FRANK GILLESPIE:
BRINGING MT. HOPE CEMETERY INTO THE 21st CENTURY

by Richard O. Reise

It is 8:30 on a Tuesday morning in mid-January and Frank Gillespie is at his desk in the office of Mount Hope Cemetery, 1133 Mount Hope Avenue. He spends all day on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the cemetery office, and it is not unusual to find him there on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays as well. He works from 8:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. (the regular office hours), and often later. He even takes work home with him. He says that he averages 25 hours a week on his work for Mount Hope Cemetery. He rarely goes out for lunch, more often working while munching a sandwich he has brought from home, or ignoring lunch completely. He has been following this schedule since October 1998. And for his efforts, he is not paid a penny. Frank A. Gillespie is a volunteer, an extraordinary volunteer. And the volunteer work he is doing is even more extraordinary. He is bringing a 164-year-old cemetery into the 21st century.

Frank, born and raised in Wyoming, has been an avid photographer since the age of 10; he was an aerial photographer in the U.S. Navy, operated a commercial photography studio, and did a stint as a disk jockey on a Wyoming radio station. After receiving a master’s degree from the University of Wyoming, he came to Rochester to accept a job at Eastman Kodak Company, where he worked for 25 years. He built a replica of a 1928 Mercedes roadster on a VW Beetle chassis, has pursued the cello as a classical musician, restored antique furniture, and made the inspiring photographs that have been reproduced in the handsome book, Mount Hope Cemetery ~ America’s First Municipal Victorian Cemetery. As a trustee of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, Frank has made many contributions, including planning and staging a cemetery photo contest. When Jack McKinney, who as a volunteer had been answering inquiries from the public concerning friends and relatives buried in Mount Hope, died on September 7, 1998, Frank Gillespie decided to step in and take his place researching and answering those genealogical inquiries. Little did he realize where this would lead him.

On this Tuesday morning, answering genealogical inquiries is exactly where I found him. In 2001, he received 265 requests for information about relatives and friends. These 265 inquiries resulted in providing information on more than 1,600 individuals buried in Mount Hope Cemetery. A typical letter will provide a name of a relative who died on a specific or approximate...
date and is thought to be buried in Mount Hope Cemetery. The letter writer asks for additional details about that death and burial, like date of burial, date of death, cause of death, address at time of death, and section and lot number of the gravesite of the deceased. In addition, the writer usually wants to know who else is buried in that same family plot, and that’s how those 265 requests in 2001 multiply into detailed information about 1,600 people. “In one case,” Frank said, “I located 48 individuals in five different lots who were all related to the person making the request.”

Information in the original interment indexes, which are huge, heavy volumes with handsome flowing penmanship that dates back to 1837, lists for each individual a burial date, the location of death, the cause of death, the age of the individual at death, and the grave location in Mount Hope Cemetery. Since Mount Hope Cemetery didn’t open until 1838, those 1837 entries indicate gravesite locations in other local cemeteries. Just responding by listing information from the interment index is not enough for Frank. He then refers to the plot records, also huge, heavy volumes. Here are detailed, oversized maps of small portions of the cemetery where each family plot appears, along with the individual placement of each burial site and the occupants of that site.

With the site information, Frank makes a field trip to the family plot and looks for more information that might be recorded on the tombstones. Sometimes, he comes back with the exact birth date, which is not included in the interment index. And if the monuments present some unusual features or epitaphs, he takes a photograph that becomes part of his response to the requester.

There is no charge for this service, despite the fact that an average inquiry takes two to three hours to complete. Very few cemeteries in America offer such thorough research and response to genealogical requests. But Frank is deeply interested in genealogy himself. “In studying my own family background, I have sent inquiries to a number of both municipal and private cemeteries around the U.S.” he said, “and in one case, I enclosed a modest check to defray the expense of providing information to me, and the cemetery cashed the check but never responded.” With each personalized response, Frank includes a flyer describing our nonprofit organization, the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, and encouraging donations. This, he has found, often elicits a follow-up contribution.

Over the recent years that Frank has been answering genealogical requests, inquiries have come in from practically every part of the United States, plus Germany, Argentina, Great Britain, Australia, and especially Canada. All of which indicates that boomtown Rochester has spread its influence broadly across America and the world. Frank said, “I think that Rochester has been a jumping-off place for many people.” As a matter of fact, most

Maps to graves of famous people were designed by Frank Gillespie for supplying to visitors. These maps combine an overall cemetery map along with a detail plan for specific grave location.

