

Fall 2013

News from Oak Hill

The NEWSLETTER of the FRIENDS of OAK HILL CEMETERY

Report of The President

Dear Oak Hill Family Members,

It has been some time since we last sent a newsletter out to our "family." Nonetheless, things have been happening at Oak Hill Cemetery. Our annual meeting was held on June 3rd with all the officers being elected to retain their positions. The newest board member, Loretta Castaldi, has worked hard with the staff to revamp the financial reporting for both the Oak Hill Cemetery Company and the Preservation Foundation. Superintendent Dave Jackson has accomplished an impressive amount of work in his first year as Superintendent. Among his accomplishments, he presented and the Board approved an update for the Cemetery "decoration" policy, additional Saturday hours for public access, work on drainage issues in Chapel Valley and on Reno Hill, coordination of some weekend events providing additional revenue, and the completion of operating budgets for the Cemetery and the Foundation. Other board members David



Slate roof replacement and other work underway on Renwick Chapel.

Photo credit: Dave Jackson

deVicq and Marisa Bourgoin have been immersed as well in all that has gone on in the past several months.

In the last newsletter, we reported that a project to replace the stonework mortar on the Renwick Chapel was contemplated. The Chapel had suffered interior water damage and

repairs were necessary. As the project progressed, it became apparent the scope of the repairs should be expanded. After careful consideration and deliberation, the Board of Managers instructed the Superintendent to proceed with a full restoration of the important features of the Renwick

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OAK HILL CEMETERY

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Cemetery Hours

Office and grounds:
9:00 am to 4:30 pm, M - F
Saturday 11:00 am - 4:00 pm.
Sunday 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm,
(weekends walk-in gate only
and no drive-in access) weather permitting.
Please observe rules posted at gate.

Board of Managers

George G. Hill, President,
John W. Gill, President Emeritus
David C. de Vicq, Vice President
Marisa Bourgoïn, Secretary
Loretta Castaldi, Treasurer
David Jackson, Superintendent

Cemetery Publications

Available in the cemetery office

"Oak Hill Cemetery"

A brief history – contains a map of the cemetery, list of notable people buried in Oak Hill and a brief history of our founding. \$3.00

Oak Hill Note Cards

Set of eight note cards featuring four scenes of Oak Hill Cemetery through the seasons. Envelopes included. \$5.00

"Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown, DC Monument Inscriptions and Burial Data"

Two-volume set, including
matching sleeve. \$175.00

President's Report (continued from page 1)

Chapel. Not only would the mortar be replaced but also the slate roof. Additionally, exterior paint will be freshened and the interior painted decorative plaster and plaster walls will be repaired and repainted. Stained-glass windows will be cleaned and the small broken areas replaced. The oak floor will be sanded and refinished. Even the heating system, which was added some forty years ago will be inspected and replaced, if necessary.

As you can see from the extensive work list for this project, our intent is to fully restore our wonderful Chapel to its original and grandest condition as well as preserve it for years and years to come. As has been said in our meetings, "you should probably replace the slate roof every one hundred and sixty years, whether it needs it or not!" It is needed, and it will be done!

And so comes another aspect of the project, financing. This newsletter is entirely focused on the Renwick Chapel (and recognizing earlier donors), its history, its design and materials, some of the events held there, and some

details about the work being done. We hope that by familiarizing you to the greatest possible extent, we may pique your interest and your generosity for this project. The expected expenditure for the restoration project exceeds \$200,000. This is clearly one of the most ambitious preservation projects ever done at Oak Hill Cemetery and the project is on our most significant structure. The Oak Hill Cemetery Preservation Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization and we understand that donations to the Foundation are considered tax deductible under IRS rules.

Enjoy this compilation of facts and stories about the Renwick Chapel. Our founder, William Corcoran, and his chosen architect James Renwick, Jr. created something really special. Once you have read about the Chapel, please consider making a donation to its preservation.

