

NYSAA NEWSLETTER



Contact Information:

Sherene Baugher
NYSAA President
sbb8@cornell.edu

David Moyer
Newsletter Editor
plumbbob66@yahoo.com

The NYSAA Website is
<http://nysarchaeology.org/nysaa/>

The editor and the NYSAA Executive Board encourage any NYSAA member who would like to submit an article, letter, editorial or news items to submit it electronically to David Moyer at the address listed above.

Albany Mayor Proclaims “Dr. Paul Huey Day”



Figure 1. Paul Huey at the State Museum

On May 5, 2024, at the 25th Annual Albany History Fair held this year at Historic Cherry Hill and co-sponsored by Crailo State Historic Site, Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan presented Dr. Huey with a proclamation declaring that day to be "Dr. Paul Huey" day in Albany. Also presented were a proclamation and a citation, each complete with large gold seals from the State Senate and Assembly signed by local legislators. These recognized Huey's accomplishments and "his commitment to raising awareness of the region's Dutch history and its significance."

All three documents described Dr. Huey's contributions to the understanding of life in early Albany through his excavations at the Fort Orange site and the study and preservation of more than 36 State Historic Sites ranging from Sackets Harbor Battlefield near Watertown, N.Y., to the Walt Whitman Birthplace State Historic Site near Huntington, Long Island.

Huey was speechless at the surprise but soon recovered to thank everyone for these honors. Afterward, he said that all this truly was a recognition of the importance of archaeology to local communities, and he was very grateful for that.

If you are in Albany this summer or fall, be sure to see the special exhibit called: “a small fort, which our people call Fort Orange” in the State Museum. The exhibit examines the archaeological discovery of Fort Orange by Paul Huey, as well as four decades of archaeological research on Dutch Albany.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Albany Mayor Proclaims “Dr. Paul Huey Day”

What the heck is a HOCPA?™

“Walking on a Shipwreck”: Using Visual Media to Enhance an Exhibit About a 1758 Lake George

Cemetery and Gravestone Threats

NYSAA Awards Recipients

Underground Railroad Virtual Hub Launched

The Centennial of New York State Parks

A Cemetery Preservation Workshop Leads to Continued Action

Haudenosaunee Heritage - Past, Present, Future

John Isham – New York State Gravestone Carver

Albany Mayor Proclaims “Dr. Paul Huey Day” (continued)



Figure 2 Paul Huey receiving proclamation from Mayor Kathy Sheehan at Cherry Hill, 25th Albany History Fair, May 5, 2024.



Figure 3. Paul Huey receiving proclamation from Deborah Emmons-Andarawis at Cherry Hill, 25th Albany History Fair, May 5, 2024

For more information, check out the museum exhibit’s website: <https://www.nysm.nysed.gov/exhibitions/ongoing/fort-orange>.

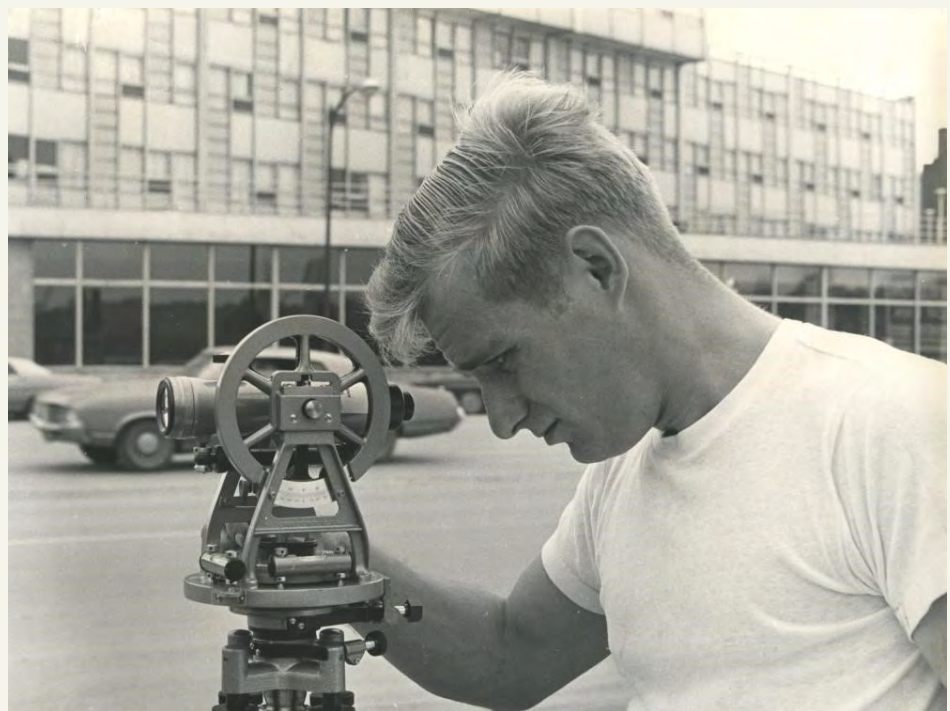
Be sure to see the short videos of Paul Huey discussing the discovery of Fort Orange.

For more information on Cherry Hill and New York State Historic Sites see:

<https://www.historiccherryhill.org/>

<https://parks.ny.gov/historic-sites/>

Figure 4. Photograph of Paul Huey using a transit to survey the excavations at Fort Orange. (Photo Credit: The New York State Museum).



“What the heck is a HOCPA?”

Sue Greenhagen
 NYSAA Central New York Cemetery Network & HOCPA member



Fig. 1. Oakwood Cemetery, dedicated in 1859, is a “rural cemetery” that utilizes the natural beauty of the area to create a park-like venue in any season of the year.

“If you knock on history’s door, it will answer and let you in. There you will find the place where everyone lives again.”¹ There is a group of dedicated people in Syracuse, NY, who have knocked on history’s door, and who have entered that place where, indeed, everyone lives again. That place is Oakwood Cemetery, and the group is the Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association (HOCPA). This very special cemetery was founded in 1859, and the names of those interred there reads like a who’s who of local history – Forman, Leavenworth, Westcott, Gere – the list goes on. This beautifully landscaped “rural cemetery” invites visitors to enter and indulge in the social, political, economic, and artistic history of central New York (Fig. 1). Our preservation group has dedicated itself since its founding in 1990 to ensuring that the history and the natural beauty of this special place is cared for so that future generations may also enjoy all that Oakwood Cemetery has to offer.

Our HOCPA volunteers spend a great deal of time helping to maintain this 160-acre property that contains over 60,000 burials. Overgrown plots have been stripped of gnarly vegetation, revealing headstones unseen for decades. Saplings have been removed that, if allowed to grow, would have damaged fragile headstones. We have a very special

¹ This quote is the prologue from a 2021 PBS documentary called *Unearthing Ogawa*.

“What the heck is a HOCPA?” (continued)



Fig. 2. Here is a group of Oakwood’s ESF volunteers, the “Crypt Keepers,” in their hazmat suits having removed a growth of Japanese knotweed.

group of volunteers calling themselves the “Crypt Keepers” who are all students at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (Fig. 2, 3). Oakwood is fortunate to have ESF as its next-door neighbor. In fact, Oakwood is used as an outdoor laboratory by the ESF faculty, so these students know the grounds very well.

An important goal for HOCPA is raising money in order to make much needed repairs. In 2003 a survey found that the front façade of the Sabey mausoleum (Fig. 4) was in danger of crumbling. Built in 1880, this imposing hillside vault in Section 3 was stabilized through fundraising, professional help and the efforts of HOCPA volunteers.

Another major project was the roof repair of the Silsbee Chapel. A leaking roof will quickly doom any building and the Chapel, designed by noted Architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee and built in 1879, was in imminent danger (Fig. 5). By the Spring of 2021, we were on the verge of losing one of the most iconic buildings in Syracuse. The problem was determined to be the flashing that was up against stone and masonry. Thanks to generous donations, HOCPA was able to hire a local firm to make the needed repairs. These kinds of repairs and “fixes” will always be ongoing projects.

In addition to Mother Nature creating issues with the building, we also have the problem of vandalism (Fig. 6). Vandals have actually broken into the Chapel, gone into the basement and started fires. It also goes without saying that graffiti now adorns the Chapel’s inside walls, as well as the sides of many monuments around the cemetery. Solar powered cameras, installed by HOCPA, have proved to be a useful deterrent to a lot of unlawful activity around the Chapel.

“What the heck is a HOCPA?” (continued)



Fig. 3a. The Crypt Keepers work throughout the school year clearing decades of vegetative growth.

In 1991, Oakwood Cemetery was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. With this honor comes a responsibility to, as the National Park Services states, “... identify, evaluate and protect America’s historic and archeological resources.” One of the ways HOCPA does this is through educational outreach. We tell folks about Oakwood through guided tours, visiting programs, our newsletter and social media. Our summer tour schedule runs from May through September on the third Sunday of the month and we also give tours to

groups upon request. Often these walking tours are graced by the presence of a “resident” along the way. One of our HOCPA members does living history and presents a person’s story in the words and character of that resident. We have also developed a traveling PowerPoint program called “Live Oaks & Dead Folks” which we take to libraries, senior citizens, and anyone who wants to know more about Oakwood (Fig. 7). Technologically, we have created a strong presence on the Web, FaceBook, and Instagram. ²

What’s the best part about Oakwood Cemetery? The stories the “residents” have to tell. Some stories are sad, such as Myrick Bradley in Section 3, who, in 1868, died when he was hit in the head by the crane that was placing a monument over his wife’s grave. Some are amusing such as the story of former Congressman Thomas Treadwell Davis, also in Section 3 (Fig. 8). Always accused by his wife of being late for everything, Davis even managed to be late for his own funeral. (In his defense, he had been in Washington, DC, when he died and the train back to Syracuse was delayed.)

