

# Sweet Auburn

*The Newsletter of the Friends of Mount Auburn*

Summer 1987

## The Great Experiment

by Walter T. Punch

Great undertakings are often heralded in less than dramatic fashion. So it was that at its second anniversary dinner in September 1830, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society announced through Mr. Zebedee Cook, Jr., vice-president and a founding member of the Society, that it intended to establish a public cemetery.

Some years before the Society was founded, Jacob Bigelow, M.D., Professor of the Application of Science to the Arts of Life at Harvard College, had been considering the increasingly problematic situation of interment in urban Boston. Influenced by the example of Père La Chaise, originally a rural cemetery outside of Paris, and by the peaceful gardens of England, Bigelow greatly desired that Boston should have a prominent cemetery in a rural setting.

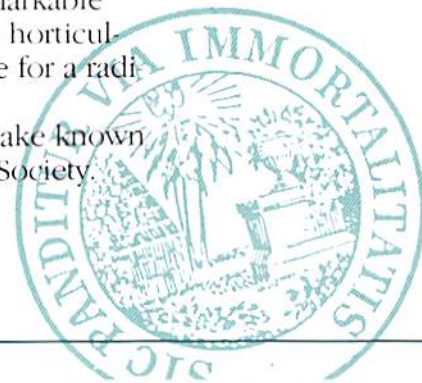
Two obstacles blocked his path: funds and a suitable location. Help and support were to come from the newly-formed Massachusetts Horticultural Society for which Dr. Bigelow was corresponding secretary. The Society's first president, General Henry A. S. Dearborn of Roxbury, had in mind from the beginning to establish and maintain an experimental garden for the Society. The two men conferred and a plan to combine a rural cemetery and garden was born.

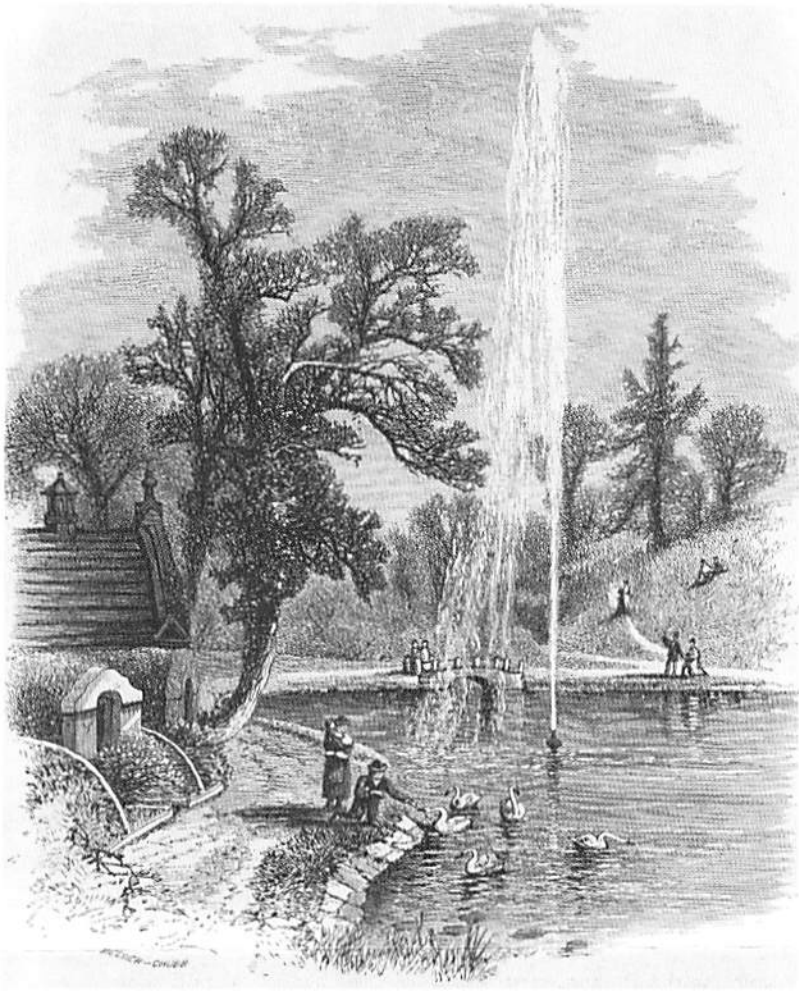
Another player in this drama appeared at this time, Mr. George W. Brimmer. He offered his land towards the endeavor for the \$6,000 he originally paid for it. The seventy-two acres were visited by General Dearborn who found them wholly adequate for the dual purposes of the Society. A committee was formed to further investigate the project.

