SYMBOLISM IN MT. HOPE

This issue of the newsletter initiates a series of short articles dealing with symbolism found on some of the monuments in Mt. Hope. A stroll through Mt. Hope—or indeed any Victorian era cemetery—can be fascinating. Take time to look at the grave markers. Read the fading names and inscriptions; notice the stonemcutter’s art and the sculpted symbolism.

Perhaps the design was chosen to represent the life and beliefs of the deceased. Perhaps it reflects his or her interests, occupation, affiliation, or perhaps it simply appealed to the purchaser and was affordable or popular at the time.

One of the most common motifs found in Mt. Hope Cemetery is an anchor, the symbol of hope. It is an ancient symbol and has been found in the catacombs of Rome. Starting with the anchors atop the old gatehouse, how many examples of hope can you locate?

EPITAPHS FOUND IN MT. HOPE

The marker for John Snell, who died on February 16, 1857, at age 37, has a carving of a wood-burning engine, which indicates his occupation and also commemorates a brave deed.

He came to his death in the discharge of his duty as an engineer on the New York Central railroad by means of an obstruction willfully placed on the track in the night. But heroically keeping his post on his engine, the Daniel Webster, to the last he generously sacrificed his own life for the preservation of the lives of those under his charge.

This memorial is erected by his fellow engineers, and others not only as a monument of their respect for his magnanimity as a MAN but also as a tribute of their esteem for him as a COMPANION and FRIEND.

Figure of Hope with Her Anchor
HERVEY ELY--PROMINENT PIONEER
by Richard Reisem

For half a century, Hervey Ely was one of Rochester's leading citizens--prominent in political and social life, in church work, in manufacturing and commercial and building enterprises. But when he arrived here in 1813, he was a 22-year old looking to make a living at running a store in Col. Nathaniel Rochester's 100-acre settlement known as Rochesterville. Ely arrived with his brother, Elisha, and a friend, Josiah Bissell. They came from Pittsfield, Massachusetts. And the modest general store that they established at Four Corners was the second store, after Hamlet Scrantom's, to open in this pioneer village.

The opportunities for milling on the Genesee River immediately attracted the Ely brothers and Bissell. They repaired an old raceway built by Ebenezer Allan where the War Memorial now sits, and within five weeks of arriving in town, they not only started the general store but erected a sawmill as well, which began operations on December 14, 1813. By early 1814, the industrious Ely brothers and Bissell had also opened a gristmill for grinding wheat to flour.

In 1815, the Ely brothers painted their gristmill a dull red. It was known thereafter as the Red Mill. Four pairs of millstones turned out a finer grade of flour than was available from anyone else. This improved product was in such demand that the mill ran late into the night and thereby--in the days before the village acquired any bars, saloons, or other watering holes--provided a convenient and favorite gathering place for those who sought a little relaxation after sundown with a flagon of whiskey bought from the newly established distillery nearby. It was a life of hard work and hard play for the 331 residents of Rochesterville in 1815.

The village's first wedding was staged on October 8, 1815. Jehiel Barnard married Delia Scrantom, the eldest daughter of Hamlet Scrantom, who ran the other general store at Four Corners. An old left-handed fiddler named Noble was hired to play at the wedding dance. And the account of the event, as it was written down, reported that Hervey Ely, now 24 years old, and his partner "went into the dance in right good earnest."

The Genesee River, which so beneficently provided mill power, was also a temperamental river. Heavy rains in November 1817 caused the river to swell and the resulting floods carried away several buildings in the village. It also severely damaged the Red Mill. But the flood was only the beginning of trouble for the Red Mill. To supply additional raceways with water power, Elisha Johnson and Nathaniel Rochester raised the dam on the Upper Falls, where the Court Street bridge is situated today. This action severely curtailed the Ely mill operation, which stood on land leased from Nathaniel Rochester. So the Ely brothers and Bissell brought a lawsuit against all those involved in raising the dam. Col. Rochester was furious. He was so indignant that he offered the property on which the Ely mills stood for sale when the lease was up in 1821.

The Ely brothers and Bissell escaped Rochester's control by transferring their sawmill and gristmill operations to the east side of the river. In the long run, the move proved to be a blessing for them. They built a state-of-the-art gristmill, the likes of which had never been seen anywhere. The site for this up-to-date operation was the location of the current Rochester Public Library.

Ely's Greek Revival Mansion
Grain was carried up mechanically in buckets from the canal boats to the top of the five-story mill. From there, the grain descended through successive stages of cleaning, grinding, cooling, siting, and packing until the final product rolled out in sealed barrels onto the decks of canal boats aimed for eastern U.S. and European markets. The whole operation was accomplished without grain ever once being touched by the miller's hand.

