

BUSHNELL'S BASIN CEMETERY

Linking the present to the past in one of Perinton's early hamlets, Bushnell's Basin, is the small pioneer cemetery on Route 96 just east of Garnsey Road. This early burial ground, along with the school that stood between it and the road and the white frame church that still stands in the Basin, formed the nucleus of this community. Bushnell's Basin, first settled in 1812, boomed with the construction of the Erie Canal.

The peaceful burial spot, once shaded by many trees, is the resting place for over two hundred Perinton residents, many of them war veterans and prominent contributors to the development of Perinton. The cemetery has a Victorian flavor. Although there are missing stones and a number that need repair as a result of the 1998 Labor Day storm, most of the remaining stones are of marble and many have high quality carving. Carvings of a willow tree, a finger pointing to heaven, a dove, an urn, or a grieving figure were commonly used gravestone symbols of Victorian era mourning. The willow tree, first used in ancient times as a sign of mourning, signifies nature's lament. A severed tree branch indicates mortality, while a sprouting branch promises life everlasting. A finger pointing upward means heavenly reward, faith, and the promise of ascension to heaven. Angels also signify ascension. The dove, often found on children's graves, represents Christian constancy, devotion, and purity, and can be related to the Noah's ark story. A lamb, also found on children's graves, means innocence. Various fruits such as figs and pineapples mean prosperity and eternal life, while flowers refer to the frailty of life and mortality. On the other hand, a garland symbolizes victory. The anchor is an ancient Christian symbol and also signifies hope. Doors or columns signify heavenly entrance. A skull, sometimes with wings, often found on early New England gravestones, symbolizes mortality, the wings indicating the flight of the soul from mortal mankind. All the symbols, however simple or elaborate, are attempts to express a range of human emotions from grief to the certainty of eternal rewards.

Bushnell's Basin Cemetery, as is true of many older, community burial grounds, is a place where the story of the area unfolds. The first burial was that of Clarissa Richardson who died in 1827 at the age of twenty five. Although the written records end with 1937, the most recent gravestone is that of George Dickens, who died in 1956. There are war veterans. Amos Woodin, who died in 1842, was a Revolutionary War veteran. Jared Frisbee fought in the War of 1812. There are four graves of Civil War veterans: Otis Rosebrook, George Hill, Robert Hill, and Captain David Hill. George, Robert and David were brothers.

There are twenty one members of the Collins family in the cemetery record. They owned property to the east on Route 96, once called Ketchum Road, and built the elegant Greek Revival house at # 1041. When Harskeline Collins owned the house, there is some evidence that it operated as a stop on the Underground Railway.

The Ketchums, after whom Route 96 was once named, lived down the road from the Collins family, and owned three hundred acres. Around 1850 they built the farmhouse that is



now #1433. There are four Ketchums buried in the cemetery, including Joseph, who originally purchased the property.

Gould and Elias Richardson managed and then probably owned the tavern that was built in 1818 and eventually took their name. Elias, his daughter Susan, and Gould's wife Clarissa are all interred at Bushnell's Basin.

The Joseph McCoord family moved to the Basin area in the 1860's and settled on a seventy five acre farm just north of Garnsey Road. The McCoords raised oats and rye, but their main crop was apples that they processed in a cider mill near the site of today's C-Store. By 1902, the family owned property in the Basin, both where Hitching Post Plaza is and across the street, as well as one hundred eight acres on Austin Road in the vicinity of Garnsey Road. McCoord burials are indicative of the fragility of life. Joseph G. was three days old when he died, Malachi was two, and Joseph F. drowned in the Colorado River at age twenty one.

There are fifteen members of the VanNess family listed in the burial records. The family owned several hundred acres in the area along Ketchum Road /Route 96. One of Perinton's designated landmarks, 24 LaSalle Parkway, was built in the late 1850's or early 1860's by either John or Calvin VanNess. The VanNess family had ties to both the Ketchums and Hannans, two of Perinton's significant pioneer families.

A cemetery can reveal family stories. Illness may take more than one family member at a time, like Emily Collins who died in March 1835 at the age of one and her brother Hiram who died in April at age three. Three or four members of one family may go off to the same war like the Hall brothers. The closeness (or size) of families is evident when fifteen or more of its members are buried in the same cemetery. Not only are there numerous graves of children, but there are also those of people like Louise Dickens and John Lash who managed to survive childhood and childbirth and disease and war to live into their nineties.

A little imagination and bit of quiet time to reflect on the lives of those who are buried at Bushnell's Basin not only helps to link the past to the present, but also makes real the stories that are told there.