

Transitions

September 2020

Vol. 6, No. 1

Vice!

A Message from the President

[Continuing the trend of unusual events this year, President Paula Christiansen has graciously allowed me to borrow her message space for this issue only!]

If 2020 has shown us anything, it's that nothing lasts forever. Life is fragile, and some of the most basic things that we've come to rely on can vanish with a whisper (or a whimper). In honor of the 75-year anniversary of the bombing of Japan, this issue features local resident and hero, Frederick Bock, and describes his role in the Nagasaki bombing raid. Certainly, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki illustrated in very graphic fashion the fragility of human life and how everything can change in a moment.

In a similar but less dramatic way, the mission of Friends of Forest Home Cemetery has also changed since its formation in 2013. One of our founding members, Gerry Christiansen, passed away in 2016, depriving us of his expertise, commitment, and brute strength. (The Adopt-a-Veteran page of our website is dedicated to Gerry.)

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In 2018, another founding member, Elizabeth Hern, resigned due to health issues, taking her love of art and history and her passion for Babyland with her.

In 2018, physical work at the cemetery was delayed for several months while the City made repairs to the watering system. In 2019, the watering system failed again and was never turned on; cemetery visitors had access to a single spigot at the front of the cemetery. And in 2020, without notice to the public, the City abandoned the watering system – pulling out spigots and leaving only a single source of water at the front of the 32-acre cemetery.

Cemetery road work has been budgeted at grossly inadequate levels and delayed for years. The City budgeted \$50,000 total for road work for each of the past 3 years, but did not spend any of the budgeted money in 2018-2019. In 2020, the City began minimal road repairs around the community mausoleum, but the rest of the roads continue to erode and wash away without any meaningful effort to repair or repave.

Drainage problems have not been addressed, causing sections of the cemetery to flood each year. And no cement work has been done to repair mower damage or prevent continued erosion of the hillsides, further weakening the tree-root system and causing several large trees to come crashing down each year. No effort is made to trim or cull dead trees before they fall.

Since the City took over Forest Home Cemetery more than a hundred years ago, it has failed miserably in its duty to maintain this beautiful historic cemetery.

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A GLIMPSE OF HISTORY

Frederick Carl Laurence Bock

1918 – 2000

“Philosopher & Scientist”



Frederick Carl Laurence Bock was born in Greenville on January 18, 1918, the son of local historian and former mayor, Wyman Bock and his wife Helen. He graduated from the University of Chicago in 1939 and enrolled in a graduate program in philosophy.

On July 11, 1941, Bock enlisted with the air force at Fort Custer, a military camp situated between Battle Creek and Kalamazoo, Michigan. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in February 1942 and given command of a B-29 bomber, which was nicknamed “*Bockscar*.”

For 17 months during WWII, Bock flew frequent missions over the infamous “hump” – the most dangerous airlift route from India, over the Himalayas, and into China to resupply Chinese troops who were fighting the Japanese. By conservative estimates, more than 1,000 men and 600 planes were lost over the hump’s 530-mile stretch of rugged terrain. Extreme weather in the region took down more U.S. pilots than the Japanese. Eventually it was dubbed the “Skyway to Hell” and the “Aluminum Trail” for the number of planes that didn’t make it. THAT was Bock’s regular route. From China, Bock also flew many air raids over Japan.

After the war, in a speech to the Greenville Rotary Club, Bock spoke very favorably of the Chinese, commending them for their dogged fighting style and predicting that they would one day emerge as a great world power and friend to the U.S.

The treacherous conditions of the eastern routes were exemplified by the ill-fated bombing of Nagasaki – the site of the second atom bomb due solely to poor weather conditions and a string of unfortunate circumstances.

The First Bomb

The *Enola Gay* dropped “Little Boy” on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, wiping out 90% of the city and immediately killing 80,000 people. Major Charles Sweeney and his crew flew observation in the C-15, “*The Great Artiste*,” taking photos and scientific measurements. Sweeney’s team was slated to drop the second atom bomb on the Japanese island of Kokura, home to one of the largest arsenals in Japan, on August 11. But poor weather moved up the date of the second raid and there was no time to refit *The Great Artiste* for a bomb run. So Sweeney’s team switched with Bock’s team and flew the *Bockscar* fitted with “Fat Man.” Bock’s team flew observation in *The Great Artiste*.

