



FRIENDS OF OCONEE HILL CEMETERY

Spring 2020

MAJOR OSCAR J. BROWN
1ST U.S. CAVALRY
BORN AT GORDON CO. GA.
NOV. 26, 1858.
GRADUATED AT
U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY
JUNE 16, 1877.

ENGAGED IN BARROCK
CAMPAIGN 1876.
ALSO IN THOSE WITH INDIANS
ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO
1880—1881.
INSTRUCTOR IN U.S. MILITARY
ACADEMY WEST POINT
1888—1887.

BROWN

DELPHIA ALMEDA BROWN
NEE HAMPTON
BORN WILKES CO. NC.
MAY 25, 1813
DIED AT WASHINGTON GA.
MAY 28, 1859.

*At the approach of death, with serene
and true courage, she said to her friends:*

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Cover Image: The gravesite of Major Oscar J.
Brown, West Hill, lot 184a. Photo by Dennis
McDaniel Photography.

From the President

In reading previous “Messages from the President,” I am keenly aware of the word “busy” in relation to the activities of the Friends. That is not our present status as we shelter in place hoping to minimize the devastation that could result from this pandemic. These times are unlike anything most of us have experienced, and we started canceling assembled meetings in early March and incorporating technology to enable us to hear reports and deliberate. We intend to be ready and able to resume gathering and working together for the cemetery as soon as conditions are safe. We have dreams and plans!

Reading those messages has filled me with pride and admiration for what the Friends have brought forth in the past 21 years. I don’t think any of us who worked to establish the organization dreamed of this many accomplishments. Oconee Hill Cemetery has never looked better than it does today! Although others are responsible for the grounds, we were the impetus for improvement, and the Friends have originated and facilitated many measures that are securing the fabric of the cemetery. A lot of things would not have happened if you and your predecessors had not raised your voices and contributed generously.

Looking over Harry Yates’ March 2008 treasurer’s reports, I was delighted to see names of those still in our midst. Harry was a meticulous treasurer, keeping us informed of new members, renewing members and gifts. He kept his camera ever at hand to document daily the restoration and renovation of the Sexton’s House. Harry had a great sense of humor that helped us over a number of bumps in the road during our initial attempts to get organized. It was he who joined Mary Anne Kenner and me in speedily gathering and submitting the information needed to obtain tax-exempt status when we got the IRS’ surprising notification that the application was incomplete. I will never forget those two weeks! Or Harry and JoAnn, our first corresponding secretary. Or Mary Anne, whose interest, unique talents and perseverance resulted in the founding of the Friends of Oconee Hill Cemetery. She was masterful. She energized us, and she made us proud to be a part of the Friends. She set the tone, and a succession of able presidents has continued her good work.

The Friends and the whole of Oconee Hill Cemetery have greatly expanded my friendship circle and enriched my life. Seeing names of those still in our midst and continuing to support the cemetery 12 years later triggered an upward leap of my heart. There was a corresponding poignant tug upon seeing names of cherished Friends, fellow laborers on behalf of the cemetery, who now rest within its bounds.

While we are sheltering at home, we can continue to advocate for Oconee Hill Cemetery. Study the accompanying list of paid members and think of those who should be there but are missing. Write a note and invite them to join you in being a Friend—be sure to include our mailing address (on the back cover of this newsletter)!

Or send us their names and addresses and we’ll write. We can make this time of waiting a productive one for the Friends and the cemetery as well as an opportunity to reach out to lifelong friends. If your name is missing, please take care of that oversight. We need you! The names of people renewing or joining are printed in this newsletter.

Another way you can help is to recommend new members for the Friends board. We have open positions. We need people who have fresh ideas and approaches to keep us moving forward. We need people of all ages. Cemeteries are parks and wonderful classrooms for teaching young children, and their parents can develop programs. Those you recommend don’t have to have expressed an interest. Sometimes our interest develops after someone else involves us. That is precisely what happened to me 50 years ago. I had no idea then that I would devote so much of the remainder of my life to learning about cemeteries and Oconee Hill in particular.

The text for three more volumes about Oconee Hill Cemetery is in my computer, and I occasionally add annotations. George proofread volume 1 many times and urged me after its publication to keep working and finish the remaining volumes while he could help and be included in the acknowledgments rather than in the contents. Other things intruded, and now he will be in the contents. My love of people lures me from the computer, but I intend to complete the work. Help me reach that goal more quickly and help the cemetery shine even brighter as an Athens gem by recommending people to move into these board positions.

Please keep safe.

Charlotte Thomas Marshall
President

NEW LIFE FOR THE SEXTON'S OFFICE

Many of you may have noticed the small abandoned cottage just north of the Sexton's House. For many years prior to 2017, this was the sexton's office, where all Oconee Hill Cemetery records were kept and where the sexton conducted the official business of the cemetery. There was a brief period of time when we had both a sexton and a general manager on staff, and we used one of the main rooms in the Sexton's House as an office for the new general manager, Donald H. Smith. The official sexton, Brian Adler, remained in the sexton's office.

With the increasing use of the Sexton's House as a venue for funeral services and receptions, the flow of guests in the house has been hindered by the general manager's office occupying one corner of the building. The Board of Directors of the Friends of Oconee Hill Cemetery have proposed to the Board of Trustees moving the general manager's office to the sexton's office cottage and thereby improving the flow of guests through the house.

