

The Munger-Hunter-Wilder Plot

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Nathaniel Rochester's grave in section R is one of the main attractions of Mt. Hope Cemetery, and understandably so, considering that he helped to found Rochester in 1803 (Reisem 49). However, if one were to walk a little beyond his grave, down the side of the steep hill upon which Rochester's headstone rests, to the path known as "West Ave", one would soon come across the plot of another family that, while not nearly as famous, also made considerable contributions to Rochester. For in Lot 37 of Section R lie the bodies of Mr. Carter Wilder, a former mayor and businessman of Rochester, his wife, Francis Hunter Wilder, as well as many relatives of these prominent Rochester citizens.

The plot contains nine graves, with individual headstones for seven of its occupants and a double stone that marks the graves of one of the couples. Unlike many other plots in Mt. Hope Cemetery, which are enclosed or were enclosed at one time with metal chain or fencing of some kind, the Wilder plot is marked off with a stone wall which is built into the side of the steep hill. At its tallest point (where the hill is steepest) the wall is 2' high, and it forms a 30' by 30' square around the plot. Stone steps lead up to the plot from the road, making it easily accessible to visitors. While parts of the wall have begun to crumble and fall apart, the intact portions show how beautiful the plot must have looked when it was new.

The most striking feature of the plot, however, is the central pillar. The pillar is about twenty feet high and has a square base, 4' x 4'. The first few feet of the pillar

maintain a square shape, a ring of acanthus leaves rounds it out for about a foot, and then variations on an octagon shape make up most of the pillar's height. Another ring of acanthus rounds the top of the column, upon which is placed a cross. On either side of the cross, four more acanthus leaves form smaller crosses. Acanthus is symbolic of the heavenly garden, and is associated with the rocky ground on which many ancient Greek cemeteries were placed ("Glossary of Victorian Cemetery Symbolism"). It is one of the oldest cemetery motifs and



is often found on memorials. The cross is closely associated with this idea of a "heavenly garden", as it is the main symbol of Christian belief.

The most interesting of the pillar's features, however, are the inscriptions on the sides of its lower, rectangular portion. While all but one of the individual stones contains only a first name, the column details the exact date of each person's death, how old they were when they died, and in some cases, where they died. The column is also used to



indicate the married couples in the plot, as each side is devoted to one couple. The sides, starting with the one that is facing the visitor as he or she comes up the steps and moving counterclockwise read as follows:

<p>ROBERT HUNTER DIED MARCH 2nd 1843 AGED 51 YRS.</p>
<p>ELIZA, WIFE OF ROBERT HUNTER DIED IN GENOA, ITALY MARCH 9th, 1874 AGED 67 YRS.</p>
<p>CARTER WILDER DIED IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA DECEMBER 22ND, 1875 AGED 47 YRS.</p>
<p>FRANCES WIFE OF CARTER WILDER DIED AT HOME AUGUST 5TH, 1887 AGED 57 YRS.</p>
<p>CURTISS MUNGER DIED DEC. 26TH 1827 AGED 46 YRS.</p>
<p>FANNY WIFE OF CURTISS MUNGER, DIED JAN^Y. 18TH 1852 AGED 71 YRS.</p>
<p>MARY BARNES WIFE OF EDWIN H. MUNGER DIED JULY 12TH 1845, AGED 36 YRS.</p>
<p>EDWIN H. MUNGER DIED SEPT. 22ND 1867, AGED 64 YRS.</p>



The oldest of the interred are Curtiss and Fanny Munger, both born in 1781. Their individual graves are located in the back row of the plot, along with the graves of the other Munger couple, Mary Barnes and Edwin H. Munger. The four headstones are identical and very simple, each one consisting of a small rectangle with a rounded top, with only the first name of its owner engraved. Curtiss and Fanny are placed next to each other in the northeast corner of the plot, and Edwin and Mary are in the southeast corner.