By 1833 there were four mill races in town and 18 mills equipped with 78 run of stones. Rochester shipped 300,000 barrels of flour annually, which was one-third of all the flour going down the Hudson River. Eighty thousand of those barrels came from Elys’ highly productive mill. The two brothers were now in full charge; their partner, Bissell, died in 1831. Not only was Rochester’s preeminence in the flour business solidly established, but the Ely contribution was the single largest.

Hervey Ely was a Presbyterian and a good one, too. When all the other millers were loading and shipping flour on Sunday, Ely forbade his flour to be shipped on the Lord’s day on the canal boats that he controlled. Ely was also influential in local politics. In 1834, he and six other men formed the Whig party in Rochester. At the meeting, Ely represented the Antimasons. And Ely took pride in his growing town. He planted sugar maples and other trees all along the west side of Washington Street South. They were the first trees set out for ornament in Rochester.

Somewhere in his busy and prosperous life, Hervey Ely found time to marry. Whether his wife, Caroline A. Ely, was the partner with whom he danced in “right good earnest” at the 1815 wedding, we don’t know. Hervey and Caroline never had children of their own, but they were foster parents to at least eight. They were both generous people, even when they didn’t always have the means to be so. By 1837, however, Hervey Ely’s means were substantial, and he decided to build a proper mansion with some of those means.

He selected one of America’s foremost architects of the time, S.P. Hastings, of Boston. Hastings designed a superb mansion in the Greek Revival style, considered today to be one of the top ten architectural masterpieces of Rochester.

Hervey and Caroline Ely moved into their gracious mansion and established their lives at No. 11 Livingston Park, the social heart of Corn Hill at the time and its most elite address. It was a street of sweeping lawns and formidable colonnades. From his house, Hervey Ely could walk to work. And in the evenings, the Elys could entertain on their broad piazza or in their elegant parlors.

This life lasted only four years for them. In 1839, the price of flour plunged from $11 a barrel to $4.50. By 1841 Hervey Ely could no longer afford his Greek temple. He sold it, and the Elys lived simpler lives after that, although they never gave up their generosity to others. Hervey Ely died on November 23, 1862, at the age of 71 years and was buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery. A few years after Ely’s death, his close friend, Lewis Henry Morgan, the internationally known anthropologist, said of him, “I cannot mention the name of my venerable friend without expressing my high appreciation of his great abilities, of his genial and unselfish nature, and of his liberal and enlightened sentiments. He will be remembered as one of the great men of his generation.”

MEMBERS’ NIGHT

Members, mark your calendar for a Wednesday evening at the gatehouse on September 13, 5 to 8 p.m. There will be refreshments, slide shows, and tours. Bring a friend if you wish.
PHOTOGRAPHERS' NIGHT AT MT. HOPE
Photographers gathered at the north gate area of the cemetery on the evening of June 20 to study the photographic effects of twilight and the full moon. R.I.T. photographic students and other photographers from different parts of the country took pictures. The event was jointly sponsored by R.I.T., Eastman Kodak Co., and the Ansel Adams Gallery of California.

The Friends acted as hosts at the gatehouse and served refreshments until 11:30 p.m. to participants.

RESETTING GRAVESTONES
The City of Rochester allocated money to reset or repair stones in the cemetery. The Friends assisted Superintendent of Cemeteries James Dorschel in identifying the stones. A contract was awarded to Leonard Ogden General Contractors, and the work is now in progress.

TOURS
Guided tours of historic Mt. Hope are conducted every Sunday at 2 and 3 o'clock. Special tours can be arranged by calling 461-3494 and leaving a message.

THE FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY

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STREET_______________________________________________________
CITY & STATE_________________________________________________
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TELEPHONE________________________
I cannot join, but would like to contribute $______________

FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY
791 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, New York 14620

NEW MEMBERS
The Friends welcomes these new members:
Judith A. Byman
Patricia Corcoran
Patrick Downs
Andy & Barbara Greenstein
Cynthia Howk
Russell Lee
Patricia McGrath
Margaret Neuman
Alice M. Raymond
Mary Lou Tyndall
Mrs. Charles A. Yuile

COLLECTORS' T-SHIRTS
The Friends of Mt. Hope Cemetery have T-shirts for sale. They are dark purple with the Friends' logo in white. The T-shirts come in a small size for children, and in 3 sizes for adults (M, L, XL). They are a good buy at $6.00 each. The price for any Friends' member is $5.00, upon presentation of a membership card. T-shirts are available at the gatehouse on Sunday afternoons from 1:30 to 5:00 p.m.

Membership Categories:
[ ] Basic $15.00
[ ] Contributing $25.00
[ ] Supporting $35.00
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[ ] Benefactor $100.00
[ ] Life Membership $500.00 or more
[ ] Retired/Student $5.00

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