This project has been accepted by the Trustees and will be jointly funded by the two boards.

We are currently studying the sexton's office to determine what renovations are necessary before the relocation of the general manager's office. We know that the windows will have to be repaired or replaced. The cottage will need to be repainted both inside and out. We want gutters and downspouts on both sides of the building and across the front porch. We will need to replace rotten wood on the siding of the house and on the decorative trim of the porch.

On the interior, we must address the sagging floor inside the cottage. Once we have leveled the floor, we want to sand and refinish it. We also need a new period-appropriate light fixture for the room. Finally, we will cut two vents on either side of the chimney on the back wall to blow insulation into the attic. During the entire project, we will be watching for any documents or artifacts that may turn up.

As of April 2020, we are meeting with contractors and soliciting estimates for this work. If the estimates are beyond our budget, we may have to postpone some of the work described above. We think now that construction will begin in mid-summer of this year, with completion by the end of the year. We have stressed to all prospective contractors the importance of recognizing the historic nature of the sexton's office and preserving its character and complementary relationship to the Sexton's House. All of us look forward to the reopening of the cottage and using the space as it was intended for over a hundred years. Keep watching the progress as you enter the gates of Oconee Hill.



[Note: Oconee Hill Cemetery ceased using the term "sexton" in 2017. While many of the Friends and friends liked the term because of its historical association with the cemetery, the Trustees thought it had some religious connotations that were no longer valid. The title "general manager" is more descriptive of the job that Mr. Smith now holds.]

COVID-19 AND OCONEE HILL CEMETERY

As we approach Holy Week, it seems almost impossible that many of us had never heard of a coronavirus until the latter part of January. This unimaginable pandemic has now turned our lives upside down in just two months. I thought you, our Friends, might be interested in some of the decisions we have made during this difficult time and the precautions we have taken to guard against the spread of the virus among our staff, volunteers and visitors at the cemetery.

We decided early on that we would try to remain open. While I never saw “cemeteries” listed as either essential or nonessential businesses, we took the position that they are essential to families in their time of need. We also recognized that the spring growing season is the most critical time of the year for landscape maintenance. We thought we could continue to operate under the safety recommendations provided by the CDC and the local, state and federal governments. We maintain a 6-foot separation for all social interactions and for our employees in their work environment. We encourage each other to wash our hands frequently with soap and warm water. We try to avoid touching our faces at all times. We do not allow any large gatherings in the cemetery.

The Board of Trustees has not met face-to-face since February 19, 2020. We met on March 25 and April 15 via Zoom. It is not quite the same as meeting in person, but we can see and hear each other and we have been able to make decisions necessary for the cemetery. The board will continue its virtual meetings as long as the COVID-19 threat exists.

One of the hardest decisions we have made was the one to cancel our Easter sunrise service. The Trustees knew that

we had to cancel the service, but it was still hard because the service has become so meaningful to all of us. This would have been our fifth year; we had everything lined up and had planned a publicity campaign to reach new audiences. We expected a large crowd. We take comfort in the fact that this service is so popular, and we look forward to hosting it in 2021.

I have continued to meet individually with our general manager, Don Smith, every Monday. We observe our 6-foot physical separation without fail. The main reason we continue to meet is the need to sign deeds and other legal documents. So far, the business side of Oconee Hill seems to be going smoothly. We have had a relatively good first quarter. I have been impressed by the decisions Mr. Smith has made to keep everyone safe. He continues to show prospective buyers available lots, but he does so in a separate vehicle. He points out lots for sale from a distance of 6 feet or more. He uses the telephone and email as much as possible in conducting the business of Oconee Hill.

We have difficult weeks and months ahead. There will be hard decisions to make. At this point, none of us knows how long this pandemic will last and what the new “normal” will look like. Please talk with us about any special situations you may have that relate to Oconee Hill Cemetery. We appreciate your patience and your support during this time. Stay safe. Best wishes, as always.

W. Thomas Wilfong
Chair, Board of Trustees



The Colonial Dames gave the flag at the Oconee Hill Cemetery, and we thank them very much for their generosity.

Featured Stone: Elizabeth Church Robb



Elizabeth Whipple Hunt Church Craig Robb was the third daughter of University of Georgia President Alonzo Church and Sarah Trippe Church. Church taught mathematics before assuming the presidency in 1829, a position he kept until 1859. Elizabeth died of an ovarian tumor in her 44th year on January 6, 1868, at her residence on West 20th Street in the City of New York. She first married Louis Stevenson Craig (1805–1852) with whom she had her only child, Sallie Craig, in 1844 at Ft. Jesup, Louisiana. Lt. Col. Craig was buried at Ft. Rosecrans, San Diego, California.

In 1860, Elizabeth remarried to banker and railroad executive James Robb of New Orleans and moved with him to Chicago. She spent the war years there aiding nearby Confederate prisoners and fighting her own battle with cancer. After her death, one Georgia newspaper reported, "We are pleased to learn that a movement is on foot, under the auspices of a distinguished Confederate General, to erect by contributions from Confederate prisoners of war, a monument at Oconee Hill Cemetery, on West Hill, at Athens to the memory of that Christian gentlewoman, Mrs. James Robb, of New York City." This is how Elizabeth is most remembered today. She is buried on West Hill, lot 103 1/2.

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