Very little is known about their lives, but it is possible that they neither lived nor died in Rochester, and were later reburied here. Curtiss Munger almost certainly was reburied, because he died almost nine years before Mt. Hope Cemetery was established in 1838 (Reisem 3). Genealogy charts show that Curtiss Munger was born in East Guilford, New Haven, Connecticut and married Fanny Jones of Saybrook Connecticut (“Descendents of Richard Byshop” 18). According to the chart, they had two children, Edwin Munger and Eliza Munger (18). The chart does not indicate the name of Edwin’s wife or even that he was married, but does show that he had two children, making it fairly safe to assume that he was married and is the same Edwin Munger as is buried in the plot (18). In addition, the chart sheds some light on why his wife is the only female on the

pillar to be listed with her maiden name, and why Edwin is the only person to be listed with his middle initial. One of Edwin's sons was also named Edwin (Edwin A. Munger) and also married a woman named Mary (Mary Murry) (18). In a family with two Edwin Mungers, both with wives named Mary, it would have been important to distinguish between the couples.

Much more information can be found on Curtiss and Fanny's other child, Eliza, as she was once a prominent Rochester citizen. Eliza was born in Saybrook, Connecticut, was educated at Albany, and in 1824 married Robert Hunter in Brockport, Monroe County ("Death of Mrs. Hunter"). At the time, Robert Hunter was the proprietor of the Merchants' Line of canal boats. He is considered one of the pioneers of turnpike and canal transportation in New York State, being one of the first to establish lines of wagons from Albany westward ("Death of Mrs. Robert Hunter"). Before the Erie Canal opened, he regularly drove wagons between Albany and Buffalo, transporting merchandise and produce. After the canal became navigable, he changed his line of operations from the turnpike to the towing-path, eventually becoming the head of a prosperous canal transportation company ("Death of Mrs. Hunter"). Eliza and Robert Hunter had one daughter, Frances (who was probably named after her grandmother, Fanny Jones Munger), born on July 31st, 1830 in New York City ("Called Away From Earth"). Shortly thereafter, the family moved to Albany, where they resided until Robert's death in 1843. After his death, Mrs. Hunter and her daughter moved to Rochester, where they spent the remainder of their lives. Internment records show that Robert was not buried in

Mt. Hope until April 23rd, 1845; most likely, his widow and daughter had him reburied there after they changed their city of residence.

Mr. and Mrs. Hunter have the only double headstone in the plot, with two rounded stones resting on a slab. The two round stones resemble mirrors, and are bordered by intricate designs. Unlike the other individual stones in the plot, which give first names, the circles contain the words “Mother” and “Father”. Between the two separate portions is half of a broken cube;

the back half of it appears to have fallen off. On the front is a carving of three circles overlapping, which represents the holy trinity of Christian belief (“Glossary of Victorian Cemetery Symbolism”).

They are buried together in the southwest corner.



According to the Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser, an important Rochester newspaper in the nineteenth century, John F. Bush purchased a valuable house on East Avenue for Mrs. Robert Hunter of Albany for \$14,000 in September of 1856 (“Sale of a Valuable Dwelling”). 48 East Ave remained the residence of Mrs. Hunter and her daughter and son-in-law for the rest of their lives. The Union and Advertiser reports on May 18, 1858 that \$400-500 dollars worth of dishes and silverware were stolen from Mrs. Robert Hunter’s house (“Series of Daring Burglaries!”). Most of the stolen goods were recovered by police in an abandoned lot a few days later, though the thieves escaped

(“The late Burglaries – Recovery of Property”). The article also mentions that Mrs. Hunter’s daughter and her brother, Mr. Munger, were also asleep at the house during the time of the burglary. This “Mr. Munger” had to have been Edwin H. Munger, who was perhaps visiting his sister and niece. Mrs. Hunter and her daughter left for New York the day after the robbery, but probably returned soon thereafter (“Series of Daring Burglaries!”).