We even have a scandal or two. In 1854, Alfred Fyler was accused of murdering his wife Ruth (Fig. 9). He was found to be insane and was sent to the Utica Lunatic Asylum. He was also suspected, but never charged, of bringing about the demise of his first wife, Marion, nine years earlier. Believe it or not, all three, Ruth, Marion and Alfred, are in the same lot in Section 21 of Oakwood.

Some stories are so poignant, like that of little Lester Tucker in Section 14 who was just nine days shy of his fourth birthday when he passed away in 1869. His memorial is a small chair, a cape draped over it and a small child’s shoe (Fig. 10). Over the years the base has settled and the

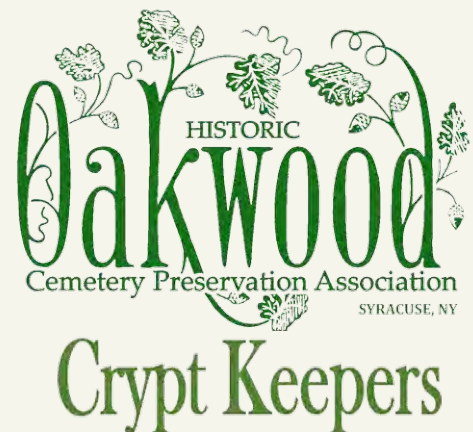


Fig.3.B. Logo of the Oakwood Cemetery “Crypt Keepers”

² Our website address is hocpa.org and we’re on Instagram and FaceBook as *Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association*. Our email address is HocpaOakwood@gmail.com

“What the heck is a HOCPA?”
(continued)



Fig. 4. The Sabeyes, John and his sons John, William, Charles, Heber and James, were all hatters in Syracuse. The firm, established in 1860, was in business for over 60 years.



Fig. 5. Designed by architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee (upper left), the mortuary chapel was built in 1879. Over the years the roof joints deteriorated and water was entering the building. To alleviate the problem, flashing at the gable joints was replaced in 2021.

“What the heck is a HOCPA?” (continued)



Fig. 6. Graffiti has long been a problem in Oakwood. The lower picture shows the work of a graffiti “artist” on the interior of the small mausoleum of Dr. Azariah Shipman in Section 4. The picture top left shows an open door to his vault. The center is of the iron gate that was added by HOCPA. Upper right is shows our members installing a camera by the Chapel.

chair finally tipped off the base. In 2011 HOCPA worked to get the base stabilized and the chair back where it belongs. The epitaph reads, “Not lost but gone before.”

Some stories are just plain strange. Take George O’Blenis, for example. While walking down the hill from Section 3 into Dedication Valley, you’ll notice a very odd headstone belonging to the O’Blenis family. The stone was actually erected by George W. O’Blenis in honor of his father, John E., who died in 1813. On the front is a diamond shape with marks within. No one has been able to decipher the “chicken scratches,” that is, until now. Published in the *Sandy Creek News* of 21 January 1904 was an article entitled “A Curious Inscription.” (Fig. 11) It gave the results of a contest run by the New York Granite Company offering a prize for the oddest epitaph or inscription on a

headstone. The winner of the contest, and a twenty dollar gold piece, was Edwin Soule of Sandy Creek. He entered the O’Blenis headstone and won. The best part of the article was that the “chicken scratches” have been explained. In the center of the diamond is the letter “r” from which “repent & live” can be read up, down, backward and forward. According to George W.’s obituary, he made the headstone himself, using cement of his own mixture. He firmly believed that his headstone would far outlast all the granite and marble stones in the cemetery. The monument was erected around 1880, and George wouldn’t let any of the cemetery workman help him with it. Strange, indeed.

We have the famous – Civil War Major General Edwin V. Sumner, Abolitionist Jermain Loguen (Fig. 12), furniture designer Gustav Stickley, legendary Syracuse University football coach Dick McPherson (Fig. 13), to name just four.

There are the almost famous like Charles Corregan, a candidate for President of the United States (Fig. 13a). Corregan ran in 1904 on the Socialist Labor Party ticket, and garnered over 12,000 votes nationally, but it was no match for Teddy Roosevelt’s 7 million plus. Charles Corregan does not have a headstone.

Then we have the rich and famous, namely Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage, widow of Wall Street tycoon Russell Sage, who is also buried in Oakwood (Oakwood Cemetery in Troy, NY, that is) (Fig 14). Mrs. Sage, who inherited her husband’s vast fortune in 1906, grew up of modest means in Syracuse. By the time she died in 1918, she had donated over \$45,000,000 to charities and institutions such as hospitals, churches, colleges, and homes. She endowed the Russell Sage Foundation which, as it says on its logo, is “For the improvement of social and living conditions.” She paid more income tax than anyone in America, but, as she was quick to point out, she didn’t even have the right to vote.

As you can see, HOCPA is multifaceted, but it all comes down to one thing – we love Oakwood Cemetery. Come with us, knock on history’s door. It really is the place where everyone lives again.

**“What the heck is a HOCPA?”
(continued)**



Fig. 7. HOCPA makes the story of Oakwood available to the public in various ways. We hold scheduled group tours, and we offer tours by appointment. That’s the Syracuse Garden Club in the upper left. School groups visit the cemetery as well. Those are 5th graders from Ed Smith Elementary School at the lower right. We also take Oakwood’s story on the road with a PowerPoint called “Live Oaks & Dead Folks.” The picture in the upper right shows a program held at Liverpool Library.



Fig. 8. On the left is the Bradley family monument. It was a crane placing this monument in 1868 that struck Myrick Bradley. The center photo is the gravesite of Congressman Davis. At the right is a photo of his gravesite before it was cleaned by HOCPA volunteers.

**“What the heck is a HOCPA?”
(continued)**



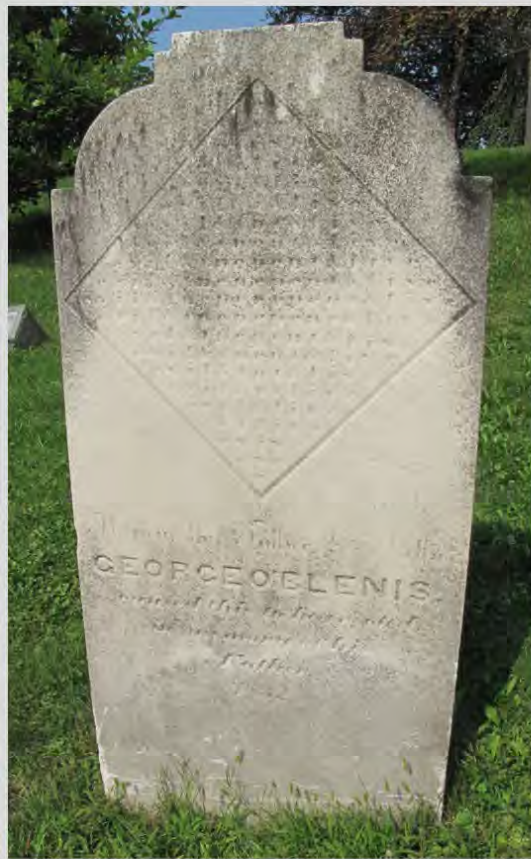
	<p align="center">NOW IN PRESS, The Fyler Murder Case.</p> <p>The subscribers will publish, immediately after the conclusion of the trial of Alfred Fyler for the murder of his wife, a pamphlet of one hundred and fifty or two hundred pages, containing—</p> <p>I. A COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE MURDER. II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PRELIMINARY LEGAL INVESTIGATIONS. III. A FULL REPORT OF THE TRIAL OF ALFRED FYLER, now in progress, embracing the testimony in full, arguments of Counsel, &c. IV. A CORRECT PORTRAIT OF ALFRED FYLER, and several other Illustrations.</p> <p>This pamphlet will be prepared by Mr. CARROLL E. SMITH, who has for some years been a reporter for the newspapers of this city.</p> <p>* * * Liberal deductions will be made to those purchasing this pamphlet to sell again. Orders may now be left at our News and Book Depot, No. 2 Granger Block.</p> <p align="right">SMITH & HOUGH. Syracuse, Feb. 27, 1855. d&wtf</p>	
---	--	---

Fig. 9. In 1855, Alfred Fyler was convicted of murdering his wife the year before. Instead of prison, he was sent to the Utica Insane Asylum. Carroll E. Smith, on the right, a local newspaper man, was quick to seize the opportunity to capitalize on the case. Before the verdict was even read, he was preparing a publication detailing all the gruesome details of the case.



Fig. 10. Oakwood Cemetery, built on hills, has many monuments that have toppled due to settling (and gravity). In 2011 HOCPA volunteers saw to it that Lester Tucker's chair once again sat upright.

