

# Oak Lawn Cemetery Celebrates **150** Years



 Oak Lawn Cemetery  
& Arboretum 

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# Oak Lawn Cemetery Celebrates 150th Anniversary

By Bronson Hawley and Bob Weinstein



In December of 1865, a small group of community leaders established the Oak Lawn Cemetery Association. Oliver H. Perry prepared and filed the necessary papers with the Connecticut General Assembly which authorized the purchase of 12 acres near Bronson Road.

From its inception, Oak Lawn's leaders wanted to create a park-like setting that attracted visitors. That mission is adhered to by the cemetery's current leadership.

In our first year of full operation, 23 lots were sold for an average price of \$31.25, and sixteen people were interred. In the early years, the cemetery also functioned as a historical society and botanical garden, maintaining records of the past. During the 1860's and 1870's more land was purchased, operations expanded and the cemetery hired its first full time superintendent. Through careful financial

management the association's finances stabilized enabling the grounds to be maintained in a consistent, manicured fashion.

In 1892, Arthur Osborn Jennings, a local banker, became president of the association, a position he would hold for 25 years. Under Jennings's tenure, the cemetery acquired three additional parcels of land totaling over 40 acres. He modernized operations and established many innovations including the installation of a 10,000 gallon water tank that was filled from the Mill River.



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In the early 20th century, Mabel Osgood Wright, community activist and founder of the Connecticut Audubon Society, took on an active role in the cemetery's maintenance and landscaping. She and her sister felt that the grounds had become too cluttered and overgrown with trees and shrubs. A committee was formed to "devise ways for improving and beautifying the

cemetery grounds." The result was a more open, park-like landscape which is Oak Lawn's trademark today.

Throughout the twentieth century, numerous noted community leaders served as Chairman of Oak Lawn's board of directors including William O. Burr, Oliver Gould Jennings, J. Walter

Perry, Elbert S. Overbaugh, and W. Eben Burr. Our current chairman is David S. Huntington.

The cemetery's records show many of Fairfield's familiar notables who played important roles in shaping, building and defining the spirit, soul and essence of Fairfield and surrounding communities.

We are Fairfield's history. Since the Oak Lawn Cemetery Association was incorporated on Dec. 29, 1865, it has grown and evolved to fulfill its founders' mission. Far more than a burial place for Fairfield County, Oak Lawn is a proud reflection of the area's rural roots, its place in American history and the growing community it serves.



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# Oak Lawn at 150: A Valued Partner in Fairfield Conservation, Education Endeavors

By Stephanie Kodweis

Travel writer Pico Iyer once described sanctuary as “a place apart from time.” Residents of Fairfield are fortunate to have a number of such places within our borders, whose origins are defined by a visionary spirit, and share a legacy of conservation and stewardship that endures today.



Oak Lawn Cemetery, the Ogden House garden located adjacent to its grounds, the Birdcraft Museum and the Fairfield Garden Club share a common ancestry. Members of our Town's founding families, Mabel Osgood Wright and Annie Burr Jennings, played significant roles in shaping these well-known institutions. Oak Lawn has been a long-standing partner in conservation and education initiatives with the garden club and The Fairfield Museum & History Center.

Incorporated in 1865, Oak Lawn, off lower Bronson Road, occupies 100 acres of grounds. It was conceived as a park-like cemetery, whose thoughtfully designed landscape was intended to go beyond its primary function and serve as a sort of botanical garden, providing a place of repose both temporal and eternal. Today, Oak Lawn has more than five miles of paved roads, carefully tended mature trees and shrubs, wetlands and wildlife preserves.

In 1907, Mabel Osgood Wright began efforts to create the tranquil sanctuary that exists today. She planned the original oak tree planting scheme along the river bank and also endeavored to beautify and improve the grounds. Annie B. Jennings, along with other prominent women in Fairfield, was influential in making various enhancements to the property.

In 1914, again with help from Annie B. Jennings, Mrs. Wright helped to found the Birdcraft Sanctuary, the first preserve of its kind in the U.S., and the Connecticut Audubon Society. Within 10 years of its 1914 opening Birdcraft was a home to 32 different bird species, and had been visited by 10,000 people. It remains an educational center and has been designated a National Historic Landmark.



Jennings was also instrumental in establishing and supporting a number of other important community institutions, including the Fairfield Historical Society (now the Fairfield Museum & History Center) and the Fairfield Public Library. She donated land for the Birdcraft Sanctuary and opened the extensive gardens at her Fairfield estate, Sunnieholme, to the public.

The Fairfield Garden Club, of which Mrs. Wright was the first president, has also had a long association with Oak Lawn and Ogden House, an 18th century saltbox house owned by the Fairfield Museum & History Center, that stands next to the cemetery. The Ogden House colonial garden has been planned, planted and maintained by the Fairfield Garden Club since 1935 and is the club's longest continuous civic project.