In 1864, Frances Hunter married A. Carter Wilder of Rochester. Abel Carter Wilder (though he often went by “Carter Wilder”) was born in Mendon, Worcester County, Massachusetts, on March 18, 1828 (“Wilder”). He completed preparatory studies and moved to Rochester where he engaged in mercantile pursuits (“Wilder”). In 1852, he was elected Vice President of the Rochester’s first Democratic Whig Young Men’s Council and in 1855, he was elected corresponding secretary of the Athenaeum and Mechanics Association (“Athenaeum Election”). In 1857, he moved to Leavenworth, Kansas where he continued mercantile pursuits, and in 1859 he was a delegate to the Osawatimie convention (“Wilder”). He was also a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1860 that nominated Abraham Lincoln as candidate for president, served as a captain in the Kansas brigade for one year during the Civil War, and served one term as a Republican in the thirty-eighth Congress (“Wilder”). At the end of his term, he returned to Rochester where he published the Morning and Evening Express and served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Mechanics Savings Bank (“Wilder”). In 1868 he retired from business, resigning from the Board of Trustees and selling his half of the ownership of his newspaper to his partners (“The Sale of The

Express”). He then spent a year traveling in Europe with his wife and mother-in-law (“Items In Brief”).

Upon returning to Rochester, Carter resumed his interest in politics as a member of the Republican Party. A letter he wrote in 1871, dated October 23, gives a hint about his character and personality:

“...We are in political excitement all the time and will be till after the election. New York is now the great battlefield and we shall try to carry the State by a good large Majority. Henry Wilson speaks here to-morrow and we expect a great mutiny. I worked hard for his nomination at Philadelphia and shall be very glad to see him. Don't this Election knock a good many Politicians where they will be likely to stay? There is no use in going over the catalogue of Martyrs, as history will make short work with many of them. Horace will come out the worst because he took the greatest risks and has sacrificed everything to his ambition. He has been working two years to get just where he is the worst beat man that ever ran for the Presidency....” (Wilder 138-9).

In February of 1872, Carter Wilder was nominated as the Republican candidate for mayor and was elected to that position in March (“Republican Nomination For Mayor”).

However, he resigned as mayor before the end of his term in order to go to Europe in the hopes of improving both his own health and the health of his mother-in-law, Eliza Hunter (“Death of Ex-Mayor A. Carter Wilder”). Mr. and Mrs. Wilder and Mrs. Hunter sailed for Europe in August of 1873 intending to spend the winter in Italy (“Mayor Wilder Resigns”). On March 9th, 1874, Eliza Hunter died in Genoa, Italy of heart disease, and the Wilders returned to Rochester to arrange her funeral and internment in Mt. Hope Cemetery (“Death of Mrs. Robert Hunter”).

The Wilders continued traveling in hopes of improving Carter's health, first to Florida and then San Francisco in November of 1875 (“Death of Ex-Mayor A. Carter

Wilder”). Two years earlier, New York City physicians had diagnosed him with “catarrhal consumption”, that is, tuberculosis. He was accompanied to California by his wife, his wife’s cousin Mrs. Francis Little, who is also buried in the family plot, and a niece. He died on December 22nd, 1875; funeral services were held in San Francisco, and his body was returned to Rochester to be interred at Mt. Hope Cemetery.

Carter Wilder’s gravestone is the most artistic, complex, and probably expensive stone in the plot, excepting the main pillar. His stone is in the shape of a tree trunk with one cut-off branch. At the base of the trunk are ferns and leaves, and calla lilies creep up one side of the trunk. The name “Carter” is engraved on the front of the stone, with a



bark texture to match the “bark” of the stone. At the base of the stone is the carver’s name, reading “A. McDonald Mt. Auburn Mass.”. A tree trunk indicates that a life has been cut off (Reisem 167) while a severed branch can

symbolize mortality (“Glossary of Victorian Cemetery Symbolism”). The number of broken branches can also indicate deceased family members buried at that site, which would be his wife, if this were the case (“Commemorative Motifs”). Ferns represent sincerity and sorrow while the calla lily symbolizes marriage (“Glossary of Victorian

Cemetery Symbolism”). The stone was probably chosen by Frances, and expresses her sorrow and her love for her husband.