A String of Unfortunate Circumstances

During pre-flight inspection, it was discovered that the *Bockscar* had an inoperative fuel-transfer pump, making it impossible to use any of the 640 gallons of fuel carried in the reserve tank. But since the bomb was already armed and would have been too dangerous to move to another aircraft, it was decided that the crew would simply have to carry the extra fuel all the way to Japan and back, which would consume more fuel.

As the weather deteriorated, the rendezvous point for the three-bomber squadron was moved to a different location and flown at higher altitude, consuming even more fuel. By the time *The Big Stink* failed to show up at the new rendezvous point, *Bockscar* had already stayed 30 minutes longer than it should have before moving to the target and beginning its ascent to bombing altitude at 30,000 feet.



The fat man silhouettes on the nose represent four pumpkin bomb missions (in black) and the atom bomb dropped on Nagasaki (in red).

When *Bockscar* reached Kokura (the primary target), clouds and drifting smoke from a massive firebombing raid on nearby Yawata the previous day, obscured the aiming point. Despite three attempted bomb runs in 50 minutes, the bombardier could not drop visually, and the aircraft's fuel shortage was becoming critical. So the plane was diverted to the secondary target: Nagasaki. Twenty minutes later, the bomb was dropped at 10:58 local time, destroying 44% of the city. An estimated 35,000 people were killed instantly, of which roughly 25,000 were Japanese munitions workers, 2,000 were Korean slave laborers, 150 were Japanese soldiers, and 6,850 were civilians. More than 60,000 people were injured.

Without enough fuel to reach the emergency landing field at Iwo Jima, the *Bockscar* made a harrowing landing at Okinawa. With only enough fuel for one attempt, the plane made an uncleared landing, firing distress flares and making a swerving 90-degree turn at the end of the runway. By the time the plane stopped, two engines had died from fuel exhaustion and only 5 minutes of fuel remained.

The Observation Crew

Fred Bock and his crew aboard *The Great Artiste* acquitted themselves well on this historic mission. The New York Times Pulitzer prize-winning science writer, William Laurence, who road along on the Nagasaki run, described the experience as follows:

I watched Capt. Frederick C. Bock, the pilot of our ship, go through the intricate motions of lifting a B-29 off the ground and marveled at the quiet efficiency of this Michigan boy who had majored in philosophy at Chicago University... I talked to him on the ground and I was amazed at the transformation that had taken place. Man and machine had become one, a modern centaur.

Bock's crew also flew one last conventional bombing raid over Japan on the final day of the war.

By war's end, the 27-year-old pilot had been promoted to the rank of Major, and had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal, the American Theater Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Medal, and the Victory Medal.

Bock firmly believed that dropping the atom bombs helped to avoid a protracted ground war with incalculable losses on both sides. In a post-war letter to his parents, Bock wrote: "These are tremendous events and I am glad to have had a part in them. An entirely new realm has been opened up for mankind. Most people cannot realize what epoch-making events have occurred here."

Civilian Life

After the war, Bock returned to Chicago where he earned his PhD in zoology with a specialization in mathematical statistics and genetics. Working with some of the first commercially available computers, Dr. Bock created algorithms for solving complex problems. He participated in numerous research and development projects, first for Armour & Co, then for ITT Research Institute, in Chicago. In 1979, he joined Baxter Travenol Laboratories, where he developed a mathematical model for peritoneal dialysis. He retired in 1986.



Bock's childhood home at 300 W Washington St. in Greenville.



The above photo is signed by all eight members of *The Great Artiste* crew on the Nagasaki strike, including Commander Fred Bock, and Scientific Yield Observer Lawrence Johnston, the only man to witness the detonation of all three atom bombs (including the Alamogordo, NM test).

Fred married Helen Elizabeth Lossman in 1947. Helen was highly intelligent in her own right, having received a B.A. in biology from Westminster College in Pennsylvania, and an M.A. in education from the University of Chicago. Married for 53 years, Fred and Helen had two daughters and a son. After Helen's retirement in 1987, they moved to Scottsdale, Arizona.

For years, Bock spearheaded efforts to get the 509th Composite Group recognized for its crucial role in ending WWII. Those efforts finally paid off in September 1999, when the 509th Composite Group was awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, with valor, for exceptional service in combat.

Fred Bock died of cancer at his home in Scottsdale, Arizona, on August 25, 2000. He was 82. Buried in Section JL of Forest Home Cemetery, Bock's headstone summarizes the man: "Beloved by Family and Friends, Philosopher & Scientist, Maj Army Air Force WWII."