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THE MAUSOLEUMS OF
MOUNT HOPE CEMETERY

Ely Mausoleum
Lot 19 Section D
Lot purchased by Alfred and Caroline Ely May 5, 1891

Exterior Dimensions: 11'8" wide x 19'6" deep
Crest Size: NA
Windows: Stained glass in back wall
Date Built: Probably 1861

ARCHITECTURAL NOTES: This graceful mausoleum was designed to look like
a miniature version of a Greek temple. Four round columns with ionic capitals
undulate the entablature. With their curvilinear details, ionic capitals recall leaf and
plant forms. The columns in the Greek Ionic order are taller and thinner than
those of the more masculine Doric order.

CONDITION: Both the exterior and interior of this mausoleum are in an excellent
state of preservation.

ENTOMBMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NORTH</th>
<th>SOUTH</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOP</td>
<td>Almira Field Beers, 1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Caroline L. Ely, 1871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Joseph Field Ely, 1873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOTTOM</td>
<td>Alfred Ely, 1892</td>
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</tbody>
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Frank Gillespie’s Mount Hope mausoleum survey includes 84 entries like this one of the
Alfred Ely mausoleum in Section D.

...fews. On the reverse of the store receipt is a short list of high-fat, high-calorie items
that were purchased by this requester, one of those items being Breyer’s chocolate ice
cream.

Considering that Mount Hope Cemetery does not have computerized
records, and the only source materials are
the original records, which are organized
semi-chronologically and certainly not by
surnames, it is almost impossible to respond
to the Smith request. Yet, Frank is holding
on to the inquiry on its slip of supermarket
receipt in case any good ideas come to him.

One of those good ideas that came to
Frank about two years ago was a natural
extension of all of these genealogy requests.
Mount Hope Cemetery is divided into 35
major sections, each one of which holds
many hundreds of family lots or even more
single graves. The original plot maps in
those big, heavy books are too detailed and
cover too small an area to be useful if repro-
duced for day-to-day use in locating
gravesites efficiently. Furthermore, these
plot maps contain extraneous material, such
as survey and dimensional information.

So, primarily for walk-in requests,
Frank began to divide the cemetery into
about 70 pieces, each of which could have a
map that filled a page and would be easily
readable. When a person asked for the loca-
tion of a gravesite, the front-office staff
could present an overall map of the ceme-
tery and highlight the appropriate section
and then provide another map of the relevant
portion of that section. This detailed map
shows every lot and its number. On the
reverse side of this lot map, Frank noted the
family name on the end monument in each
row of lots. With these two maps, anyone
can quickly find the proper section and,
locating the name on the end monument in
the proper row, walk down that row to the
desired gravesite. Voila!

These new detailed maps, which
required an immense amount of field work
recording landmarks and monument names,
were an instant success. They greatly sim-
plified gravesite locations for the public. In
fact, they proved so useful that the grounds
staff of the cemetery now routinely refer to

of the requests he receives are from out-of-
town. Locally, people drop into the cemetery
office and receive grave locations directly
from the front-office staff.

Frank tries to answer letters within
seven days, but the summer requests are
overwhelming, and replies sometimes take
longer then. “Most people are well prepared
with extensive, explicit information, and that
helps speed up the process,” Frank said.
Sometimes, however, the letter writer has
the wrong Mount Hope Cemetery. Frank has
tracked down 13 Mount Hope cemeteries in
New York State, and he can often detect
which one is the correct choice just from the
information provided in the letter. “People
pick us first,” Frank said, “because we are
very visible on the Internet. If you enter a
search for Mount Hope Cemetery, ours is
most likely to pop up first. Our web site is
so extensive and complete that people
assume it’s the right one.” Our web site
address, by the way, is www.fomh.org.

As we talk on this Tuesday morning,
Frank shows me an example of the kind of
request he hates to receive. On the back of a
short grocery-store receipt are written five
names, all with the last name of Smith. The
first one is Bessie. Is this a formal first
name, or a nickname? Below the names is
the notation: “late 1800s and early 1900s.”
Frank asks me, “Do you know how many
Smiths we have among the 350,000 perma-
nent residents at Mount Hope?” If the
Rochester telephone book is a suitable com-
parison, I estimate that it is probably quite a
them when digging new graves or performing maintenance at specific gravesites. And when Frank goes out to find a lot for a genealogy request, the maps are indispensable, reducing his search time significantly. Frank has completed 62 of these detailed lot maps and figures that he has about six more to do.

