BEWARE OF THE WATER

SIDNEY JOSEPH LOVECRAFT'S TWO ORDEALS WITH WATER

by Richard O. Reisem

It was warm and sunny that Saturday afternoon on August 2, 1845. Sidney Joseph Lovecraft, eight years old, left his home at 59 Chestnut Street (now totally commercial) and walked downtown to the Genesee River. The river was flowing very swiftly that afternoon. Watching it from the stony ledge where he was standing at the edge of the water made the boy slightly dizzy. Behind him was Louis Chapin’s massive City Mills that fronted on Aqueduct Street and the new machine shop that was under construction for the Barton & Belden firm. It was Saturday and Sidney felt alone at the river's edge, half mesmerized by the rushing water and half fearful of its potential danger. In a moment when he was concentrating more on the river than on where he was stepping, he slipped and fell into the racing current, which would, unless some miracle occurred very quickly, carry the eight-year-old boy with scant swimming ability over the 96-foot Genesee Falls.

Patrick McElroy was a mason working on Barton & Belden's new shop building when he heard Sidney scream. He turned to see the struggling boy moving downstream and instantly plunged into the water to attempt a rescue. Luckily, he caught Sidney just in time and was able to transport him to the shallower water on the opposite shore. It was a close call and one that the traumatized boy would never forget. But little did he know that before his life would be over, he would experience the fearful qualities of water, but much more dreadfully next time.

When Sidney Lovecraft was 21 years old in 1858, he fell in love with Electa M. Perry, a lovely girl born in Michigan but who now lived with her parents in Webster, New York. By now, the Lovecraft family had moved from Chestnut Street to Marshall Street in Rochester's Wadsworth Square area. A neighbor there was a Universalist minister, the Reverend George Montgomery, who married the couple in the Universalist church.

A year after the wedding, Electa had a child, unfortunately stillborn. The couple never had any other children. And just two years later, in 1861, the Civil War began with its need for volunteer soldiers. Both Sidney and his younger brother, Silas, just 17 years old, enrolled in August 1862. Both enlisted for three-year terms—Silas in Company C, 140th New York State Regiment, and Sidney in Company I, 8th New York State Cavalry Regiment. Silas witnessed ferocious fighting in the Rochester regiment led by the dashing young Colonel Patrick O'Rourke. The battles were so fierce that Silas, still only 17 years old, developed severe depression and died. Sidney, devastated by his brother's death and fearful for his own, deserted the army and fled to Canada along with hundreds of others who became disenchanted with the ugly war that seemed to be sacrificing lives with abandon.

Even though the war ended in 1865, Sidney did not return home from Canada.
until almost five years later. When he did return to his wife and family, he started to work as foreman in his father’s mill on Warehouse Street. Sidney and Electa also moved into his parents’ (John and Eleonor Lovecraft) house at 8 Marshall Street.

In the middle of September 1873, Sidney and Electa Lovecraft and three other couples planned an outing in Sidney’s small sailboat, “The Peerless.” Besides Sidney and Electa, the party included Joshua (Sidney’s cousin) and Libbie Lovecraft, Frank and Libbie Raymond, and Mr. and Mrs. James B. Stevens. The group sailed from the Lake Ontario port at Charlotte at the outset of the Genesee River. On the relatively calm lake, they traveled 30 miles east to Sodus Point where they camped for several days. Then Joshua Lovecraft and the Stevens couple returned to Rochester by land, leaving the other five people – Sidney and Electa Lovecraft, Libbie Lovecraft, and Frank and Libbie Raymond – to return to Charlotte by boat.

The disastrous events that occurred on that small sailboat on its return trip were reported inaccurately in the Rochester Union and Advertiser, which troubled Sidney Lovecraft to the extent that he wrote the following detailed account of the voyage:

“Messrs. Editors of the Union & Advertiser – Having read your issue of the 18th instant, some of the statements made are entirely wrong, and may mislead your readers. I will therefore give you a description as near as I can of our unlucky voyage on our return from Sodus Bay, hoping you will publish the same.

“We were to return Saturday, the 13th instant, but not having a fair wind we waited until Monday when we broke camp and started home with a fair south wind, and the following people aboard: Frank C. Raymond and his wife Libbie, Mrs. Libbie Lovecraft, wife of Joshua E. Lovecraft, my own wife, Electa, and myself, five in all. It was half past 8 a.m. when we left the pier at Sodus; reached Pultneyville a few minutes after 11, and kept on until we reached Bear Creek. We put in there, as it was getting cloudy. I went up to the scales where they weigh the iron ore, and inquired what they thought of the weather. Most of them did not know. One young man stated that he did not think it would rain, so we started on.