Sincerely,
George G.Hill

President



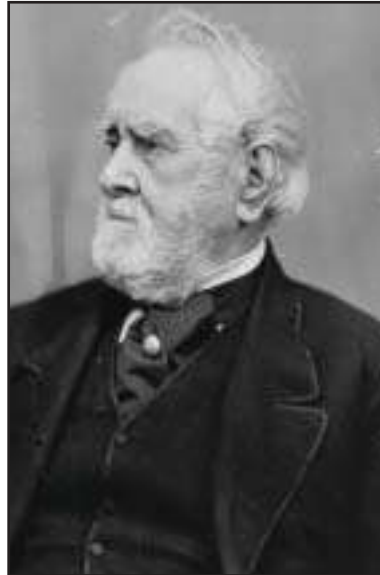
The Renwick Chapel History

William Corcoran asked

*"Would you design a
chapel that will be fitting
for this project?"*

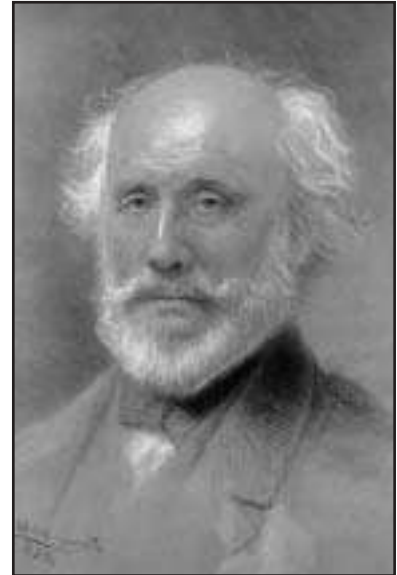
Mr. Renwick replied,

"Of course!"



W. W. Corcoran

Photo credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-cwpbh-04664 (digital file from original neg.)



James W. Renwick, Jr.

Image courtesy of the Frick Art Reference Library.

Between 1846 and 1848, the United States of America waged war on its neighbor to the south, Mexico. President Polk took note of the many Americans moving to Texas and decided to annex the area, all the way to the Rio Grande River, as well as the areas we now know as California, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Nevada. The war cost over \$100 million dollars and raising the funds was what helped start the fortune of William Corcoran, one of Washington, DC's most notable philanthropists.

In 1849, Mr. Corcoran bought a home located at H

Street and Connecticut Street NW that was previously owned by Massachusetts statesman Daniel Webster. The home, the first significant Victorian remodeling project in Washington, was originally constructed in 1828. As the new owner of the home, Mr. Corcoran wanted to enlarge and remodel it, so he turned to the young architect, James W. Renwick, Jr. Renwick set about to enlarge the house into a Renaissance-inspired mansion marking the introduction of the Italianate style into Washington on a large scale. Renwick's attention to detail included varying designs of classical window

frames, cornices, and floral swags throughout the home in brownstone.

At a meeting with Renwick while the Connecticut Street project was underway, Mr. Corcoran explained "I am establishing a cemetery in Georgetown consistent with the dignity of the newer cemeteries that have been developed in Boston and New York. I've asked George de la Roche to survey and layout the grounds and landscape design. Would you design a chapel that will be fitting for this project?"

Mr. Renwick replied "Of course!" and so began the his-

toric Oak Hill Cemetery and its "Renwick" Chapel.

Mr. Renwick went on to become one of the notable architects of his time designing important churches, government and hospital buildings, and residences along the east coast. He won the design competition for the Smithsonian "Castle" by unanimous vote of the Smithsonian Board of Regents. He was selected to design St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. The "Renwick" Chapel, as it is now known, is the only example of Renwick's Gothic Revival church design in the District of Columbia*.