**“What the heck is a HOCPA?”
(continued)**



‘A CURIOUS INSCRIPTION.’
The New York Granite company's Journal offered a prize of a twenty dollar gold piece for the oddest epitaph or inscription and in its November number printed 325 odd bits of cemetery literature. The prize was awarded last Monday to Edwin Soule of Sandy Creek, for the following, which was found in Oakwood cemetery, Syracuse, N. Y., on a large slab placed about four rods north of the Lily pond. The key to this puzzle is the letter “r” in the center, from which “repent & live” can be read up or down, backward, or criss cross in any direction.

```

e
e v e
e v i l v e
e v i l l i v e
e v i l & t & l i v e
e v i l & t n t & l i v e
e v i l & t n e n t & l i v e
e v i l & t n e p e n t & l i v e
e v i l & t n e p e r e p e n t & l i v e
e v i l & t n e p e p e n t & l i v e
e v i l & t n e p e n t & l i v e
e v i l & t n e n t & l i v e
e v i l & t n t & l i v e
e v i l & t & l i v e
e v i l l i v e
e v i v e
e v e
    
```

Honor thy Father & Mother
GEORGE O'BLENIS
caused this to be erected
in memory of his Father
1832

The prominence “George” has given his own name on the face of the stone causes many to smile and few to look at the back side and see that he really did have the old gentleman's full inscription cut there.

Fig. 11. This headstone, constructed by George O'Blenis, is unreadable today. In 1904, the *Sandy Creek News* published the solution to this mystery.



Fig. 12. Notable residents of Oakwood Cemetery include Abolitionist Jermain Loguen and Civil War Major General Edwin V. Sumner.

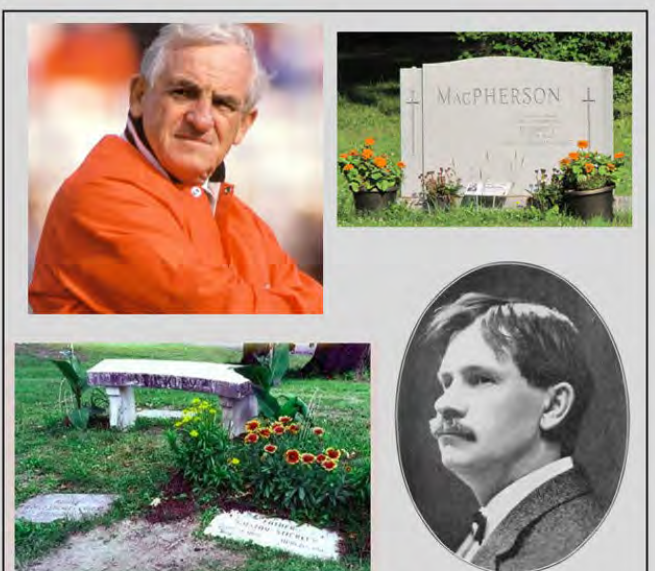
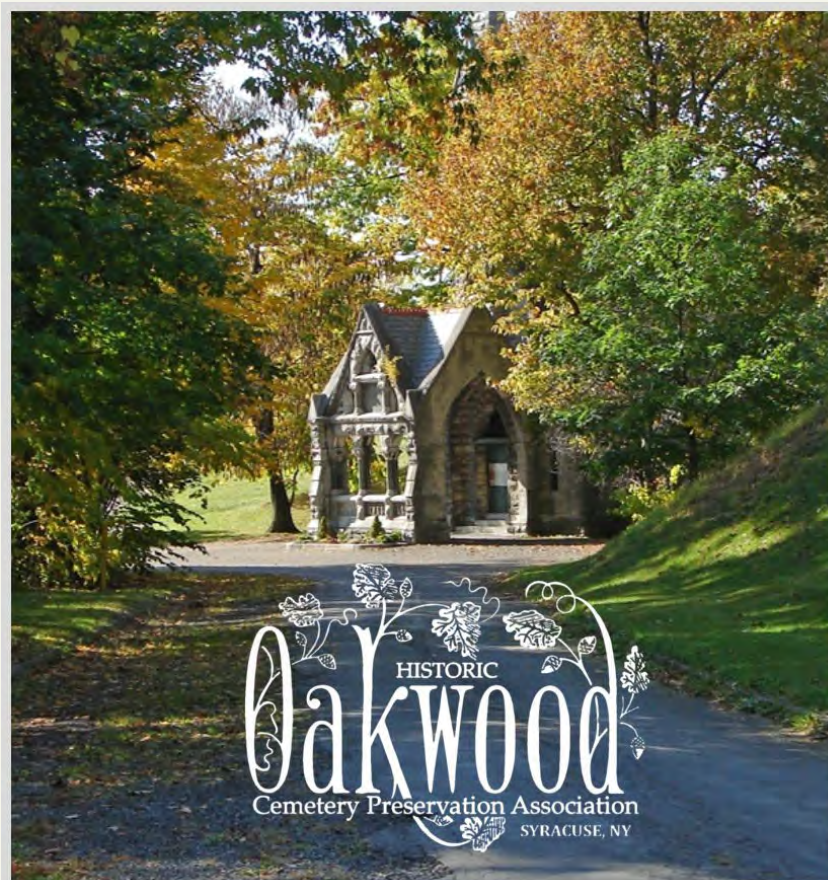


Fig. 13. Two other well-known residents of Oakwood are S.U.'s “Coach Mac” and furniture designer Gustav Stickley.

**“What the heck is a HOCPA?”
(continued)**



Fig. 14. Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage inherited the vast estate of her financier husband, Russell Sage, in 1906. Among her philanthropic accomplishments were the creation of the Russell Sage Foundation and the founding of Russell Sage College. Mr. Sage’s mausoleum in Troy is shown lower left. Mrs. Sage’s modest stone is lower right.



“Walking on a Shipwreck”: Using Visual Media to Enhance an Exhibit About a 1758 Lake George Shipwreck

Joseph W. Zarzynski (The French & Indian War Society at Lake George, Inc. & Auringer Seelye Chapter)

Introduction

Integrating visual media into archaeology exhibits has been a popular choice for museum curators. A shipwreck floor mural and a documentary called “Walking on a Shipwreck,” about the painting, are examples. In 2023, a video documentary followed volunteers as they crafted a full-scale floor mural of 1758 bateau shipwreck in Fort William Henry Museum, Lake George, NY. Here is how the mural was accomplished and where to view the documentary.

The Colonial Bateau

The word “bateau” is French for “boat.” The watercraft may have been introduced to America by Dutch settlers (Figure 1). Bateaux were flat-bottomed vessels, 25–35 ft. long, and pointed at bow and stern. Generally rowed, bateaux were poled in the shallows, and could be rigged with a crude mast and sail. Bateaux transported cargo and troops upon inland waters during colonial times.

Bateaux at Lake George

In March 1757, an army of 1,600 French troops and their Indigenous allies from the Champlain Valley traversed ice-covered Lake George to attack Fort William Henry. They burned 300 British bateaux on shore, destroyed all structures outside the fort, and torched several sloops. However, the British did not surrender; that happened in August 1757.

The following year, a mighty British army with Indigenous supporters crossed Lake George to attack Fort Carillon (later called Fort Ticonderoga) on Lake Champlain. The British were defeated by a smaller French force, and the invaders returned to the south end of Lake George.

As the autumn of 1758 approached and with no fortress to safeguard their vessels, the British deliberately sank over 260 of their warships. This became known as “The Sunken Fleet of 1758.” That protected the boats over the winter from French marauders. In 1759, the British recovered many sunken warships, but a few dozen awaited underwater explorers.

Studying the “Sunken Bateaux of 1758”

Several bateau shipwrecks were rediscovered in 1960 and were studied by the Adirondack Museum from 1960–1965. In 1987, the nonprofit group Bateaux Below, which I directed, began a 24-year study of colonial and other-era shipwrecks in Lake George. From 1987–1991, Bateaux Below mapped seven sunken warships called the “Wiawaka Bateaux.” With state permission, one of those submerged boats, Wiawaka Bateau C, was “revealed” for mapping, photography, and ROV-conducted videography. In 1992, the seven Wiawaka Bateaux were listed onto the National Register of Historic Places, the first Lake George shipwrecks with that designation.

Painting a Floor Mural of a 1758 Bateau Shipwreck

Years later in 2023, it was decided to paint a 1:1 scale floor mural of Wiawaka Bateau C Shipwreck onto the floor of the John Farrell Archaeology Room in Fort William Henry Museum. That was done under the auspices of The French & Indian War Society at Lake George, a nonprofit entity, with support from Fort William Henry Museum. Painting a floor mural was more cost effective than a professionally printed and installed, vinyl overlay with a price tag of \$6,200. The image was the shipwreck’s actual length, 31 ft. 7 in. (Figure 2).

Ashley Orzech, Fort William Henry’s graphic designer, took the archaeological drawing, in “plan view,” and printed it in several mosaic pieces using a four-ft.-wide printer.

On day 1 (May 5), several eager volunteers, under the direction of a maritime archaeologist, began laying out the mosaic sheets.

On day 2 (May 18), the team assembled the mosaic overlays onto the floor, taping together the sections. The large mosaic was then removed, so museum staff could paint the floor using gray paint.

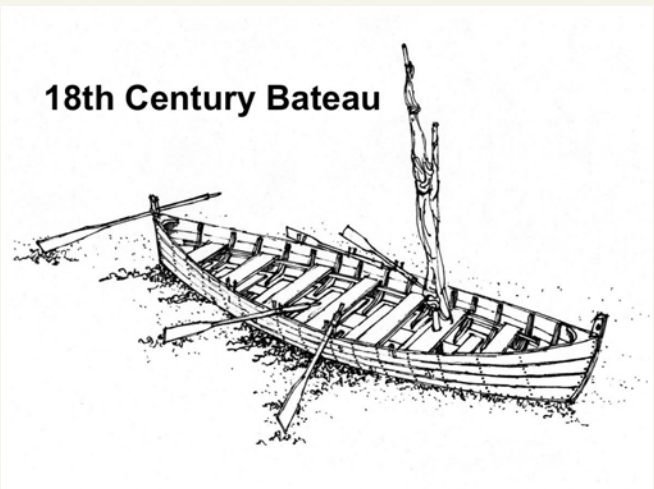


Figure 1. A drawing of a typical 18th century bateau (credit: Mark Peckham).