In his report to the Garden and Cemetery Committee, General Dearborn noted the rapid growth of the Society in its two year history. He spoke of the establishment of the Library, the exhibitions, and the collection and dissemination of information, seeds, plants, and scions. It was indeed a remarkable start. The Society had awakened a sense of interest in horticulture in the citizens of Boston. It was a propitious time for a radical new endeavor and the Society seized it.

It was given to the Honorable Edward Everett to make known to the general public the plans and intentions of the Society.

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*Commonwealth Press*





The essence of Everett's task was to create an awareness of the necessity for change in the means and surroundings of burial for urban dwellers. Mr. Everett summoned authority and precedent from many sources, and spoke glowingly of the beauty of the land that was "Sweet Auburn." All efforts were successful and on 23 June 1831, the Massachusetts Legislature passed an act allowing the Society to proceed with the cemetery and garden project.

The consecration ceremony took place at the new cemetery three months later. A temporary amphitheater was created in what is now known as "Consecration Dell" for more than 2,000 spectators, and a platform erected for the orator, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, as well as for the officiating clergy, the Rev. Dr. Ware and the Rev. Mr. Pierpont. The service was filled with music and processions and an original hymn of dubious literary merit written for the occasion. We are told that the sky was cloudless and the sun bright. It was all in all a perfect

start for this remarkable new endeavor.

President Dearborn's request for information on cemeteries and funeral monuments from Paris and London had proven most useful. In a short time the Egyptian gateway and the high fence were erected and an additional 100 acres were eventually added to the original tract. The experimental garden, more than thirty acres in size, was laid out. The garden was begun and within about a year, J. W. Russell, second superintendent and gardener of Mount Auburn Cemetery, was able to exhibit specimens from the garden in the hall of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. All indications pointed to a great success in the merger of cemetery and garden.

For many varied and complicated reasons, the experimental garden did not continue. There were two opposing factions within the Society regarding the running of the cemetery and garden and after many difficult and heated meetings an amicable solution was finally reached. The

Proprietors of Mount Auburn were incorporated by a second Act of the Massachusetts Legislature on 31 March 1835 and a deed of conveyance was made out to them. A financial arrangement was also agreed upon between the Cemetery's Proprietors and the Society. This took place less than four years after the lovely consecration ceremony on that sun-filled day. A great experiment had failed. Or had it?

It seems clear, in retrospect, that a horticultural society should not be in the business of running a cemetery. Nonetheless, it must be argued that without the support of the members of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, Dr. Bigelow's dream might never have been realized. This impetus and the lasting legacy of intense dedication to beauty and commitment to the plant world are an indelible connection between Mount Auburn and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

*Mr. Punch is the Head Librarian for the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.*

## Struggling to Save the European Beech

"I first recognized the problem on several European Beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) in 1982," said Phil Sands, Horticulturalist at the Cemetery. "I noticed that soon after the dripping cankers appeared on the bark, the tree would begin to thin or even to die back at the top or on the side limbs."

Bleeding canker (phytophthora cactorum), is characterized by the oozing of either a watery, light brown or thick reddish-brown substance from the bark of the tree. It is a fungal disease that is best controlled by pruning the affected limbs, although some good results have been obtained with the regular application of fungicide, coupled with an intense fertilizer program.

Why should normally vigorous, healthy, 50-100 year old trees suddenly succumb to this infection? As Mr. Sands searched for a cause, it became apparent that something unusual must have occurred to weaken the trees enough for an infection to take hold. A look back at the weather records of 1979-1985 reveals a pattern of winters that were unusually cold or had very little snow, as well as very wet springs and dry summers.

Beeches are sustained by an extensive surface root system which can be adversely affected by prolonged weather extremes. This, in turn, leaves the trees vulnerable, in this case, to bleeding canker.

Here at Mount Auburn, as soon as a tree is diagnosed as having the canker, a systemic fungicide is injected in the tree, and severely affected limbs are removed. Initially, less vigorous trees were injected with a systemic, concentrated fertilizer to help them fight off the infection. The existing tree fertilization program has been intensified using 10-6-4 every two instead of every four years on all of the European Beeches.

Mr. Sands conferred with Dr. Terry Tatter from the Shade Tree Lab at the University of Massachusetts, and with Dr. David Nielson from the Ohio State Extension Service, both of whom serve as consultants to New York City regarding the diseased beeches in Central Park. They concurred with the current course of treatment.