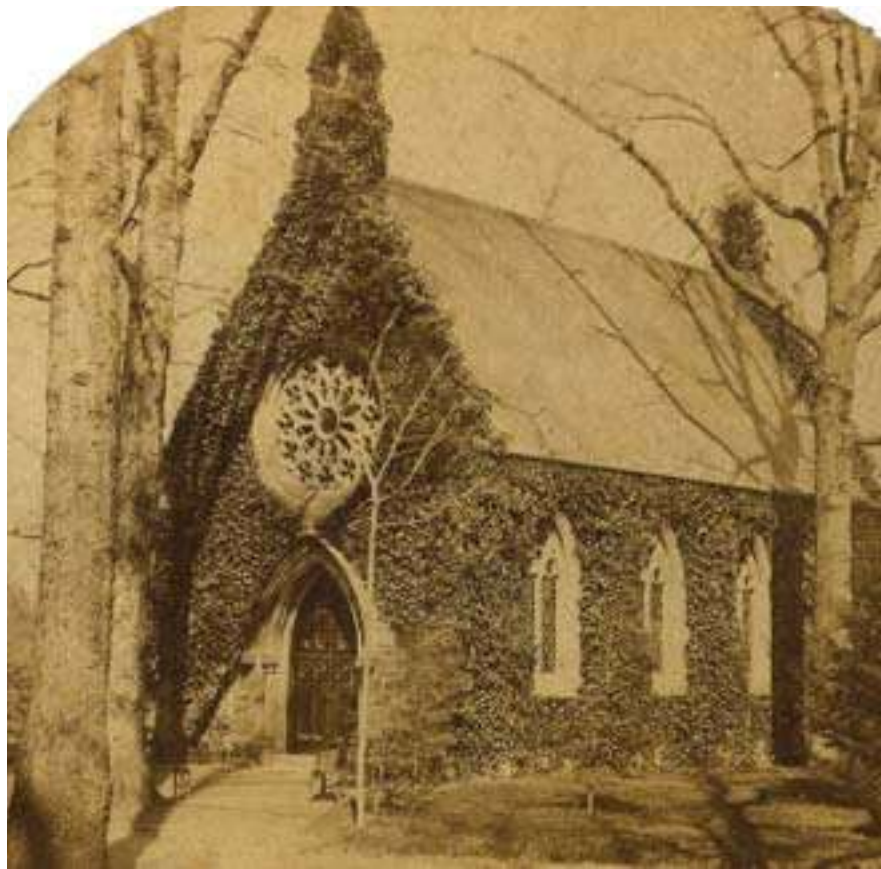
No formal documents recording Mr. Renwick's engagement for the project or his original design have survived. What has survived is a structure, entirely complementary to a "Romantic era" cemetery, notable for its contribution to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. The fine proportions, skillful use of materials, and attention to detail reflect the sensitivity of its designer, James Renwick, Jr. and its benefactor, William W. Corcoran. The timelessness of the Chapel was honored by its 1972 placement on the National Register of Historic Places. The description "Gothic Gem" is appropriate!

Over the last 164 years, the Renwick Chapel has been the scene where families have mourned the passing and celebrated the lives of many who are

interred in the Cemetery. There are mentions of presidents and cabinet members, senators and representatives, and captains of industry who were present for these events. Indeed, Renwick Chapel has been visited by the distinguished of Washington, DC for over a century and a half. In their book, Buildings of the District of Columbia, Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee listed Renwick Chapel as one of the historically significant buildings in Georgetown. Some of the others listed are Dumbarton Oaks, the Evermay Estate, and the Gatehouse at Oak Hill Cemetery.

Today, Renwick Chapel retains its historic stature. The structure is unchanged from its completion in 1853. The building is still used for mourning and celebration, gatherings and meetings. Its story-book appearance continues to delight all who view it. Mr. Corcoran and Mr. Renwick would be proud to know that their vision of an iconic structure, true to the idea of the "Romantic Era" of cemetery development, thrives in a world vastly different from that of its beginning.

*St. Mary's Episcopal Church, another Renwick creation, is High Victorian Gothic architecture, a different style. It was built in 1886.



The Renwick Chapel from a stereoscopic photo in the cemetery's collection.



Gothic Revival Architecture & The Renwick Chapel:

Details and Materials

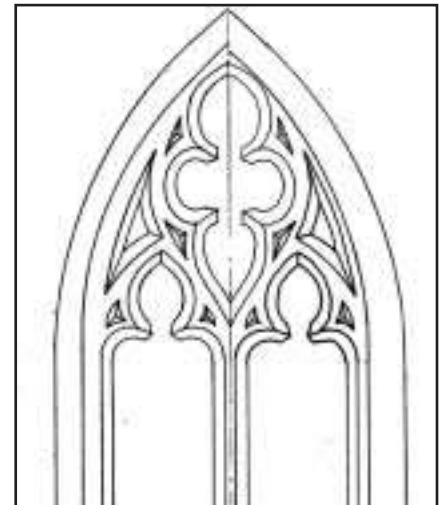
Gothic Revival Architecture was an offshoot of Gothic Architecture that started in Europe in the 1150s. Known as "modern style" at its beginning, Gothic was scornfully described as being from barbarians or "Goths" by Renaissance architects 300 years later. The revival began in the late 18th century and became popular in the U.S. by the mid-19th century.

The characteristics of the Renwick Chapel that identify its architectural style are:

- **Grand design:** The building sweeps upward with remarkable grandeur. Our little chapel boasts impressive height (over three stories) and stateliness for its size!
- **Flying buttresses:** Renwick Chapel is buttressed on each of its long axes. Although they are not flying buttresses, each is distinctively set out from the core of the building

and can be identified by its decorative stone work.