“Just before we reached Irondequoit Bay, the wind went down and left us. Frank and I took the oars and my wife went to the tiller, and we rowed until within about a mile of the lighthouse at Charlotte. The wind then sprang up from the southeast, and I went and took my place at the tiller. I took out my watch and told the party we would get in in time to go on the 7 o’clock train to the city. When we were about 200 feet of the pier, I turned my head and looked over my right shoulder, but it was too late. The squall was upon us. I tried to bring her in the wind, but could not on account of the jib sheet being fastened on the cleat.

“I then told Frank to pull the pin and lower the mainsheet; he pulled the pin, got the ropes snarled, and they went to the masthead all in a heap. The sail dropped about three feet and bagged in the water, and then there was no help for us. Over we had to go, and the boat turned bottom-side up. Frank got on the boat, then I got on and helped Libbie Lovecraft and my wife, and then helped Frank to get his wife on. We then stood up on the bottom of the boat and hallowed and yelled and waved our handkerchiefs for about ten minutes.

“Meantime, the wind had changed and was blowing off shore. I told them that we must try and right the boat, and I thought I could bail her out. The women took off their cloaks and their heavy garments and threw them away. I then get them to one side and we righted it up. They all then tried to climb on the boat, and in so doing they turned her over again. When I came up I got hold of the boat and again got on the bottom, but I could see no one but Frank, and he had hold of his wife. The sail had covered up Libbie Lovecraft and my wife, and I thought that they were both gone, when my wife’s head appeared out from under the sail, and she had hold of Libbie. I called to her to give me her hand. She said, ‘No, I can hold here; you get Libbie on first.’ I got hold of Libbie and drew her on the boat, then my wife, and then helped Frank and his wife to get on.

“We then tried to right the boat the seco-
When it came daylight, Frank and his wife were about exhausted, and I could see that they could not hold out much longer. He was wild; he could see nothing, did not know me when I spoke to him. My wife found a piece of the jib sheet and passed it to him, telling him to fasten his wife and himself (this was before daylight), which they did, but when it came light, I saw that they had got hold of the rope and were just holding on by their hands.

About sunrise, Mrs. Raymond slipped off the boat and my wife caught her and drew her on again. And then Frank fell off, and she caught him and gave him a fresh hold. Frank and his wife then went off the second time, and my wife and I drew them on again, and they seemed to have lost all their senses; they would throw off their hands. Frank and his wife went off the third time, his wife astern and he on the side.

She drifted toward the boat again, went under it and met Frank, and they both went down together. As near as I could judge, it was about half an hour after sunrise. I looked toward Libbie Lovecraft and saw that her eyes were getting large, and soon after she said she could not see, that she was blind. My wife got near her and tried to rally her, but as soon as she became blind she seemed to give up. She died in my wife's arms. Both Mrs. Raymond and Libbie were dead before they touched the water or at least went under. When Libbie went off, it must have been between 9 and 10 o'clock a.m.

Just as daylight made its appearance, we saw a sail making directly for us, but when she came within a mile of us, she turned and went up the lake. There she turned toward the shore and then turned and ran down the lake. Just before Libbie commenced getting blind, we saw two sails start out from Charlotte right toward us, but it was like the others, when they got within a mile of us, they would turn and sail the other way.

When it came daylight, we were about six or seven miles out in the lake. We could see the blast furnace and the Spencer House, but not anything else clearly. About half an hour after sunrise, the wind changed to the northwest and kept blowing harder all the time, and about noon the waves were running very big. About 3 p.m., my wife made her first complaint, saying, 'Oh dear! Will nobody pick us up? It does seem so hard to die here and no one left to tell.' I spoke to her and told her to cheer up. Then I would try and make one more effort. I was near the stern and slid around the boat and got upon the bow and took an oar in my hand and tried to row, but my strength was gone from my arms. But looking over the side, I saw that we were going through the water toward shore a great deal faster than before.

When I got on the bow, her stern went up and gave a great deal larger surface to the wind. We then took my wife's petticoat, she holding one corner with her teeth and the other corner with one of her hands. I held up the other end and it improved our speed wonderfully. It was a great while before we could see the little streaks on the houses where the windows should be, and everything after that kept getting plainer.

Soon my wife said that she saw a man. She looked again and said she did not know whether it was a man or a post. Soon after she said she saw two little girls. Then we waved the petticoat to the best of our ability. They saw us and ran down the bank, went up a bank on the other end and itimproved our speed wonderfully. We then saw two men come out, and they saw us. And then the men put for their boats. The little girl and boy who saw us first were Katie Langdon and Frank Woodhull. The women were Mrs. John Langdon and Miss Mattie Stroger.

The men soon got the boat ready, and then pushed her out through the surf and got us off. When we got on shore, it was 7 o'clock p.m. They took us to the house of Amos Robb, where he and his wife, with his assistants, took care of us. They will be remembered by us until the day we die.

