

# Transitions



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## A Message from the President



As we wind down the activities at Forest Home Cemetery for another summer, I would like to thank everyone who has supported our organization by attending tours and programs this year. I would also like to take a moment to reflect on our 5 years of existence as a nonprofit, volunteer group.

Our goal has always been to work amicably with the City of Greenville, and as such we have not openly criticized the City’s indifferent attitude toward care of the cemetery grounds and infrastructure. But we have consistently communicated our concerns about the inadequate grounds maintenance – mowing, tree trimming and removal, and deteriorating roadways – all of which are the City’s responsibility as the owner of the cemetery. These issues have been brought to the attention of the City Manager, City Council, and City staff – but have been routinely disregarded.

We have observed considerable damage done by the lawn-care providers – headstones toppled over and chipped, cement curbing broken and moved aside for easier mowing access, and most recently, workers who moved the Victorian iron fence surrounding the Gibbs mausoleum, subsequently leaving it lying on the ground. Photos and a description of these issues were sent to the City Manager and each Council member, with no response from anyone.

In March 2017, a clump of trees fell on the stately Gibbs mausoleum, shearing off the rear corner of stonework and damaging the decorative copper roofing. The fallen trees were cleared away, but no effort was made to repair the damaged building.

Our research confirmed that when she died in 1915 (103 years ago!), Mrs. Gibbs bequeathed \$5,000 to the City to be held in trust for the maintenance of the family mausoleum. This spring, Friends secured bids from two companies that could make the necessary repairs and submitted these, along with photos and proof of the trust funds, to each Councilperson and the City Manager. The Gibbs mausoleum still remains unrepaired – more than 18 months after it was damaged.

We have suggested reopening the Baldwin Lake Drive cemetery entrance, with the offer that Friends would pay for a decorative metal gate, its installation, and landscaping. Although we were told this would be discussed in a City staff meeting, we never received any formal response to our offer, and the entrance remains chained off to “prevent vandalism.”

During the 2016-2017 public hearing on the City budget, I proposed the concept of investing the cemetery perpetual care fund of roughly \$332,000 with the Greenville Area Community Foundation, where it would yield earnings that could be used for cemetery maintenance. No known action has been taken, although City staff was also provided detailed information regarding this option from the Foundation.

Just this summer, the directional sign for the cemetery at the corner of Baldwin and South streets was removed during construction of a cement pad for the disc golf course. The only remaining way-finding sign to locate Forest Home Cemetery is at the corner of Merritt Drive, just as you enter the grounds. Anyone who is not familiar with the location of the cemetery would

*Continued on page 4 . . .*

### What’s Inside:

- A Glimpse of History . . . . . 2-3
- Appleton Mausoleum Fundraiser . . . . . 4
- Murder, Mayhem & Madness Tour. . . . . 4

## A GLIMPSE OF HISTORY

### Margaret A. (Church) Appleton 1808 -1878

In August 1878, the Pontiac Commercial ran a short story about a Mrs. Appleton of Greenville, who had killed her husband and thrown his body in the well on their property. Several weeks later, the Pontiac Commercial published a much longer version of the story, which was later picked up by the Grand Rapids Eagle and the Detroit Post & Tribune. The story went like this:

Margaret Appleton (referred to as the “detestable Mother Appleton”) was a “clever doctress” and a “professional abortionist” who moved to Greenville with her husband, a niece, and a nephew. The nephew, age 16, got sick of the abuse in the Appleton household and ran off. Around 1864, Margaret Appleton killed her husband and threw him down a well on their property. The niece, age 11 at the time of Mr. Appleton’s disappearance, was thought to have known something about the murder, and she, too, went missing about a year later. In later years, when people asked Mrs. Appleton about the missing “niece,” she told people that she had married a grocer and moved to Big Rapids. But no one could locate the niece. Margaret Appleton became a “severe Christian” in the later years of her life. For 2 years before she died, Mrs. Appleton was attended by a demented hired girl, who she later had removed to the poor house out of fear that she had overheard Mrs. Appleton talking in her sleep about the murder of Mr. Appleton.

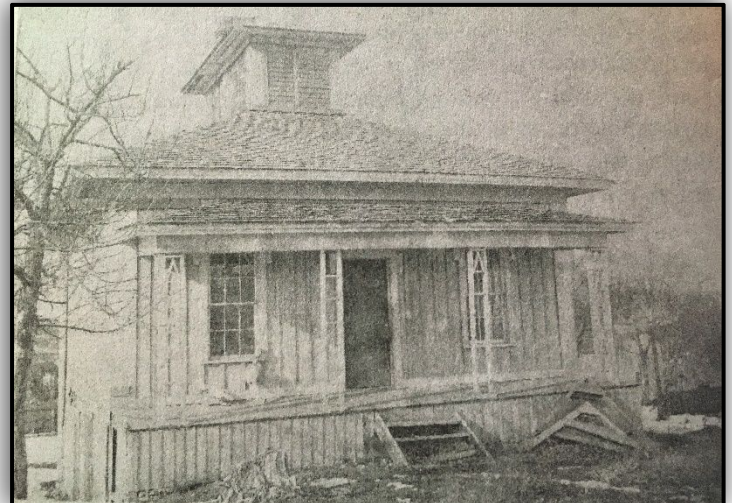
Shortly before her death, Mrs. Appleton had a “handsome brick vault built in the Greenville cemetery.” In her last days, Mrs. Appleton confessed to the murder in the presence of her pastor, the Rev. Mr. Patton, her physician, Dr. John Avery, and her lawyer, Mr. Tatem. The shocked men searched the well and found a skull and human bones, and when Mrs. Appleton died 2 weeks later, they buried the remains of Mr. Appleton with her in the new vault.

