

Surprise in mausoleum

by CLARE O'NEILL CARR

The bodily remains of an early Red Hook family — and a tragic memory — were discovered recently when a 19th Century mausoleum was dismantled at St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery in the village.

A supposedly empty vault yielded about three or four bodies, as well as a monument to a young child accidentally drowned in the Sawkill Creek over 100 years ago.

A new record of the bodies will be made, then the remains will be

reburied in the spring, according to cemetery officials.

The vault of the Fraleigh-Shook family, residents of this area since the late 18th and early 19th centuries, was due to be torn down for the past 15 years, according to spokesmen for the St. Paul's Cemetery Association.

The stone edifice, built around the 1830s had become weakened with age and exposure. It posed a danger to children who might climb on top and fall through or off of the loosened (please turn to page 5)

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stones, according to association spokesman Douglas Freer.

Irving Fraleigh, whose ancestors were buried in the vault years ago — and whose father (also named Irving) had signed over ownership of the mausoleum to the cemetery association — gave his permission for the action.

It was his understanding, he said, that the remains of family members buried there had been removed and reburied years before, leaving the vault empty and deteriorating.

However when workmen proceeded to pull down the structure several weeks ago, the remains of about three or four bodies were discovered, along with a number of marble crypt covers listing the deceased.

Sheridan Fraleigh

A beautiful monument to the memory of Sheridan Fraleigh, an 8-year-old boy who would have been the uncle of the present Irving Fraleigh, was also discovered, according to David Cohen of Red Hook, a stone cutter who supervised the demolition.

According to local historian Clara Losee, the tragic death of Irving and Almira Cookingham Fraleigh's son Sheridan in 1876 shook the local community.

The boy drowned at the Fraleigh homestead on Route 199, at the juncture of the Sawkill and Lackskill streams, just across from the family

farm.

The marble crypt cover of his grandmother, Lydia Christina Shook, who died in 1885, was also discovered in the vault.

One year after the boy's death, the couple had one other son, Irving Peter Fraleigh.

His son is the present Irving Fraleigh, who still lives on the family farm on Route 199.

Primarily Shooks

The names found in the vault recently belong primarily to the Shook side of the family.

Besides Lydia Shook Fraleigh, grandmother of Sheridan, the vault contained: her parents George and Margaret Allendorf Shook, who both died in 1862; Ellen Maria Shook, who died in 1927 at the age of 70; and Eliza Gillespi, who died Dec. 13, 1893.

Cohen said the names will be recorded and engraved, along with the dates of their deaths, on the monument to Sheridan Fraleigh.

That monument, which was built to withstand exposure to the weather, will mark the remains disinterred this winter.

According to Cohen, who with the help of several men tore the structure down, the coffins and remains were difficult to distinguish. It was also impossible to match crypt covers with the coffins, he said.

The marble crypt covers listing the names were leaning against the inside

of the structure.

Whether someone had entered the crypt and disturbed them "is hard to say," Cohen stated.

The names were recorded from the covers, which, with the exception of one or two, were broken and deteriorated.

Air and water, leaking into the vault over a long period ate away the marble roof and crypt covers, as well as the remaining coffins inside.

"You couldn't tell who was who," said Cohen.

Funeral director

When the bodies were discovered, undertaker Charles Hutchens of Burnett and Rockefeller Funeral Home was asked to oversee the work, said Cohen.

At that point, he added, the work continued by hand.

The remains were placed in funeral bags and stored in the holding vault.

According to Hutchens, the process was technically a disinterment, for which no state permit was needed.

A state permit for disinterment is needed when remains are moved outside of a cemetery, but not when they are removed and reburied within the same one, said Hutchens.

Criticism

There has been some criticism over destruction of the vault by the local historical society.

J. Winthrop Aldrich, Red Hook town historian, said he was disappointed that the cemetery association did not contact the historical society before destroying the vault.

"I'm very regretful that a significant edifice believed to be one of the two largest and most ornate above-ground mausoleums in the town had to be destroyed," said Aldrich.

The other vault, which Alrich said is

the burial place of the Bartlett family in Annandale, is located just north of the Chapel of the Holy Innocents at Bard College.

According to Cohen and cemetery spokesmen, however, repair of the Fraleigh vault was too costly to undertake.

The structure had been deteriorating for many years, and the danger of accident and liability to the cemetery was significant, said Cohen.

The large cap stones, which were so loose that they fell when the building was first pushed, weighed 400 pounds. The granite side stones weighed 800 pounds each, according to Cohen.

Because of deterioration, the doors to the vault could not be opened.

Children playing on the vault could have gotten seriously injured, Cohen said.

Cohen, who operates a memorial business, also said that the marble

and stone found inside were so deteriorated that they had no significant value for recycling or resale.

He said that two marble crypt covers were sold, but the rest of the stone was given away to anyone who would haul it.

Cohen, who said he volunteered to tear the mausoleum down, acknowledged that the job was not a pleasant one.

"A lot of jobs aren't pleasant," he added. "But it would have been much less pleasant if a kid had gotten hurt."

There is no cemetery record of the Fraleighs and Shooks who were originally buried in the vault, since records at the cemetery only go back to the 1930s, according to St. Paul's cemetery groundskeeper John Slater.

A fire apparently destroyed early records, according to cemetery spokesmen.

