

Natalie Reyes

SMUS695: Science Cabinet of Curiosities

African American Monument at Little Falls Church Street Cemetery

DID YOU KNOW?

The African American Monument in the Church Street Cemetery is an upside-down stone tree stump

As we enter the Church Street Cemetery from the West Monroe Street entrance, at first glance you may be wondering where you are heading? But as you take a look to your right while walking up the small hill, you will notice a stone tree stump under a cedar tree. As you stand in front of it, you will notice on your right several gravestones—some made of white marble and some made of limestone. Remembering your starting point as you walk away from the tree stump, you will begin to notice how these gravesites are somewhat shaped as a triangle. As the monument being the shapes starting point, it has a huge significance in its history, creation, and location. It was created to dedicate the seventy-seven African Americans who were buried in the Little Falls Church Street Cemetery around the 1800s. Many of which were children and infants.

Then known as the “Colored Burial Ground”, former City Historian Edwin Vogt (pronounced Vote) had wanted to create a monument in memory for the many African Americans that did not have a gravestone for their burial which had bothered him when he became aware of this information. As his daughter remembers him saying he wanted to rectify the part of history and the past injustices. Trying for some time to secure funding for a monument by sending letters to all the churches in the Little Fall area, the Little Falls Historical Society became aware of Vogt’s efforts. Their officers and board directors contributed in helping Vogt with the project. This collaboration expanded by the Historical Society communicating

with funeral directors Harry and Kevin Enea of the Enea Family Funeral Home and Burdick Enea Memorials. The Eneas were asked if they would acquire a monument that related to the project.

Furthermore, the former Mayor of Little Falls, Robert Peters committed the City of Little Falls to this project. He believed it would be an honor for the city of Little Falls to get involved in a project that brought awareness to the African Americans who were buried in Church Street Cemetery who had been forgotten. Residents started becoming aware about this section of the cemetery through the newspaper publications. Then the Board of Public Works and the Common Council approved the project to move forward.

The Eneas had agreed in searching for and donating a monument for the African American gravesite section which led to the founding of this stone tree stump. Collaborating with the Eneas, Louie Baum, David Krutz, Pat Frezza-Gressler and Jefferey Gressler had gone to the Burdick Enea Memorials in search of the monument. As a symbol for “**a life cut short**” the tree stump was chosen to be a strong, meaningful monument for the many African American men, women, children and infants who were buried in the cemetery. With the overseeing of the Eneas and the collaboration of Vogt, Baum, Krutz, and the Gresslers, the inscription of the dedicated monument was created. When standing in front of the tree stump, you will see it state and I quote “In memory of those early African-Americans who were discriminated against in both life and death. Denied equality, few grave stones exist in this section referred to as “Colored Burial Ground.” It is for us, the living, to rectify this wrong by granting this tribute of remembrance and respect.”

As the City of Little Falls workers helped dig out the hole and add cement foundation for the monument, the Historical Society began planning the dedication ceremony. They had

contacted Reverend Robert Williams of the Hope Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church in Utica, New York, who had agreed to be a part of the ceremony. Sadly, former City Historian Edwin Vogt had passed away before the monument's dedication, but his wife Joan Vogt knew he was glad of the project completion. On August 16, 2015, the monument was dedicated during the Canal Celebration Little Falls community festival. The process and creation of this African American monument is significant. About fifty people attended to see it in the section it stands today.