“Walking on a Shipwreck”: (continued)

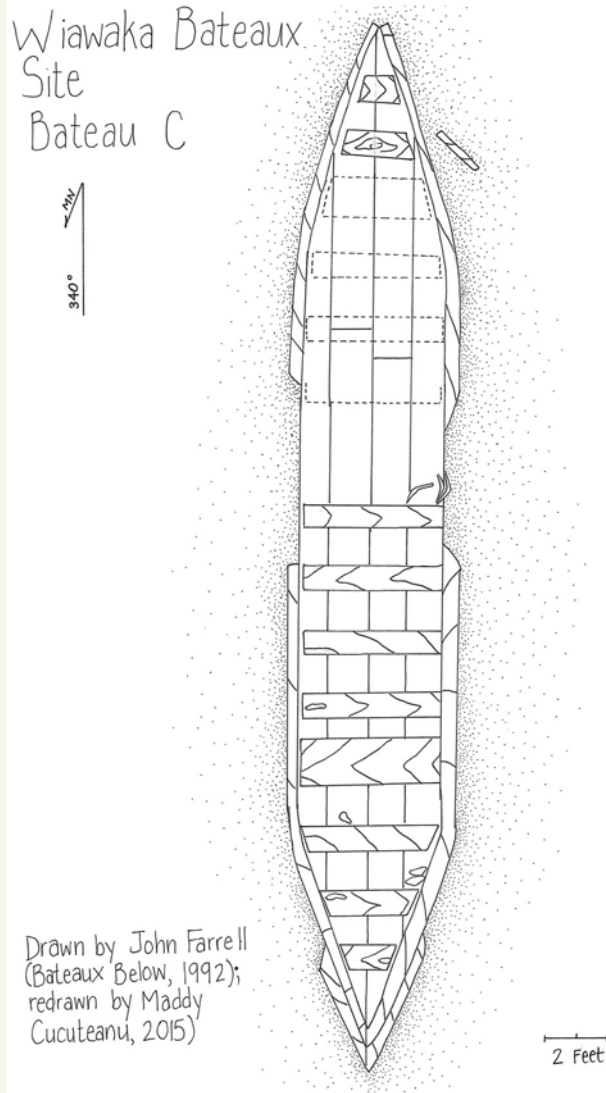


Figure 2. This drawing, by John Farrell (Bateaux Below, Inc.) and redrawn by Maddy Cucuteanu, shows Wiawaka Bateau C Shipwreck. The sunken boat was mapped by Bateaux Below divers over 1987–1991. The drawing was painted as a full-scale floor mural in Fort William Henry Museum (credit: John Farrell, Bateaux Below & Maddy Cucuteanu).

battens (cross pieces over the bottom boards), and the disarticulated frames. Rocks, used in 1758 to sink this bateau, were shown in gray. During our summer work, fluffy white poplar seeds often floated into the room when doors were open to dry the paint. These were blown off the floor using a leaf blower.

Day 11 witnessed more volunteers painting the shipwreck’s structure with brown paint. This continued over days 12–16 (June 25–July 7). On days 16–17 (July 8–9), the team re-darkened hull structure’s seams with black paint. On July 9, after 17 days of work, the floor mural was completed.

Glenn Campbell, operations manager at the museum, reported that Mike Severance and he applied several coats of sealant for protection from pedestrian traffic (Figure 5). Moreover, a poster in the exhibit room informed visitors about the parts of the sunken bateau (Figure 7). The exhibit opened on August 4, 2023.

On May 25, day 3, the team reassembled the bateau pattern onto the newly painted “canvas.”

On days 4, 5, and 6, the volunteers cut away the individual paper likenesses of hull timbers. As they did so, the team chalked in the shipwreck timbers (Figure 3).



Figure 3. In 2023, Mary Pat Meaney (Auringer Seelye Chapter) and Gary Bernhardt (Van Epps-Hartley Chapter) chalk in hull lines of a 1758 bateau shipwreck onto the floor of the underwater archaeology room in the museum (credit: Joseph W. Zarzynski, Auringer Seelye Chapter).

Day 7 marked the start of coloring the mural using paint from Golden Artist Colors (New Berlin, NY). This was recommended by Laura Von Rosk, the former director of the Lake George Arts Project. Her suggestion proved ideal for the endeavor. The painters began using black paint to cover the chalk outline (Figure 4). On day 8, they continued delineating the shipwreck’s lines.

On June 23, the ninth day, the “inking” of the shipwreck outline onto the exhibit floor was completed.

On day 10, the volunteers employed brown paint for the bateau side planks (aka strakes), the bottom boards, the

“Walking on a Shipwreck”: (continued)



Figure 4. Left-to-right, Joseph W. Zarzynski (Auringer Seelye Chapter), Egan Johnson, and August Johnson paint the bateau shipwreck’s hull lines (credit: Mary Pat Meaney, Auringer Seelye Chapter).



Figure 5. This shows the newly revamped underwater archaeology room at Fort William Henry Museum in August 2023, shortly after the floor mural was finished and the exhibit finalized (credit: Joseph W. Zarzynski, Auringer Seelye Chapter).



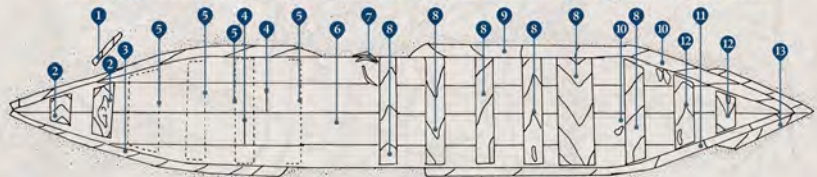
Figure 6. This image is the opening scene of the video “Walking on a Shipwreck,” produced by Peter Pepe (Pepe Productions). The documentary tells how the shipwreck floor mural that was completed in 2023 in Fort William Henry Museum (credit: Peter Pepe, Pepe Productions).

“Walking in a Shipwreck” Video

The muralists also collaborated with Peter Pepe (Pepe Productions) on a 5-min., 42-sec. documentary with the appropriate title – “Walking on a Shipwreck.” In April 2024, the video was posted on YouTube (Figure 6). The documentary will also be shown on a video monitor in the museum so visitors can find out about the underwater archaeology project of the Wiawaka Bateaux, as well as understand how the floor mural was created.

FLOOR MURAL DESCRIPTION, A 1758 BATEAU SHIPWRECK

In 1992, seven sunken 1758 British bateau shipwrecks, called the Wiawaka Bateaux, were listed onto the National Register of Historic Places. This was the first designation of shipwrecks in Lake George placed on the National Register. One of those vessels, Wiawaka Bateau C, is 31 feet, 7 inches long. The floor mural shows Bateau C in 1:1 scale and in plan view. Today, about 30% of the 1758 warship remains as a shipwreck, with stem, sternpost, strakes, and many frames missing. The shipwreck lies a mile away from the museum on an slope in 20–40 feet.



- 1 A broken and disarticulated strake (side plank)
- 2 Battens
- 3 Garboard strake; named as is the first strake from the bottom
- 4 Butt joints for bottom boards
- 5 Dashed lines represent outline of where battens were once located
- 6 Battens are missing in this section
- 7 Partial and disarticulated frames
- 8 Battens; rectangular pine planks nailed over the four pine bottom boards to hold them in place
- 9 Garboard strake
- 10 Sinking rocks
- 11 Garboard strake
- 12 Battens
- 13 Strake; this, the second side plank from the bottom

1758 Bateau C Shipwreck drawn by John Farrell (Bateaux Below) in 1992. Archaeology team: Dr. Russell P. Bellico, Bob Benway, Vince Capone, Terry Crandall, John Farrell, Dave Van Aken, Joseph W. Zarzynski, and others. Image redrawn in 2015 by Maddy Cucuteanu. Floor mural project documentary by Peter Pepe. Floor mural design and paint team: Sandy Arnold, Gary Bernhardt, Mark Faraci, August Johnson, Egan Johnson, Tim Lagace, Pat Meaney, and Joseph W. Zarzynski. FWH Museum assistance provided by Anna Atkins, Glenn Campbell, Kathy Flacke Muncil, Ashley Orzech, and Mike Severance. Paint donated by The French & Indian War Society at Lake George, Inc.



Figure 7. This poster helps visitors understand the structural parts of the 1758 Wiawaka Bateau C Shipwreck (credit: Ashley Orzech, John Farrell, and Maddy Cucuteanu).

Cemetery and Gravestone Threats

By Dale & Tina Utter – Chenango Chapter

As soon as a gravestone is set in a cemetery, it is under threat from Mother Nature. The annual weather cycle goes from the sun's excessive heat to days of extreme cold with general freezing and thawing in-between. For over 125 years, granite has been our primary gravestone material but even that tough stone is not totally impervious to the onslaught of extreme weather. New granite monuments have a highly polished finish. Over time, this sheen is diminished. Power washers, that some cemeteries use to clean gravestones, hastens this process. Typically, our biggest concern is the biological growth that accumulates over time and renders the stones unreadable. The lack of the polished surface facilitates the biological growth.

