

**Friends of Oakdale Cemetery, Inc.**

520 North 15th Street  
Wilmington, NC 28401

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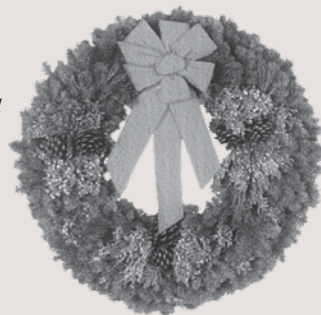
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**Holiday Wreaths Available**

**ORDERS MUST BE PLACED BY DECEMBER 2, 2019.**



The Friends of Oakdale Cemetery offers Christmas wreaths. This year the fresh live wreaths will be identical to last year's - 25 inches across with a waterproof red bow. The wreaths will be placed on the grave site of your beloved ones during the second week of December. **\*\* NOTE: Previous years we had offered trees as another option, but have found them too inconsistent in size from one year to the next and have opted to not continue.**



**Wreath, 25 inches \$35.00 each. (\$2.00 OFF EACH FOR MEMBERS)**

**Provide the name of the person BURIED on the lot and check the appropriate selections.**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ WREATH \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ WREATH \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ WREATH \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ WREATH \_\_\_\_\_

Record YOUR contact information should we need clarification on your order.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

**ORDERS MUST BE PLACED BY DECEMBER 2, 2019.**  
*Make checks payable to:*  
**Friends of Oakdale Cemetery**  
520 N 15th Street  
Wilmington, NC 28401

**If you need assistance with your order, please call the cemetery office at 910-762-5682.**

# Inscriptions

VOLUME 15, NO. 2

FALL 2019



**Mary Lily Kenan Flagler Bingham**

*By Jan Davidson*

*Historian, Cape Fear Museum*



Mary Lily Kenan Flagler Bingham (1867-1917) became notorious when she married one of the richest men of the Gilded Age.

Before she became famous and extraordinarily wealthy, Mary Lily grew up in an affluent household. She was the daughter of William Rand Kenan and Mary Hargrave Kenan. Mary Lily was born in Duplin County,

on June 14, 1867. The family moved to Wilmington when she was a child. Mary Lily was well educated for a woman in the late 19th century: she both attended Tileston School in Wilmington and Peace College in

Raleigh. Miss Kenan was also well known for her musical abilities and according to one account, she was North Carolina's "reigning belle" because of her vivaciousness, beauty, and accomplishments. By this 1890s, Mary Lily had become well acquainted with some of the richest members of Wilmington society. She traveled with Mr. and Mrs. Pembroke Jones and became socially intimate with the Jones' friend, Henry Walters, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Henry

Morrison Flagler.

Mr. Flagler came to have a starring role in Mary Lily's personal life and helped shape the future of the entire Kenan family. Flagler was a fantastically wealthy robber baron. He made his riches through an association with Standard Oil, as a railroad tycoon, and as a land and hotel man. Flagler opened up Florida through building a railroad to Key West and creating "winter resorts." Mary Lily Kenan married the much-older Henry Morrison Flagler in 1901. She was his third wife. Henry Morrison Flagler was 72 years old. She was 34, but it wasn't only the age gap that scandalized the nation. In order to marry Mary Lily, Henry Morrison Flagler had to obtain a divorce from his second wife, who had become mentally ill over the course of their marriage.

*Continued on page 2*

**Calendar of Events**

**Annual Meeting of the Friends of Oakdale Cemetery**

The Annual Meeting of the Friends of Oakdale Cemetery will be held on Tuesday, December 9, 2019 at 11:30 a.m. at the Kenneth Sprunt Office Building.

**Friends of Oakdale Cemetery Board Meetings**

Second Tuesday of every month, 12:00 noon. Kenneth Sprunt Office Building, Oakdale Cemetery.

**Walking Tour - Music and the Women of Oakdale**

**Saturday, October 19, 2019, 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

Join the Friends of Oakdale for music by Susan Savia, acoustic singer and instrumentalist, then tour the cemetery with Jan Davidson, Cape Fear Museum Historian. Listen to period music followed by a tour of many of the most notable and colorful women in the cemetery. \$15.00 per person. Tours are canceled in the event of inclement weather.

**ALL TOURS ARE CANCELED IN THE EVENT OF INCLEMENT WEATHER.**



**Veterans Day Remembrance**

United States Flags will be placed on the graves of veterans of all wars who are buried throughout the cemetery on November 9 at 10:00 a.m.

**Christmas Wreath Sale**

Deadline will be Monday, December 2, 2019 for ordering Christmas wreaths, which will be placed on the graves of loved ones during the second week of December. See back page for more details and ordering information.



## Mary Lily Kenan Flagler Bingham

*Continued from front page*

In order to obtain a divorce, he changed his legal residence to Florida and persuaded the Florida legislature to allow divorce on the grounds of insanity. He was criticized for this action.

According to the Goldsboro Argus, "A Man who would thus cast off an aged wife, blameless herself, is simply beyond execration." When the couple married in 1901 in Duplin County, Flagler gave Mary Lily Kenan "...a check for \$1,000,000, and \$3,00,000 in bonds as a wedding present." After their marriage, Henry lavished gifts and attention on Mary Lily, and she lived a seemingly charmed life in the social spotlight. Henry Flagler died in 1913 and Mary Lily inherited an enormous sum of money.

