



FRIENDS OF OCONEE HILL CEMETERY

Spring 2019

*Happy 20th Birthday,
Friends of Oconee Hill*



OCONEE HILL CEMETERY
1856

NATIONAL REGISTER
OF HISTORIC PLACES

THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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Cover Image: *Scenes from Oconee Hill
Cemetery over the past 20 years.*

From the President

Suddenly it's spring in Athens! This year's March and April camellias, azaleas and dogwoods seemed more abundant than ever while February's bright swaths of daffodils in the cemetery marked the beginning of a very special year for the Friends. We will celebrate our platinum—20th—anniversary this year!

In this issue, you'll enjoy FOH board member Jody Wilson Boling's feature article about the history of the Friends since our founding in February 1999, while the cover photo montage editor Anna Dyer compiled illustrates many of our accomplishments over the past two decades. An anniversary celebration is tentatively planned in conjunction with our 2019 Annual Business Meeting in October. We hope you will join us!

Each spring we acknowledge our membership, a number that has grown in spectacular fashion from a handful of Athens Garden Council members under the dynamic leadership of the late Mary Anne Kenner to a robust and growing roster of more than 425 individuals, families and organizations under the care of our dedicated membership co-chairs Ann Moseley and Jodie Guy. Thank you all!

Over the winter, the FOH board developed plans for projects we hope to take on in the coming months; some are new, while others are "finishing touches" on previous projects.

The trustees are now considering a multi-phase design plan proposed by the Friends for the entire Sexton's House Complex that addresses both aesthetic and usage issues for the public-use area of Oconee Hill Cemetery. As part of that plan, we expect to begin needed repairs and renovations to the existing Sexton's Office structure soon so that the cemetery manager's office can be relocated there from its temporary location in the Sexton's House Hartman Room.

In addition, we hope to remove several dead, dying or threatening pine trees on the knoll surrounding the Wingfield Chapel, the first steps toward implementing an earlier landscape plan necessarily delayed while the trustees evaluate the city's proposal to extend the North Oconee Greenway through the cemetery.

In March, in recognition of Women's History Month, the Friends recognized four more remarkable Athens women—Mary Saye Wells, Mamie Howard, Louise "Louie" Lane and Ruby Anderson—who are buried in Oconee Hill through a series of profiles published on our Constant Contact email platform. Please make sure that we have your email address so that you can receive these email news and feature releases in your inbox.

And, at dawn on April 21, the Dr. Ryan Baer, newly installed senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Athens, conducted our fourth annual Easter sunrise service at the Wingfield Chapel. We are delighted to provide the community such a scenic and serene setting for this most meaningful observance.

As the days lengthen and warm, please visit Oconee Hill Cemetery and see for yourself why our green hills and valleys have been so special to our community for 163 years. With your help, FOH can head toward another 20 years of service to this local treasure.

With my thanks,
NANCY BUNKER BOWEN
President

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The Friends of Oconee Hill Cemetery is a nonprofit organization in Athens, Georgia, that is dedicated to building a partnership between the cemetery and the community by focusing attention on the cemetery's beauty, historic legacy, facilities and needs, particularly for the restoration and support of the cemetery through membership dues and other funding.



Happy Birthday, FOH!

by Jody Wilson Boling



Garden Club Council representatives (left to right) Paula McDonald, Beth Lewis, Virginia Shultz, Helen Costantino, Mary Ann Kenner, Jerry Caskin, Sara Marbut and Anita Sams Holton, at the February 1999 signing ceremonies.

With each year, we celebrate the accomplishments of the past, build on the successes in the present and make plans for the future. As the Friends of Oconee Hill Cemetery reach our 20th birthday, let us look back at the past and ahead to the future.

The city of Athens purchased the original 17 acres of Oconee Hill in 1855 when the Jackson Street cemetery became overcrowded. An overseeing board of trustees was organized in 1856. The cemetery soon became the favorite final resting place for Athenians, who marked the graves of their loved ones with beautiful monuments and mausoleums often surrounded with graceful and intricate iron fences. The *Annals of Athens* describes the cemetery as “one of the most beautiful of spots, adorned by nature with forest trees, with vines covering hillsides, clinging to rocks and climbing the somber pines, while at the foot of the hills the Oconee murmurs between banks redolent with honeysuckle and jessamine.”

