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Downtown Oberlin Walking Tour of Civil War Monuments

Westwood Cemetery

Extended Tour

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Westwood Cemetery

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Courtesy of Geoffrey Blodgett

Westwood Cemetery

Oberlin Historical and Improvement Organization

Westwood: A Historical and Interpretive View of Oberlin's Cemetery (Oberlin, Ohio: O.H.I.O., 1997).

Perhaps Oberlin's founders had no idea how successful and popular the colony was to become when, in the 1830's they leased two acres of land from Oberlin College for a burial ground on Morgan Street. By 1861 it was clear that there were no more spaces to be sold and a larger cemetery would be necessary. In part, this was do to the need to accommodate soldiers who died during the Civil War. On July 9th, 1861, following a public notice, a meeting was held to consider a new cemetery. The Oberlin Cemetery Association was formed that day and charged with the duty of locating suitable grounds for a new cemetery.

After a year and a half, The Association secured 28 acres southwest of the village. One-third of the land was forest, one-third was clear and the remaining third was farmland. The land was purchased for \$1470. Following clearance, the cemetery was surveyed and mapped by H.B. Allen, Esq., a skilled engineer who was experienced in the formation of rural cemeteries.

The first burial in August, 1863, was that of Samuel Montgomery in Section V. At that time the cemetery was not completely cleared, ready or properly dedicated. All of the bodies buried at Oberlin's first cemetery were removed to Westwood by the close of 1863.

On June 8, 1864, citizens and students gathered at the cemetery to help clear the heavily forested acreage. Women of the community served dinner to the workers at noon. On the motion of James Fitch, the Oberlin Sunday School Superintendent, the name "Westwood" was adopted. An area was chosen and set aside for a place of burial for Civil War soldiers. The area is called, "Soldier's Rest."

The site was formally dedicated on July 16, 1864. The program included an address by Professor James Fairchild, music conducted by Professor C.H. Churchill and a prayer given by Oberlin College President Charles Finney. In 1944 The Cemetery Association transferred control of the cemetery to the City of Oberlin. In 1946 Frank Zavodsky became sexton for Westwood and re-mained such until his retirement in 1984. He was active and helpful in the affairs of Westwood until his death in 1997.

As in widespread 19th-century cemetery tradition, Westwood had a "Potter's Field" (now indicated on cemetery maps as "OAP") where poor residents whose families couldn't afford a burial site were placed. This caused a class division that Oberlin recognized early on. The practice was discontinued and these types of burials are now conducted throughout the cemetery.

Today the cemetery is thought of as a memorial park. Many city residents walk, jog and bike the cemetery pathways. In comparison with other cemeteries, Westwood's monuments are generally simple and plain; however, upon closer inspection, the inscriptions document who these people were that settled here during the formative decades.

The cemetery binds together Oberlin's founding fathers with its city residents and whispers a story of a unique and profoundly dedicated town.

Gravesites of Historical Figures

Adapted from Westwood: A Historical and Interpretive View of Oberlin's Cemetery (Oberlin, Ohio: O.H.L.O., 1997).

Rev. John Bardwell

d. 1871

Cornelia Bardwell

d. 1894

John was a Congregational minister and an agent for missionary efforts among the Chippewa Indians of Minnesota. Following the Civil War, he went south to organize schools for black freedmen. In 1866 he was beaten by a former slave owner and a white mob, in Mississippi. Cornelia was known to have hidden slaves in their home on E. Lorain.

Jabez Lyman Burrell

b. 1806 d. 1900

"Deacon" Burrell was a wealthy and influential Oberlin businessman, college trustee and anti-slavery activist. He contributed large sums to institutions in the south for the education of black freedmen.

Simeon Bushnell

b. est. 1829 d. 1861

Bushnell was an Oberlin clerk and printer who was jailed for his role in the Oberlin-Wellington Slave Rescue along with 19 others. While in jail, he told jailers, "I have sworn eternal enmity to the fugitive slave law, and while God lets me live I mean to defy it, and trample upon it." He died of tuberculosis in 1861 after collapsing in the Oberlin College chapel vestibule, shortly after the death of his daughter. He was 32 years old. The inscription on their joint monument reads, "Christ hath gotten us the victory." Cor. 15:57.

