

Transitions



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A Message from the President

Welcome Spring! As Friends has done in recent years, members will be filling several urns around the cemetery with colorful flowering annuals. Many thanks to Walmart and Meijer who donated materials and gift cards for this project. Please consider beautifying your own family's graves as well!

I'm pleased to report that the stately Gibbs mausoleum has received some much-needed repairs since it was damaged in a windstorm in 2017 – the copper roofing and stonework has recently been restored to its original condition. You can read the fascinating history of the Gibbs family later in this newsletter.

In June, Friends will be meeting with the City manager to discuss ongoing concerns about the maintenance and care of the cemetery. If any readers have specific concerns that they would like us to address in that meeting, please email us at foresthomefriendsinfo@gmail.com. We welcome your input!

~ Paula Christiansen, President

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Proper Headstone Cleaning

Each year around Memorial Day, the number of visitors to Forest Home Cemetery grows as family members tidy up lots and clean their loved ones' headstones and monuments. Because there is so much misinformation about the proper way to clean headstones, we offer the following practical suggestions.

NEVER clean a cemetery marker with these:

- ✦ **Bleach** – Salts in the bleach can damage all headstones and can cause erosion and yellowing.
- ✦ **Acids** – Muriatic acid and other products containing acids (Lime Away, Naval Jelly, ammonia, vinegar, or lemon cleaners) will eat away at the surface and can cause irreversible damage, such as crystallization, to stone surfaces.
- ✦ **Soaps, Detergents & Household Cleaners** – Products such as TSP, Calgon, Fantastic, Formula 409, Spic and Span, Borax, Ivory, household detergents, or any abrasive cleaners can not only damage the headstone's surface, but can dramatically promote further biological growth after cleaning.



- ✦ **High-Pressure Water** – A high-pressure washer can cause serious damage to the surface of marble, sandstone, and limestone markers. Instead, use a garden hose with pressure not exceeding 60 psi.

Continued on page 2 . . .

The Origins of Decoration Day



Memorial Day – or Decoration Day as it was originally known – was first established in May 1868 by order of Major General John Logan, a former Union army commander and head of the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic), an organization of Union veterans.

The first large observance was held that year at Arlington National

Cemetery, across the Potomac River from Washington D.C., and was attended by roughly 5,000 people. For all of the celebrants, President Lincoln’s Gettysburg address was still fresh in their minds.

In 1916, just as WWI was raging in Europe, Rev. H.B. Johnson addressed Decoration Day attendees in Greenville:

Like all other sentiments and passions, patriotism is capable of being counterfeited and perverted. There is a maudlin patriotism which toys with the flag, and sheds tears over the flag, and chatters everlastingly about the flag, but has no more value of significance than the mutterings of a drunken man.

There is a sham patriotism which makes great professions, and behind these professions conceals selfish project. A man seems to be shouting for his country when he is really shouting for himself. He dotes upon his country in order to secure his personal advancement. When a man becomes extravagantly patriotic in speech and emotion it is well to find out the cause of his extravagant devotion to the flag.

Our republic needs the support of real patriots. A patriotism that will be sane and sincere, calm-eyed and steady. A patriotism that will not simply blaze out for a day and then die away into darkness.

Decoration Day was celebrated throughout the nation on May 30, from 1868 to 1971. After WWI, the day was expanded to honor those who have died in ALL American wars. And in 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday, though it is still often called Decoration Day. At that time, it was moved to the last Monday in May, where it is celebrated today.

Upcoming Events

- Mid-June “Magnificent Tombs” Tour (indoor)
- August 10 Historical Family Walk (pets invited)
- September 14 “Magnificent Tombs” Tour (outdoor)
- October 26-27 Murder, Mayhem & Madness Tour

Check our website for more details.
All outdoor events will have a scheduled rain date.

Proper Headstone Cleaning *(cont.. from page 1)*

- ✦ **Sealants** – Do not apply sealants to a headstone, as this can result in the stone not being able to “breathe.”
- ✦ **Metal Tools** –Metal tools such as wire brushes or putty knives can leave lasting marks on soft stone surfaces.

Professional conservators RECOMMEND . . .

- ✦ **D/2 Biological Solution** – This anti-microbial solution is non-toxic and biodegradable. It kills organic growth on stones and **does not damage** headstones. For more information, go to: <http://d2bio.com>.