This remarkable tale was republished in the September 4, 1879, Greenville Independent, and subsequently refuted by the published testimonials of Dr. John Avery and the Rev. Mr. Patton. But apparently not everyone was convinced that the stories weren’t true. In fact, a next-door neighbor, Claude Barlow – who was only 3 years old when the newspaper story was published – later recounted his own experiences at the “haunted” Appleton house, which his family had purchased and tried unsuccessfully to rent out. The stories made their way into a book titled, “Memories of a Greenville Boy.”

Unsettling rumors aside, Margaret Appleton led an inconspicuous Christian life while in Greenville. She was born in Pennsylvania around 1808, and first shows up in the 1850 census as Margaret Church, living with a 5-year-old girl named Mary Church, who was later referred to as her adopted daughter. It’s unknown whether Church was Margaret’s maiden name or a married name. The 1850 census also shows that Margaret Church lived down the street from some printers, which may explain how she eventually met and married her husband, William Appleton, whose stated occupation was always “printer.”

William Appleton, as it turns out, was a rather unsavory character. He was born in New Jersey around 1808, and – perhaps unbeknownst to Margaret – was first married to a woman named Maryanne. In the same 1850 census that showed Margaret living in Pennsylvania with her adopted daughter, William Appleton was living in Kentucky with his wife and five children! He must have moved around a lot even then, because those five children were born in four different states. He reportedly abandoned that family in May of 1855, and was officially divorced from Maryanne Appleton by February of 1856.

William Appleton married Margaret in late 1856 or 1857. They arrived in Greenville, with Mary Church, in 1858. At that time, Margaret established a Fancy Dry Goods and millinery store, while William Appleton appeared to earn money by selling sewing



*The Appleton house, located on the NE corner of what are now Orange and Baldwin Streets, was torn down in 1902.*

machines. (Everybody, from Claude Barlow to Dr. John Avery referred to William Appleton as a “peddler,” even though he always referred to himself as a “printer.”)

GREENVILLE  
**FANCY DRY GOODS STORE**  
— AND —  
**MILLINERY ESTABLISHMENT,**  
*One Square north of the Rossman House,*  
(FRENCH'S OLD STAND.)  
**MRS. APPLETON,**  
Late from the East, would respectfully announce to the Ladies, and the Families in general, living in Greenville and its vicinity, that she has located as above, where she hopes to receive the patronage of the community. Her stock consists of  
**Millinery Goods,**  
**EMBROIDERIES,**  
**Laces, Dress-Goods, Gloves, Hosiery,**  
**TRIMMINGS, ETC., ETC.**  
ALSO,  
**Children's Clothing, Ready Made or Made to Order.**  
She hopes by strict attention to business, low prices and courteous manners to merit your patronage.  
In regard to **PRICES**, the public are assured that her prices are as low as can be found in the eastern cities. Her object is to dispose of her Goods at fair rates, and become a permanent citizen.  
P. S.—Country Produce taken in exchange.  
**BOUDOIR SEWING MACHINES.**—Harris, patentee; price, \$45;—the best single-thread machine yet introduced, on hand for sale. Also, *Johnson's Sewing Machine*, a fine article and a useful ornament—price, \$55—on hand for sale, at the above named store.  
WM. APPLETON, Ag't.  
Greenville, Sept. 20, 1858.

In the first advertisement for her store, Margaret offered her goods at prices “as low as can be found in the eastern cities.” The ad also stated her willingness to accept “country produce” in exchange for goods sold. Unfortunately, the millinery shop must not have fared very well, since by April of 1861, Mrs. Appleton felt it necessary to advertise that she was still in business, “all reports to the contrary notwithstanding.”

According to Dr. Avery, sometime in early 1863, William Appleton left town “with a horse and wagon on a peddling tour.” He reportedly sent Margaret “occasional letters,” with the last letter being sent from Detroit. He was last seen in Pontiac. (Remember, the “Appleton Hoax” originated in the Pontiac Commercial newspaper.) In any event, Margaret never saw him again, and there’s no record of them ever being divorced.