More recently, attention is being given to those huge, heavy original volumes that contain all of the records of the cemetery and that have inestimable value because they are the singular source of all that data. The Interment Index comprises ten books. These are unchanging permanent records of each burial, entered at the time of burial. The Plot Records have lot maps, vault placement, burial names in each plot, and survey information. These books are constantly changing as new burials are made. The Day Books constitute a chronological history, day by day, of what happens in the cemetery, like burials, cremations, and removals. The Lot Register is a chronological record of lot purchases. And finally, there is the Cremations and Removals Register.

These original volumes are handled daily, some of them having been used for as long as 164 years. They are particularly heavy, being oversize with covers of cloth-or-leather-covered wood and composed of thick, acid-free paper with a high fabric content. Lifting and carrying these heavy books about the front office every work day provide ample exercise for the two women, Irene DelRusso and Laura Ferguson, who mostly need to use them.

Recently, the city of Rochester received a substantial grant from New York State to preserve the ten-book Interment Index by microfilming it and then transferring the microfilm data to computer-searchable CDs. When completed in about six months, this would allow the original books to be placed in archival storage. And the CD versions will be available not only at the cemetery, but at places such as the Rochester Public Library, the University of Rochester Library, and the Rochester Historical Society.

Placed in charge of accomplishing this project is Frank Gillespie, who will add Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays to his schedule in order to finish it between now and the desired completion date of July 1, 2002. The microfilming project, however, does not provide the most desirable end result. The microfilmed data shows the original handwritten material, which is sometimes not as legible as could be desired. And the computer search is limited to narrowing an inquiry to the first three letters of a surname within a discrete block of years. It is, however, a temporary immense improvement over the current situation.

The best solution is a fully computerized database, where the entire contents of the cemetery’s records are manually entered as computerized files that can be rapidly searched a number of ways, such as by name, address, death date, burial date, gravesite location, age, or cause of death. When Jack McKinney died in 1998 and a considerable number of donations in his memory were sent to the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, Frank Gillespie suggested and organized what has come to be known as the McKinney Project, which precisely takes the manual genealogy searches that Jack did for many years and computerizes the data for optimum utility and flexibility.

Frank has led the McKinney Project since 1998. To date, with the enormous volunteer help of the Rochester Genealogical Society and others, the first of ten books that constitute the Interment Index has been completed and computerized, the data entry for the second book is complete, and the third book has been started. Much more funding will also need to be acquired to purchase the equipment and software for the new record system. And Frank refused to give me an estimate as to when the McKinney Project would be fully up and running. Maybe years, maybe decades. He is studying the possibility of contracting the data entry from a variety of sources to speed up the process.

As if all these projects were not enough, Frank recently undertook a study to document everything known about the mausoleums in Mount Hope. There are 82 of them. He has photographed each one, recorded the land purchase date, noted the date of construction and exterior dimensions, collected names and death dates of every burial in each of them, positioned their location in the cemetery, and rated the current condition of each structure. He plans to photograph all of the stained-glass windows as well and add that material to his survey. At his request, I provided architectural notes concerning materials, style, and ornamentation of the mausoleums. This project in hard copy and computer CD is nearing completion.

ELY AND LULU McALLASTER BUELL,
COLORFUL PERSONALITIES
by Jean Czerkas

The Portland Avenue campus of Rochester General Hospital occupies land previously owned by pioneer settler Oliver Culver. He purchased the original 146 acres of land from Nathaniel W. and Fanny Howell and John and Clarissa Greig of Canandaigua, New York for $522.20 in 1819.

Oliver Culver first came upon the property in 1796 when he and a companion traveled Lake Ontario in a canoe to meet and trade with the Indians. After camping near Irondequoit Creek, they shouldered their packs and followed a trail that led them to a Seneca Indian village located on or in close proximity to the land eventually purchased by Culver. He bought the property to prevent destruction of the site that was sacred to the Indians. Reputedly, the land was not disturbed during his lifetime. Culver, an enterprising individual who owned extensive real estate, went on to become the first supervisor of the town of Brighton. His wife, Alice Ray Culver, was given life use of his vast real estate holdings when he died in 1867 at the age of 88 years.

The Portland Avenue site was eventually inherited by Culver’s granddaughter Alice Ely Buell. Alice and her husband, prosperous wholesale grocer George C. Buell, resided in a stately home on Livingston Park in Rochester’s Third Ward with their three children: Ely, Henry, and Alice.
Noted Rochester architect Claude Bragdon designed a rustic cottage for the Portland Avenue property in 1900 that was occasionally occupied by Alice Ely Buell during the warmer months of the year until her death in 1918. Bragdon designed an English cottage style house for her son, Ely, the family firm to become a “gentleman farmer.” Except for a short time in 1906, when they occupied a four-bedroom home on Oliver Street off East Avenue, designed for them by Claude Bragdon, the country house on the Portland Avenue farm became the permanent home of Ely, Lulu, and their four children.