Friends has used this product with excellent results. It can be purchased in 32-oz. spray bottles, or in 1- and 5-gallon jugs, from Amazon (use Amazon Smile to benefit Friends!) or eBay. A similar product, *Wet and Forget*, has been used by others with disappointing results.

Follow these steps to properly clean your headstone:

- 1) Wear rubber gloves and eye protection while working.
- 2) Thoroughly rinse the stone with water.
- 3) Remove soil and any deposits of biological growth using a natural or nylon bristle brush, toothbrush, or wooden craft stick. Dip frequently in water to reduce friction.
- 4) Do not allow cleaning solution to dry on the monument. Rinse the stone thoroughly after cleaning.





A GLIMPSE OF HISTORY

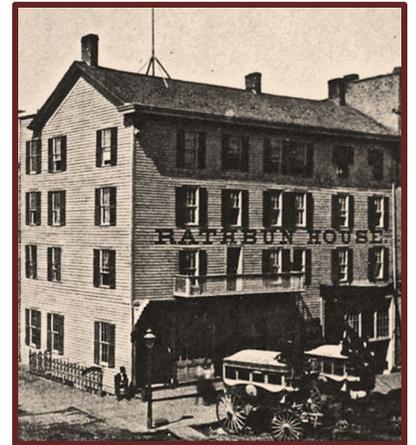
Elizabeth Hudson Gibbs

March 13, 1835 – October 5, 1915

Elizabeth Gibbs was one of 11 children born to Charles and Anna Rathbun. Her father, Charles, spent his early years working as a farmer in Utah and later Ohio. In 1844, Charles Rathbun loaded up a caravan of ox-drawn carriages and wagons and brought his wife, mother-in-law, and 10 youngest children to Michigan. Elizabeth was 9 years old when she arrived in Grand Rapids with her family.

Charles Rathbun bought a large mansion at the corner of Monroe and Market Streets (formerly the home of Louis Campeau) and renamed it the Rathbun House. Two years later, he built a large limestone addition that added 60 rooms, a kitchen, a large dining room, and a huge ballroom covering the entire upper floor. The hotel then had 117 rooms. The Rathbun House became the most popular hotel in western Michigan. Elections were held there, auctions were conducted from the front balcony, and bonfire rallies were held on the street in front. The huge upper ballroom was used almost nightly for dances, lectures, concerts, or shows by traveling theatrical groups.

Growing up amidst the varied cultural life at the Rathbun House in Grand Rapids left an indelible mark on the young Elizabeth. In February 1858, at the age of 22, Elizabeth married Thaddeus Gibbs (age 24) at her father's farm in Paris Township. The newlyweds settled in Dexter, Michigan (near Ann Arbor), where Thaddeus worked as a dry goods merchant. They had their first child, Mary Francis "Minnie" Gibbs, just over a year later. And 4 years after that, Elizabeth had twin girls, Anna and Ella Gibbs.



Thaddeus and Elizabeth Gibbs' house at 404 W. Cass St, which still stands today, although currently converted to a multifamily rental. Two of the Gibbs' daughters were buried at the house, until the last daughter, Ella, died of consumption on September 8, 1886, at which time all three girls were removed to the Gibbs plot in Forest Home Cemetery

The Gibbs family relocated to Greenville in 1872, where they purchased a home at 404 W Cass St. Thaddeus also purchased half a city lot just north of the Fargo & Belknap building, and built a three-story brick store, which was thereafter referred to as the "Gibbs Block." He partnered with Greenville resident, Jerome Woodward, and operated a dry goods mercantile business at that location until the firm was dissolved in 1875.

When she was 14, Minnie Gibbs was confirmed at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Greenville. One month later, in April 1874, she was recognized for perfect "attendance, punctuality, and deportment" during the Winter Term at Greenville Union School. After graduating from high school, Minnie went to Chicago to study elocution in the Spring of 1879.

In early 1880, Elizabeth went to visit her daughter, Minnie, in Chicago. That summer, Minnie gave a highly publicized dramatic reading at the Fuller Opera House in Greenville, where she received warm reviews. In the Spring of 1881, Minnie performed with several different comedy and theatrical troupes in Chicago. She married S.S. Kinkade, whom she met while performing in one of the comedy troupes. That same year, Minnie performed in a production of the Uncle Tom's Cabin opera that was circulating widely in Chicago during that era.