Before the use of granite, marble was the accepted medium for gravestones. This material is subject to the same limitations as above but with one other critical threat. Since the age of the Industrial Revolution, mankind has been spewing an untold amount of pollution into the atmosphere. As they say, what goes up must come down. In this case, we have acid rain that descends and is absorbed into marble gravestones. Marble is not as durable as granite and the acid contained in our refreshing rain has been slowly dissolving our marble gravestones. This process is not reversible and many stones are no longer readable. It seems high quality marble survives better but the low-quality material is disappearing before our very eyes. This is a sad situation and of course entirely man-made.

Our first gravestones in central New York State came from local quarries and the material was sandstone. This is a sedimentary rock formed by successive layers of sand slowly being deposited upon the earth's surface. These deposits resulted from the action of wind and water. Limestone is also a sedimentary rock but is composed of deposits of plant and animal fossils and can be found farther north in our state.



Figure 1. An example of a gravestone splitting apart due to delamination.

These deposits are formed in horizontal layers on the ground. When the stone is quarried and made into gravestones, we set these stones so that the horizontal layers are now setting vertical in the ground. This creates a huge problem for these markers. Over time these layers start to break down and separate in a process called delamination (Figure 1).

This action is started by water seeping into the stone and freezing and then thawing. Each time this happens the crack gets a little bigger. In time the stone is threatened and the whole front or back may fall off. A stroll through a cemetery will reveal that nearly every sandstone gravestone has some degree of vertical cracking. Very little can be done to arrest this condition. It is a matter of great concern that our oldest and most significant gravestones will return to dust.

Perhaps the greatest detriment to our cemeteries/gravestones is mankind, which is totally preventable. Apathy is a severe issue. Across New York State is an innumerable number of cemeteries in various states of disarray. Just like cars, houses, equipment, et cetera, our cemeteries require periodic maintenance to sustain a minimum level of condition.

Cemetery and Gravestone Threats (continued)



Figure 2. Extensive damage to the base of a marble gravestone from a cemetery Cortland County.

Many people just don't care about old, local cemeteries or ever give them a thought or sometimes even know they exist. These cemeteries represent our local history and it is because of these people that went before us that we have the freedoms and standard of living that we currently enjoy. Each succeeding generation has built upon the successes of those that went before us. Those resting places deserve more attention.



Figure 3. Gouges from lawnmower strikes on a marble stone from Cortland County.



Figure 4. Lawnmower strikes on a sandstone marker from Cortland County.

While driving through cemeteries, we are disturbed by the damage we sometimes see. Lawn mowers, in combination with a careless and hurried attitude, are destroying our cemeteries. Old sandstone gravestones are historical treasures and cannot be replaced and are difficult to repair. Both sandstone and marble gravestones are being gouged, scraped, broken, and run over by negligent maintenance people (Photos 2-6). Some stones are destroyed and gone forever. Is there no respect for our history and these "open air museums?" In our opinion, this type of careless damage is nothing less than grave desecration.

We see this in abandoned cemeteries maintained by towns, we see this where there are

active cemetery associations, we see this wherever so-called responsible entities are supposedly taking care of cemeteries. We have addressed numerous organizations with our concerns and have been greeted with shock and concern to total indifference. Some people just don't believe us but a simple walk through the cemetery will confirm our finds.

Cemetery and Gravestone Threats (continued)



Figure 5. Lawnmower scrapes and gouges on a marble stone from Cortland County.

We understand that it costs money to mow and maintain a cemetery but that is no excuse for shoddy maintenance or not caring at all.

Whether it be a volunteer or paid worker, they should be held accountable for their actions and monitored for proper care. People will get away with whatever they can and if they think no one is watching or cares, there will be a problem.

Zero-turn mowers have no place in a cemetery because they promote speed which increases the likelihood for an accident. People can go too fast, turn too quickly and even in the most careful hands, things can happen. We mow several cemeteries so we know what it is like and how careful you need to be.

Another issue we find is the careless use of commercial grade weed eaters. Our marble and sandstone gravestones are fragile and weed eater line striking the stone can remove pieces of stone or permanently scar them (Figure 7). Guards can be put in place so the line never touches the stone or at a minimum use a lesser quality line and be careful. Is it even necessary to remove the grass so close to the stone? A best practice would be to carefully weed eat around the stones before

using a lawn mower as this would help keep the mower from striking the stone.

The use of Roundup, which is a weed and grass killer, can eliminate the need for weed eating around the stones. It sounds like a good fix to reduce the amount of time and expense of using a weed eater. Unfortunately, when you kill all the vegetation around the gravestone, you kill all the roots that were holding the dirt together (Figure 8). With that binder gone, the soil loosens and the stone can start to lean because there is less resistance for it to stay straight. It is just a matter of time before a leaning stone breaks from the strain or just completely falls over. Now you have other issues involving resetting or repairing the stone. To complicate matters even further, Roundup is absorbed by the stone and over time will react to break down the bonds within the stone and lead to its deterioration. And then there is also the case that all that dead vegetation and brown dirt that you are left to see is not very attractive.

In the pursuit of reading gravestones, people do immeasurable damage in cleaning gravestones. No chemicals of any kind should ever be used. This includes: oven cleaner, muriatic acid, bleach, shaving cream, et cetera. Chemicals can erode the stone or just promote more biological growth, as does the use of flour or chalk. The only approved cleaner is water and a universally accepted biocide called D/2. In addition, wire brushes nor any metal tools of any kind should ever be used to clean a gravestone as this can permanently scratch and damage any stone (Figure 9).

In the past, it was customary for people to visit the graves of their deceased relatives; I know I did with my parents 60 years ago. With children growing up and dispersing to all corners of the country, there isn't that sense of family connection and knowing your roots like there once was. This results in less care for the gravesite as each generation is that much more removed from the deceased. We do suggest to those that do visit the graves of their loved ones that you observe your stones very closely.

Cemetery and Gravestone Threats (continued)



Figure 6. Lawnmower damage caused by constantly running over a fallen marble stone from a Cortland County cemetery.



Figure 7. An example of weed eater damage on a marble stone from Cortland County.



Figure 8. Unsightly use of chemicals like Roundup kill the roots causing the stones to lean.



Figure 9. Irreversible damage caused by a wire brush. Photo by Andrew L.—Find A Grave.

Accompanying this article are photos of examples of gravestone damage: scrapes, gouges, broken stones or even those that have been run over by a lawn mower. It is easy to see the damage on marble stones, not so easy on sandstone and even harder to tell on granite. With granite stones you will most likely observe that the stone has been repositioned on the top of the foundation stone, this is very likely because it has been struck by a lawn mower.

Cemetery and Gravestone Threats (continued)

In summary, we cannot control Mother Nature and the damage she causes to our gravestones but we certainly can control the man-made issues that arise. The first step is reversing the apathy toward our cemeteries and recognizing them for their cultural and historical worth. This can be achieved by education. The next step is giving them the proper, responsible care that they deserve. Not using zero turn mowers, commercial grade weed eaters or Roundup would help tremendously.

The most critical step in saving our cemeteries is to hold those people that are maintaining them accountable for their actions. If someone knows there will be repercussions for damaging a stone then they will be more careful. If anyone sees any damage like this in a cemetery, we strongly suggest you speak to those people responsible for its care. If you don't, this damage will only continue. Holding people accountable is the key to stopping the unnecessary destruction of our invaluable cemeteries.

(We would like to thank fellow Cemetery Network member Ethan Dickerman for his inputs to this article. He is a caretaker for Rombout Rural Cemetery in the Town of Fishkill and provided additional insight into this important issue.)

Underground Railroad Virtual Hub Launched

Submitted by Ethan Dikerman, Finger Lakes Chapter

The Underground Railroad Research Project, a three-year collaboration between Cornell University researchers and community partners in Ithaca, New York, has launched a virtual hub for its local and regional Underground Railroad projects. Designed by Ithaca web design firms, Iron Design and Ancient Wisdom Productions, the Hub's attractive and user friendly landing page currently features eight research projects representing the collective enthusiasm and work of researchers, community partners, and interested citizens to learn about and imagine this important part of American history.

The Hub's landing page invites users to explore a variety of projects, including a 3D model and a virtual tour of Ithaca's main Underground Railroad "station," the St. James AME Zion Church. Another link delves into the results of a community archaeological excavation at St. James. Other projects focused on freedom seekers include an interactive map of an escape route from Virginia to the Ithaca area, a mobile guided tour of Ithaca's Underground Railroad-related sites, and a website featuring brief narratives of historical fiction that deepen understanding of this pivotal period of American history. Additionally, the Virtual Hub includes links to a resource that documents the presence and livelihoods of Ithaca's Black residents from 1820-1870 and a page that provides an overview of rural humanities projects in the central New York region. Educators may especially be interested in the link to a teaching model for researching and writing about the Underground Railroad.

The resources featured on the Hub's landing page are especially relevant for users at schools, colleges, libraries, museums, history centers, heritage tourism centers, and community groups and can be accessed at <https://undergroundrailroadhub.net/>.

Funding for the Underground Railroad Virtual Hub has been provided by a New Frontier Grant awarded in 2021 and administered by Cornell University's College of Arts and Sciences.

The Centennial of New York State Parks

Sherene Baugher, Finger Lakes Chapter

April 18, 2024, marks the 100th Anniversary of the New York States Parks Commission. See the link: <https://parks.ny.gov/100/> for more details. This will be a great time to revisit our parks. Enjoy the breathtaking waterfalls, scenic vistas, and our excellent historic sites.