Lewis Clarke

b. 1815 d. 1897

The Clarke's family story, describing their sufferings as slaves on a Kentucky plantation, was published in 1842. He met author Harriet Beecher Stowe between 1845 and 1850 and said it was his experiences that formed the basis for the character of George Harris in her novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin. After he died the governor of Kentucky ordered that his body lie in state in the city auditorium so that many could pay homage to the ex-slave whose life had made such an impact on pre-Civil War history. His body was subsequently taken to Oberlin where he had been a popular abolitionist speaker.

Winifred Carter Quinn Conner

d. 1874

Solomon Quinn

b. est. 1836 d. 1894

Born in North Carolina as a "free person of color," Winifred was nearly 60 years old when she migrated to Ohio in the 1850's with nearly 50 members of her family. Most of the people were property owners in the South but were driven out by the "Black Codes," and the harsh reality of survival for themselves and their families. Solomon, born free in North Carolina about 1836, served for a brief time in the 17th U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War. For the last decade of his life he was one of the pillars of the Second Methodist Church.

Henry Cowles

b. 1803 d. 1881

Henry Cowles lived his life as a teacher, scholar, and abolitionist. He joined with college President Asa Mahan, professor Charles Grandison Finney, and other Ohio abolitionists in the foundation of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. Cowles was editor for the Oberlin Evangelist a religious periodical founded in 1839. The paper served as an outlet for the colony's philosophies, exposing the eastern states to the Oberlin opinion on slavery, moral reform, missionary work, revivalism, and the notion of Oberlin Perfectionism.

Sabram Cox

b. 1823 d. 1897

Born into slavery, Cox tried to escape twice, both times being caught. The second time he was jailed. When no one claimed him, he was freed. Later he was associated with prominent abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy who produced an anti-slavery paper. Lovejoy was killed by a mob that destroyed his plant and threw his printing press in the river. A drayman by trade, Cox was said to have retrieved the press. In 1839, after saving a considerable amount of money, Cox left the south for an Oberlin education. He continued to participate in the anti-slavery movement and was known to have led slave escapes by posing as a slave. Slave catchers pursued him while the actual slaves escaped. Cox became active within the Oberlin Community, serving on the village council and as street commissioner.

Lee Howard Dobbins

b. 1849 d. 1853

Lee Howard was a four year old slave child whose mother died in slavery. Before she died, she entrusted her son to the care of another slave women who treated him as her own. He was traveling the underground railroad to Canada with her when she was forced to leave him behind in Oberlin because he was so sick. She had several other children with her and Dobbins father, who was the slave owner was closely trailing them. Lee Howard died several days later in the care of an Oberlin family. A funeral was held in Oberlin's First Church where over 1000 attended. The townspeople raised a fund for his tombstone by spending ten cents each. His tombstone is now housed in the Oberlin College Archives. It reads: "Let Slavery Perish! Lee Howard Dobbins, a fugitive slave orphan brought here by an adopted mother in her flight for liberty March 17, 1853 left here wasted with consumption found a refuge in death, March 26, 1853 Aged 4 yrs." Lee Howard was originally buried in the old Professor St. Cemetery. His body was removed to Westwood where he now rests in an unknown location. His short life was the inspiration for the Underground Railroad Monument installed in 1993. It is located in the front of the cemetery.

Wilson Bruce Evans

b. 1824 d. 1898

Freeborn in North Carolina, Evans came to Oberlin in 1854. He was an active abolitionist before the war, joining in the work of the underground railroad and was jailed for his participation in the rescue of John Price at Wellington. He served one year in the Union Army during the Civil War.

James Harris Fairchild

b. 1817 d. 1902

Fairchild was the third president of Oberlin College after serving as a tutor, teacher and theologian. Fairchild was well-known for his abolitionist views. After his wife, whose family owned slaves in the south, was given a slave (also named Mary Kellogg) from the family plantation, she and James Fairchild promptly freed her and she lived out her life in their employ in Oberlin. Fairchild was also known for his role in the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue where he harbored the fugitive John Price in his home before he could be taken to Canada.