The tradition of conservation and education continues, and the partnership between Oak Lawn, The Fairfield Garden Club, and The Fairfield Museum & History Center remains robust. In 2013, in response to Honeybee Colony Collapse Disorder, the Fairfield Garden Club created an apiary near the herb garden on Oak Lawn's property, an initiative made possible by the Fairfield Museum & History Center and Oak Lawn itself. Beekeeping was of great importance during colonial times as honey was valued for food and for medicinal uses. Colonists introduced bees to America by transporting them along with apple trees. The presence of these pollinators also ensured a productive garden, which was critical to survival in 18th century New England.

The role of pollinators is again being recognized as crucial to the ecosystem and the food chain. This joint apiary

project now consists of six hives. They are maintained by the garden club. The honey is harvested and jarred by club members, with the assistance of Oak Lawn employees, and is sold at the museum at 370 Beach Road.

In 2014, Oak Lawn was recognized for its efforts in planting and propagation. It was accredited as an arboretum whose mission is “to collect trees, shrubs, and other woody plants for the benefit of the public, science and conservation.” Oak Lawn and Connecticut College are the only two designated arboreta in the state of Connecticut, as recognized by the Morton Registry of Arboreta. It was awarded this distinction having met high standards in planning, governance, planting and public access, among others.

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# Experience Oak Lawn Cemetery's Natural Beauty

*Take its walking tour, visit its arboretum*

By Bob Weinstein and William E. Allen, MD

Oak Lawn Cemetery is a meticulously and lovingly manicured park rich in natural beauty.

There is no better way to experience Oak Lawn's grandeur than to take advantage of its walking tour and see its rare collection of trees, shrubs and plants. Nature lovers are in for a special treat.

You'll see numerous trees that are indigenous to North America as well as many imported varieties. Oak Lawn Cemetery was named after a stately White Oak tree that stood near its entrance. Known as the "Cemetery oak", it is a tree that Americans regarded as a symbol of immortality. Today there are many varieties of regal oak trees on the grounds—the Swamp white oak, Black oak, Red oak (also called Northern red oak or Champion oak) and Scarlet oak. You'll see fine examples of the flowering dogwood, Sugar maple, Black tupelo, Eastern red cedar, and the classic American elm, to name a few.

Special treats include the American sycamore, one of the largest hardwoods, reaching 130 feet high and 10 feet in diameter, and the European copper beech, easily recognizable with its stout wrinkled grey trunk resembling an elephant's foot. The arboretum has other tree species including a collection of imported deciduous conifers such as the Dawn redwood, related to the Giant sequoia, and the Golden larch, ancient trees that are native to China; Sawara falsecypress, better known as Japanese cypress; Japanese Stewartia and Persian ironweed. The collection also includes one of Connecticut's most notable trees, the Austrian pine, one of the largest in Connecticut.

To celebrate this unique collection of trees from around the world, in 2014 Oak Lawn Cemetery was awarded

Level 1 Accreditation as an Arboretum by the ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Program. This special honor recognizes Oak Lawn Cemetery as an accredited arboretum in the Morton Register of Arboreta. An arboretum is a special place whose mission is to collect trees, shrubs and woody plants for the benefit of the public, science and conservation. More than 100 trees have been identified and most have been labeled with identification signs.

Oak Lawn has the unique distinction of being the only cemetery in the state of Connecticut and only the second site of any type in Connecticut — along with Connecticut College — to be honored with this designation. Accreditation is awarded based on strict standards, which include meeting levels of achievement, labeling of species, tree science, planting, conservation, programming and public access.

Working closely with the Arbor Day Foundation, Oak Lawn Cemetery has launched a public educational program, including an annual tree planting tutorial event on Arbor Day.

Additional educational programs include a semiannual bird walk and tree tour, under the guidance of the Connecticut Audubon society and Oak Lawn's arborist. The cemetery's specimen-identification program has expanded to include woody plants, and its gardens have been upgraded to include a honeybee apiary as part of a public-education program about the role of honeybees in the pollination of trees and plants.

Visiting the arboretum for the first time is a unique and unforgettable experience. It's an opportunity to get an up-close, hands-on glimpse of nature's vast, limitless creations that are not only breathtakingly beautiful, but also play a unique role in our ecosystem. Plans are being developed for an audio tour to include points of historical interest.

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# Oak Lawn Cemetery Biographies

By Bob Weinstein

Oak Lawn is honored to have been chosen as the final resting place for many distinguished and well known individuals. Among them are:



**Rufus Baker**  
(1919-1992)

A 1938 graduate of Fairfield's Roger Ludlowe High School. Baker was playing for the all-Africa American Bridgeport Colored Stars when he was spotted by the New York Black Yankees, a Negro National League team, and signed as their shortstop. He went on to forge a distinguished baseball career, playing with or against legends who included Roy Campanella, Don Newcombe and Josh Gibson, catching for Satchel Paige and hitting against Cool Papa Bell.