Throughout the state, there will be regional and local celebrations of park history. On April 17 in Ithaca, there was the opening of an exhibit on the 100th anniversary of the parks in the Finger Lakes Region with a special focus on Robert H. Treman State Park (Fig. 1 and 2). The exhibit at the History Center in Tomkins County will be up until December 31. Do check it out next time you are in Ithaca. Also, learn about the history of some of our parks that were scenic resorts before they became NYS parks.



For NYSAA members who have excavated sites in our parks, contact your park and historic site and see how you can become involved in the celebration.

The celebration also has the park challenge: Parks has a list of 100 challenges to encourage people to get out to our parks and historic sites. If you complete 24 of the challenges, you win a prize. Here is a list of activities:

<https://parks.ny.gov/documents/100/OPRHPCentennialChallengeChecklist.pdf>

It can be fun activities for you, your friends, and family members.

A Cemetery Preservation Workshop Leads to Continued Action and a Meaningful Discovery at the Rombout Rural Cemetery

Ethan Dikerman, Finger Lakes Chapter

In 1747, in Fishkill, NY, residents established the first Presbyterian Church and churchyard, which served a vital role in the community's religious life and as a hospital for ill soldiers during the War for Independence. By 1885, the site was transferred to the ownership of the Rombout Rural Cemetery Association for continued operation and permanent maintenance of the burial grounds. Like many older cemeteries in the Hudson Valley (and New York more broadly), red sandstone, marble, and granite gravestones mark gravesites. Each stone is unique, and the degree of decoration often represents the person they commemorate. For example, a fashionable gravestone that is highly decorative might represent the deceased's status or class (McGuire, 1988, Baugher 2013, and 2014).

Cemetery preservationists, taphophiles, and historians regularly point out that annual cemetery maintenance expenses are a never-ending challenge. Large cemetery corporations often have endowments and partially operate off their investment income, plot sales, donations, and other services. No such fund existed for the Rombout Rural Cemetery until the trustees took steps to establish one during the 2020 shutdown, which they plan to grow over the coming years. Cemetery maintenance is defined as a diverse array of activities: mowing, weed whacking, cleaning up leaves and branches, gravestone cleaning, straightening and resetting, and more. For this article, I will focus primarily on the Rombout Rural Cemetery's efforts to clean, straighten, and reset gravestones in the old section (formerly the Presbyterian Churchyard).

Since 2012, the Board and a team of volunteers have slowly worked to remap the cemetery, clear it of overgrowth, mow, transcribe, and, most recently, preserve stones. On June 13th, 2023, cemetery preservationists Dale and Tina Utter of central, New York, led a preservation workshop at the Rombout Rural Cemetery for the Board of Trustees to learn the procedures and concepts accepted in the field. The workshop included a detailed discussion on the following topics:

- 1- The properties of each type of stone used for gravestones. For example, stratigraphy and flexibility.
- 2- How do chemical cleaners and weed killers interact with natural stones?
- 3- The impacts of weather, including the freeze-thaw cycle, on gravestones.
- 4- Recommended cleaning techniques.
- 5- Recommended approaches to straightening, resetting, and repairing gravestones.

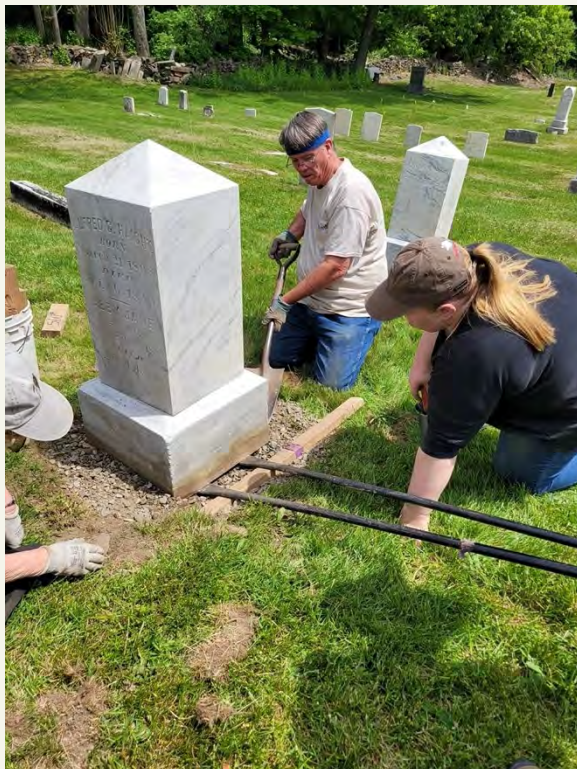
The workshop began with Dale and Tina demonstrating how to clean a stone using Orvis soap, soft brushes, water, and D/2. Next, the two demonstrated how to straighten a leaning stone and straighten a monument with essential tools. The workshop concluded with trustees dispersing and applying the practices demonstrated that day to a series of stones that most needed attention.

The day's final project was a group effort to clean several late 18th century red sandstone markers, two of which were carved by noted colonial gravestone cutter John Zuricher (see Baugher, 2013, and Dickerman, 2021). Trustees remarked about the closeness they felt by working so closely with a physical marker commemorating the life and death of someone who passed nearly 250 years ago. Others remarked on the net change in the epitaph and tympanum's readability by the day's end. The Board, Dale, and Tina retired for pizza at the neighboring plaza as a reward. Dale and Tina's workshop inspired the Board to continue workdays once per month through November 2023, which resulted in the cleaning of at least 30 gravestones, including all red sandstone markers. Numerous stones were reset and straightened, including one that was bent and warped due to excessive leaning. New workdays will be scheduled for the 2024 season too.

Rombout Rural Cemetery Workshop (continued)



Left, Figure 1: Image of the infant John Haight's gravestone during cleaning with Orvis soap, which was allowed to sit briefly in the epitaph for easier reading. Photograph by Lisa Daley, 2023. **Right, Figure 2:** Image of RRCA Trustees and volunteers straightening a gravestone under the direction of Dale & Tina Utter. Photography by Lisa Daley, 2023.



Left, Figure 3: Image of Dale Utter teaching RRCA Trustees and volunteers how to straighten a small monument using traditional tools and methods. **Right, Figure 4:** Image of Maria Webb's gravestone, recently straightened. Note: A substantial bend and twist in the stone was observed due to the stone's severe leaning. If not straightened, this stone would have snapped in two.

Rombout Rural Cemetery Workshop (continued)

The July 2nd, 2023, workday was part of this sustained effort that resulted in a significant discovery. On this day, several trustees identified a tan sandstone marker that laid flush with the earth and partially beneath another flat marker – an observation that suggested it fell decades before. Concerned that continued exposure to the soil, the freeze-thaw cycle, and mowing prompted RRCA trustees to unearth, raise, and identify the stone to develop a better preservation plan. Using an archaeologist's trowel, we carefully excavated a 4" perimeter to a depth of 4" below the surface, which allowed us to examine the stone's integrity. Close inspection indicated a single but tight crack in the stone's outer stratigraphic layer, suggesting it could be lifted with minimal damage.

Four 4" diameter rollers were laid down next to the stone upon which a layer of plywood was added to serve as a surface to lay the stone once flipped. Upon lifting the stone, we instantly recognized it as the work of John Zuricher. While degraded and delaminating, likely from its initial break decades before and subsequently from the elements, the stone's pieces were collected for reassembly and potential conservation. It should be noted that a tan sandstone is an unusual material for Zuricher, for he favored red sandstone sourced from northern New Jersey. Equally important is the stone's good legibility, allowing us to identify the deceased as Martha *Carman* Van Wyck, the wife of William Van Wyck, who died on July 8th, 1772. William's gravestone stands adjacent to the south of her stone and recorded his death on November 24th, 1793 (Van Wyck, 1912).



Left, Figure 5: Image of the Martha Van Wyck gravestone still buried. Note another gravestone had fallen and laid atop the Van Wyck stone for several years. **Right, Figure 6:** Image of the newly unearthed Martha Van Wyck gravestone carved by John Zuricher circa 1772. Photograph by Ethan Dickerman, 2023.

Rombout Rural Cemetery Workshop (continued)

Up until July 2nd, the graves of one 18th century and two early 19th century women whose names started with ‘MAR’ were unidentified: Martha Van Wyck (died 1772), Margaret Bogardus (died 1806), and Margaret Bogart (died 1800). Another badly damaged red sandstone marker lies approximately 25 feet from Martha’s. The only three letters left on this stone are ‘MAR.’ Through a process of elimination informed by John Wilson Poucher, M.D.’s 1913 transcription of interments (Poucher, 1924: 85-91), I theorize that this other stone represents the grave of Margaret Bogart or Margaret Bogardus.

While more research is needed to identify the graves of Margaret Bogardus and Margaret Bogert, the meaningful discovery of Martha Van Wyck is a prime example of the importance of cemetery care and gravestone preservation. Efforts for the long-term preservation of Martha’s stone are being evaluated to determine the most effective and cost-effective approach. Dale and Tina’s kick-start workshop on June 13th was an important event that empowered the Rombout Rural Cemetery Association’s trustees to proceed with preservation efforts. Each stone will present unique challenges and take time to treat, but meaningful and long-lasting results are imperative and set a strong example for others.