- **Pointed arch windows and rose windows:** All windows on the north and south sides of the building are pointed arches, as is the doorway that opens to the Ellipse. A large rose-shaped window over the door adds to the lighting inside the Chapel.
- **Vaulted ceiling:** The high, arched ceiling is supported by vaults emanating from where the buttresses connect on the exterior. These high arches are made of wood and painted to match the stained wood above them, supporting the steeply pitched roof.
- **Light and airy interior:** Natural light is the greatest part of our Chapel. It emanates from the stained glass windows on both sides and most significantly from the large stained glass window depicting an angel located over the altar.



Pointed Arch Windows

Photo credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, DC, GEO, 41B-(sheet 12-14)

- **Emphasis on decorative style and the ornate:** Although there are no gargoyles on the Renwick Chapel, the ornamental iron gates, colorful stone carved floral caps, interior decorative plaster and detailed woodwork all contribute to an ornate and rich style seldom seen in small buildings of this type.



Buttresses

Photo credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, DC, GEO, 41B-(sheet 4-14)



Light and airy interior

Photo credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, DC, GEO, 41B-6



Decorative style and the ornate

Photo credit: Dave Jackson

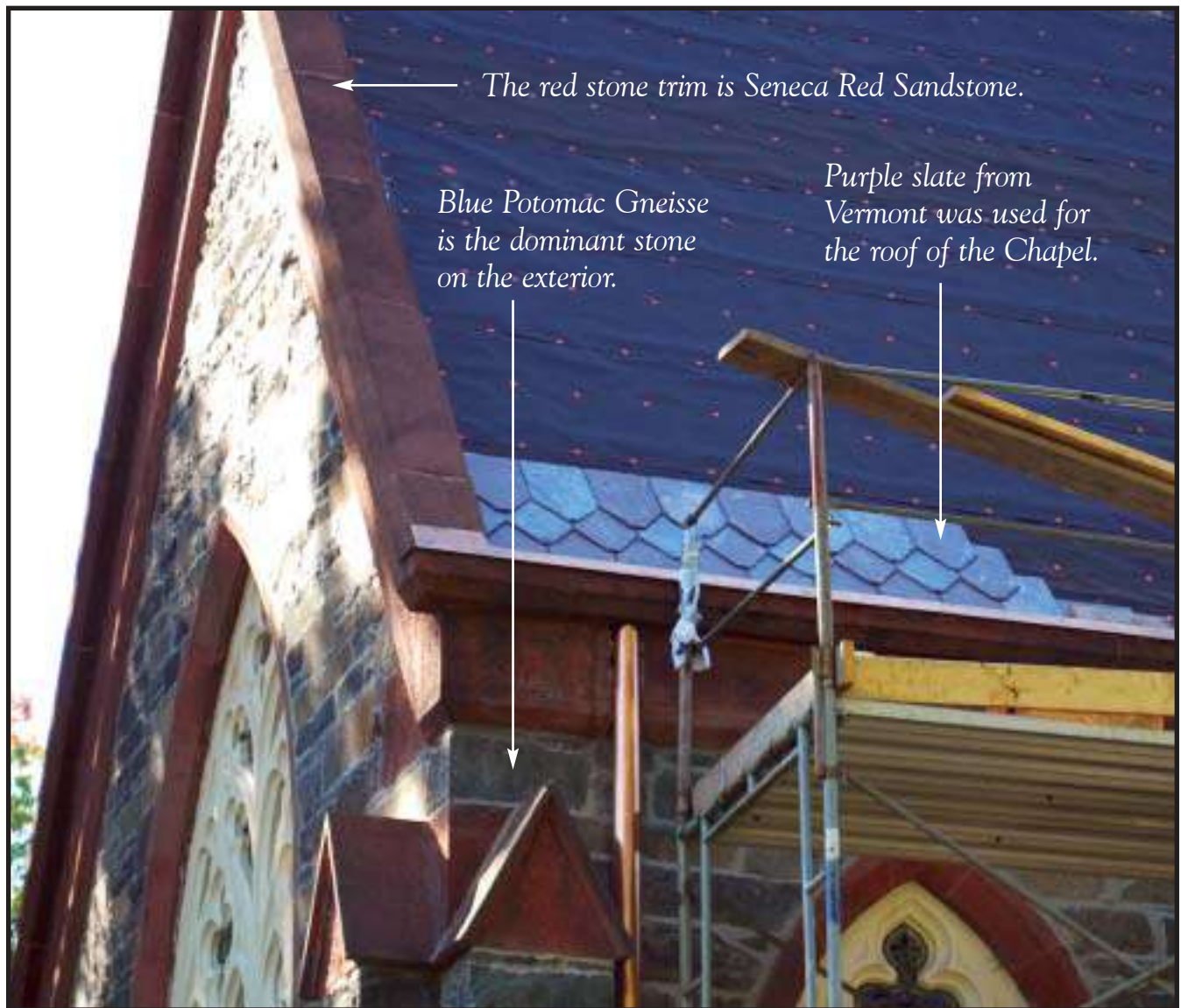


Photo credit: Dave Jackson

Meticulous materials

Mr. Renwick was quite deliberate in the selection of materials used to construct the Chapel. A few notable supplies include:

- Blue Potomac Gneisse is the dominant stone on the exterior. Gneisse or striated granite is quarried in many parts of the U.S.; however, because it's described as Blue Potomac Gneisse, it's believed that this stone came from a quarry on the Virginia side of the Potomac River above Georgetown. The blue color symbolizes heaven or peacefulness.