Since 1983 the Cemetery has lost six trees to the infection, and currently thirteen trees are under treatment and close observation. All of the beeches on the grounds are being carefully monitored in the hope that early detection and treatment will save them. "We are hopeful and guardedly optimistic that we can help our beeches fight off this infection," said Mr. Sands. "We will do everything we can to save them."



## Children Visit Mount Auburn

Mount Auburn provided leaders for twelve groups of children last summer, and countless other school and day camp groups visited the Cemetery on their own. We encourage teachers and parents to bring their children here to help foster an understanding of the role of cemeteries in our communities, and to demonstrate why Mount Auburn is a place for both the living and the dead.

The following is a sample of some of the questions asked by children this summer:

Why do people come to this cemetery when they are still alive?

Is Jesus buried here?

How many souls are buried here?

Are there any famous people buried here—like Michael Jackson or Mick Jagger? (ed. note: To the best of our knowledge, both of these men are in good health)

Do fairies live here?

What happens to children when they die?

Where does your soul go? Where is mine now?

Why are there so many different kinds of stones?

Look! A petrified dog! Is he buried here? (ed. note: No animals are buried here.)

Can we go swimming?



### Did You Know . . .

. . . that in 1942, the Proprietors of the Cemetery donated 40,300 pounds of scrap metal to the war effort?

. . . that 18 million gallons of water are pumped between April and November from the Cemetery's own fifty-foot deep gravel-packed well?

. . . that the statue of Nathaniel Bowditch by Ball Hughes on the corner of Central and Chapel Avenues was the first full-length, cast-bronze statue in the world?

. . . that only a decade after Mount Auburn was founded, almost as many people had visited the Cemetery as had visited Niagara Falls?



## Dear Readers,

This issue of *Sweet Auburn* is the final edition to be printed under the editorship of Eden Foster Sizemore, Program and Membership Director. Eden will be moving to Florida in August to be with her husband Russ, who is teaching Philosophy and Religion at New College in Sarasota.

All of us on the staff and many of the Friends members who have gotten to know Eden will miss her warm personality and her enthusiasm for the Friends of Mount Auburn and her love of the Cemetery. She has done a superb job in organizing and developing the Friends and its programs. We wish her well in starting a new life in Florida.

While we are sorry Eden is leaving, I am delighted to announce that Jean Rosenberg will be taking over the position effective August 1. Jean comes to us after several highly successful years as Program Director for Habitat Institute for the Environment in Belmont. Most recently, Jean spent the past year studying landscape design at Radcliffe College where she intends to continue on a part-time basis.

We look forward to welcoming Jean as a new member of the staff, and are confident that through her efforts and with the help of many staff members and volunteers, the Friends will continue to be an active part of the community and an important and integral part of the Cemetery.

With best wishes,

*Alan D. Chesney*

Alan D. Chesney, *President*  
Mount Auburn Cemetery

## With an Eye to the Land: Mount Auburn's Geologists

by George Ehrenfried

Mount Auburn is well known as a mecca for visitors who are attracted by its varied collection of plants and trees, and by the many kinds of birds they can find here. Geology is another field of interest whose devotees can find enjoyment from roaming around with their eyes open.

Visitors can learn about geology here in several different ways. One way is to search out the resting places of distinguished men who have made major contributions to geological science.

There is Prof. George Becker (1847-1919, Oak Avenue, C4 on the map) of the University of California, for instance, who studied mining and ore-treatment in Europe, introduced their advanced methods into America, and later, in Washington, founded the Carnegie Geophysical Laboratory. Charles Thomas Jackson (1805-1880, Mountain Avenue, D4 on the map) carried out the first geological surveys of Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, and shared with Dr. Morton (who also rests in Mount Auburn) the credit for the discovery of ether as an anesthetic. Jackson's studies of the Lake Superior copper deposits helped to cause Boston financial interests to become a major force in the development of these mines. And Prof. William Barton Rogers (1805-1882, Walnut Avenue, E5 on the map), of William and Mary College, did the first geological survey of Virginia, and later moved to Boston where he helped to found M.I.T.

The monument to Jules Marcou (1825-1898, Chestnut Avenue near Palm Avenue, C4 on the map) is of special interest. Marcou's field of study, before he came over from France, was in fossils. The visitor who sees his monument will find it hard to believe that shellfish once grew to such huge sizes. The stone is actually a natural sized model of an ammonite, an extinct fossil related to the present-day chambered nautilus. Even though both have spiral forms, they are not related to snails. Marcou took part in several of the very early government surveys of the "wild west." He drew the first geological map of the whole of the United States, although it was severely criticized by other geologists, who said it was full of mistakes.