Works Referenced:

Baughner, Sherene, and Richard F. Veit

2013 John Zuricher, Stone Cutter, and His Imprint on the Religious Landscape of Colonial New York. In *Tales of Gotham, Historical Archaeology, Ethnohistory and Microhistory of New York City*, Meta F. Janowitz and Diane Dallal, editors, pp. 225–247. Springer New York, New York, NY. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-1-4614-5272-0_14.

Baughner, Sherene, and Richard F. Veit

2014 *The Archaeology of American Cemeteries and Gravestones*. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA.

Dickerman, Ethan

2021 *Gravestones and the Politics of a Windowed Continental*. *New York State Archaeology Association*.

McGuire, Randall H.

1988 Chapter 14: Dialogues with the Dead: Ideology and the Cemetery. In *The Recovery of Meaning: Historical Archaeology in the Eastern United States*, Mark P. Leone and Parker B. Potter Jr., editors, pp. 435–480. Smithsonian Institution Press. https://www.academia.edu/485203/Dialogues_with_the_Dead_Ideology_and_the_Cemetery.

Poucher M.D., John Wilson, and Helen Wilkinson Reynolds

1924 *Old Gravestones of Dutchess County*. *Issue*. https://issuu.com/jeffway/docs/dutchess_gravestones.

Van Wyck, Anne

1912 *Descendants of Cornelius Barentse Van Wyck and Anna Polhemus*. Quintin Publications (Tobias A. Wright Printer and Publisher), New York, NY. <https://www.rootspoint.com/product/descendants-of-cornelius-barentse-van-wyck-and-anna-polhemus/>.

EVENTS

Haudenosaunee Heritage - Past, Present, Future

Dolores is shown with the beaded Mohawk bird that was purchased by her grandmother at the Afton Fair in 1903.



Ronnie is shown inside the longhouse at Ganondagan where she taught Haudenosaunee culture for 17 years.

Traditional Cornhusk Dolls and Raised Beadwork Presentations with internationally recognized Dolores Elliott and Seneca Nation member Ronnie Reitter. Space is limited. NYS Parks online registration www.naturalheritagetrust.org/haudenosaunee-arts. The Origin of Stories" storytelling free Friday 7 pm, historic site's pavilion off Hill Street. Bring a lawn chair. If rain, the session will be at the Hotel building. "Discovering the Traditional Raised Beadwork and Cornhusk Arts" Saturday 10 am to 12 noon see the collections of Dolores Elliott and Ronnie Reitter. Free admission. Don't miss the Smithsonian "Voices and Votes: Democracy in America" exhibit "Museum on MainStreet" program and "Sackets Harbor in the North Country" exhibit showcasing Haudenosaunee women's influence on the Suffragists.

Presented By: [Sackets Harbor Battlefield State Historic Site](http://www.nysparks.org/sacketsharborbattlefield)

- Dates: June 14 & 15, 2024
- Location: 401 West Main Street
- Address: Box 27, Sackets Harbor, NY 13685
Phone: [\(315\) 646-3634](tel:3156463634)
- Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Price: free

More Information: <https://parks.ny.gov/historic-sites/sacketsharborbattlefield/details.aspx>

John Isham – New York State Gravestone Carver

Dale & Tina Utter, Chenango Chapter

We have the pleasure of living in rural Chenango County of south-central Upstate New York. The area was opened to settlement, about 1790, after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War. Sixty years ago, this was a land of small family-owned dairy farms. Today most of those small operations are gone and have been replaced by large corporate farms.

We have travelled the county extensively, observing its many cemeteries. The early gravestones were made from sandstone, with most being local bluestone. Nowhere in our travels have we seen the red sandstone typical of the findings when you get closer to the Hudson River Valley or as found in the New England States. Although we have found a few cherub-like figures, most notably done by the carver Jonas Stewart 2nd (Coffin Man), we never see the winged faces on quarried stone done by professional carvers as found further east of the county. This is the land of willow and urn iconography.

Our cemetery adventures are never limited to Chenango County, as we travel beyond our borders on a regular basis for further exploration. Recently, we made a trip to Otsego County and before we knew it, were entering Schoharie County. In Cobleskill, we were excited to see a sign that read established 1752. We wondered if we would find any red sandstone or winged faces in this area. Since they are non-existent in Chenango County, we are always looking for them elsewhere, especially when we head east into an older part of the state. We were very disappointed when the large cemetery not only lacked red sandstone or winged faces, it didn't contain any old gravestones.

We checked our Find-A-Grave website application and found a cemetery further north. We entered Lawyersville and stopped at the Reformed Church with a cemetery behind it. Initially, going up the hill, all were granite and marble gravestones but as we neared the top, we saw red sandstone. We noticed a broken red gravestone leaning against a tree and much to our surprise, we saw a winged face. As we looked around, we were thrilled to find not one but a total of six stones with a long, narrow nose and upswept wings protruding from under the chin. The dates ranged from 1813-1817 and one was red sandstone.

We were really shocked by our discovery. Seldom do we find one stone with a winged face but here we found six and it appeared they were all done by the same carver. We felt there had to be some kind of story behind all of this. As we pondered our finding we headed west to the next cemetery.

At Zion Rural Cemetery in Seward, we hadn't gone far before we noticed more red sandstone. Sure enough, there were the long-nosed winged faces we had seen at the previous cemetery. We found four more winged faces, one with a tilted head with downswept wings coming out of the ear position, with a date range of 1808-1817.



Figure 1. Historic marker denoting the significance of gravestone carver John Isham. Note that the sign was sponsored by the NYSAA's Central NYS Cemetery Network. Zion Rural Cemetery, Seward, NY

John Isham – New York State Gravestone Carver (continued)

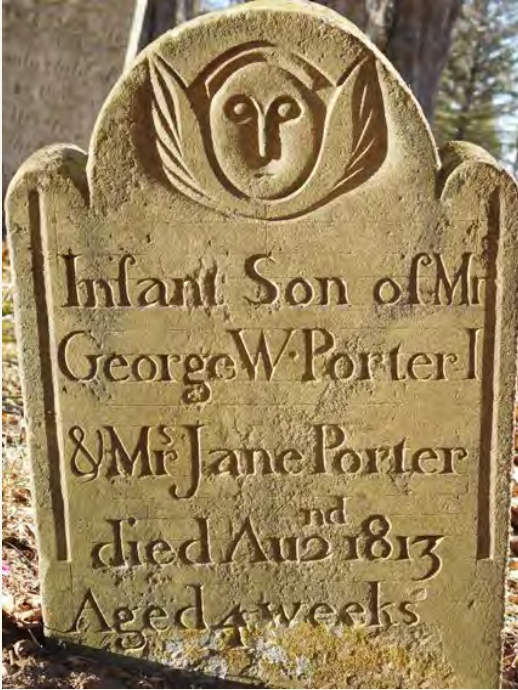


Figure 2. Gravestone of the son of George Porter in Lawyersville Union Cemetery.

While driving home, we discussed what we had uncovered and how we could find additional information. We had no idea who the carver was or his origin. It is tough to do research when you have no idea where to begin.

Today's social media provides invaluable tools to aid in research and keeping in touch with people. We have a Facebook page called Cemetery Lovers where we post interesting cemetery findings and the work we do in cemeteries. Not long after we got home, Tina posted pictures of our winged faces on our page. Mary Carroll, a friend we had met at the Connecticut Gravestone Network Symposium in 2019, commented that she believed this was the work of Conn. gravestone carver John Isham. Now our research could begin!

Our first questions were: Who was John Isham and if he was a noted Conn. gravestone carver then why was his work in NY? If this wasn't his work, then whose was it?



Figure 3. Gravestone of Bethiah Porter in Lawyersville Union Cemetery, d. 1817.

We found our initial answers on Find a Grave. One must be aware that the information found here is not always accurate or complete but it is a great place to start. John was born June 20, 1757 in Colchester, Conn. In 1778 he married Lois Adams and they had two children but only Benjamin lived into adulthood. John died April 7, 1834 in Farmington, Conn.

When we checked Find a Grave for Benjamin Isham, we discovered he was born in Colchester, Conn. on September 28, 1779. He married Phebe Hall in 1801, had 12 children and died June 14, 1840. He graduated from Hartford College and was a minister of the Presbyterian Church. What really got our attention was his moving to Sharon, N.Y. circa 1810. Sharon is not far from Lawyersville or Zion Rural Cemetery where we had found the winged faced gravestones. Now our question was, who carved the stones. Could the son have been a carver himself or were they done by his father?

We next turned to the Farber Gravestone Collection to see what information could be found there. This website is an invaluable tool with over 13,500 images of over 9000 gravestones, mostly from the Northeastern U.S. prior to 1800. Although there wasn't any written information about John, we did find many pictures of his work in Conn. and discovered there were two

John Isham – New York State Gravestone Carver (continued)



Figure 4. Marker for General James Dana, Lawyersville Union Cemetery, d. 1817

gravestones he had done in Saugerties, N.Y. These photographs did help us confirm it appeared to be the work of John but we still hadn't eliminated that perhaps Benjamin had become a carver himself. More research was needed.

We googled "John Isham" for additional information. We happened upon an advertisement for the 2012 Connecticut Gravestone Network Symposium. One presentation was going to be, "John Isham, stone carver from East Haddam" by Irma-Carper Miller and Dr. Karl Stofko. We remembered meeting Irma at an Association for Gravestone Studies conference several years earlier. When we couldn't reach her, we contacted a mutual friend, Dana Laird. We finally connected with Irma and she gave us the phone number for Dr. Karl Stofko, the East Haddam, Conn. Municipal Historian for many years. This was an area where John had carved over 300 gravestones.