- The red stone trim is Seneca Red Sandstone. In 1848, Renwick had begun work on another of his projects, the Smithsonian Castle. He had selected stone from the Seneca Quarry in Maryland for that building and knew its characteristics. Clearly, Seneca Red Sandstone was on his mind when he thought of how to trim the exterior of the Chapel. The red stone is carved into detailed ornaments on the front of the building. There are also red sandstone adornments on the roof at both ends of the ridgeline.
- Purple slate from Vermont was used for the roof of the Chapel. Slate was selected for its durability; purple was the color of choice thanks to its symbolism in Catholicism, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Windows: LaFarge, Tiffany, or someone else?

Of course, the original Chapel structure included windows all around, creating the light and airy feel within the building. But it's thought that the original windows were replaced with stained glass in the early 1880s in preparation for one of the largest events ever held at Oak Hill Cemetery.

In 1882 William Corcoran proposed the remains of "Home Sweet Home" author John Howard Payne be returned from North Africa (now Tunisia), where he had served as American Consul. Payne had died in Africa in 1852, and his long-time friend Mr. Corcoran wanted his remains-along with a significant stone monument marking their location-returned to America. Payne's coffin and monument arrived in New York in March 1883 and was held in state in New York's City Hall. Afterward, the coffin was moved by train to Washington, D.C., and stored in Renwick Chapel.

The New York Times reported, "Mr. Corcoran desired to have the event of Payne's re-interment marked in a distinguished manner," and so a great event was planned. The day before the re-interment, Payne's coffin was moved to the Corcoran Art Gallery, where it lay in state. At 4 p.m. the following day, it was moved by a hearse "followed by a procession back to Oak Hill Cemetery. In the pro-

cession were the President, many members of his cabinet and representatives of the Supreme Court, the Diplomatic Corps, the Army and Navy, the District of Columbia and Mr. Corcoran, along with specially invited friends."