Margaret’s daughter, Mary (who was never adopted by Appleton) was an active member in the First Methodist church and sang in its choir. In August 1863, when she was 17, she married William Van Loo, who ran a general merchandise store with Manning Rutan under the name of Rutan & Van Loo’s in Greenville. Shortly thereafter, Mary and her husband moved to Big Rapids, where Van Loo partnered with Barzilla Hutchinson in opening a furniture and grocery store. Mary and William were married for 27 years, until William died in 1890. They had two boys: William Jr. and Kingsley Van Loo (who was the first boy born in Big Rapids). Tragically, William Jr. died of “quick consumption,” just one month after his father, at the age of 24. He was a graduate of Albion college, with a promising future ahead of him.

Mary later moved with her son, Kingsley, to California. She married Barzilla Hutchinson (her husband’s former partner) on his ranch in Fowler, California, in October 1896. Barzilla had moved to Fowler in 1884, where he set up a vineyard and orchard, and began buying up land until he had acquired 160 acres. He eventually became known as the “Peach King,” due to the large size of the peaches raised in his orchard.

Mary’s son, Kingsley Van Loo, remained in Oakland, California, where he became a prominent fruit grower on his own 100-acre ranch. But we never really learn any more about Mary’s relationship with her mother, and Margaret’s story ends rather sadly.

After William Appleton left in 1863, Margaret fell on hard times (as did many others during the Civil War.) Shortly after her daughter married William Van Loo, Margaret adopted a motherless 1-year-old infant named Enola “Nolie”

Makely, who was “crippled.” Sometime later, she gave up her millinery business and survived on rent from boarders that she took in, earnings from the sale of floral pieces that she made with flowers from her garden, and the charity of neighbors.

Margaret Appleton was an invalid for the last 10 years of her life. A few months before she died, she mortgaged her house, using part of the money to build a modest vault in Forest Home Cemetery (built around July 1878), and the rest for her support and burial. She died on September 5, 1878, at the age of 69, and was buried in the mausoleum. She is the only person buried there. Her disabled daughter, Nolie – then 16 years old – was taken to the County Farm to live because she had no means of financial support and her temperament was such that no other family was willing to take her in.

What, you might ask, ever happened to the shifty William Appleton? In August 1864, he was apparently working as a printer in the offices of the Hamilton (Ohio) Telegraph, when he learned that he had received an inheritance of \$35,000 (equivalent to half a million in today’s dollars!) from a deceased relative. Could that be why he never returned to Greenville? Roughly 3 years later, he married his third wife, Elizabeth, who was 20 years his junior, and they had a daughter, Nettie, the next year. Apparently, the third time was the charm, though, as William remained with his third wife until he died of “old age” in April 1882. He was 74 years old.

## President's Message – cont. from page 1

find it impossible to find from the major streets. Although Friends offered to pay for a larger, more attractive sign for the Merritt Drive entrance so the City could relocate the existing way-finding sign to the South street intersection, the City never responded.

I find it difficult to understand the lack of respect shown by the City of Greenville for those persons laid to rest at Forest Home Cemetery – hundreds of war veterans, scores of early settlers and business owners, political figures, as well as everyday residents who have shaped the history of this town. The cemetery roads, retaining walls, trees, and grounds remain in abysmal condition, while city dollars are freely spent for discretionary items. A city's burial grounds should be an area of which to be proud - not ashamed. Something needs to change!

~ Paula Christiansen, President

***“Show me your burial grounds  
and I'll show you a measure of  
the civility of a community.”***

*Benjamin Franklin (1706 - 1790)  
Author, politician, scientist, inventor*

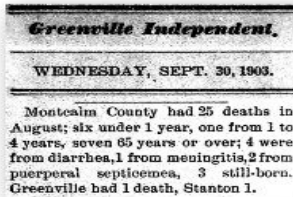
## FUNDRAISER To Restore the Appleton Mausoleum



Friends has obtained an estimate of the cost to repair and restore the front façade of the Appleton mausoleum.

**Won't you help us reach our \$750 target?**

All donations will go specifically to this project. You can mail a check to “Friends of Forest Home Cemetery” at 108 W South Street, Greenville MI, or donate on our website at [www.friendsofforesthome.net](http://www.friendsofforesthome.net). Work will be performed in 2019.



## Back by Popular Demand! Murder, Mayhem & Madness Tour\* at Forest Home Cemetery

(Presented by Undertaker Chris and Grim Reaper Ed)

Saturday, October 27, 2-4 p.m.

~ or ~

Sunday, October 28, 5-7 p.m.

\$6/person, ages 13 & over  
\$4/person, under 13 years

**NOW  
OFFERED ON  
2 DATES!**



Be sure to arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled start time. **Costumes optional!**  
To purchase tickets in advance, call Kathleen Dunne at (616) 824-9601, or visit the Friends website at: [www.friendsofforesthome.net/Upcoming-Events.html](http://www.friendsofforesthome.net/Upcoming-Events.html).



\*Due to the sensitive nature of this tour, including graphic details about accidents, murders, and suicide, this tour may not be suitable for children under 13 years of age.