Vice President's Message – cont. from page 1

Instead of fulfilling its obligation to the 5,400-plus people who've purchased burial plots, the City has prioritized recreational and discretionary projects that benefit far fewer, such as the splash pad (~\$332,000), the skate park (~\$100,000), handicapped river access at Jackson's Landing (~\$186,500), and the revamped Heritage Park next to City Hall (~\$75,000). The Baldwin Lake entrance to the cemetery has been chained off for years. And when the disc golf course was created, the City removed one of the last two directional signs letting people know that the cemetery is even there.

The old saying, "you can't fight City Hall" has proven to be true when it comes to Forest Home Cemetery. For years, Friends has negotiated with the City and advocated to get critical infrastructure work done. But these efforts have gone largely unrewarded.

The economic hardships of 2020 have also demonstrated that some "essential" community services are desperately needed, whether they're profitable or not. Forest Home Cemetery falls into that category. Like the police, fire department, water and sewer, and roadways, having a place to bury the dead constitutes a basic and necessary public service in every municipality. And if the City is unwilling to apply for grants or otherwise spend the money necessary to maintain this service, it should consider turning it over to someone else who can get the job done right. As an attorney and Friends board member, I will continue to advocate for this, in the hopes that the history and beauty of the cemetery will not be lost.

Friends of Forest Home Cemetery remains dedicated to preserving the wonderful history of our community and memorializing the people buried at Forest Home Cemetery. We will continue to do research and present tours and other programs to highlight this history. But the days of physical labor and advocating to deaf ears at City Hall are over. The burden now rests on the community to make their voices heard. As 2020 has shown us, time is fleeting; but some things are worth remembering.

~ Kathleen Dunne, Vice President

Let Us Know What YOU Think!

Ideas, comments, or suggestions? Feel free to contact one of our super-helpful board members:

Paula Christiansen, President
(616) 894-9922

Kathleen Dunne, Vice President/Treasurer
(616) 824-9601

Briana Herzog, Secretary
(989) 817-2840

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

- Pick up trash, plant flowers, or take a few watering jugs to beautify the cemetery while you're visiting.
- Report suspicious activity to the City.
- Attend City Council meetings, especially when the annual budget is being reviewed, and let the City know that the operation & maintenance of Forest Home Cemetery is important to you.
- Write Letters to the Editor to the Daily News.
- Attend events that honor our early community history and the lives of people buried at Forest Home Cemetery.
- If you or a family member has a plot, consider legal remedies to enforce the City's statutory & contractual obligations to maintain the cemetery.



Back by Popular Demand!
Murder, Mayhem & Madness Tour*
at Forest Home Cemetery
(This Year Featuring the Undertaker's Past Favorites!)

Saturday, October 31, 2-4 p.m.
~ or ~
Sunday, November 1, 5-7 p.m.
\$8/person, ages 13 & over
\$5/person, under 13

POSTPONED TO 2021!

*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.

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 our website at: www.friendsofforesthometour.com/Upcoming-Events.html.

On The Road

(Dawn M. Hays)

Showcasing and Preserving a Town's Historical Cemetery

When Paula Christiansen and Kathleen Dunne met, the pair discovered they had something in common: a love for Forest Home Cemetery in Greenville, Michigan.

Paula Christiansen and Kathleen Dunne met at a meeting of the Friends of Forest Home Cemetery. They discovered they had something in common: a love for Forest Home Cemetery in Greenville, Michigan. The pair decided to start a tour of the cemetery, which is one of the oldest in the state. The tour is called "Murder, Mayhem & Madness" and is held annually. The tour is a walk through the cemetery, with the tour leader pointing out the graves of people who were involved in murders, accidents, and other crimes. The tour is a fun and educational experience for everyone. The tour is held on Saturday, October 31, from 2-4 p.m. and on Sunday, November 1, from 5-7 p.m. The cost is \$8 per person, ages 13 and over, and \$5 per person, under 13. The tour is open to everyone, and no reservations are necessary. The tour is a great way to learn about the history of the cemetery and the town. The tour is a fun and educational experience for everyone. The tour is held on Saturday, October 31, from 2-4 p.m. and on Sunday, November 1, from 5-7 p.m. The cost is \$8 per person, ages 13 and over, and \$5 per person, under 13. The tour is open to everyone, and no reservations are necessary. The tour is a great way to learn about the history of the cemetery and the town.

IN THE NEWS

Friends of Forest Home Cemetery was featured in the February 2020 issue of American Cemetery & Cremation, an international trade magazine.

To read the full article, visit our website at: www.friendsofforesthometour.com/In-The-News.html.