Tragically, whatever promising career Minnie may have been destined for was abruptly cut short when she died unexpectedly at the age of 22, while visiting Kinkade's sister in Denver, Colorado. That morning, Minnie's husband came down for breakfast at 8 a.m. while his wife remained in her room. Around 10 a.m., a lady went up to see about Minnie coming down to breakfast and found her

A Glimpse of History – continued from page 3.

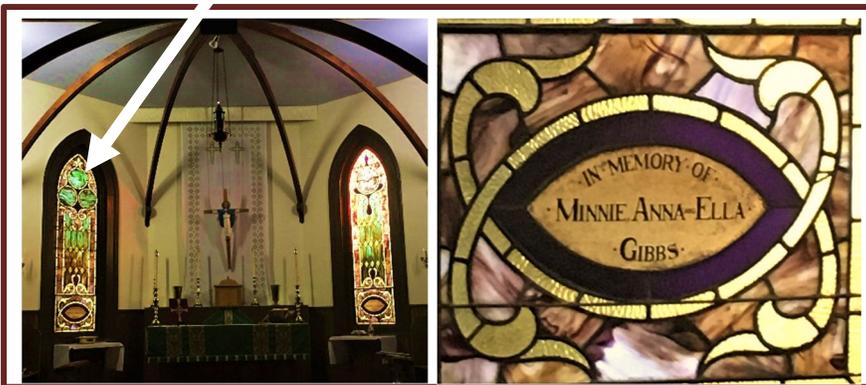
dressed and lying on the bed, seemingly asleep. Physicians were promptly summoned, an electric battery and other appliances were used, but all to no avail. Minnie never recovered consciousness and passed away without a struggle. Heart disease was pronounced as the cause of her death. Her remains were preserved for shipment and sent to Greenville. The funeral service was held at the Gibbs home on Cass Street, and Minnie was “temporarily interred” near the home.

In August 1883 – just over a year after Minnie’s death – Elizabeth took her twins, Anna and Ella, to Boston, to enter the New England Conservatory of Music. They returned to Greenville less than a year later. Anna died on August 25, 1886, after a “long and painful illness.” The funeral service was again held at the family home, although it was attended by very few friends because Anna’s twin, Ella, was also home sick with consumption (TB). Ella died from her illness just 2 weeks later on September 8, 1886. After a funeral service at home, Minnie and Anna were disinterred and the three girls were taken by funeral procession to be buried at Forest Home Cemetery. All three girls were just 22 years old when they died.

The Gibbs mausoleum, which Mrs. Gibbs called the “cottage,” was built sometime after the three girls were buried on the Gibbs lot, around 1887-1888 (it was built over their graves.) In February 1889, Mrs. Gibbs had a large granite pedestal placed outside the “cottage” and a life-sized statue of Ella, made of Italian marble, was placed on top of the pedestal. According to local lore, Mrs. Gibbs would go out to the cottage to visit her girls and would sit in the rocking chair that still remains inside today. When the City last opened the mausoleum for repairs in 1993, they saw the rocking chair, a table with an ornate tea set, and several small religious statues near the daughters’ headstones. There were also seashells covering the floor. It’s unknown when Ella’s statue was removed from its pedestal and moved to the interior of the mausoleum, but it was inside the mausoleum by 1993. The mausoleum was recently renovated by the City this past winter, after a severe wind storm damaged the copper roof, sheared off the upper rear corner of the structure, and knocked down the northeast fencing around the plot in the Spring of 2017.



The remainder of Mrs. Gibbs’ life seems to have passed unremarkably, although she and Thaddeus remained very active in St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (at the corner of Cass and Clay). In 1880, Elizabeth was instrumental in hosting ice cream socials and fundraisers to help pay off the mortgage on the church. And in 1905, the Gibbs gave \$600 to the church, to be used for the construction of a guild hall. When she died, Elizabeth donated a beautiful memorial stained-glass window in her daughters’ names, which remains in the chancel of the church today. It is said that images of her daughters’ faces were once visible in the three green circles at the top of the window, but sadly those images have since disappeared.



In their twilight years, Elizabeth and Thaddeus often spent winters in Florida. They also made regular trips to visit family members in Chicago, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Manistee, Toledo, and New York. In February 1910, Thaddeus died of bladder cancer at the age of 81. He and Elizabeth had been married for 56 years! Elizabeth died 20 months later, at the age of 80. Thaddeus, Elizabeth, and their three girls are all buried in the Gibbs mausoleum.