The high cost of the stone is apparent not only in its detail and fine artistry, but also in the carver’s inscription near the base of the stone. The stone indicates that it was carved in Mt. Auburn, a well-known cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Once it was carved, it would have to be shipped to Rochester. Costs for transporting such a large stone, especially in the late nineteenth century, would have been high. This further indicates Mrs. Wilder’s love for her husband and her insistence on commemorating him with the finest headstone.

The next person to be buried in the plot was Caroline Little, wife of Francis Waldo Little, born Caroline Hunter. Not much is known of Caroline, except that she was a cousin of Frances Hunter Wilder and that her funeral services were held in Mrs. Wilder’s house on East Avenue (“Died”). Internment records state that she died of Bright’s disease, which is a form of kidney disease (“Bright’s disease”). Her gravestone, which appears to have been broken and repaired since its installment, has the name “Carry” below a lily carved on the front, and on the back the inscription reads:

CAROLINE HUNTER

Wife of

FRANCIS LITTLE

born May 28, 1838

died June 9, 1882



Her stone is unusual in that it is the only individual stone in the plot to convey more information than a first name. Lilies, when used on gravestones, symbolize majesty, innocence, purity, and resurrection and are often associated with the Virgin Mary (“Glossary of Victorian Cemetery Symbolism”). All that is known of Francis Little, who is mentioned on the stone, is that he moved to Brooklyn and remarried in 1893 (“Married”). This could explain why he is not buried in the plot beside his wife; he is probably buried with his second wife, possibly in a cemetery near Brooklyn if he remained there with his new wife.

Frances “Fanny” Hunter Wilder, who conducted the funeral for her cousin Caroline, was the last to be interred in this plot. While much of her life has already been accounted for, little has been said about her life after her husband’s death. Mrs. Wilder attended Christ Church and was active and prominent in church work (“Called Away From Earth”). Upon her death, the Union and Advertiser said she “was noted for her piety and many charitable acts” and described her as “a lady who was never weary in well being and one widely known and highly respected throughout the community.” She

died unexpectedly on August 5th, 1887 from heart disease, and according to internment records, Bright's disease as well, leaving an adopted daughter, Miss Frances H. Wilder ("Called Away From Earth").

Frances Wilder's stone is in the shape of a cross on top of a square base which has a simple plaque reading "Fanny." Engraved on the cross are the letters "IHS", which stands for the Latin "Jesus Hominum Salvator" – Jesus the Savior of Men (Reisem 166). Clearly this shows a strong Christian belief on the part of Frances Wilder, which is supported by the knowledge that she was an active member of her church. This also ties in with the religious symbols on the central monument. It is very likely that as Mrs. Wilder was the last to die, she played a large and perhaps sole role in choosing the design for this monument. The fact that her parents' graves read "Mother" and "Father" rather than their first names – and she was their only child – also seems to imply that she had a great influence over the appearance of the plot. In addition, as the Mungers are her relatives, she may have been the one responsible for having their bodies and headstones moved to Mt. Hope Cemetery.

Overall, the Hunter-Wilder-Munger plot conveys a strong religious belief. There is also a marked contrast between the stones of the Wilders and the Mungers; Carter and Frances' stones are quite extravagant, while the Mungers chose markers that are much more modest. Whether this was due to a difference in taste, in changing trends of monument design, or simply reflects different degrees of wealth, cannot be known, although we do know that the Hunters and Wilders were quite successful and wealthy. Regardless of the reason, the Wilders' stones convey much more about the inhabitants,

and are more likely to catch the eye of the average passer-by. Interestingly, it is not the life achievements of the deceased that are commemorated, not for their business success, election wins, or charity work that they are remembered, but their religious belief and love for one another.



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