He was a wealth of information and answered our many questions. He told us that John and his wife Lois had lived in Sharon from about 1816-1818, before moving to Saugerties for a short time and then returning to Conn. about

1819 to apply for his Revolutionary War pension. It was clear now that John Isham was the carver of the stones we had discovered. But now we had the question of why did he go to Saugerties?

We decided to return and look for additional Isham stones. On our way there, we stopped by West Richmondville Cemetery and found the graves of John Isham's wife Mary who died in 1842 and John's son Benjamin who died in 1840. We did find another Isham stone in Zion but it did not have a face on it. A search of additional cemeteries did not reveal any more of his work.



Figure 5. Gravestone of Anna Hannahs, Zion Rural Cemetery, d. 1817

While doing our research, we discovered a book, The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them by James Slater, which provided invaluable information. Isham carved mostly brownstone gravestones on the eastern side of the Connecticut River with nearly 400 stones of his 470 stone inventory found in the areas of Colchester and East Haddam where he once lived. His stone carving career lasted from circa 1785 to 1815. He is noted for his simple winged faces with the long slender nose.

We now felt we needed to go to Saugerties and see what more could be found in Mountain View Cemetery where the Farber Collection showed two of his stones. According to Find a Grave, there are nearly 8,000 burials there and 96% of it has been photographed. We decided to do a filtered search of the stones that were placed there prior to 1820 and see if any more of those could be his. First, we needed to determine exactly what we were looking for.

John Isham – New York State Gravestone Carver (continued)

By scrutinizing the photos of the stones we had taken, we would look for identifying characteristics of this carver. We would then compare them to the stones on Find a Grave and this would give us an idea if more stones were to be found there.

The first thing we noticed was how he curled his small “f,” “r,” and curled the tail on his “y.” The cross-bar on his capital “A” was set high and the cross-bar on his small “P” seemed to be missing entirely. Rather than sitting on the baseline, his capital “J” would extend below it. A close look at his numerals revealed a short “1” and “0” and numerous numbers also extended below the baseline. For his numerical days of the month, the “th” was above the numbers. Inscriptions were in a block style lettering and epitaphs appeared as an italic style of writing.



Figure 6. Four examples of John Isham's work in Zion Rural Cemetery, Seward, NY.



Figure 7. Gravestone of Samuel Schoonmaker at Mountain View Cemetery, Saugerties, NY, d. 1812.

With these identifiers in mind, a review of Saugerties Mountain View Cemetery on Find a Grave showed at least seven of Isham's stones, including the two in the Farber Collection. While searching the cemetery, we found one marble stone that was not previously identified. Of the eight stones, six were red sandstone with four of them having winged faces. In addition, we discovered one more stone in Wolven Cemetery west of Saugerties.

We still wondered why John had moved from Sharon to Saugerties. When taking a closer look at one of the names on the stones he carved, we got a clue. He had engraved the stone for Mary Isham, wife of Samuel. Could this be a relative of his? Indeed it was, Samuel was his older brother and Mary was his wife's sister. (Per: Roots Web, Find a Grave and WikiTree.)

Shortly after our trip to Saugerties, we received a package from Laurel Gabel that contained more information about John Isham, as well as even more information that Dr. Stofko's research had revealed. About that same time, we discovered he was a Revolutionary War veteran and had applied for a pension and we reviewed this documentation on the Fold3 website.

John Isham – New York State Gravestone Carver (continued)



Figure 8. Gravestone of Mary Isham, Mountain View Cemetery, Saugerties, NY (Photo Credit – Donna J. McClain, Find a Grave)

We decided to take a trip to Canaan, Conn and determine if we could find any of John's work while he was living there. At East Canaan's Hillside Cemetery, we found two stones we attribute to him: Thaddeus Austin - died October 21, 1821 and Philena Hood - died April 5, 1820. South of there, another stone was found in Falls Village's Grassy Hill Cemetery: Clarrissa Kellogg - died February 10, 1817.

By now we were enamored of John Isham and wanted to see some of his earlier work so we headed for eastern Conn. Our first stop was Colchester where John was born in 1757 and lived until circa 1783 before he moved to the area of East Haddam. At Bull Hill Cemetery we found his father's grave, also named John - died in 1802, and his father-in-law's, Benjamin Adams -died in 1796. Both stones, as well as others, were carved by John Isham.

Between Dr. Stofko's material, John Isham's pension record and the dates on gravestones, we have formulated a timeline for John and his wife Lois. We believe they left East Haddam, Conn. in late 1816 and moved to Sharon, N.Y. to be close to their son Benjamin and his wife Phebe. They stayed there until early 1818 then moved to Saugerties where his brother Samuel and his wife Mary lived. In June of 1819 they bought land in Canaan, Conn. and then sold it in 1822 and moved to Farmington, Conn. John Isham died in 1834 and his burial site is unknown at this time. Lois died March 10, 1842 and is buried in West Richmondville Cemetery in N.Y. along with her son Benjamin and his wife Phebe.

Reading John's pension record, provided great insight as it was a firsthand account of his life from 1775, when he enlisted, until August 1831. It is interesting to note that he was originally approved for a pension in 1819, then was "...stricken from the Pension List" in 1820 when an inventory of his assets showed to be \$1184. In August of 1831, when his assets had been reduced to \$551, he reapplied for a pension and was approved for \$80 per annum. What we found interesting, was when he stated, "...my trade and occupation has been that of a stone cutter and stone engraver..." We often see early gravestone carvers referred to as "stone cutters."



Figure 9. Gravestone of Margaret Winnie d.1817 at Wolven Cemetery, Saugerties, NY. (Photo Credit – Donna J. McClain, Find a Grave).

John Isham – New York State Gravestone Carver (continued)

Heading south, we stopped at several other cemeteries and viewed Isham's work. At First Church Cemetery in East Haddam, we saw the graves of John and Lois's infants, Alfred and Laure, whose stones he had carved. Typical throughout our travels, we saw the striated, upswept wings and face with the long nose.

On our way home, we stopped at Farmington to see if John carved any stones after he left Canaan. In Memento Mori Cemetery we found three stones: Eliphalet Wadsworth - died 1823, Elnathan Hooker - died November 20, 1822 and Robert Fairchild - died January 21, 1822. These were all marble with no winged faces.

This concluded our research on John Isham. During his few years in New York State, he carved 20 gravestones and carved another six in Conn. after his return there in 1819. Of course, more of his work may be discovered in the future. It is interesting to note, upon his return to Conn., he only carved in marble and we never saw another winged face.



Figure 10. Gravestone of Clarissa Kellogg, d.1817 at Grassy Hill Cemetery, Falls Village, CT.



Figure 11. Gravestone of Philena Hood, d.1820, at Hillside Cemetery, East Canaan, CT.



Figure 12. Gravestone of Thaddeus Austin, d.1821 at Hillside Cemetery, East Canaan, CT.

John Isham – New York State Gravestone Carver (continued)

Zion Rural Cemetery in N.Y., where we first started with this John Isham story, was in atrocious condition, as so many cemeteries are. We went back and cleaned and straightened his stones, as well as repaired one and set one in a concrete collar. We also cleaned those in Lawyersville.

We still felt something needed to be done to bring attention to this carver of winged faces here in central N.Y. With the help of our dear friend, Mary Dexter, we paid for a historical sign which gave a brief history of this noteworthy carver. Now our work was done. It had led us on an interesting adventure.



Figure 13. Gravestone of Elnathan Hooker, d. 1822 at Memento Mori Cemetery, Farmington, CT.



Figure 14. Gravestone of Elphalet Wadsworth, d. 1823 at Memento Mori Cemetery, Farmington, CT.

2024 NYSAA Awards Recipients

Jonathan Lothrop, New York State Museum



Mike Beardsley accepting the Whitney Commendation on behalf of Laurie Rush with Jon Lothrop.



Matt Kirk receiving the Fellows Award with Sponsor Joe Zarzinski & Jon Lothrop.

To all Chapter Treasurers and At Large Members: 2024 dues are due!

Please send your dues to:

Treasurer Ann E.W. Morton
amorton@rochester.rr.com
Phone 315 986 3086

c/o Morton Archaeological Research Services
1215 Macedon Center Road
Macedon, NY 14502-9301

This year, you can also pay your dues with PayPal—here's how (works for At-Large members and Chapters!)

PAY YOUR DUES (AND MAKE DONATIONS) WITH PAYPAL

It's easy. Login to your PayPal account (what if I don't have a PayPal account? See below**)

On your home screen, look for Quick links, Send money:

Click on Send money. It will ask for a name, email or phone no. Put in the NYSAA email:
nysaa.paypal@gmail.com

And click the little envelope (send). Fill in the amount (At Large dues are \$20.00). You can add a note at the bottom (helpful if you make a donation, like the Funk Foundation).

Click continue. You will see the "What's this payment for?" box. Click "Sending to a friend"

You will see: "How do you want to pay? This is your bank account or whatever. Pick your payment method and click "Next". Review your payment, and click "Send Payment Now."

You are done!

**If you don't have a paypal account you can create a personal account for free: <https://www.paypal.com/us/webapps/mpp/account-selection>

Or if you don't want a paypal account, you can ask me to send you an INVOICE through paypal—that contains a "pay now" link so you can pay without a paypal account. Email me at amorton@rochester.rr.com and I'll send you the link.

If your Chapter would like to use PayPal for dues, donations etc. it's easy to set up a Not-for-Profit account. Just email me for the instructions!



NEW YORK STATE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION