

# Report of The President

Dear Oak Hill Family Members,

Much has happened at Oak Hill since my report to you in the last newsletter. Weather seems to have been in everyone's mind this year. The winter of 2013-14 has been among the more difficult of recent vears. The severe cold has resulted in some difficulty for the cemetery; replacement of the water supply line to the staff building, freeze damage to asphalt roads, and some vet-to-be determined amount of damage to grass and plant materials. We hope that the significant moisture will result in good conditions for shrubs and trees in the coming year.

In November, additional sites for cremation inurnments were completed.
These "Beech Tree Lawn Crypts" are located along Eastern Avenue across from the Evermay wall. Set between the stone curb and a new retaining wall, these sites are approximately four feet squared

and they are grass covered. Each site is designed to accommodate two inurnments and a traditional upright monument. Additional



Photo by Lou Krach.

inurnments may be added to these sites over time with special arrangements. These have been well received by those who have inspected them. Please contact the office should you have an interest.

> The cemetery is now open to walk-in visitors on both Saturday and Sunday. Since beginning these new hours, we have seen a substantial increase in the number of visitors with inquiries about the history and questions about who is buried here. Lou Krach was added to the staff as our weekend office person. He has been very helpful to visitors and family members giving directions, selling brochures, and helping find individual grave sites. Please stop by and greet Lou if you come in during the weekend. Hours are Saturdays 11 AM to 4 PM and Sundays 1 PM to 4 PM.

project to preserve the Renwick Chapel. As you may know, our preservation project began last fall with the replacement of

continued on page 2

### OAK HILL CEMETERY

3001 R Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20007-2923 Telephone: 202-337-2835 Fax: 202-337-6481 www.oakhillcemeterydc.org

Email: oak hill cemetery@verizon.net

### 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 Bourgoin, 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

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

# President's Report (continued from page 1)

all the mortar in the exterior stone and the installation of a new Vermont Purple slate roof. As winter ensued, work began inside the chapel with plaster restoration and interior paint. An unexpected hurdle was encountered when twenty-one decorative plaster ceiling medallions required replacing after they were unavoidably damaged in the process of removing and replacing the roof. Further work has been completed to restore the stained glass windows, the light fixtures and re-finish the oak floor. The project will be complete in the spring after the exterior paint is finished. Please see the other reports in this newsletter for more details.

The Board of Managers feels that its desire to fully restore our wonderful Chapel to its original and grandest condition and preserve it for years to come has been fulfilled. I want to thank the many members of our Oak Hill family for generous donations which have all been used to pay the expense of the restoration. A substantial amount has been received since the last newsletter. If you haven't made a donation, or even if you have, please consider making a donation to the Oak Hill Preservation Foundation so that we may fully fund this preservation project. Of special interest, our project has not yet included the installation of Lexan covers over the stained

glass windows (about \$25,000). We are advised that this covering will significantly extend the lives of the windows thus postponing the time when they will have to be removed and re-constructed. This was in the original plan of the project, to be done if funding allowed. Should our donations be enough, or if a generous family stepped forward to make this possible, then we will go ahead with the Lexan. Otherwise, it is the one portion of the project that will not be accomplished. Please contact the office if you have questions regarding vour donation.

George G. Hill



# The Renwick Chapel Restoration Update



"Gothic Gem" restored.

Here's the story...

The entire slate roof was replaced after the old mortar was removed and replaced around the stone exterior walls. Photo by Dave Jackson.

Our Renwick Chapel restoration project is nearly complete. As we go to press, the only remaining part of the project is to complete exterior painting. All other parts of the project are complete. "What was done?" you might ask. "A lot!" is the answer! Here is the story...

Since the fall of 2012, signs of water intrusion were becoming more and more apparent inside the Renwick Chapel. There were pictures in our newsletter at the time showing damaged plaster and paint above and between several of the windows on the north and south

sides of the interior. As time went on, the damage spread, particularly on the north side. An examination of the exterior showed gaps in the mortar around some stones but the question was, "Is that the only problem?"

A specialist was brought in with a moisture meter to test various areas inside the chapel. He found unusually high moisture readings above the windows and above the level of the roof line. These indicated water intrusion above the level of the stone and confirmed the need for a new roof and gutter system.

The proposal from Wagner Roofing to remove the roof and gutters, replacing both using Vermont Purple slate and copper gutters and downspouts, was accepted. The materials were ordered. After some weeks, the material arrived and the roof project began.

Prior to the roof installation, Lorton Stone was engaged to remove old mortar between the stones on the exterior and replace it with new mortar. We selected the mortar color and Lorton sent one of their top artisans, Jimy Portillo, to work on the project. Mostly from scaffolding, all the mortar was painstakingly removed by hand and then replaced and delicately finished using old world masonry technique to ensure a proper finish. All the stone was washed, removing years of dust and accumulated film. The result was a re-emergence of the Potomac Blue Gneiss stone that was specially chosen for the Chapel by James Renwick, Jr.

As the mason finished, the roofers appeared to remove the original roof which was installed around 1851. At question was "What was under the slate?" The answer: A single thickness of oak sheeting, about 10 inches wide and 2 inches thick ran vertically from ridge to gutter. Slate shingles were attached on the outside; a coffered ceiling and 80



Plaster gothic ornaments that were damaged were replicated.