Lydia Root Andrews Finney

b. 1804 d. 1847

Charles Grandison Finney's first wife and the mother of their six children. The couple was married in 1824. Like all of Finney's wives, she shared in his revival work, traveling with him and developing ministries which were sympathetic to his own. And, like all of Finney's wives, she was active in her own right working for anti-slavery,

moral reform, and causes for the poor and for children. She was involved in the formation of the Ohio Ladies Anti-Slavery Society.

James Fitch

b. est. 1816 d. 1867

A participant in the Oberlin-Wellington slave rescue, Fitch was jailed for his involvement in the rescue of John Price. At the time of the jailings, his known role was only that of an instigator. It wasn't revealed for some years that it was he who drove fugitive John Price to the home of James Fairchild for hiding. He was well-known for his abolitionist leanings. His home was said to have several secret rooms for the purpose of shielding fugitive slaves. He was also the superintendent of the Oberlin Sunday School.

Jeremiah Fox

b. 1827 d. 1909

A former slave who escaped bondage and came to Oberlin by the underground railroad in the mid 1850's, Fox took part in the Oberlin-Wellington Slave Rescue although he was not jailed with the other participants. Since he was an escaped slave, he avoided court appearances. Fox joined the Fifth United State Colored Heavy Artillery in 1865 and served a year in Vicksburg.

Timothy B. Hudson

d. 1858

The chair of Latin and Greek at Oberlin College from 1838 to 1841, Hudson resigned in order to become a lecturer for the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. In this role he held conventions and lectured throughout the state. He returned to a professorship from 1847-1858.

Wiley L. Jennings

b. 1854 d. 1902

Born a slave, Jennings was freed at the abolition of slavery. He later came to Oberlin and enrolled in Oberlin College for one year. An eccentric known for being a hard worker, he had some trouble with the law. He advertised in a matrimonial publication for a white wife, which for many was unacceptable. This resulted in a white woman's arrival from Illinois with the expectation of marriage. She was unaware of his race and quickly left town. Because of the incident, Jennings was said to have used the mail to defraud and was threatened with legal action. When Jennings became older he took on odd religious beliefs and believed he was a divine healer. His irrational behavior led to his removal to a state mental hospital. He never married.

Henry Johnson

b. est. 1776 d. 1886

Before he escaped slavery in about 1844, Johnson was said to have been a servant of Andrew Jackson and to have cleaned guns at the Battle of New Orleans. He escaped to Canada but came to Oberlin after hearing of the town's reputation. He worked as a gardener and brick layer and was known to have assisted escaping slaves on the underground railroad. One of his methods involved serving as a decoy along with other blacks aboard a wagon leaving town while the real escaping slaves left safely.

Allen Jones

b. 1794 d. 1877

Born into slavery, Jones was trained as a blacksmith and gunsmith. He eventually saved enough to buy his freedom but his owner cheated him out of it. He later saved \$3000 and friends purchased his free papers for him. He then saved an additional \$2000 and purchased the freedom of his wife Temperance, their three children and his own father. His passionate belief in education led him and other freedmen to build a school there in the south for their children.

In 1843, along with John Copeland (who later was hanged for his participation in the raid on Harper's Ferry) and family, Jones left the south to escape persecution. After arriving in Oberlin, Jones set up his blacksmith shop opposite the First Congregational Church and later moved to a shop he built on South Main St. He valued education his entire life, seeing that his children were educated. All five of his sons attended Oberlin college and four graduated. A former Oberlin college student said Jones was, "a perfect Hercules in strength" who "clearly outranked in strength of individuality any white man of Oberlin, with the possible exception of President Finney."

Mary Kellogg

b.(est.)1818 d. 1863

Mary Kellogg was a Louisiana slave belonging to the family of her namesake Mary Kellogg, the wife of James Harris Fairchild. She was willed to Mrs. Fairchild who immediately set her free and employed her in their home in Oberlin.