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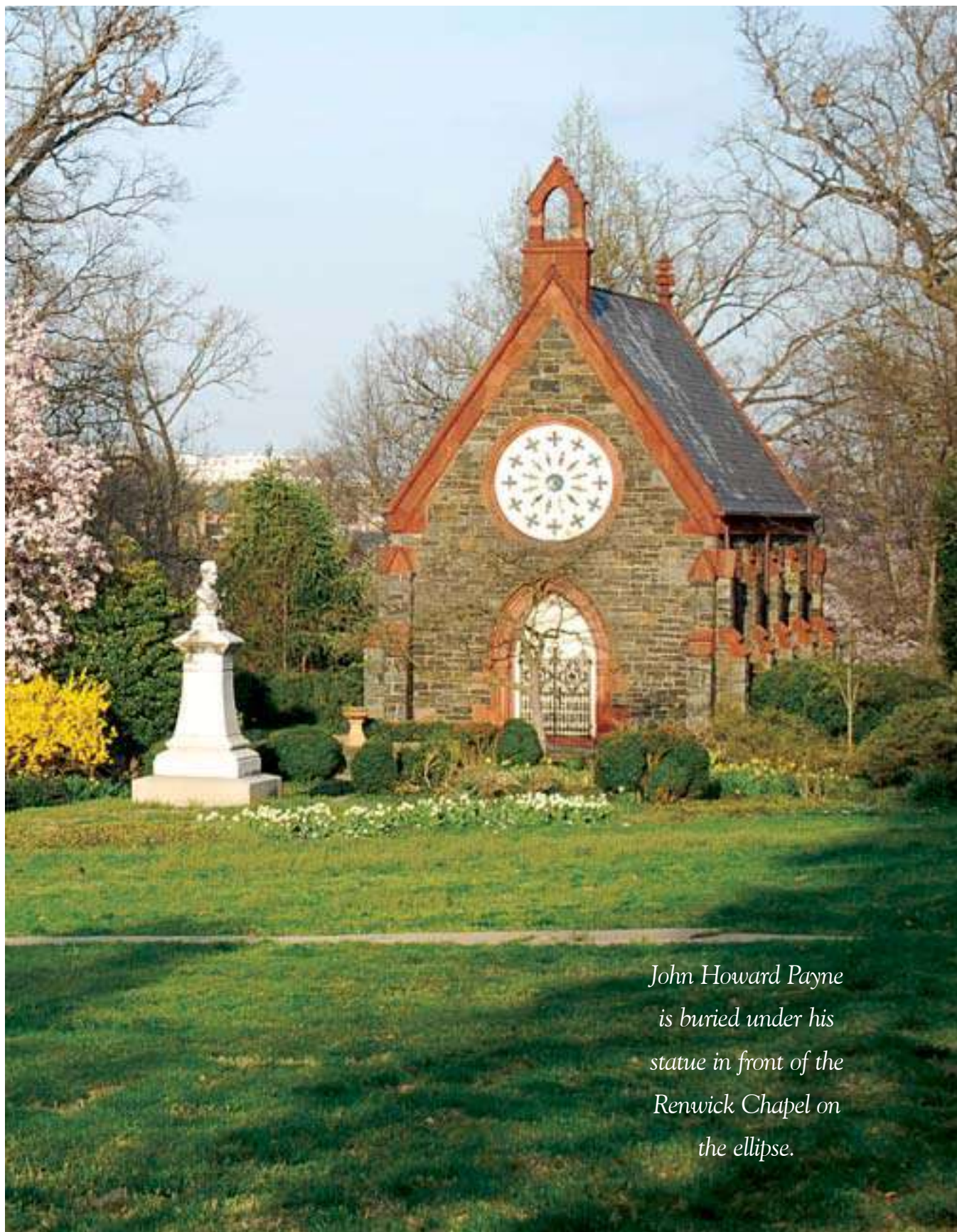
The article goes on to describe an elaborate event with bands, speeches and prayers attended by as many as 3,000 people. "The turnout of carriages was amazingly large, filling up all the neighboring streets."

Mr. Corcoran bore all the expense associated with the Payne event; it seems that he wanted to show Oak Hill at its

best. Two years earlier, John LaFarge and John Tiffany both received patents for a form of opalescent glass to be used in stained glass art. Mr. Corcoran wanted to showcase the Renwick Chapel with the latest available technology; to that end, stained glass-including some opalescent-was ordered and installed for the Payne re-interment event.

No records identifying the artist who designed the windows have survived. Efforts to tie them to La Farge, including contacting a descendent of John La Farge, proved inconclusive. The logical conclusion is that the artist must have been a pupil of La Farge because the work is done in a similar style, even if it isn't exactly the same.

Over the years the stained glass windows have undergone repairs, including the replacement of broken sections and the installation of support bars to prevent the glass from bowing due to temperature changes. In the 1980s the Board of Managers was concerned about the possibility of vandalism, a common problem at the time. As a result, Plexiglass covers were installed over all the stained glass, but they were removed in 2006. The current Board of Managers is considering the installation of new extended-life Lexan covers on the windows to protect them from vandals and weather in order to preserve them for future generations to enjoy.



*John Howard Payne
is buried under his
statue in front of the
Renwick Chapel on
the ellipse.*

Photo credit: Dave Jackson

Other Renwick Chapel Facts

- The cornerstone reads "1850."
- William Corcoran spent \$9,400 to build Renwick Chapel. He is buried, along with several generations of his family, below the Grecian mausoleum on the north side of Oak Hill Cemetery, overlooking Rock Creek.
- The second of two funeral ceremonies for Willie Lincoln (third son of President Lincoln) was held in Renwick Chapel in 1862. The service attendees included Abraham Lincoln, his son Robert, and John Nicolay, Lincoln's secretary. Mrs. Lincoln was overcome by grief and did not attend the ceremony. Willie's coffin was laid in the Carroll Family Mausoleum (Lot 192). The coffin was removed to Illinois in 1865.
- The pews and other furniture were donated to the Cemetery in the spring of 1956 by Miss Nina MacKall. The furniture was made by Page Church Furniture Company of Albemarle, N.C. Miss MacKall passed away in 1981 at age 88; she is buried in Lot 929.
- The Renwick Chapel had two gas-fired, six-light chandeliers for interior lighting. Electric service was installed in 1947 and the chandeliers were converted from gas to electric. Gas shutoff valves are still present on each light arm.
- Gas service was restored to the Chapel in 1963 when a furnace was installed.
- The altar set, a brass cross and two candelabra, was donated by Preston Dixon Callum in 1961. Colonel Callum was Baltimore's first Traffic Commissioner for nearly 30 years, although he never owned or drove a car. He passed away in 1963 at age 75 and is buried in Lot 1014.
- Renwick Chapel's pews seat 48 people. There are 12 additional folding seats.
- Board of Managers member Marisa Bourgoin and her husband John were married in Renwick Chapel in 2002. Renwick Chapel has been the site of many weddings over the years.
- There are four brick-lined casket crypts under the floor of Renwick Chapel. Up until the 1980s, these were used for storage when weather conditions or other matters postponed burials.
- There are 80 gilded plaster medallions on the ceiling of Renwick Chapel. Several will be replaced in the 2013 Preservation Project. One of note includes Mr. Corcoran's initials.



Gilded plaster medallion

Photo credit: Lou Krach



Converted gas fired chandeliers

Photo credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS, DC, GEO, 41B-7

- The peak of the Renwick Chapel roof is over three stories high.
- The quatrefoil, a shape similar to a four-leaf clover, is predominant throughout Renwick Chapel. Twelve quatrefoils line the perimeter of the large rose window over the entrance, each filled with stained glass. A quatrefoil mold shapes stained glass at the top of each of the eight side windows. And finally, quatrefoils are used in the wood trim around the wainscot paneling inside the building. The quatrefoil symbolizes the cross, the crucifixion and the four corners of the Earth; equal-sized foils also represent eternity.

Preserving the Renwick Chapel

by Dave Jackson

Recently I've spent a lot of time doing research about the Renwick Chapel, lining up contractors, and trying to learn as much as possible about the history of the building. The Board of Managers, headed by George Hill and with guidance by David deVicq, has directed that the work done in this project be as comprehensive as possible. Instead of replacing a part of the roof, the entire roof system and underlayment are being replaced. Instead of looking for the areas where it is obvious the mortar has failed, the mortar over the entire building is being taken out and replaced. Instead of having to revisit the same building components every 3-5 years, we will insure the integrity of the structure for many decades.

Dealing with the different contractors and determining costs has been challenging. As in any project like this, there have been surprises. At the time of this newsletter, our best estimate of the work to be done and costs are:

Repointing of exterior stone work - \$50,000

Replacement of slate roof, ridge cap, gutter linings, and downspouts - \$80-100,000

Repair of decorative and wall surface plaster - \$20-25,000

Repair of Stain-glass Windows - \$8-12,000

Optional installation of protective Lexan over windows - \$24,500

Paint, interior and exterior - \$12-15,000

Repair, sand and refinish oak floor - \$4-6,000

Miscellaneous expenses - \$2-3,000

Total Project Cost - \$200-235,000

The work is proceeding and will be completed by early 2014. The project will be the most comprehensive preservation project in the history of the Renwick Chapel. We hope that you will visit Oak Hill next year when the work is complete. We will provide greater access to the chapel by opening it daily, weather permitting, for anyone who wishes to see the inside and appreciate its grandeur.

In this issue we request your donations, as usual. But because of the unique nature of the Renwick Chapel Preservation Project, **we ask that donations be made to the Oak Hill Cemetery Preservation Foundation.** The Preservation Foundation is funding all of the work being done on the Renwick Chapel.

The Oak Hill Cemetery Preservation Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization and donations to the Foundation are likely to be tax advantaged to the donor. Please see your tax advisor for details.



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February 13, 2013 - November 1, 2013

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