By 1898, with almost all of the lots in the original section sold, the trustees

acquired an additional 82 acres on the east side of the river. An iron truss bridge was constructed in 1899 and continues to be the only connection between the original “old” section and the “new” east section.

By the late 1990s it became apparent this beautiful and historic cemetery needed to be restored to its former glory. An organization’s greatest assets are the members who give freely of their time, talents and money to support the work they have undertaken with dedication and hard work, and Oconee Hill is fortunate to have many such supporters. In 1999, Mary Anne Bittner Kenner and a group of Garden Club members and other community leaders gathered to organize the Friends of Oconee Hill Cemetery.

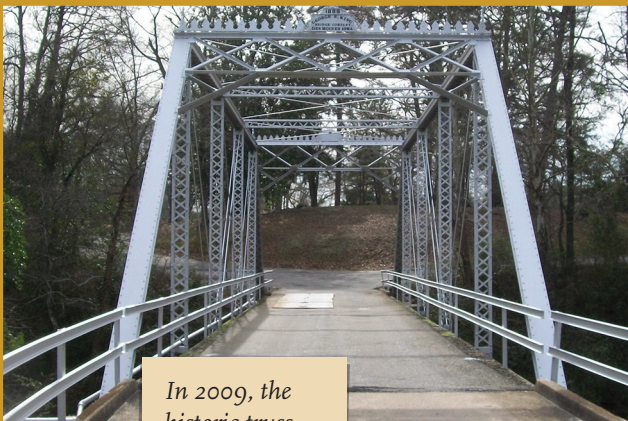
Using Kenner’s organizational and leadership qualities, the Friends quickly began the work described in the group’s mission statement. Burial and gravediggers’ records were copied and preserved; hand railings were installed; downed trees and limbs were removed, and some monuments that had toppled over were repaired. In 2004, the Heritage Garden Club partnered with FOH to provide landscaping for the entrance, well house and other areas in honor of Sylvia Gibson, past president and charter member of the Garden Club.

In 2005, FOH focused on renovating the Sexton’s House. The trustees had purchased the former

manager’s residence of Athens Manufacturing Company around 1897. Plans were developed, the contractor was hired and the Friends began a well-organized campaign to raise the necessary funds. Mr. Terry Wingfield, then chair of the Frances Wood Wilson Foundation, stepped forward and presented a challenge grant of \$75,000, which FOH matched through the generosity of membership and the Athens community.

Restoration began in January 2007 and the ribbon cutting was held in September the same year. The beautifully appointed rooms, named in honor of generous families and groups, were furnished with period furniture, chandeliers and rugs—gifts from Friends members and other community leaders. In 2008, the Athens-Clarke Heritage Foundation acknowledged years of hard work and dedication by the leadership and members of FOH, strategic partners and individuals who love this beautiful cemetery with a historic preservation award for Outstanding Rehabilitation.

FOH also began cleaning the Old Pauper Burial Ground and the adjacent African-American Burial Ground, which lies between the south side of West Hill and the Tanyard Branch of the Oconee River. The two areas were not protected by



In 2009, the historic truss bridge was given a facelift.

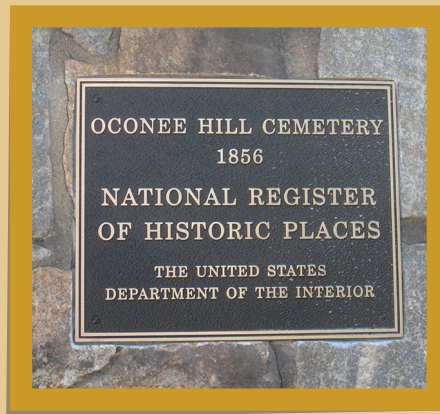
perpetual care agreements and by the 1920s, were overgrown and essentially abandoned. FOH financed and organized cleaning and clearing and is committed to maintaining and restoring hallowed ground.