Henry Lee

b. 1836 d.1899

Lee was born into slavery in 1836. In 1858 he escaped to Syracuse, NY by under-ground railroad. He came to Oberlin in 1859, enrolled in the public schools and studied at Oberlin College. In 1865 in Wheeling, West Virginia, he refused to leave a first class train seat in order to move to a section reserved for black patrons. The conductor and another man tried to forcibly remove him. Oberlin College President Asa Mahan was on the same car and came to his aid. Four years later, the same thing happened on another train. Lee was ejected, beaten by three policemen, and jailed. He sued the railroad in a two year lawsuit and won damages. In 1894 he brought before the Oberlin Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education, the fact that a textbook contained the name "Sambo". He complained that the author intended to apply the name "Sambo" to blacks as a race. His efforts caused the superintendent to secure a pledge from the author to change the name in the next edition. In 1899 he died after an iron roof fell on him

James Monroe

b. 1821 d. 1898

As a scholar and teacher, legislator and ambassador, Monroe spent his life serving the abolitionist cause, his country, and Oberlin College. He spoke out early against the evils of slavery and soon caught the eye of William Lloyd Garrison, a prominent abolitionist who encouraged Monroe to become a more visible anti-slavery lecturer. While lecturing, Monroe became acquainted with many of the leaders of the abolitionist cause including Frederick Douglass and Wendell Philips. In Boston, Monroe spoke to Charles Grandison Finney, who encouraged him to pursue an education at Oberlin College. While a student at Oberlin, he continued to lecture on abolitionism and gained a reputation for his magnetic style. He was a State Senator from 1860 to 1862, where he was unanimously chosen President Pro-Tempore. Working hard for human rights, Monroe helped pass a bill which counteracted the effects of the federal Fugitive Slave Law. In 1859, Monroe traveled to Harper's Ferry, Virginia in an attempt to recover the body of black Oberlinian John Copeland, who had participated in John Brown's raid. The mission proved to be unsuccessful.

John Morgan

A professor who was fired from the Lane Seminary because of his sympathy to the anti-slavery movement, Morgan was brought to Oberlin College as a mathematics professor in 1835 along with Mr. Finney.

Alonzo Pease

b. 1820 d. 1881

Pease was an Oberlin self-taught artist who had several paintings exhibited at the Academy of Design in New York. He also painted portraits of several Oberlin College presidents for \$50 apiece in 1860. He was the nephew of Peter Pindar Pease, Oberlin's first citizen. Pease served as Captain of Company H in the 41st Ohio Volunteer Infantry. He later resigned because the Colonel insisted on returning escaped slaves to their masters. An ardent abolitionist, he was said to have painted fugitive slaves white, enabling them to slip past slave catchers unnoticed.

Hiram Pease

b. 1797 d. 1889

Brother of Peter Pindar Pease, Hiram Pease was a member of the first Oberlin College class. He was a Sunday school teacher and a deacon in the First Congregational Church. He was an abolitionist active in the underground railroad. Pease was known for his sense of humor illustrated in the following tale: While he was still in excellent health, he took a large granite boulder to his shop and during his spare time he polished one side of it so it could be used as his grave marker. He requested that it read, "Under this sod and under these trees, Lies the body of Hiram A. Pease. He is not here, only his pod: He's shelled out his soul, and gone back to God." His family didn't comply because they said there wasn't enough room on the polished side of the stone. His sense of humor stayed with him till the end when he was said to have proclaimed on his deathbed, "It's too early to plant Pease!"

John Scott

b. 1827 d.1912

An emancipated slave who came to Oberlin in 1856, Scott worked as a harness and trunk maker. He was jailed in Cleveland along with 19 other men for his role in the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue. He was the last survivor of those jailed. Scott joined the Fifth Ohio Calvary in 1865 at age 38 and was discharged several months later. He later left Oberlin and moved to Tennessee but returned to Oberlin a few years later because he didn't like the treatment of blacks in the south.

