

Winter, 2013

News from Oak Hill

The NEWSLETTER of the FRIENDS of OAK HILL CEMETERY

Report of the President

February, 2013

2012 was a year of transition at Oak Hill, and a successful one at that. For a quiet little cemetery company, it certainly seems that there is always a lot going on. The three most important changes were Ella Pozell's retirement as Superintendent, John Gill's retirement as President, and the election of Loretta Castaldi as Treasurer.

Ella's retirement was the most concerning, as she and Joe had been the team who led Oak Hill on a daily basis for 28 years, and she alone had been in charge since Joe's tragic death in 2005. The depth of her professional skills, and her personal touch with the Oak Hill community of family and friends could not be easily replaced, we knew. But Ella had thought ahead, and at her suggestion we found Dave Jackson, who has settled in very well. Dave and his wife Darla (who is Ella's niece) have begun to get acquainted with the job, the neighbors and the community, and are beginning to feel at home. Please welcome them warmly, if you have not already. Dave brought an impressive resume of skills, and experience at a high level of management, and the Board is learning how to integrate his abilities with our needs. Ella tells that when she and Joe first took charge

many years ago, they spoke with the prior Superintendent, sometimes several times a day. She has likewise made herself available and works on special projects as needed. Thank you, Ella!

*As a person, I do not
always welcome change;
too often, it is not change
for the better. However,
the changes of last year
were inevitable, they
were done with
deliberation and care,
and we have made the
best of them.*

The second momentous transition was John Gill's retirement as President of Oak Hill. John has been the President for forty years, another transition not easily made. We were fortunate when John agreed to become President Emeritus, to continue to attend Board meetings, and to share his considerable knowledge and wisdom. Thank you, John!

The third major transition was the election in November of Loretta Castaldi as a new Board member, and as Treasurer of Oak Hill. Loretta brings experience as the Chief Financial Officer of a large company, and a level of financial experience and acumen that is greatly needed. Already she has identified some shortfalls in our financial controls, and has begun to reexamine our bookkeeping, insurance and healthcare needs. We will benefit greatly from her financial sophistication and judgment. Thank you, Loretta!

2012 ended with Oak Hill in fine condition: our infrastructure is in good repair, with plans to address those areas in need. Those areas that were in greatest need have been addressed, with the list of backlogged projects diminishing. We have generally balanced well the income from sales of lots and niches with reinvestment in repaved roads, and rebuilt cobblestone gutters, new pathway interment spaces, major tree and landscape work, the construction of Willow Columbarium, burial lots on North Hill and at Davis Circle, and at the 28th Street gate. Most of those casket sites have been sold, but a few remain. This year we will consider construction of another mausoleum on the Ellipse, and will plan pathway and road work on North Hill. Our finances are in good shape, but we will always

continued on page 2

OAK HILL CEMETERY

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Cemetery Hours

Office and grounds: 9:00 am to 4:30 pm, M-F, closed Saturdays and National Holidays. Sunday (grounds only) 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm, weather permitting. Please observe rules posted at gate.

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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 Letter

continued from page 1

need to add to our endowment. One area needing improvement is our budgeting and reporting, and 2013 will be a year of change in our internal financial controls.

As a person, I do not always welcome change; too often, it is not change for the better. However, the changes of last year were inevitable, they were done with deliberation and care, and we have made the best of them. I wish to again thank former Superintendent Pozell, current Superintendent Jackson, President Emeritus Gill, and my fellow Board Members David deVicq, Loretta Castaldi and Marisa

Bourgoïn for a successful 2012. And we all depend upon Melissa Van Schaick for her thoughtful work as our Assistant.

Our groundscrew, who is led by Brian Williamson and includes Jose Guzman, Ricardo Haraújo, Abraham Mejia, and Mainor Pinar-Torres, continue to work hard and maintain the cemetery grounds throughout each season. Families and visitors alike enjoy the beauty of Oak Hill, and that collective benefit is made possible from the fruits of their labor. We are grateful for all their efforts.

Thank you for your support.