In 1906, a general plan for the grounds of their home by local landscape architect, Alling Stephen DeForest, who designed the original landscape for the East Avenue home of George Eastman, reveals a house surrounded by green lawns, spacious meadows, and towering trees. A long, curved driveway led to the house and around it to a stable, also designed by Claude Bragdon. A poultry house, dairy, ice house, cattle barn, bull pen, barnyard, fruit orchard, and a large area devoted to growing several varieties that was constructed on portions of the property not deeded to him by Alice until 1911. Census information and Rochester City directories indicate that Ely, his wife Lulu, and their growing family occupied the site beginning as early as 1902.

Ely Buell, Oliver Culver’s great-grandson was a graduate of St. Paul’s Preparatory School in Concord, New Hampshire, and Hamilton College. After graduation, he considered entering a seminary to study for the ministry but instead went to work for his father’s firm, George C. Buell, Wholesale Grocers. Ely married the very lovely Lulu McAllaster in 1897 when he was 26 years old and she was 21 years of age.

Before her marriage to Ely, Lulu lived with her family at 5 Strathallan Park. Her father, George McAllaster, was a partner in the firm of McAllaster & Humburch, Jewelers.

During the early years of their marriage the young couple lived with Ely’s parents in the Buell family home on Livingston Park. After the death of his father in 1898, Ely left of berries were located south of the house.

At times referred to as a colorful personality, Ely was most often deemed an eccentric. He was frequently seen riding through “Buell’s Woods” on one of his many horses, garbed in brightly colored, custom-made, red, green or orange corduroy trousers. A former employee recalled seeing Ely ride a horse through the front door and out the back of the house on several occasions.

The farm became home to a menagerie of birds and animals. In residence at various times were a bear, peacock, pigeons, guinea hens, chickens, goats, cows, dogs, and the Morgan and Tennessee walking horses Ely raised. Hero, one of Ely’s dogs, was sold or given to George Eastman. Among the many tales of life on the farm include that of the numerous noisy guinea hens that flew out of
the trees when visitors approached the house, and the nervous peacock that was shipped to the farm in a crate and arrived sans its feathers. It was eventually sent to a large farm they owned in Ontario, New York. The fire department was called to capture the bear when it escaped, climbed a tree, and refused to come down.

When the United States entered the first World War, Ely attempted to enlist in the army but because of his age (he was over 45 at the time), he was rejected. He joined the American Red Cross and was assigned overseas duty. Anxious to become involved in the war effort on the battlefield, he resigned and enlisted in the French army.

After completing his training, he was commissioned as a lieutenant and served with a French artillery unit until the armistice. While he was away, Lulu supervised the upkeep of the Portland Avenue and Ontario, New York, farms. After the war, he returned to his farm home, his family, and the animals he loved.

Ely was a nature lover with a great fondness for animals but a romantic at heart. His short temper and wry sense of humor belied the many kindnesses shone to his employees, friends, and neighbors. He filled notebooks with typewritten poems he enjoyed. Some were authored by well known poets and others by friends. He compiled a collection of his favorite poems into an anthology titled “Love Poems of Today and Yesterday,” published in 1935.

In front of the house was a terrace held in place by a fieldstone retaining wall. It was here that Lulu, an avid gardener, planted and cared for her flower gardens. Her membership in the Rochester Garden Club was extremely important to Lulu, and she made elaborate preparations when the ladies of the club held a meeting at the farm. The house and garden had to be in perfect order when friends arrived. A fountain erected in her honor by the club may be seen in the garden of the Rochester Historical Society on East Avenue.

Lulu never learned to drive a car and had to depend on her husband to drive her to her many social engagements. In later years, when the area was more developed, she walked the long drive to Portland Avenue and used public transportation.

Although busy with life on the farm, the Buells continued to participate in social activities in Rochester. They were members of the Country Club of Rochester, the University Club, and the Rochester Historical Society. In 1934, Ely entered five horses in a Country Club of Rochester horse show. Silver Image, Hallelujah Pride, Three Cheers, Golden Model, and Olivia were entered in the Saddle Horse, Ladies' Saddle Horse, Heavy Weight Park Hack, and Light Weight Hunters classes.