Concerned about the appearance and condition of the historic truss bridge after more than a century of daily use, in 2009, FOH made an engineering and structural analysis of the bridge and developed a plan to address issues, financed with a grant from the Watson-Brown Foundation. Then, with grant money, a gift from major donors Robert and Sylvia Gibson and the generosity of other donors, FOH raised the necessary funds to clean, prime, paint and make necessary repairs on the bridge. This architectural beauty will continue to provide families and visitors with safe access to both sections of the cemetery as well as a beautiful link from the past to the present.

FOH, along with the trustees and Congregation Children of Israel decided to apply for designation on the National Register of Historic Places. After gathering specific documentation, including maps and photographs, they submitted the nomination application in 2012. The U.S. Department of Interior Historic Properties Review Board approved it, and the cemetery was officially placed on the register in May 2013, formally recognizing the property's "architectural, historic or archaeological significance."

A 100-year-old dream was realized in 2014 with the construction of an open-air chapel, situated on a beautiful knoll at the eastern end of the bridge. Once again, a grant from the Frances Wood Wilson Foundation and private donations made this possible. The chapel, named by major donor Terry Wingfield in honor of generations of the Wingfield family, is much used as a site for weddings and other gatherings.

By 2015, FOH turned their efforts to other projects that would continue to complement the mission statement. The beautiful antebellum cast-iron fence that surrounds the Lumpkin and Cobb lot was in desperate need of repairs, refurbishment and preserva-



In 2013, Oconee Hill Cemetery was listed on the National Register of Historic Places

tion. The Friends turned to the Watson-Brown Foundation and Lumpkin and Cobb family descendents to raise funds to fully restore the fence. By the summer of 2018, the entire fence had been repaired, cleaned and restored to its former glory.


Several departments at the University of Georgia, faculty members and UGA student volunteers undertook a Geographic Information System mapping project on the old section of the cemetery. The result was the identification of 316 graves of veterans who served in wars and conflicts from the American Revolution to Vietnam. This work is ongoing,

and FOH is committed to ensuring perpetual care for the veterans who have served our country with honor.

After Tropical Storm Irma devastated many century-old trees in the cemetery in 2017, local garden clubs and other organizations stepped in to help FOH raise money to replace downed trees. The Friends developed a website, Facebook page, a brochure and other media outlets to keep membership and the community apprised of work and events. The membership of FOH continues to grow, and thanks to continued financial support from dues, memorial, and donations, our work is sustained and supported.


With so much history and so many accomplishments in a mere 20 years, FOH continues to build on the legacy of positive partnerships with the community and to set the stage for a bright future. The Sexton's House and Wingfield Chapel are used for community gatherings and receptions for families to receive guests before and after burials of their loved ones. Acquisitions and gifts from members keep the Sexton's House updated and functional. Gravesites continue to be sold, and several families are raising funds to repair and restore monuments and mausoleums in their family lots. Each Easter, a sunrise service is well attended, and the annual Veterans Day Observance is the only such public observance in Athens-Clarke County.

Happy 20th birthday to the Friends of Oconee Hill Cemetery!


**PIONEERS AND LEGENDS OF
 OCONEE HILL CEMETERY**
FRESHMAN COLLEGE EVENT
FRIDAY, JULY 26, 2019
7-8:30 P.M.
 Mary Anne Lamar Cobb, Mildred
 Lewis Rutherford, Lucy May
 Stanton, Dianne Davison, Howell
 Cobb, Fred Davison, Thomas Dyer
 and Dan Magill
EVERYONE IS INVITED.
FACULTY MEMBER:
GARRISON BICKERSTAFF

**FOURTH ANNUAL EASTER
 SUNRISE SERVICE**

On Easter Sunday, April 21, at 6:30 a.m., the fourth annual sunrise service was held at Oconee Hill Cemetery. Geoffrey Wood played the opening on his trumpet. Tom Wilfong, chair of the trustees of Oconee Hill Cemetery, gave a welcome. Dr. Ryan Baer, senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, gave the litany for his Easter message. Tom Hodgson had sent out two Constant Contact emails about the Easter sunrise service. The crowd has grown larger each year. The Gospel lesson was from Luke 24:1-12. After Dr. Baer's message, called "An Idle Tale," the attendees sang the hymn "Christ is Risen! Shout Hosanna!" Dr. Baer gave the charge and the benediction. As the crowd left, they sang "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today! Alleluia!" and said "Amen" in unison.