Respectfully submitted,
George G. Hill

Memorial Trees at Oak Hill Cemetery

From time to time, the Cemetery is asked to memorialize someone, a family member or close friend, who may or may not be interred at Oak Hill. The "Memorial Trees" provide a unique opportunity for Patrons to establish a lasting memorial and enhance the landscape. Patrons may select the site, the tree species (if there are multiple species designated) and the inscription for the stone monument. Trees and monuments will be installed each November. Commitments for trees should be made by the end of September each year. Here is how it works:

We will plant trees in the Cemetery in the fall to replace some lost over the years. With the counsel of Bartlett Trees, we are selecting sites for new trees, determining the best species suited for each site. Each site will be evaluated as to its location, available sunlight, and its effect on the surrounds over the long term. The majority of the native trees in the cemetery are White Oak and Poplar. Over the years many varieties were added but sometimes in their maturity, they became a problem due to root invasion or blocking sunlight. Our plan is that newly planted trees will enhance the Cemetery in the best possible way for decades.

We will designate many of the sites "Memorial Tree" sites. These trees will be identified by a six-inch by twelve-inch monument at the base identifying an honoree. The monuments will be carved stone and will be moved from the tree trunk as the tree matures, preserving the memorial aspect of the planting. The Memorial Trees will be ordered in October for November delivery and planting each year. Monuments will be ordered at the same time so that they are installed as the trees are planted.

This will be an on-going program as the need for replacement trees will always be present.

If you are interested in being a Patron of a Memorial Tree, please contact the Oak Hill Cemetery office for all the details.

Oak Hill Welcomes Loretta Castaldi

Ms. Castaldi now serves as Treasurer on the Board of Managers and is also a "Find a Grave" volunteer.

Ms. Loretta Castaldi most recently served as CFO and Vice President of Finance, Administrative and Human Resources for Smarthinking, Inc, an online provider of tutoring and educational services. Ms. Castaldi joined Smarthinking after sixteen years of experience at University of Maryland University College (UMUC). While at UMUC, she served in several financial and administrative capacities, culminating in the vice president of admin-

istration, responsible for information technology, facilities management (including conference center, hotel and food service operations), human resources, procurement and finance. Previous positions with UMUC included chief accountant at the European division in Heidelberg, Germany as well as bursar and chief financial officer of the university's worldwide operations. In addition to her experience at UMUC, she worked for a Big 4 public accounting firm in Chicago and the largest privately owned company in Texas. She received her Masters of Business Administration from Northwestern University after completing undergraduate studies at University of Notre Dame. She is a Certified Public Accountant.



Find a Grave

Once a week, I lace up my walking shoes, fill my army surplus canteen with water, slather on the sunscreen, and download the cemetery map from Oak Hill Cemetery's web site. For the next two hours, I methodically walk the paths of Oak Hill Cemetery visiting each grave site in a selected section. I photograph each tombstone, document location information, and upload the photograph and information to the Findagrave.com web site. I am just one of 800,000+ volunteers who strive to document and pictorially preserve cemeteries in the United States and around the world. Volunteers have documented over 90 million graves on Findagrave.com.

Findagrave is the brainchild of Jim Tipton who created the website in 1995 to support his passion for visiting the gravesites of famous people. He soon learned that he was not alone in his interest in cemeteries. So he expanded his website to accommodate all gravesites even if the memorialized person would not be considered famous to most people.

The Findagrave web site allows users to search, free of charge, all of the posted data. Findagrave has become a must-visit online destination for genealogical researchers. Users input information such as name, dates, country, and cemetery's name to refine their search. For example, a search of Oak Hill Cemetery returns over 21,000 entries. Users may also communicate with other users who are researching the same family names.

Findagrave has allowed me to find the burial locations of long lost relatives. By volunteering to document the tombstones at Oak Hill Cemetery I am hoping that I can return the favor to some other genealogist who can't visit the cemetery in person.

-Loretta Castaldi

Aqua, Alta, Access, and Accomplishments

After purchasing twelve and a half acres of land in June of 1848 and obtaining a congressional charter for the Oak Hill Cemetery Company in March of 1849, one of the first people William Wilson Corcoran hired to advance his project was Captain George Dela Roche. The Captain was a civil engineer and he was tasked with surveying the property and laying out the grounds for cemetery use. He began work in May 1849 to convert the hills and ravines steeply cut by nature into the beautifully landscaped rural style Victorian-age cemetery we now cherish.

Provision for storm water drainage was a key element of Dela Roche's design and the network of stone and brick flumes and tunnels, which underlie principal roads, paths, and stairways, serves us well to this day. He built the main routes along the channels nature carved and then created terraces, whose serpentine walkways included skillfully laid stone gutters to conduct water to his underground disposal system. Dela Roche kept the pathways relatively flat and spaced no more than about sixteen feet apart thus catching runoff quickly and feeding it into scores of strategically located inlets before the surface water flow could gain enough volume or speed to cause the type of soil erosion which turns local waterways brown with entrained sediment headed to the Chesapeake Bay. His design

was green well before the wisdom of the concept was broadly recognized. He brilliantly melded access to thousands of burial sites with an essential and efficient drainage infrastructure.

the cemetery purchased after Dela Roche's departure.

All of the construction the two men oversaw in the mid 19th century was accomplished by large numbers of laborers, some skilled stonecutters and a few horses. As the drains and terraces were hand dug, the round stones which are so very plentiful in our grounds were set aside: The smaller stones



Above: Our current crew sprigging liriope along Eastern Avenue.

By October of 1851 a huge amount of work had been done and a burial site on North Hill was given to Dela Roche in recognition of his development of the Western half of Oak Hill. That same October John Alexander Blundon became the cemetery's first superintendent and continued Dela Roche's design philosophy during his eighteen year tenure. One does not know how long the two men worked together, but the overlap was probably brief. Within nine years Blundon had been awarded a burial site for developing the Eastern half of

for use in pathway gutters and the largest for paving the steepest grades of roadways. Heavier stone for stair steps and for the floor and roof of brick sided drains and flumes came from small quarries on cemetery property and other nearby sources. Pathways were originally surfaced with fine stone pebbles about the size of "BB" shot. The least steep roadways were typical of country dirt roads. Both pathways and dirt roads required frequent grading and rolling. All types of gutters needed to be shoveled, raked, or swept clean. The

labor payroll must have exceeded 50 men at peak seasons.

From the late 19th well through the early 20th century, little heavy work remained and the work force was reduced and morphed from skilled constructors to grounds keepers. Some of the broader lawns were platted for interment use and a few drains were extended or had branches added. Gradually, newer materials such as vitrified clay pipe and a few cast iron grates were brought in. After World War I, some early “Tarvia” and Macadam surfaces were tried on the old dirt roads. Maintenance of paths and gutters and border plantings remained quite well done as scenes from stereocards and early photographs testify.

Strangely, between 1928 and 1941, no superintendent was employed. The workforce declined and pressure mounted to widen and smoothen both roads and paths. Sometime after World War II when Georgetown’s cobbled streets were paved over and a little later when propane fired heater-planers were used to soften and scrape away worn bituminous surfaces, a program which must have seemed like a very good and cost saving idea at the time was adopted. Paving contractors, faced with trucking the burnt bituminous scrapings to suburban disposal sites gained permission to haul the waste into the cemetery and spread it on all roads and many pathways. The more they brought in, the less they had to truck to the suburbs. As a result, many path and road gutters were filled with material from which most of the bituminous binder had been burnt away. Initially, the wider, smoother higher black surfaces looked good but soon runoff from rains flowed across lots and paths, bypassing drains and cascading down roadways. The type of erosion avoided



by Dela Roche and Blundon began in earnest.

In more recent years, during the tenure of now President Emeritus John W. Gill and specifically during the tenure of Superintendents Joe and Ella Pozell, a steady effort was made to stop erosion. Our cemetery workforce of four and currently five men have done much to clear gutters and open drains on a continuing basis. A massive project to stabilize the long steep pathways along the Western slope of Bridge Avenue successfully precluded a major soil failure and reestablished drainage integrity. First sandbags and then asphalt berms and some stone curbing forced water on the roadways to reach some old and some newly created inlets to underground drains. As funds have allowed, the repaving of roads, working west to east, has included excavation and repair of gutters and inlets, removal of thick but badly deteriorated paving and application of high quality modern asphalt. Most recently, President George Hill has vigorously supported complete reconstruction of

Well maintained paths and gutters were manpower intensive.

Photo Credit: Library of Congress.

Eastern and Rock Creek Avenues with extensive new buried drains, new catch basins, re-opened and repaired gutters and about a tenth of a mile of stone curbstones. This work, done by contract, was preceded and followed by extensive pre-contract exploration and post contract landscaping by our five man cemetery crew. It was they who located and uncovered the long buried edges of the Eastern Avenue, probed for hidden gutters and inlets, and thus allowed formulation of a clear scope of work to be accomplished by the contractor. The same five men transplanted pampas-type grasses to border the Rock Creek parking lot, laid loose cobbles along the millroad fence line, recovered and re-set buried lot markers, transplanted and sprigged hundreds of liriopse sets, loamed and seeded many disturbed areas and carefully watered, nursed and sustained their work through a very dry summer.

continued on page 8

Superintendent's Report

As I write this, this entire week in January is projected for temperatures in the 50's and some days will be higher. Bushes and trees are setting buds at these temperatures. If a cold snap comes, I hope we will not suffer damage to the "spring bloom."

Writing a report as the new Superintendent here at Oak Hill is overwhelming. Where does one begin? Thanks to the many kind words of welcome? Working on the enormous learning curve? Reviewing the history of the cemetery? Learning the stories about people who are here, both the famous and the not-so-famous? (All are interesting!) Where to begin?

A common theme in the past has been the effects of nature on the cemetery. Last summer, while

I stood in for Ella Pozell during her vacation, the derecho storm struck June 29th. That was my first introduction to weather and Oak Hill Cemetery. We were fortunate because only minor tree damage was done. No major trees were down and no monuments were damaged. Significant cleanup of limbs and leaves was necessary and our grounds crew had the job done in short order. I quickly realized they've been through this before... more than once!

After we moved to the Gatehouse, Hurricane Sandy visited. Although our area suffered damage, it was minimal compared to New Jersey and New York. There were two major trees blown down at Oak Hill, one into the intersection at the bottom of

Chapel Hill, and the other over the fence we share with the National Park Service near Rock Creek and our Willow Columbarium. The former took another tree and some monuments that will be fairly easily repaired. The latter took some fence and another tree on the Park Service side, but no other damage. All in all, Oak Hill was fortunate in both storms to suffer limited damage. I am probably naïve, but I hope that the trees that remain after those two storms are strong and healthy and we will have several years of minimal wind damage in our trees.

Other "tree" news: A large Ash tree located along Eastern Avenue is in severe stress. This tree is significant because of its size and

continued on page 8



David Jackson stands next to a downed tree after Hurricane Sandy, October 2012.

Renwick Chapel Undergoes Major Project in the Spring

Will you help fund it?

Oak Hill Cemetery is most fortunate and proud to include the Renwick Chapel among the many attributes of our cemetery. Named for its architect/designer James Renwick, the Renwick Chapel is located on the east end of the “Elipse” in full view of all who enter. The only example of Renwick’s Gothic Revival Church design in the District of Columbia, it has been referred to as a “Miniature Gothic Gem.” The cornerstone is dated 1850.

The exterior walls are constructed of Potomac gneiss, a dark gray fine-grained igneous rock with a high mica content, lending a greenish or yellowish cast to some of the blocks. Red Sandstone (think Smithsonian Castle) is also used extensively. The structure is covered with square grey slate set at 45 degrees, and adorned with striking stained-glass windows. The interior features oak pews with seating for 50 and appropriate altar and lectern features for interments, weddings, or other contemplative services. Electric lights were added at the appropriate time as well as a heating system with floor vents. The Renwick Chapel is one of only four historically significant Georgetown buildings as described in the 1993 Buildings of the District of Columbia by Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee. Also noted were Dumbarton Oaks, Evermay, and our own Gatehouse.

As with all things historic, time has its effects. It is now time to once again make repairs to the exterior stone by replacing the mor-



tar between them. The pictures attempt to show areas where the mortar has worn away from stone and is allowing moisture penetration. The interior pictures show water damage to the plaster, the result of this water invasion. It is time to act!

The full stone repair project is estimated to cost \$30,000. The cemetery would appreciate your donation toward funding of the project. Please make checks payable to the Oak Hill Cemetery Preservation Foundation and indicate “Chapel Stone Project” to direct the application of the funds. If you are interested in underwriting the entire project, the Oak Hill Board of Managers will appropriately recognize the generosity. Of course, all donations will be recognized in our newsletter.



Top: This picture shows degradation of mortar on exterior of Renwick Chapel.

Above: Water damage near a window on the north side of Renwick Chapel's interior.

Aqua, Alta, Access

continued from page 5

Since last September, our new Superintendent, the 12th in almost 165 years has quickly caught hold, faced his first hurricane, built and sold new family lots, visited a number of neighboring cemeteries to learn how others are managed and

begun formulating an innovative plan of action for board review. Dave Jackson and his wife Darla have also lived through extensive work on the interior of their new home, our historic Gate House. Concurrently, their dog Vinny, as he accompanied his master and mistress on walks about the grounds, has served notice on Rock Creek

deer that they are no longer welcome guests. Not to be outdone, Darla's two black cats have put our long time contract pest control operator on notice of termination. I welcome the whole family and eagerly look forward to working with Dave and the family Jackson in any way that I can.

– David de Vicq

Superintendent

continued from page 6

probable age. A tree inventory done by Bartlett Tree Expert Company in 1998 deemed this Ash as the largest tree in the cemetery with a diameter of five feet three inches. (It appears larger to me!) In his recent visit, the Bartlett consultant commented that in many cases a tree like this is deemed so significant as to be "named." Emerald Ash Borer is not the culprit here. The borer has migrated near the Washington area but the cemetery's ash trees have received several annual treatments for it. The symptoms are not those of the borer. The defoliation represents a reaction to age, drought stress, and stress from pavement near the base of the tree. Bartlett believes that there is a better than even chance the tree will survive with some care as to water and observation. I hope so. The tree is a significant member of our landscape "family."

Regarding trees, I suggested, and the Board of Managers approved, the implementation of a "Memorial Tree Program." This was done to address two matters apparent to me. One is the requests to memorialize in some way someone who may or may not be interred here with some lasting object. The other is the necessity to replace trees that were lost over the years. We are, after all, "Oak

Hill" and trees should always be a part of our scenery. Trees planted today will be appreciated a hundred years from now or longer. We need to recognize the responsibility of replacing trees lost over time with some that will grow over time. Please look for additional information about Memorial Trees elsewhere in the newsletter.

Finally, part of my learning curve has been a developing appreciation for Oak Hill Cemetery. I was privileged to visit beginning in 1999 when Darla's (my wife) uncle, Joe Pozell, was Superintendent. Although I enjoyed the surroundings and the company, I wasn't a student. Now, in the early stages of my "cemetery indoctrination", I am learning about Oak Hill, its history, the efforts of those involved with its operation, the Board stewardship, and the families and neighbors who view the treasure of its existence as significant. A passage written in 1902 by Rector Morgan Dix in his introduction to *Walks in our Churchyards* by "Felix Oldboy" seems appropriate: "They will be better for the time spent in

communion with a pure spirit, and a lover of the place, as it used to be, when luxury and pride were less offensively conspicuous than now, when life was simpler and less artificial, when the tension of nerves



New stone curbstone and liriopse border.

and brain was not felt as we feel it, when the city was a quieter and safer place, and when people were happier and more contented than they seem to be today." So begins my journey. More later...

– David Jackson

History Remembered – and Corrected

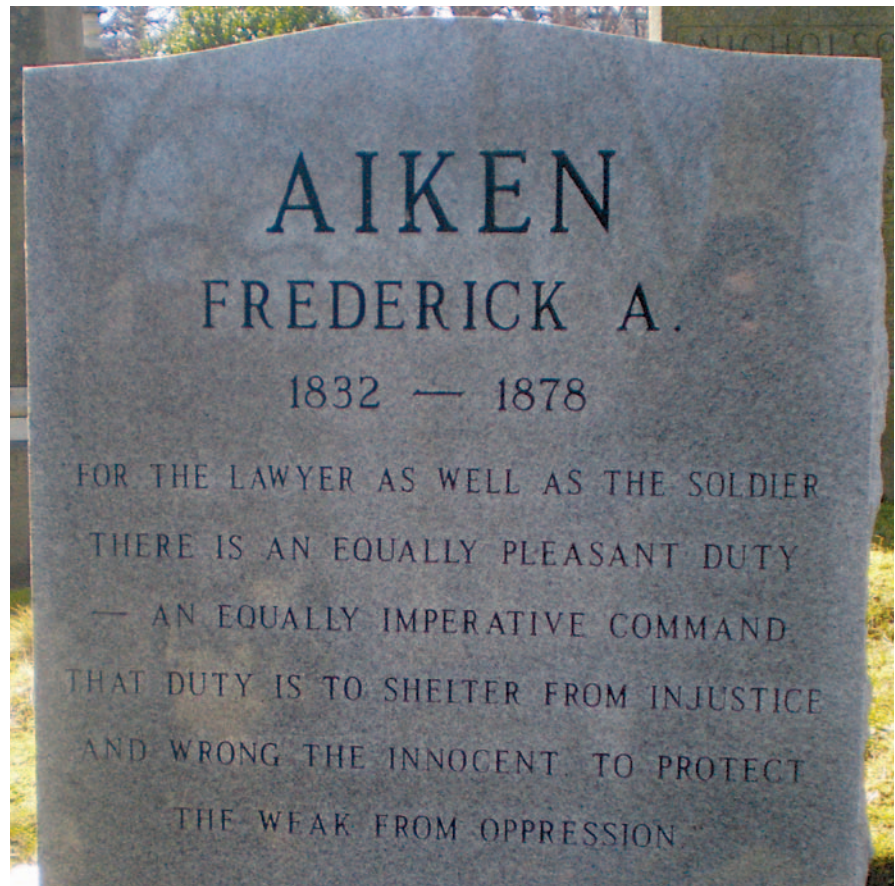
In the spring of 2011, The American Film Company and director Robert Redford introduced the public to the story of Mary E. Surratt, the first woman executed by the U.S. government for her involvement in the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Entitled *The Conspirator*, the movie starred Robin Wright as Mrs. Surratt and actor James McAvoy as her defense lawyer, Frederick A. Aiken.

During the production of the film, it was realized that very little was known of Frederick Aiken before or after his task of defending Surratt before a military commission. The Surratt House Museum in Clinton, Maryland, set about to correct that situation, and through the wonderful research techniques of a Utah associate member of the Surratt Society, Christine Christensen, many fascinating aspects of Aiken's life were uncovered.

A native of New England and active in political circles before the Civil War, Mr. Aiken fought for the Union and was wounded during the war. He returned to civilian life only to face an even greater challenge when he and his law partner, John Clampitt, were retained as defense counsel for Mary Surratt.

The untested lawyer faced insurmountable odds against a military court during a time of turmoil at the end of the war. Despite the barriers placed in his way, Frederick Aiken's summation speech in defense of Mrs. Surratt is regarded by many as one of the greatest speeches in American history.

Following his defeat in the court of law, Aiken returned to his first occupation, that of a journalist. He became the first city editor



Thanks to the efforts of The Surratt Society, Frederick Aiken's resting place is now a marked burial in Lot 79, located in the North Hill section of the cemetery.

of The Washington Post before his early death in 1878, at the age of 46. Frederick was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery, but his grave was never marked. His name remained familiar only to those who studied the Lincoln assassination story – until screenwriter James Solomon chose him as the central figure in his play about the Lincoln Conspiracy Trial of 1865.

In the course of her extensive research on Aiken, Mrs. Christensen found that Aiken's remains had been in an unmarked grave since his burial at Christmas in 1878. The Surratt Society, a worldwide, volunteer affiliate of Surratt House Museum, decided to correct that historical error. A fun-

draising campaign began in March of 2012, and Mr. Aiken's tombstone was dedicated on the afternoon of June 14, 2012, in lovely Oak Hill.

The inscription on his tombstone is the opening lines of his summation speech on behalf of Mary E. Surratt:

For the lawyer as well as the soldier, there is an equally pleasant duty –
An equally imperative command.
That duty is to shelter from injustice and wrong the innocent,
To protect the weak from oppression.

Reprinted with permission; by Laurie Verge, Director, Surratt House Museum

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June 29, 2012- February 12, 2013

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