Photo by Dave Jackson.

decorative plaster "medallions" were attached with nails on the inside. The result was two surprises. The first was the medallions began to fall to the floor while the old roof was



The new slate roof in, Wagner roofers carefully combed through the material to select only the slates which closely matched our requirement for purple, not variegated, and not a contrasting color. Photo by Dave Jackson.

removed. The second was that a plaster medallion which fell from the very peak of the ceiling had

the initials "WWC" honoring the cemetery founder, William Wilson Corcoran. In the original design, a few of these medallions were discreetly located where no one could recognize them from the floor. We were surprised when one fell from the top of the ceiling and landed undamaged!

After only a small portion of the roof was removed, work was stopped to determine what to do next. The medallions could not be removed without destroying them so a decorative plaster specialist, Gianetti Plaster Works, was called in to create molds on site of the four different medallion designs (including

the WWC) that made up the 80 items. Wagner roofing then covered the interior floor and furniture to prevent damage from other falling medallions and work proceeded to remove the old roof and install a new one. As the new roof went on, stark color variations were discovered



Original gas light chandeliers were completely refurbished by Milton's Chandeliers.

Photo by Dave Jackson.



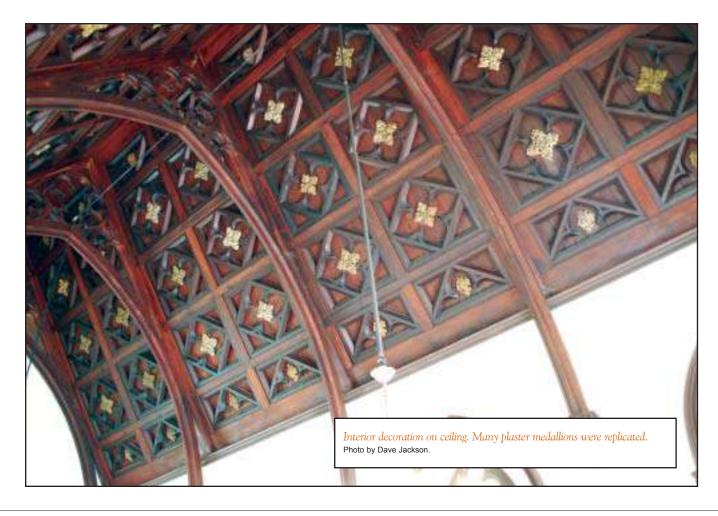
in the materials sent from the Vermont quarry. Wagner roofers carefully combed through the material to select only the slates which closely matched our requirement for purple, not variegated, and not a contrasting color. About 25% more slate was ordered to make up for the variations. There is now a truly purple roof, which matches the original Renwick selection.

As the old slate was removed and the new installed, twentyone of the ceiling medallions fell and had to be replicated from the molds. They were painted to match the existing medallions by Andy Seferlis, an accomplished professional stone artisan and good friend of Oak Hill. Next, the complicated process to reattach the newly molded

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medallions as well as the restoration of the water damaged decorative plaster and walls ensued. This required another set of "old world" skills deftly executed by John Urbas of Urbas Plastering. Gianetti and Urbas are specialists with experience covering decades of work in Washington's most prestigious homes, government, and public buildings. Renwick Chapel adds to their portfolio of fine work.

The stained glass windows, added to the Chapel in 1883 in preparation for the re-interment of John Howard Payne on our Ellipse, required several repairs. Over time, temperature variations caused bends and bows in many places. There were a number of small glass pieces that needed replacement.





Work being performed by Washington Art Glass Studio. A number of small glass pieces had to be replaced in several windows. Supports were also added to the leading around the glass pieces to protect the overall strength of the windows.

Photo by Dave Jackson.

Washington Art Glass Studio was engaged and worked a full week installing strategically placed supports on the windows to steady their structure. These were soldered in and then carefully hand tied to secure them and the windows. Replacement glass pieces were matched to colors and soldered into the lead frameworks. The result is straightened window surfaces with supports to help endure future stress.

Image Painting owner Andrew McBride (a native of Ireland) was among those invited to make a proposal for exterior and interior painting. His

approach to the project with helpful recommendations and highly favorable references made his company the vendor of choice. The painting project scope included painting the recently repaired decorative plaster, plaster walls and stained wainscot around the perimeter of the room. The utmost attention to detail was required and a beautiful job was completed. The exterior portion of the project will be completed when the weather permits.

Another surprise in the project concerned the two chandeliers. They were not in the original plan but the intent to "do it right" raised the idea of



replacing the wiring in what were originally gas fixtures. A chandelier expert, Milton Escobar of Milton's Chandeliers, was consulted. We learned a) the fixtures' wiring and sockets could be easily updated, b) the wire that supplied electricity to them was in fine condition, and (here comes the surprise) c) at some point, the fixtures were covered with gold spray paint, disguising their original appearance. Milton's Chandeliers was engaged to remove the fixtures, disassemble them and remove the gold paint. This exposed the original materials: pewter and brass. The fixtures were reassembled, lacquered, and new electrical connections were installed. When re-hung. the beauty of these unusual fixtures was revealed. They are truly works of art and should not go unnoticed when you visit the Renwick Chapel! Milton's was also asked to restore the finish on the Chapel altar set (cross, candle sticks, and vases) donated by Preston Dixon Callum in 1961.

While the major portions of the project were ongoing, smaller but no less important measures were taken to make everything as complete as possible. The cemetery staff went into the crawl space for a full inspection under the supervision of Board member David deVicq. Floor joists and electrical connections were inspected; crawl space vent covers were replaced;

the staff dug out an area to give proper furnace access. The furnace was serviced and vent connections were replaced. Roof downspout drains were cleaned and cast-iron cleanouts were installed. Even the under-floor casket storage crypts were swept and cleaned out.

The Oak Hill Cemetery Board of

Managers has closely monitored all

the phases of the project.

From beginning to end the mantra

was "complete the project to the

highest possible standard; leave no

stone unturned."

The last step was to refinish the oak floor. We believe the original Chapel floor was made from pine, commonly used in the mid-nineteenth century and still in place in the Gatehouse.

Nearly 100 years ago, extensive termite damage forced replacement of the Chapel floor and joists. Two-inch wide oak planks

were used then to cover the floor and crypt covers. A few new planks were required for repairs and were custom cut to match existing materials. The floor was sanded, stained, and finished by Alexandria Carpet One (yes, they do wood floors), our vendor of choice, again based on refer-

ences and approach to the project. This final step was completed in March and the furniture was moved back in from its storage site.

The Oak Hill Cemetery Board of Managers has closely monitored all the phases of the project. From beginning to end the mantra was "complete the project to the highest possible standard; leave no stone unturned." Following those instructions, Superintendent Dave Jackson engaged and worked with the vendors to ensure the intended outcome. When surprises occurred, the Board was consulted and adjustments were made. In the end, everyone in our cemetery

organization; officers, superintendent, and staff, contributed to making this project a success.

# Preserving the Renwick Chapel - part 2

by Dave Jackson

Wow! What a six months it has been since we last published a newsletter. Not only has a ½ year gone by, but there was Thanksgiving, the Chapel, Christmas, the Chapel, New Year's Day, the Chapel, a new year, the Chapel..... you get the picture. Of course, the normal activities of site sales, working with families through interments, and keeping the board up to date on all things Oak Hill requires a lot of attention, but the Chapel project has been at the top of the list! Now that our project

is coming to an end, I must say that it is the most fulfilling of the construction projects with which I have been associated. The importance of preserving such a historically significant building cannot be minimized. I literally get up each day, look at the Chapel, and say in my mind "hello sweetheart!" after appreciating its form and beauty. What a great privilege!

The contractors listed in the article in this newsletter about the project have been superb. As

with every project though, there has to be communication and oversight. With that communication and oversight we are very pleased with all those who did work on our Chapel. They deserve much of the credit for the project success. Also, Bob Tarasovich, a local AIA Architect who showed up one day in early 2013 to volunteer his time working on the grounds, turned into a terrific asset. He offered specifications for several project components, including paint and roofing materials. He consoled and encouraged me a couple of times

when I had questions or concerns. All the members of the Board of Managers were a driving force to "do it right", asking probing questions, and seeking innovative solutions to problems.

And now more good news and some not as good. First, the actual costs of the completed Renwick Chapel Preservation Project are very near our earlier assumptions. We were even able to cover the surprises of replacing ceiling medallions and restoring the chandeliers within our expected

amount. Not included was the installation of protective Lexan over the stained glass windows, a \$25,000 item. (These covers were optional "if funding allowed.") Second, your contributions to this project have exceeded the amounts historically received by our newsletter solicitations. Interest in this project is high and is reflected by vour generosity. We appreciate the number of donors and the amounts donated.

OK, the not-as-good news. The donations,

Thank you so much!

though significant, have not fully funded our project expenditures. We hope very much that you will consider making a donation (or increase your contribution) to the Oak Hill Cemetery Preservation Foundation, our project funding entity. If donations exceed our needs for this project they will be used towards the Lexan covers or placed in the Preservation Foundation account and used in the future for other deserving projects. Please consider a donation. We appreciate your interest and caring about Oak Hill Cemetery.

In this issue we again request your donations to finish this project. 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 tax advantaged to the donor.



### And Other News at Oak Hill

Cold enough for you?



A couple of pictures of the most recent St. Patrick's Day snow, and we hope, the last snow of 2014!



The Heron Fountain on the Ellipse with "veil" during one of the really cold weeks in early 2014.

Vinny, our
Oak Hill
mascot loves
the snow!







Our most recent addition, Beech Tree Lawn Cremation Sites, is just down from the 28th Street Gate, completed in November 2013. Some of these sites are still available.

All Photo credits: Dave Jackson

### Contributors to Oak Hill

November 1, 2013 - March 28, 2014

We wish to thank these donors for their generous contributions to this project and other funds at the Oak Hill Cemetery.

Without them this needed work would not be possible.

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