Lulu and Ely Buell continued to live on their farm home until their deaths. Ely died on October 11, 1944 at the age of 72 years. Lulu died less than a year later on April 5, 1945. Ely Norton Buell, their unmarried son who lived with his parents on the farm, died two months after his mother at the age of 37 years.

The two-story home of Lulu and Ely Buell and their family no longer exists. The resident animals and the terrace flower gardens so tenderly cared for by Lulu live on only in photographs. A tenant house and the rustic summer cottage that stood among the tall trees of “Buell’s Woods” have also disappeared.

In their place stands the campus of Rochester General Hospital, one of the area’s largest health-care facilities. The hospital purchased the property where the farm was located from Ely and Lulu Buell’s three surviving children. The portion where a tenant house and the rustic summer cottage with its Bragdon-designed outbuilding stood was purchased from Alice Ely Buell’s son, Henry Buell, and her daughter, Alice Buell Morris.

If you want to visit the gravesites of these prominent Rochesterians, you will find Oliver Culver (1778-1867) buried in Section C, Lot 55, alongside his wife, Alice Ray Culver. Buell family members are buried in Section B, Lots 28 and 62.

Acknowledgments: Frank A. Gillespie, Thomas Hickey, Mary Jo Lanphear, Philip Maples, Patricia Wayne. All photographs courtesy the Baker Cederburg Museum of Rochester General Hospital.
FRIENDS FOUNDER, W. STEPHEN THOMAS, DIES AT AGE 92

by Richard O. Reisen

W. Stephen Thomas, known to his friends and colleagues as Steve, was one of the founders of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, which formed in 1980. For many years, he guided our young organization with the wealth of knowledge he brought as a historian, tour guide, and director emeritus of the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

Steve died at his home, 1570 East Avenue, on December 27, 2001 at the age of 92 years. He succumbed to cancer.

He was a native of New York City and was graduated cum laude from Harvard University in 1932 with major studies in history and American literature and a minor study in biology. Before coming to Rochester to become the director of Rochester Museum of Arts and Science, now the Rochester Museum and Science Center, he led a peripatetic life exploring plants on an expedition to Central America, serving as a U.S. park ranger and naturalist in Glacier National Park, employed as assistant registrar at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, taking graduate courses in art history at New York University, becoming director of education at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, heading a science survey for the American Philosophical Society, joining the U.S. Navy and serving as liaison officer in Chile and later as historian attached to the staff of the Pacific fleet, and finally coming to Rochester in 1946 to be a museum director.

Former Friends trustee, Fran Coleman, wrote an essay about Steve Thomas for the Epitaph, Spring 1998, in which she reported, “As a museum director, Steve was in demand all over the world. He lectured in Cuba, in Spanish, and helped plan exhibits in Uruguay for the first modern science museum in South America. He lectured in Israel, France, West Germany, and Spain while accompanying an Iroquois exhibition mounted by RMSC, the first exhibit of native American arts and crafts shown in Europe. Steve was active in various professional museum organizations at the local, state, regional, and national levels.”

Steve loved Mount Hope Cemetery. He had background information and countless stories about all the rich and famous people buried there, as well as those who may have been infamous and wicked. He wrote the tour script that became the bible for all of the Friends’ tour guides. I toured with him and learned from him. He instilled in me his great love for Mount Hope and his enthusiasm for sharing that love as a tour guide. His wonderful stories gave me the knowledge to support my enthusiasm. His tours were often side-tracked by the sighting of unusual or interesting mushrooms, an aspect that I must admit I didn’t absorb sufficiently to replicate on my tours, but they were fascinating when Steve related his intimacy with fungi.

Steve, with assistance from city historian Ruth Napperstek, wrote Sleepers’ City, the Sesquicentennial History of Mt. Hope Cemetery, published in 1988. He asked me to proofread it for accuracy and to provide suggestions. Well, that was like asking the typist to write the novel. I did, however, read the manuscript – with humility and admiration.

Fran Coleman wrote: “We are indeed fortunate to have such a man in our organization. He is an expert on so many topics and so willing to share his knowledge. Spending time with Steve, recalling memories, listening to his stories, and going through his scrapbooks and other memorabilia is always a joy for me. I have learned a great deal from Steve and consider myself very lucky to be his friend.”

Another Friends trustee, Edward Olinger, wrote: “I will remember Stephen for his interest in people, and how he welcomed me to the board. I was fortunate to be on one of his tours when he took off to examine mushrooms he espied along the route. To take a tour with Stephen was an adventure because you never knew where it would go or end up, nor would Stephen. But he could lead a tour anywhere, because of all that he knew about Rochester’s people and events.”

Thank you, good departed friend.