The most famous of all the geologists in Mount Auburn is Louis Agassiz (1807-1873, Bellwort Path, E4 on the map). Before he came to Cambridge from Switzerland, he had already made a great name for himself in biology and the study of glaciers. His researches convinced other scientists that great continental ice sheets had spread over most of Europe and northern North America. After he came over, his teaching and lecturing and organizational work inspired countless younger people to work in similar fields, societies, and institutions, including the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology. Agassiz's monument is a piece of granite from the Aar glacier, where he had done some of his studies.

As was mentioned before, learning about the lives of these important people is one way in which a visitor can further his knowledge of geology. Other ways include the appreciation of the natural land-forms of the area, and the examination of the many and varied kinds of stones that have been used in the monuments. There is a wealth of opportunity for learning about the world around us by walking through Mount Auburn Cemetery.

*Mr. Ehrenfried is a geologist and educator in Cambridge.*



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## Biographical Notes

### Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin

1842-1924

Josephine Ruffin was an activist for Negro rights. In 1894, she organized the Women's Era Club, the first Negro women's civic association. She served as editor of its monthly publication, *Women's Era*, and also worked on the

*Boston Courant*, a weekly Negro newspaper. Josephine received her early education in Salem, Massachusetts as her parents did not want her to attend segregated Boston schools. Later, when the schools became integrated, she enrolled in the West End's Bowdoin School. The mother of five children, Josephine's own daughter, Florida, would become an educator in the Boston's public schools.

As a community leader, Josephine Ruffin also became involved with the women's movement. She was a charter member of the Massachusetts School Suffrage Association as well as a founder of the League of Women for Community Service.

*Josephine Ruffin is buried on Indian Ridge Path, B5 on the map.*

*Reprinted with permission from "A Women's History Tour of Cambridge," 1986, by Ann Rollins.*



*The Gibson Girl*

### Charles Dana Gibson

1867-1944

*Artist, illustrator.* As an illustrator for periodicals, chiefly the old *Life* magazine, he became famous both for his ironical portraits of high society, and for a robust kind of well-bred feminine beauty which he called the "American

Girl," but which has since been more generally known as the "Gibson Girl." He also created another social type, "Mr. Pipp," upon which a successful play was modeled.

His popularity was greatly increased by the publication of his drawings in album form. A leading exponent of the black-and-white art, his drawings combine simplicity of design and subtle shading with bold characterization, and reveal a strong feeling for the beautiful, the dramatic, and the humorous. *Collier's Weekly* paid him fifty thousand dollars for furnishing a double page each week for a year—said to have been an unprecedented sum for such a commission. For a few years he devoted himself to portraiture in oil but returned to illustration.

*Mr. Gibson is buried on Halcyon Avenue, B6 on the map.*

*Reprinted from Mount Auburn Biographies, "A Biographical Listing of Distinguished Persons Interred in Mount Auburn Cemetery, 1831-1952" by Foster W. Russell.*

## An Invitation to Join The Friends of Mount Auburn

Please enroll me as a member of the Friends of Mount Auburn.

— Individual \$10

— Household \$20

— Senior Citizens and Students \$5

In addition to my membership dues, I would also like to contribute \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to help defray the costs of the Friends.

Contributions over membership dues are deductible from income taxes to the extent provided by law.

Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ payable to *Mount Auburn Cemetery*.

M

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like this to be a gift membership, please enclose your name and address so that we may notify the recipient.

Friends of Mount Auburn  
Mount Auburn Cemetery  
580 Mount Auburn Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138  
617/547-7105

## From the Annals of Mount Auburn's Garden History

by Joseph Killilea

We strive from time to time for the unusual and distinctive in our corporation plantings, but alas, we may never, never surpass the triumph of creativity "achieved" some years ago at the Asa Gray garden.

It seems that the ornamental beds there needed an application of lime and a somewhat inexperienced summer worker was assigned the rather simple job. However, the stockpile of lime in the storage shed was low and, in his zeal for efficiency, he found a pile of loose, spilled material nearby, mixed it in and went about his task.