Featured Stone:

Wilson Lumpkin, West Hill, Lot 181

Wilson Lumpkin was born in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, on January 14, 1783, and moved to Georgia in 1784 when his parents settled in the part of Wilkes County that later became Oglethorpe County. Lumpkin served his state as a legislator, congressman, governor, commissioner to Cherokee Indians and state agent of the Western and Atlantic Railroad. Lumpkin was also a U.S. senator and a trustee of the University of Georgia.

Even though the distinctive design of lots circling West Hill at Oconee Hill Cemetery is the work of UGA math professor James Camak, it is no accident that Lumpkin's lot is at the very top. Lumpkin, whose 700-acre plantation was directly adjacent to the land that became Oconee Hill Cemetery, donated additional land to be within view of his home. Oconee Hill Cemetery opened in 1856, and Lumpkin's deed to the lot atop West Hill is dated 1858.

Lumpkin was married twice. His first wife was Elizabeth Walker, and they had six surviving children: Lucy, Ann, Pleiades Orion, Wilson, William and Elizabeth. His second wife was Annis Hopkins, and their children were Samuel, John Calhoun and Martha.

Lumpkin's son Samuel died in 1839 when he was a student at UGA. He was initially buried at the Jackson Street Cemetery, but after Oconee Hill Cemetery was established, Lumpkin reinterred him in the family plot. When another of Lumpkin's sons—his namesake Wilson—was just three or four, he became lost in the woods near their home and was not found until the following day. The young boy's experience produced a "peculiar mental disorganization from which he never recovered," according to his obituary. He, too, was buried in the family lot.

Lumpkin died in Athens on December 28, 1870, and was buried next to his sons at the top of West Hill. In 1918, David Crenshaw Barrow, chancellor of the university and chair of the board of trustees of the Oconee Cemetery Association, erected a monument in memory of Lumpkin, his great-grandfather, on the West Hill site.

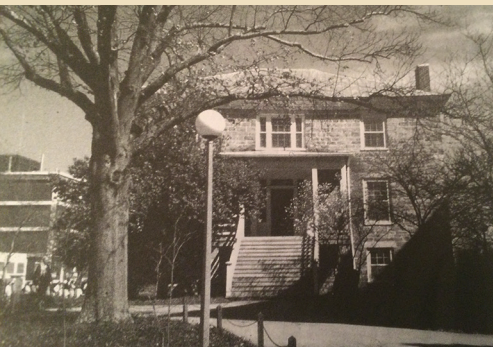
At the beginning of the 1830s, nearly 125,000 Native Americans lived on millions of acres of land in Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina and Florida. White settlers would do anything to grab the Indians' land to grow cotton and other agricultural products. The discovery of gold in Dahlonega, Georgia, in 1828 added more public pressure to force the Cherokees to leave. Appointed U.S. Commissioner to the Cherokee Indians in 1836, Lumpkin played a major role in the removal

of the Cherokee from north Georgia, on the Trail of Tears. Native Americans were forced to walk more than 1,200 miles to what is now Oklahoma. Historians estimate that more than 5,000 Cherokee died as a result of the journey.

Many things bear Lumpkin's name, including a town in south Georgia, a county in north Georgia and Lumpkin Street in Athens. Lumpkin completed his retirement home in 1844 at the top of Cedar Hill. Known today as the Lumpkin House, or Rock House, it is now surrounded by the buildings of UGA's South Campus. His family donated it to the university in 1907, along with much of the land surrounding it.



Wilson Lumpkin's marker is atop West Hill



Lumpkin's home "Rock House" is located on what is now UGA's south campus

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We wish to thank our 2018–2019 members. Without them, the accomplishments mentioned in this newsletter would have been impossible. The following list is current as of April 10, 2019. Please note: This list does not include gifts to the capital campaign, which will be acknowledged separately.

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