Giles Waldo Shurtleff

b. 1831 d. 1904

Shurtleff was a respected town leader and one of Oberlin's most famous Civil War heroes. When the Civil War began in 1861, he became captain of Company C of the 7th Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry. The company, known as "Monroe's Rifles" in honor of James Monroe, was mostly made up of Oberlin students. In August, 1861, Shurtleff was taken prisoner at Kesler's Cross Lanes, Virginia, and then held in a series of Southern jails, including an old tobacco factory, and Castle Pinkney, an abandoned harbor fort. He was released in August, 1862. In September, 1862, Shurtleff was commissioned as assistant inspector general of the 9th Army Corps under General O.B. Wilcox. The corps took part in the battle of Fredericksburg on December, 14, 1862. In 1863, he resigned from the army due to illness, but returned to service that summer as a Lt. Colonel of the 5th U.S. Colored Troops, the first troop of black soldiers recruited in Ohio, organized by John Mercer Langston. He remained with this unit until the end of the War. Shurtleff was wounded at Fort Harrison, Virginia in September of 1864. Before resigning from the army in the spring of 1865, he was made Brigadier General.

James Steele

b. 1808 d. 1859

Steele was one of Oberlin's "Lane Rebels" who came to Oberlin after leaving the Lane Seminary due to his anti-slavery convictions. Following the liberation of the Amistad captives — a ship of captured slaves from Africa who successfully mutinied — a Mendi committee was chosen to return the Amistad captives to their home which was about 100 miles south of Sierra Leone. They also wanted to open a new mission there. Steele sailed in 1841 along with two others and their wives and founded the Mendi Mission.

John Steele

b. 1835 d. 1905

Steele graduated from law school at Ann Arbor, MI. In 1861 he and Alonzo Pease formed the 41st regiment of Ohio Volunteers. He participated in the battles of Shiloh, Stone River, Chickamauga, Franklin and the Atlanta Campaign. Major Steele won the Congressional Medal of Honor while serving as Aide-de-Camp. His final service was in Texas in opposition to Kirby Smith, after the backbone of the rebellion had been broken. He was mustered out of service in 1866 with rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

Charlotte Temple

(gravesite unknown) d. 1841.

Formerly a slave, Temple had numerous scars from slavery. She died alone as her family were all in bondage. The Oberlin Evangelist reported of her death, "The slavery from which she fled still retains in its grasp all her relatives. Children and grandchildren survive her. But they were not present to smooth her dying pillow, nor follow her to the grave. The mother died alone, and was buried by strangers, without one from among her numerous offspring to follow her to the tomb; for they are all shut up in the prison house of slavery."

Henry Thomas d. 1945

A former slave who came to Oberlin, Thomas worked for the wealthy Johnson family.

Chauncey Wack

d. 1900

Wack, a leading Democrat in Oberlin, has been called "Oberlin's 19th Century Anti-Hero." He owned a hotel south of Oberlin. It was there the slave catchers looking for fugitive John Price stayed. Wack was a sympathizer with the slave catchers and was a star witness for the prosecution of the men who were jailed for the rescue of John Price.

John Watson

b. est. 1820 d. 1872

A former slave who came to Oberlin with his family about 1840 for an education, Watson owned a grocery store and restaurant. He later acquired the entire building it was housed in the Commercial Block on South Main St. He took

part in the Oberlin-Wellington Slave Rescue and was jailed along with the others for his participation. Following the Civil War, he presided at a state convention of black men at Columbus, Ohio.

John White

b. 1815 d. 1903

White escaped slavery in West Virginia by using a fake document that claimed his freedom. He acquired the document from a man who had an official state seal. He came to Oberlin in about 1838 after living in Canada and serving some time in the British army. He lived with Oberlin College President Asa Mahan for a while, and worked for Oberlin College Treasurer Hill. He also worked on the building of First Congregational Church. He later acquired farm land northwest of Oberlin and farmed for most of his life.

Albert Allen Wright

b. 1846 d. 1905

A modern scientist and effective educator, Wright was the first Oberlin College faculty member born in Oberlin. In 1864 he left school to fight in the Civil War, enlisting as a 100 day volunteer in Company K of the 150th Ohio National Guard. The company was made up almost completely of Oberlin College students.

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