

Inscriptions

VOLUME 8, NO. 2

FALL 2012

“City of Silence”: Yellow Fever Epidemic

One hundred fifty years ago this fall, Wilmington became a “City of Silence.” Raging in the city of about 10,000 (1860 population) was an epidemic of yellow fever. When it was finally over the first of part of December 1862, it had killed over 600 people, approximately 400 of which are buried in Oakdale Cemetery.

On August 6, 1862, a blockade runner, the *Kate*, docked in the port of Wilmington, having several sick seamen on board. The illness with which they were afflicted was thought to be the deadly plague. A native of Germany, Lewis Swartzman, is considered to be the first fatality on September 3, 1862. He was a wood and coal dealer, whose business was on the wharf near where the *Kate* docked at the foot of Market Street. He is buried in Oakdale, but has no stone.



There is a debate about whether the fever was brought by the *Kate* to Wilmington. There are indications that the disease was already in the area before the date the ship came into the port, although it was not diagnosed. It was not until 1900 that Walter Reed identified that bites by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito was the means by which the disease was transmitted. Newspapers of the time observed that the summer of 1862 was a particularly wet season and that mosquitoes were numerous. Standing water in ponds all over town fueled an abundant insect population. The day of the first frost usually occurred in late October or early November. This particular year the frost was later than usual.

Adding to the dreary atmosphere, pine rosin and lightwood fires burned all over the city. The smoke emitted from these fires served as an insect repellent, but produced a pall over the whole city. There were few people on the

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Calendar of Events



Walking Tour with Bob Cooke

Saturday, September 15, 2012, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Bob Cooke, a local historian and author, will take tour participants to some interesting Civil War sites and provide stories of these gallant men, both Confederate and Union soldiers.
\$8.00 – Friends of Oakdale, free.

Walking Tour with Eric Kozen and David Rice, highlighting the Yellow Fever Epidemic.

Saturday, October 20, 2012, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
For those who might have missed the August walking tour, here it is again. This was a dark time in Wilmington, 150 years ago this fall, with the yellow fever epidemic raging in town. Eric is the Oakdale Cemetery Superintendent and David Rice is Director of Public Health in New Hanover County. \$8.00 – Friends of Oakdale, free.

Second Annual Luminary Event

Sunday, October 28, 2012, Tours depart gate 6:30, 6:45 & 7:00 p.m.
This tour will also highlight sites associated with the yellow fever epidemic. Refreshments will be served. \$10.00 for everyone. Limited tickets will be available at the cemetery office starting October 1, 2012. This tour sold out last year so get your tickets early.

Horse-drawn Wagon Rides

Sunday, November 4, 2012
Tours depart at 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00 and 4:30 p.m. Two black Percheron horses, Nip and Tuck, will pull a wagon for a ride around the cemetery. A guide will ride on the wagon, giving a commentary on the history of the cemetery. Adults, \$10, children 12 and younger, \$8; Friends of Oakdale members: adults, \$8, children 12 and younger, \$6.



Deadline for ordering Christmas Greenery

Tuesday, November 27, 2012
Once again this year, the Friends of Oakdale will be selling wreaths and trees to be placed on the graves of loved ones during this holiday season. Watch for postcards in the mail in early November with ordering details.



ALL TOURS ARE CANCELLED IN THE EVENT OF INCLEMENT WEATHER.

A NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF OAKDALE CEMETERY, INC.
520 NORTH 15TH STREET, WILMINGTON, NC 28401 ♦ 910-762-5682
EMAIL: FRIENDS@OAKDALECEMETERY.ORG ♦ WWW.OAKDALECEMETERY.ORG

NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS

(Recorded between January 1, 2012 and June 30, 2012)

If you joined or renewed your membership during this time and we failed to list your name, please phone the office and we will correct the listing in the next issue of *Inscriptions*.

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Ms. Ruth St. Clair

For our Handicapped Friends

For any of the tours, a golf cart is available for those who have mobility challenges. The capacity of the vehicle is only 5 persons; therefore, registration is necessary to reserve a space on the cart by calling the Oakdale Cemetery office, 762-5682.

A REMINDER

To all the Friends of Oakdale, when receiving this periodic publication news and events of the Friends, this is not a reminder of your membership status. The Membership Committee sends out a specific letter. These letters are mailed to you annually when the time arrives according to the month you had renewed last or joined.

VOLUNTEERS WELCOMED!

If you would like to become more involved with the Friends of Oakdale Cemetery, Inc., we have lots of opportunities for you.

- TOUR GUIDES
- RESEARCH
- NEWSLETTER
- LANDSCAPING/
GARDENING
- FUND RAISING
- DISTRIBUTION
OF EDUCATIONAL
MATERIAL

Please call the Oakdale Cemetery office for more information.
910-762-5682

Yellow Fever Epidemic

Continued from front page

streets. John D. Bellamy recalled seeing many carts on the streets carrying bodies to Oakdale Cemetery.

John Dawson, Mayor of Wilmington, sent letters to towns outside of the area, seeking help. Charleston, SC, was one of the cities that answered the plea. The Rev. Dr. James Corcoran, a Roman Catholic priest from the South Carolina port, together with three nuns from the Sisters of Mercy, came in September and stayed caring for the sick during the duration of the epidemic. The Rev. Corcoran was also a medical doctor and the sisters all had nursing training. Other nearby towns contributed vegetables and other staple goods to the afflicted city. This was necessary since very little commerce was conducted. The Daily Journal newspaper had to shut down because of the sickness, only issuing one-page updates about once a week. The paper did not resume a regular schedule of publication until November 17, 1862.

As the news spread that the disease had made an appearance in the city – the first since about 1820 – prominent families began to flee for inland locations. Altogether, it is estimated that some 6,000 city residents became refugees from the epidemic.

The illness felled people from all walks of life, every race and ethnicity, as well as all ages. The Rev. John L. Prichard, pastor of First Baptist Church; the Rev. Robert Brent Drane, rector of St. James Episcopal Church and Dr. James H. Dickson, a physician, were three of the most prominent fatalities. They had stayed behind in the city in a heroic effort to care for the sick. A number of families lost several members. Within three weeks, the David Smith, Jr. family had lost mother, husband and wife. William Heyer died on

September 13, 1862 and twelve days later, his wife, Barbara, succumbed to the disease. The superintendent of the cemetery, Charles Quigley, an Irishman, was also a victim. Many in the prime of life were felled. Infants ranging in age from 11 days to three and a half months were not spared as well as those over sixty, which was considered old age in the 1860s.

Not all of the interments in Oakdale are in the yellow fever section. A number were buried on their family plots throughout the cemetery.

A list of interments in Oakdale Cemetery from September 17, 1862 until November 27, 1862 survives in the cemetery's records. However, this list was done after the civil war by W. L. S. Smith and P. W. Fanning, the latter being the cemetery company's secretary during the epidemic. Three hundred, forty-three souls are listed, but all indication is that there were many more than that. On the bottom of the list is the notation, "the true statement of interments will never be known."

Sources: "Yellow Fever" folder in the North Carolina Room, New Hanover County Library.

List of interments, compiled after 1865 in Oakdale Cemetery archives. ❖

Oakdale's Luminaries

The Second Annual Luminary event will take place on Sunday, October 28, 2012. The focus this year will be on the Yellow Fever Epidemic, visiting the graves of Dr. James H. Dickson, the Rev. John Lamb Pritchard and the



yellow fever section, where over 400 victims are thought to be interred. Along the way, graves of other interesting people will be noted. Over 600 luminaries

will be placed in the cemetery to mark the route. Tours will be at 6:30, 6:45 and 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$10. Limited tickets will be available at the Oakdale Cemetery Office after October 1, 2012. ❖

Friend's Projects

Friends of Oakdale Cemetery have recently funded several needed improvements in the cemetery. Vinca flowers were planted at the main gate and around the flag pole in late spring by Sylvia Stoudenmire and Bonnie Burriss.

The on-going iron fence restoration will be restarted in late summer, replacing finials and piping on the fences in high profile areas. The fence on either side of the bridge to the annex will be replaced. A friend of Oakdale has contributed to this project and challenged the Friends to match the funds, which they did. Bumper rails will also be installed to increase the safety of vehicles crossing the bridge. As in 2011, the Friends have allocated money for the trimming, removal and replacement of trees all over the cemetery. ❖

Quick Response (QR) Code Project



For those who have smart phones and other similar devices, QR barcodes have been placed at ten of the self-guided tour grave sites. The barcodes allow access to biographical information about these famous people. The barcode on the signage at the main gate contains a connection to a map and brief historical background of the cemetery. ❖

Friends of Oakdale Cemetery, Inc.

520 North 15th Street
Wilmington, NC 28401

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Please contact me about volunteering!