

EPITAPH

The Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery

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Thomas W. Boyde, Jr.

Rochester's First Black Architect and his decorative masterpiece: Monroe Community Hospital

Text and photos by Richard Reisem

T Intricate architectural details adorn the façades of the Monroe Community Hospital at the intersection of 435 East Henrietta and Westfall roads. It is a visual delight with cast-stone gargoyles and human statues, stone columns and pilasters, and an endless array of terra cotta and cast-stone decorative elements. The contrasting colors of red brick with white stone embellishments give this 20th-century Italianate structure a sumptuous quality not often found in a hospital, especially considering that this one was built in 1931–1933 during America's worst depression.

(Continued inside)



Monroe Community Hospital was built in 1931–33, designed by Siegmund Firestone with decorative architectural decorations by the young, trailblazing African-American architect, Thomas W. Boyde, Jr.

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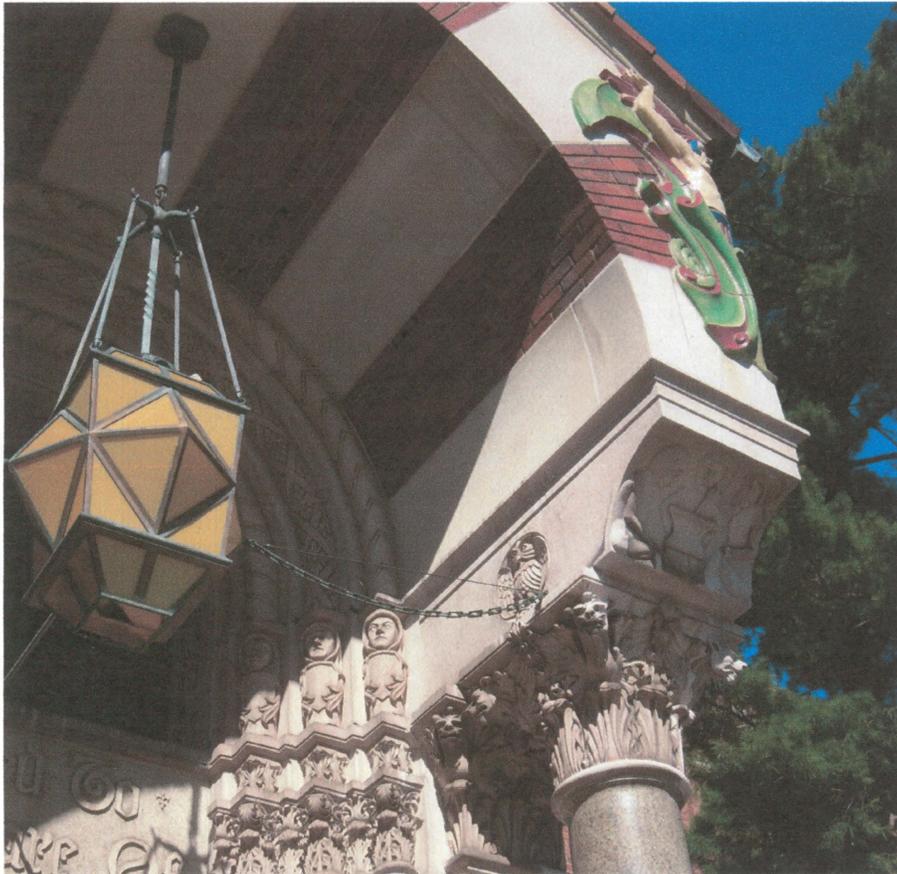
- ◀ Path Through History
- ◀ Knowles Family Plot
- ◀ Fundraiser

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Inside, the hallways are made cheerful with color tiles and bas-relief terracotta portrait medallions. Walking these sparkling halls is reinvigoration itself. The man responsible for these brilliant decorative touches was Thomas Wilson Boyde, Jr. (1905–1981), the first African-American architect in Rochester. The principal architect of this distinguished hospital

was Siegmund Firestone, who added the many rows of spacious windows to provide plenty of light and air in the hospital rooms and who designed advanced utilities and the many other progressive features that constitute an outstanding hospital design. But the decorations were the creative efforts of Thomas Boyde.

Boyde was born in Washington, D.C., December 25, 1905.



Rich architectural decorations adorn the hospital exterior with cast-stone gargoyles, human and animal statuary, and floral designs. An Art Deco lantern lights the hospital entrance.

He was educated at University of Minnesota, University of Michigan, and Syracuse University, where he was graduated in 1928 with a Bachelor of Architecture degree. He was the first black architecture graduate at Syracuse.

His senior thesis was on the design concepts of the State Tower Building, the tallest building in Syracuse, 23 stories high, designed by Thompson & Churchill Architects of New York City and built in 1927. Boyde's thesis won him an award of \$1,500, paid in gold. An award of that level for a college thesis was quite generous in 1927.



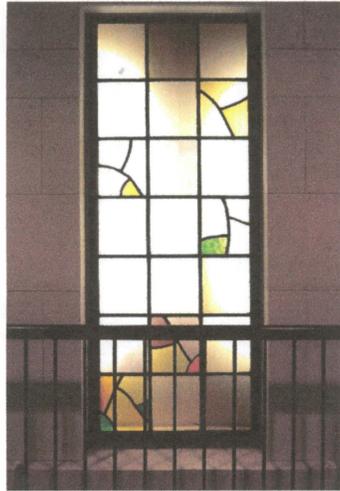
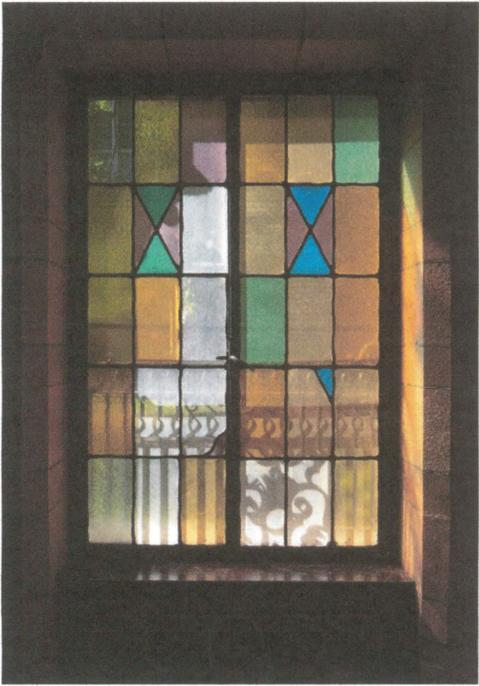
A typical arched window incorporates a terra cotta sculpture of growing plants with blossoms and cubby-holed treasures, column capitals that include horse busts and dog heads, and elaborate wrought-iron window guards. The leaded-glass window has colored panes in geometric shapes.

He received a master's degree in civil engineering from Brown University, where he was the first black graduate in civil engineering at Brown. Part of his education included study of architecture of the Lombardy region of northern Italy.

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Stone figures like this crouching, downcast man depict persons with medical needs.



The hospital interior features Art Deco windows in a variety of shapes and window-pane patterns.

An interior leaded-glass window with colored panes in rectangular and triangular shapes.



Boyde designed cheerful terra cotta wall features like this flower and twin birds display.



Wide hallways accommodate wheelchairs traveling in two directions and areas of brightly colored walls with welcoming seating.

Interior lighting is provided by overhead fixtures and wall sconces like this one, all designed by Thomas Boyde.





An idyllic pastoral mural scene in a main hallway offers a time to pause and enjoy it.

His first work as a beginning architect was at the firm of Schultz & Weaver in New York City. In the late 1920s, Schultz & Weaver designed the Lexington Hotel, and Boyd was put to work on elements of its design. He also worked for Vertner Woodson Tandy; Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, and the New York State Architect's Office.

He came to Rochester in 1930 to apply for an open position with Siegmund Firestone, who was a native of Romania and received his education in Germany, after which he came to America. Firestone had an office in New York City before opening one in Rochester.

When Boyd applied for a job with Firestone, his secretary, with a distinct lack of enthusiasm, announced that there was a young black man in the office who maintained he was an architect. When Firestone shook his hand, he said, "I was not aware that you were a Negro." Boyd answered, "You advertised for an architect. You didn't ask for the color of my skin."

But Firestone was charmed and impressed and the two had a fine working relationship. Construction on the Monroe Community Hospital began in 1931 and was completed in 1933. The innovations in interior design and the beautiful ornate exterior earned national recognition. The building was heralded as a model health care facility, and one publication called it "the most efficient installation of its kind anywhere." It set new standards for hospital design.

In 1937, Boyd returned to Washington, D.C., to work with Albert Irvin Cassell. In 1940, he found himself back in Rochester working in the architectural office of Frank Quinlan, a native Rochesterian who was educated at Notre Dame University.

While working for Quinlan, Thomas Boyd earned his New York State architect's license, and in 1947 he felt he was capable of handling all phases of an architect's job and set up his own practice in his home, but later moved to an office at 104 East Avenue, where he worked from 1957 until his death in 1981.

He designed 13 Star Market grocery supermarkets and several Big N grocery stores. He also contributed his decorative skills to the design of the Rundel Memorial Library, which had the local architectural firm of Gordon & Kaelber as principal architects. Boyd designed a building

for Great Lakes Press. He also designed Woodie View Apartments on St. Paul Street, and many other residential and commercial buildings. His private residences were primarily ranch-style structures with a very mid-twentieth-century look, which today is called the Fifties Look. His signature residential style was to feature interior curved walls and corner windows in his designs.

Thomas Boyd lived with his family (wife Jennie, son Thomas III, and two daughters, Dolores R. and



Soothing colors in the cafeteria are inviting to patients, visitors, and staff. Note the square Art Deco ceiling light fixtures.

Barbara M.) on Winterroth Street, one block east of Goodman Street North between Bay Street and Clifford Avenue.

After a long illness, Thomas Boyd died on September 12, 1981 at the age of 75 years. He is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Range 7, Lot 74. It would have been nice if he had designed his cemetery monument, but there is, unfortunately, no marker on his grave.

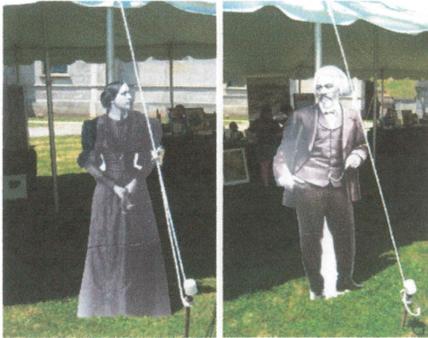


This is the State Tower Building in Syracuse, the tallest in the city and built in 1927. It inspired Thomas Boyd to write an award-winning senior thesis about its design and construction.

Path Through History Event at Mount Hope Cemetery

by Richard Reisem

On a sunny, halcyon Saturday, June 18, 2015, about 200 visitors attended the Path Through History program. They parked their cars at the south entrance to the cemetery



Cutouts of Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass invited visitors to pose with two of the most prominent permanent residents in Mount Hope Cemetery. In real life, Frederick Douglass was 6 feet, 7 inches tall.

and had the opportunity to visit the crematory and the interior of the 1912 Gothic Revival chapel, both of which were open for visitation on that day. Genealogy lookups were available in the cemetery office.

Trolleys transported the attendees to the north entrance area where a brass band from Syracuse (Excelsior Civil War Cornet Band) gave a series of concerts between stage appearances by costumed historic figures, Frederick Douglass and Nathaniel Rochester. You could be photographed with cutout figures of Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass.



Tents were set up to introduce visitors to the Strong Museum of Play, Bausch & Lomb history, Haskell Monument Company showing how gravestones are made, and the Rochester Baseball Historical Society, presenting early baseball demonstrations. Also open for a view inside was the old 1862 chapel. And in the gatehouse, a Western Union Telegraph Morse Code exhibit and demonstration was all about communication before the telephone.

Especially captivating was the group of sheep busy keeping the south lawn grass clipped, revealing lawn mowing in the early days before mechanical mowers. An intrepid few climbed Ravine Avenue to the spooky Lewis Henry Morgan mausoleum to learn a little bit about the man who founded the science of anthropology. It was a memorable day, as many attendees attested.



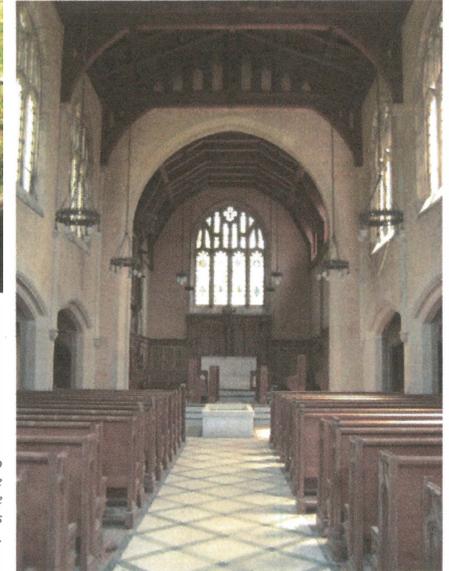
Tony Brancato and his son Brian explained how baseball was played in the early days.



The Excelsior Cornet Band from Syracuse played uplifting music throughout the festive day.



Visitors were enthralled by sheep grazing in the north lawn of Mount Hope Cemetery to demonstrate how grass was kept clipped before mechanical mowers.



A rare visit inside the 1912 chapel was provided to visitors. Notice the white marble plinth at the end of the white marble aisle. The central portion of the plinth is the top surface of an elevator that raises and lowers caskets from the basement to the chapel service level.

KNOWLES FAMILY PLOT RESTORED IN MOUNT HOPE

by Richard Reisem

Several years ago, the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery established what we called, "The Ugly Wall". It was a group of photographs that we tacked to a wall in the gatehouse showing toppled and sunken gravestones, overgrown plots, and other unsightly situations in the cemetery. We estimated the costs to restore each site, which in most cases were quite reasonable amounts, like \$25 to \$100.



Before restoration, the John Knowles family plot had three broken and toppled gravestones and one foundation hanging in the air at the end of the row of monuments.

Our goal was to find ways to restore those sites and pay for the rehabilitation. In some cases, we found descendants who were willing to finance the restoration. In other cases, the more expensive ones, we took

money from our treasury, which was money that had been donated to us by members' annual contributions or provided by interested cemetery friends who gave us



Restored with funds provided by family members, the row of eight gravestones are mended, cleaned, and properly supported.

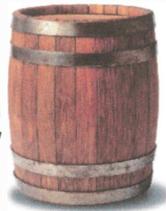
charitable gifts. Also, for some of the most expensive restoration work, we applied for and received grants.

Our Ugly Wall Program is still alive and functioning. One recent example is the John Knowles family plot in Section A, Lot 62. In November 2015, David Champa of Stone Mountain, Georgia, who is a fourth-generation descendant of John and Elizabeth Knowles, visited Mount Hope Cemetery and noticed that three of the eight Knowles gravestones were broken and toppled, and the last two monuments on a common base in the line of gravestones were cantilevered over the foundation stone, which had sunk because of earth erosion.

In December 2015, Champa contacted the Friends of Mount Hope by e-mail, asking if there was any way to have the stones restored. We obtained an estimate for all of the repairs, and Champa, besides contributing money himself, collected donations from four other relatives, (J. E. Johncox, Benjamin Champa, Gail Weber Brown, Donald Battle) all descendants of the Knowles. The total amount of the contributions was \$500, (\$425 for materials, \$75 donation to the Friends of Mount Hope). Richard Miller, Friends board member, donated his labor and expertise to mend the stones, remount and clean them, construct a new wooden foundation form, and pour a new concrete foundation for the last two pendulous gravestones.

John Knowles was born in Ireland in 1803 and died in 1858. He had been a cooper, a very necessary

occupation in the early 1800s when the production of wheat flour was the paramount industry in Rochester. Coopers made the wooden barrels in which Rochester flour could be shipped around the world. Coopers fashioned the curved wood staves of the barrels and bound them together with metal hoops, fitting the top and bottom ends of the vessel with flat wooden covers.



In the first week of last December 2015, the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery launched a fundraising program to help pay for the restoration of the Moorish gazebo at the north entrance to the cemetery and the bronze Civil War monument by the famous sculptor, Sally James Farnham. So far, 122 individuals and two organizations have responded with donations exceeding \$7,000. We are so very thankful for this outpouring of interest in enhancing this beautiful cultural resource in Rochester, Mount Hope Cemetery. Our grateful thanks to everyone on the list at right, all of whom filled out and sent in the form we sent out to our mailing list.

\$1,000

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

\$500

Abraham Lincoln Camp No. 6 of Union Veterans of the Civil War

\$100 to \$200

Catherine Angell
Jeffrey Babey
Ryan C. Bell
Nancy Bond
Scott Carpenter
Charles Copeland
Patricia Corcoran
Frank & Susan Crego
Dennis R. Donovan
Brent & Susan Downing
Mary Fisher
Eileen Gaisser
Linda Henderberg
Martha Heyneman
Christopher Husson
Geoff Kendig
Thomas Krugh
Hobie & Ellie Lerner
Caroline Maloney
Steve Marschke
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Valerie O'Hara
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Richard Reisem
Joan Schumaker
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Tammy Tingley
Robert E. Westlake
Richard Wilke
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Judith Wood

\$50

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M. Dale Clark
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Susan Cuppini
Sharon & Wentzel
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Grace Waddy
Randy Webb
Virginia & Earl Wensel
Ellen K. Wheeler
Terry Yount
Roger Zaenglein

\$35 and under

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Kathleen Beh
Bruce & Martha Boak
Brad Bovenzi
Peggy Weston Byrd
Julie Choate
Todd Clickner
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SYLVAN WATERS GETS A REHAB

Poor Sylvan Waters! This pond in a large kettle in Section K at the intersection of Indian Trail and Fifth avenues and with a beehive fountain has been derelict for years, covered in the last year or two with green muck. At press time, the City of Rochester has treated Sylvan Waters to remove the algae, which you can see in the photo is cleared in the foreground but still partially visible in the rear. Sylvan Waters has also been cleared of its leaf sediment, and a new electrical line has been installed to operate the recirculating fountain pump. Heaster Restoration will remove the vegetation and repoint the stones of the beehive. The pond also needs rain to return it to its normal depth of seven feet. The fountain may be operating this fall.



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Basic annual membership is \$20.

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See our colorful and informative Web site:
www.fomh.org

