

This Week in Saratoga County History

The Traveling Tombstone

Submitted by Rachel Clothier December 7, 2022

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Phillip Rice 1822-1879 – Corinth Rural Cemetery

Marble tombstones are usually considered permanent objects in a cemetery. Yet, the stone erected to remember Phillip Rice has been found in several locations before finally returning to the Veteran's Circle at Corinth Rural Cemetery.

Phillip Rice, born in Albany in 1822, was the son of Thomas Rice. By 1855 he was married to Martha Stead, a native of England, and living in Corinth. Phillip was a leather worker and was also listed as a shoemaker. At the age of 38 he enlisted in the army in the 30th Infantry Co. G that was organized in Saratoga Springs. He was the first to answer the call to arms in Corinth to help quell the rebellion by the southern states. He was given the rank of sergeant in 1861 and after participating in the Battle of Fredericksburg he was promoted to Second Lieutenant. During the Battle of Second Bull Run, also known as Groveton, in Virginia he was mortally wounded on August 29, 1862. According to local records of soldiers from the town clerk's his remains were

buried on the field. Rice was the first recruit from Corinth to die in the Civil War and the G.A.R. Post (Grand Army of the Republic veteran's post) was named in his honor.

A modest marble marker was presented to the family and it was placed on the family plot at Corinth Rural Cemetery. As reported in the summer of 1893 "a fine Scotch granite monument, 15 feet high, purchased in Scotland, has just been put up in the rural cemetery this week for J.T. Rice and Mrs. F.W. Walker families. The monolith was set upon the lot where their parents and Mrs. Walker's first husband, Alanson Young were interred." (From the July 28, 1893 Corinthian Newspaper) It is believed at this time the previous grave stones were removed when the large stone was placed on the lot.

Rather than discard Phillip's marble stone it was moved to Palmer Avenue and used as a foundation stone under the front porch of John T. Rice's home (Phillip's son). There it remained until the 1980s when the porch was repaired by unsuspecting owners. They discovered the tombstone and proceeded to sell it at their garage sale. Eventually it ended up at Stan's Flea Market on Route 9 in Wilton where a Civil War reenactor purchased it and returned it to Corinth. The stone spent a year or two at the town garage before finally being erected in the Veteran's Circle at the Corinth Rural Cemetery.

Tragedies continued to plague the Rice family. The Troy Whig newspaper reported in April 1871 that Mrs. Matilda (Martha) Rice had shown signs of lunacy for a few weeks. Two local doctors and a neighbor testified about her condition to a local judge who granted the certificate of lunacy. She was sent to the Willard Asylum near Utica where she died eighteen years later. Phillip and Martha's daughter Martha (Mattie) married Alanson Young who worked as an engineer at the local paper mill. In 1879 while working on the Hudson River he was swept over the falls and drowned.

Like the tombstone, Phillip's body was not to remain where he was first laid to rest. In 1866 all Federal troops who had been hastily buried on the field at Second Battle of Bull Run were exhumed and reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery. A large sarcophagus was placed over a burial vault where the remains of over 2,000 unknown soldiers rest in eternal peace.