The names of the men that rescued us were as follows: Frank Woodhull, owner of the boat that came for us, his brother W. H. Woodhull, Stephen Green, Silas Husted, Fred Keller, and Robert McFarlane. We were in the water about 25 hours. About noon on Wednesday, we were removed to my wife's father's, Joshua Perry, about two miles east of Amos Robb's, where we stopped until Saturday, when we returned to the city.

Yours &c., Sidney J. Lovecraft

The Rochester Union and Advertiser published the above account on September 22, 1873.

In 1877, Sidney J. Lovecraft sold the family mill and opened a planing mill on Anderson Street, which he operated until 1890. Then in October of 1890, at the age of 53 years, enlargement of the liver accomplished what the Genesee River and Lake Ontario tried but failed to do. He is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Range 4, Lot 90.
MICROFILM CEMETARY RECORDS NOW ON COMPUTER CDs

by Richard O. Reisen

With a New York State grant, Mount Hope Cemetery has completed the microfilming and computerization of 360,000 burials that have occurred in the cemetery over a period of 164 years. The original 10 huge, heavy volumes containing handwritten entries have been retired from daily use and put in archival storage. Their complete contents now fit comfortably on three compact disks.

Frank Gillespie, Friends trustee and volunteer genealogical researcher at Mount Hope, supervised the project. "This is not the ultimate record-keeping system that we want to have," explained Frank, "but it is a significant step forward from lugging about the heavy interment books and turning pages to find a specific burial."

The process of converting the interment records started with microfilming each of more than 5,000 pages of entries in the original books. These microfilm records were then recorded on CDs. The first CD covers the period from May 1, 1837 to December 31, 1906; the second CD from January 1, 1907 to March 31, 1952; the third CD from April 1, 1952 to February 17, 2002. All records since February 17, 2002 have been computerized.

It is still necessary to have an approximate death date in order to use the computerized files, because what appears on the computer monitor is a photographic reproduction of the actual page in the original interment record. In the page illustrated here, the burials of all the persons whose surnames start with "Fra" and who died between August 1867 and August 1881 are listed. Each interment entry notes the month, day, and year of interment; the name of the deceased; the age in years, months, and days; the cause of death; residence address at time of death; and burial section and lot number. So, for example, one entry in the illustration reads that in 1873 on February 27, Michael Frank was buried. He was 50 years and 11 months old, committed suicide, lived on Herman Street, and was buried in the north 1/2 of Lot 250 in Range 1.

Gillespie said that progress continues on the full computerization of the cemetery records, which requires entering all the data in digital form. Interment Book No. 1, which covers the period from May 1, 1837 to July 31, 1860 has been completed; the data entry for Book No. 2 is complete, and Book No. 3 is well underway. When that project is finished, which will likely take years, you will be able to find information by using a number of parameters. For example, in Michael Frank's case, you could ask the computer to provide the names of all the people who were buried on February 27, 1873; or all the people named Michael, or all the people who were 50 years old when they died; or all the people who committed suicide; or who lived on Herman Street; or who are in Range 1, etc. The Rochester Genealogical Society is currently working on this long-range project, which requires careful and labor-intensive data entry and checking.

When I asked Frank Gillespie to demonstrate the new CD system by finding Hiram Sibley whose death date I believed to be in the 1880s. He found it in less than a minute. Gillespie said, "We are now experiencing a 50 to 60 percent gain in productivity when researching cemetery records."
GREEN SPIRES

The lush summer green of Mount Hope Cemetery is accented by tight spires and broad drooping pyramids of dark green and haze blue evergreens planted in keeping with cemetery custom and Rochester's horticultural tradition. The evergreens – found in groves, as individual specimens, and in foundation plantings for mausoleums – are a mixed lot, introduced to the cemetery over the most of two centuries.

Mount Hope's evergreens have come from all over: Scotch and Austrian pines, Norway spruces, and English yews from Europe; Douglas and white firs and blue spruces from the American west; Caucasian spruces from the Caucasus and Asia Minor; and Nikko firs and false cypresses from Japan. The very few evergreen trees native to the area, but not to the Mount Hope site, are eastern white pines (once found as pure stands in the forests of the Lake Ontario coastline), white cedars, and eastern hemlocks, which can still be found in protected areas along the lake and in coves on the hillsides of the Finger Lakes. The many native evergreens of the Catskills and Adirondacks were neglected.

Evergreens have long been planted in cemeteries. Pagans believed that the spirit of the dead did not leave the body until spring bloom. Plants with the power to ward off evil spirits – beech and willow trees, and evergreens, especially yews – were planted near the dead for protection from these spirits. Like many other pagan customs adopted by Christians, such as the Yule tree, evergreens were common in cemeteries even after their original intent was forgotten. Secular cemeteries followed the tradition and evergreens are found in small village plots and expansive rural cemeteries as well as church lots and large religious cemeteries.

