vehicular traffic and even pedestrians had difficulty walking on the road because of the dislodged paving stones and deep fissures. It would be a daunting task to reconstruct this roadway that was so severely damaged by nature.

However immense the challenge, it appeared as play to two remarkable Friends of Mount Hope volunteers, Dick Miller and Marilyn Nolte. On weekdays after work and on weekends last summer and fall, the two could be found cutting back the brush and digging out the scupper. Dick Miller undertook the massive masonry job of rebuilding the stone roadway and installing a stone curb to ensure that water from the road would not flow down the hill and erode it further. To enhance Ravine Avenue even more, Dick and Marilyn, along with another volunteer, Pat Corcoran, decorated the roadway shoulder by planting hundreds of attractive perennials.

The result is a Ravine Avenue that looks as pristine as it did in 1838, using the same materials that it was constructed of then. With all of the concrete posts replaced and painted white, which Dick Miller accomplished as part of the project, the road looks ready to accept carriages. But it is too fragile to permit automobiles and trucks, so it is a walkway today. It leads to the spookiest mausoleum in Mount Hope Cemetery - the Gothic, Medina-sandstone vault of Lewis Henry Morgan, the founder of the science of anthropology. Dick and Marilyn tidied up that mausoleum site as well.

Our thanks and profound admiration go out to Dick and Marilyn for this exceptional transformation. The NYS DOT would not have done it half as well. What a team!

TAKE A LOOK AT OUR NEW WEBSITE

For several years, the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery have maintained a web site created by our youngest trustee, Emily Horvath. Over time, she has gradually improved it, but now, with significant effort, Emily has created a sophisticated and attractive site that displays dramatic improvements. "There is lots more information," said Emily, "and it looks quite different with beautiful photographs and a fresh layout."

Furthermore, the web site is now linked to a prize-winning site about Mount Hope Cemetery created by students of Gates-Chili High School, who graciously donated their creative efforts to the Friends. Those students entered a contest sponsored by the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle to create an Internet web site that related to one of the city's cultural resources. Well, the Gates-Chili students won first prize. We believe they did a fantastic job, but, of course, we also believe they had a fantastic subject.

You should check us out at www.fomh.org. Cemeteries can be uplifting.

-ROR