In 1916, Mary Lily remarried. She and Judge Robert Worth Bingham were wed at the New York City home of Mr. and Mrs. Pembroke Jones. Less than a year later, Mary Lily Kenan Flagler Bingham died after a short illness. According to the Wilmington Morning Star, "...the news of her death produced a profound shock in the family..." This shock seems to have quickly turned to suspicion about how she died. Headlines spoke of a "tragic mystery," "foul play," and "murder" and seemed to imply that Mary Lily's husband may have had something to do with her death. So rather than remaining at rest in Oakdale, first armed guards were stationed around her grave site, and then Mary Lily Kenan Flagler Bingham's body was exhumed in September of 1917. Despite this drama, no charges were ever levied against anyone in the matter of Mrs. Bingham's death. The results of the autopsy were also never released. Rumors of drug use, alcoholism, and murder have swirled around the life of Mary Lily Kenan Flagler Bingham ever since.

Mary Lily's marriage to Henry Flagler helped make her entire family richer than most people's wildest dreams. And after his death, even with her remarriage, she controlled the Flagler fortune. She left most of her millions to her siblings and a niece. She also donated \$1.875 million dollars to the University of North Carolina, which funds the Kenan Professorship Fund to this day. ❖



### Sources

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- Ibid*, p. 48, p. 55
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- "Flagler Kenan" *Goldsboro Daily Argus*, August 24, 1901, p. 4
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- <https://www.flaglermuseum.us/history/whitehall>
- "Marriage of Mrs. M. Flagler" *Saint Albans Daily Messenger*, November 15, 1916, p. 5
- "Mrs. Robert Bingham Dead," *Wilmington Morning Star*, July 28, 1917, p. 10
- "Foul Play Suspected in Flagler Case," *The Statesville Sentinel*, September 24, 1917, p. 7
- "Suspect Murder of Mrs. Robert Bingham," *Fort Wayne News*, Indiana, September 20, 1917, p. 1
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- "Foul Play Suspected in Flagler Case," *The Statesville Sentinel*, September 24, 1917, p. 7
- Exhumation Permission, Charles T. Nesbitt, Consolidated Board of Health, September 18, 1917
- David Leon Chandler, *Henry Flagler: The Astonishing Life and Times of the Visionary Robber Barron who Founded Florida* (New York: MacMillan, 1986)
- "Scandal Lingers, 80 years later," *Wilmington Star*, January 31, 1988, p. 5C
- "Kenan Professorship program helps retain outstanding faculty members," *The Daily Tar Heel*, January 11, 1984, p. 4
- <https://museum.unc.edu/exhibits/show/early-benefactors/mary-lily-kenan-flagler-bingha>

## Hurricane Florence Update

Every day gets better for Oakdale. To recap, over 200 trees were damaged, 126 had to be removed and we could only access 76 stumps to grind. The loss of this many trees has truly changed the landscape of the cemetery. Cost to clean up the trees and vegetation was about \$135,000. There were nearly 100 monuments damaged as a result, mostly of orphaned. We have since been able to upright and repair 88 monuments to date leaving only a few to remain with a cost of \$22,500 to have this work accomplished. And as fate would have it almost a year to the date we were brushed by Hurricane Dorian on September 5th. Thankfully this storm did not produce much damage other than 1 large tree that came down. We were blessed that this storm spared Wilmington as it passed off our coast. ❖



## Retirement of Staff



This Spring, the Oakdale Cemetery had two of its long time employees retire after many years of working at the cemetery. Bertha Register (*pictured at left*) who was the Secretary in the office retired after 22 years of faithful service helping numerous families and visitors to the cemetery over this time, she will be greatly missed. Brian Williams who worked on the maintenance staff for 18 years keeping the grounds sharp and always eager to help families and visitors out on the grounds. We certainly are most grateful for their time working at Oakdale Cemetery and wish them the very best in their new chapter of life, retirement. ❖

## Old Glory Retired



Thanks to the Sons of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the American Revolution Chapters for providing the patriotic service of retiring nearly 150 American US flags this past Flag Day on June 14th. We were also grateful for the participation and preparation of flags by Boy Scout Troop #232 as they

have for the past few years. If you have any worn or torn US flags, you are more than welcome to drop them off at the Oakdale office any day and we will collect them for the Annual Retirement on Flag Day. ❖

## Ivy (Funerary Art)

The use and planting of ivy once was prolific in cemeteries. We all know how hearty ivy grows once established. Families at one point used to plant ivy beds to identify where their loved ones were buried, a long tradition now lost. Ivy was also heavily symbolized on monuments in the 1800s and still continues to be utilized today. Due to its vitality, Ivy is associated with immortality and devotion since it clings to just about anything it grows near. Ivy is symbolized on monuments referring to attachment, friendship or eternal affection. ❖



## Podcasting Tales

Oakdale Cemetery has recently been working with Hunter Ingram at the Star News and doing Podcasts to tell the tales of historical events and some of the folks buried here. To listen to some of the stories go to Cape Fear Unearthed podcasts, these episodes have grown in popularity and tours of the cemetery are being developed around the stories. ❖



## Arbor Day

Thanks to the Cape Fear Garden Club for including Oakdale Cemetery within its annual Arbor Day festivities. A White Oak was planted to commemorate the tradition started 147 years ago in 1872 in Nebraska. This could not have been more appropriate for Oakdale this Spring since there was such a major loss to our tree canopy from Hurricane Florence back in September 2018. ❖



[www.oakdalecemetery.org](http://www.oakdalecemetery.org)

For those interested in Oakdale Cemetery, the website provides spectacular photography by Kenneth Newland. Featuring a fresh updated look and offers a more user friendly experience, improved navigation, and more interactive resources including maps, burial database, the ability to purchase items online, history, news, calendar of events, comprehensive cemetery information, newsletter archive and much more.



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