The predominance of exotic rather than native evergreens in Mount Hope comes from the 19th-century tradition of creating an overlay of introduced plants, both deciduous and evergreen, in the natural landscape. Also, there is the influence of the nursery industry in Rochester and the proximity of the Ellwanger & Barry Nurseries, who donated plants to the cemetery as early as 1847. By the turn of the century, cemetery designers were railing against the use of evergreens and, to their eyes, the funereal appearance and gloom they created, favoring flowering plants instead. Happily, their ideas were ignored and the evergreens of Mount Hope persist, and new ones have been planted, preserving the beauty of the 19th century landscape.

UNITED WAY
DAY OF CARING AT
MOUNT HOPE
CEMETERY

Wednesday, May 1 was the Rochester-wide United Way Day of Caring and Mount Hope Cemetery was one of the lucky beneficiaries. About 150 Kodak employees descended on the cemetery's 196 acres and accomplished a remarkable amount of spring cleanup. Leaves were raked from most of the old sections, and the back of Section A was thoroughly cleaned of brush as well. Directional signs to Susan B. Anthony's and Frederick Douglass' gravesites were moved to new and better locations, and the roof and side supports of the large north entrance map sign, which had fallen in a windstorm, were repaired.

Marilyn Nolte, Friends trustee and chair of the Friends restoration committee, and Jeff Simmons, cemetery operations supervisor, planned and directed the work. They selected the sites to be raked and divided the Kodak volunteers into groups to accomplish the tasks. Nolte said, "The
Kodak volunteers worked very hard and accomplished an enormous amount of cleanup in one day.” While the workers took a break for lunch around the Florentine fountain, Friends trustee Warren Kling presented a short history of Mount Hope Cemetery to the crowd.

A full tarp of leaves is ready to be dragged away for disposal.

Lunch break for 150 hardworking Kodak volunteers.

FRIENDS VOLUNTEERS IN GARDEN CENTER PLANT SALE

by Richard O. Reisen

For the last four years, several members of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, who are serious gardeners, pot interesting and unusual plants from their own gardens and stock a stall at the Proud Market, sponsored by the Rochester Civic Garden Center on Castle Park, across the road from Mount Hope Cemetery.

This year, on Saturday morning, June 1, John Pearsall, Friends trustee and volunteer cemetery gardener, Letitia McKinney and Mary Olinger, both members of the Friends and volunteer gardeners in Mount Hope, pooled their collection of fascinating plants, set up a stall on Castle Park, and became plant salespersons at the Proud Market. At the end of the sale, they had only six pots unsold, and they had sales revenues of $342.50. As they have done for the past three years, the team donated the entire earnings to the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery. This year, Pat Corcoran, a Friends trustee and cemetery gardener as well, also supplied plants for the sale.

John Pearsall reported, “The success we had was due to the salesmanship of Mary and Tish. They really pushed the stuff which other vendors don’t do. I suggested to them that they should go into the used-car business.” But we at the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery extend grateful thanks and encourage this plant-sale team to continue this annual late spring event.
INSTITUTIONAL PLOT MAPS IN MOUNT HOPE ARE REDRAWN BY VOLUNTEER

by Richard O. Reisen

There are more than two dozen institutional plots in Mount Hope Cemetery. They include the Civil War plot, the Firemen’s plot, the plots of many Jewish congregations and other religious and fraternal groups. Each of these institutional plots is divided into many individual gravesites, all of which are noted on the original plot maps that are now many decades, even a hundred or more years, old. With regular use, these maps, although drawn on fine vellum, have deteriorated, many to the point of being unusable.

Enter Dennis Donovan, a member of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery who has a number of family members buried in the cemetery. Single-handedly, he maintains over 25 family lots in Mount Hope. He also possesses a particular skill that has recently been singularly serendipitous for Mount Hope Cemetery. He is a retired architectural draftsman. And he presented his drafting services as a volunteer to redraw all of those institutional plot maps.

So far, he has redrawn more than 20 maps with individual graves noted by number instead of the former practice of entering all of the information on the maps themselves. That information included the name of the deceased, date of burial, and type of vault. Whenever a new burial was made in an institutional plot, all of that information was recorded on the map itself, and the frequent need to enter new data or look up burial information has caused substantial wear to the maps. Now, when Donovan has completed his project, each map will carry a number on each gravesite, and the burial information for that grave number will be separately computerized.

Dennis Donovan, Friends member and volunteer, putting his architectural drafting skills to work on redrawing the cemetery’s maps of institutional plots. Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.
The gardens in Mount Hope Cemetery tended by Friends volunteers are particularly fine this summer. Trustee Pat Corcoran has been especially active in enhancing the garden program and enlisting volunteers to adopt historic garden sites. Shown above is the Yaky plot located just west of the gatehouse at the north entrance. Leitia McKinney designed, planted, and tends this visually exciting garden.

Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.