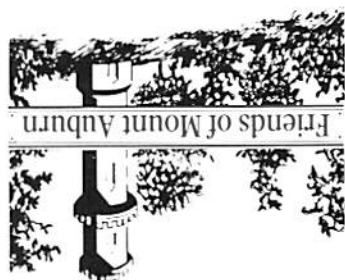
When the first rain ensued, Asa Gray erupted into a 700 square foot bubble bath. That bucket of loose lime had in reality been a broken bag of powdered hand soap!

Very unique and spectacular. However, the effect did not impress the Superintendent and cannot be repeated.

*Mr. Killilea is an eighteen-year veteran of Mount Auburn's gardening staff.*



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Cemetery  
580 Mount Auburn Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

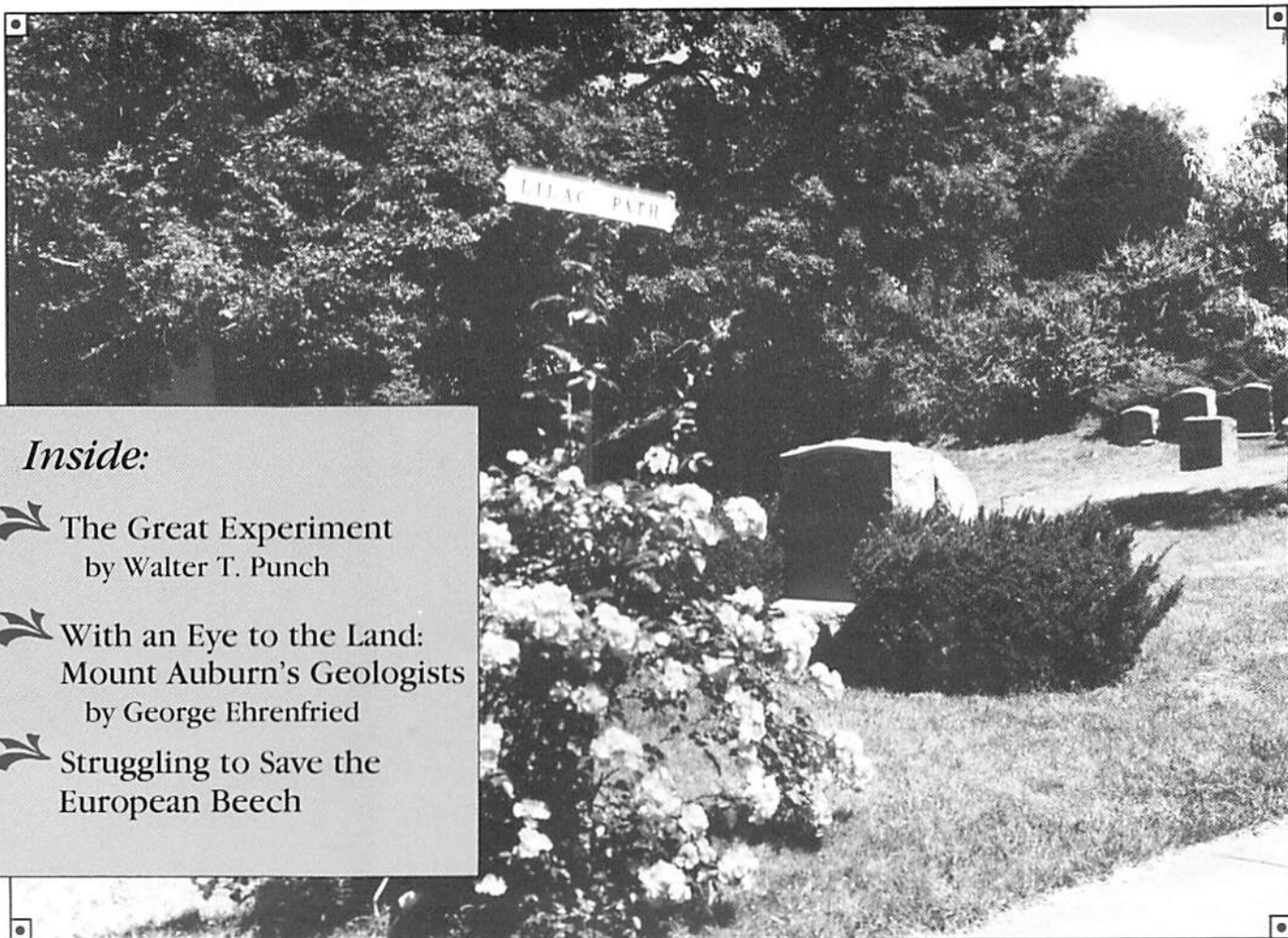


Photo by Alan D. Chesney

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