**Michael J. Daly**  
(1924-2008)

When Michael J. Daly was a U.S. Army infantry captain during World War II, he received the highest military decoration

for valor and heroism — the Congressional Medal of Honor. Advancing alone in front of his troops during the battle of Nuremburg, Daly engaged in four separate firefights, singlehandedly eliminating 15 German gunners and destroying three machine gun nests. The next day, he was shot. Daly was also a two-time recipient of the Silver Star. Recognized for point leadership in combat, he served in the infantry throughout the war, both as enlisted and as an officer in the First and Seventh Armies. He was a board member and benefactor of St. Vincent's Medical Center, and its Michael Daly Center of Emergency Care was named in his honor.



**Jason Robards Jr.**  
(1922-2000)

Jason Robards Jr. was widely acclaimed as one of the most powerful and important actors on the American stage and screen. He is credited with promoting the legacy of Eugene O'Neill. He created iconic acting masterpieces that audiences will never forget, such as the portrayals of Hickey, the willful demolisher of pipe dreams in *The Iceman Cometh*; Jamie Tyrone,

*Continued on next page*



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the self-lacerating older brother in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*; *A Moon for the Misbegotten*; and many others. He won a Tony for *The Disenchanted*, an Emmy for *Inherit the Wind* and two Academy Awards, for *All the President's Men* and *Julia*. During World War II, Robards joined the Navy and served in the South Pacific when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. He took part in 13 major naval engagements.



Courtesy of Fairfield Museum & History Center

## Mabel Osgood Wright (1859-1934)

A writer, environmentalist and wildlife activist, Mabel Osgood Wright founded the Connecticut Audubon Society in 1896. A pioneer in bird-protection efforts, she established the Birdcraft Sanctuary in Fairfield in 1914, the oldest private songbird sanctuary in the United States. She was also a prolific writer, distinguishing herself in both fiction and nonfiction. Between 1907 and 1922, she worked hard to beautify Oak Lawn Cemetery.



Courtesy of Fairfield Museum & History Center

## Frances Wakeman (1835-1918)

A proud descendent of one of Connecticut's oldest families, Frances Wakeman was best known for playing an important role in Fairfield county's community affairs. With Cornelia Crapo, she established the Wakeman Memorial Association in 1911 in honor of her grandfather Jesup Wakeman. Initially her intention was to launch a youth group. The Association purchased property and built a clubhouse on the corner of Harbor Road and Main Street in Southport. It later moved to its current location on Center Street, and was known as the Wakeman Boys Club. Today, it has two additional facilities in Fairfield and one in Bridgeport and serves more than 4,200 children and teens each year.



Courtesy of Fairfield Museum & History Center

## George E. Northrop (1844-1906)

George E. Northrop was a Civil War combat veteran who served as a private in Company A, Connecticut 8th Infantry. Enlisting twice, Northrop distinguished himself in the Battle of Antietam, one of the bloodiest battles in American military history. Following the war, he returned to Connecticut to become the first chief of the Southport Volunteer Fire Department in 1890.

Continued on page 10

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*Courtesy of Perry Family*

**Judge John H. Perry  
(1848-1928)**

An authority on both parliamentary and corporate law, Judge John H. Perry was well-known as a distinguished attorney, state legislator and judge. Widely respected for his integrity, humility and ability to make quick, incisive and just decisions, Perry held many prestigious positions, such as House Speaker in the Connecticut Legislature for several terms, a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1902 and the Public Utilities Regulation Commission, judge of Fairfield County Court of Common Pleas, and benefactor and president of Pequot Library Association. In appreciation of his many and varied contributions, President William McKinley appointed Perry agent for the U.S. Chilean Claims Commission.



*Courtesy of Southport Conservancy*

**Capt. Paschal Sheffield  
(1798-1886)**

During the War of 1812 — also known as America's Second War for Independence — Capt. Paschal Sheffield was a merchant captain and privateer. This brave and courageous Southport native played a major role in America's abortive attempt to rescue Napoleon from exile in St. Helena. Sheffield's son Joseph was the founder of the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale University.



*Courtesy of Pequot Library*

**Virginia Marquand Monroe  
(1837-1926)**

Virginia Marquand Monroe was the niece and sole heir of prominent jeweler, silversmith and philanthropist Frederick Marquand. In 1889, with her husband Elbert, she founded the Pequot Library, which was built on their estate. During the library's formative years, Monroe managed and underwrote the library's expenses. The library has been a pillar of Fairfield County for more than 126 years, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Monroes donated the library to the town of Fairfield.



*Courtesy of Fairfield Museum & History Center*

**Oliver Gould Jennings  
(1865-1936)**

Son of Oliver Burr Jennings, Oliver Gould Jennings was one of the founders, along with the Rockefeller family, of the Standard Oil Co. — one of the world's first and largest multinational companies. Jennings went on to play a major role in improving Fairfield County during the first third of the 20th century.

*Continued on page 12*

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# Grant Program Enhances and Preserves Oak Lawn Cemetery's Unique Park Setting

By Bob Weinstein and Don Parrott

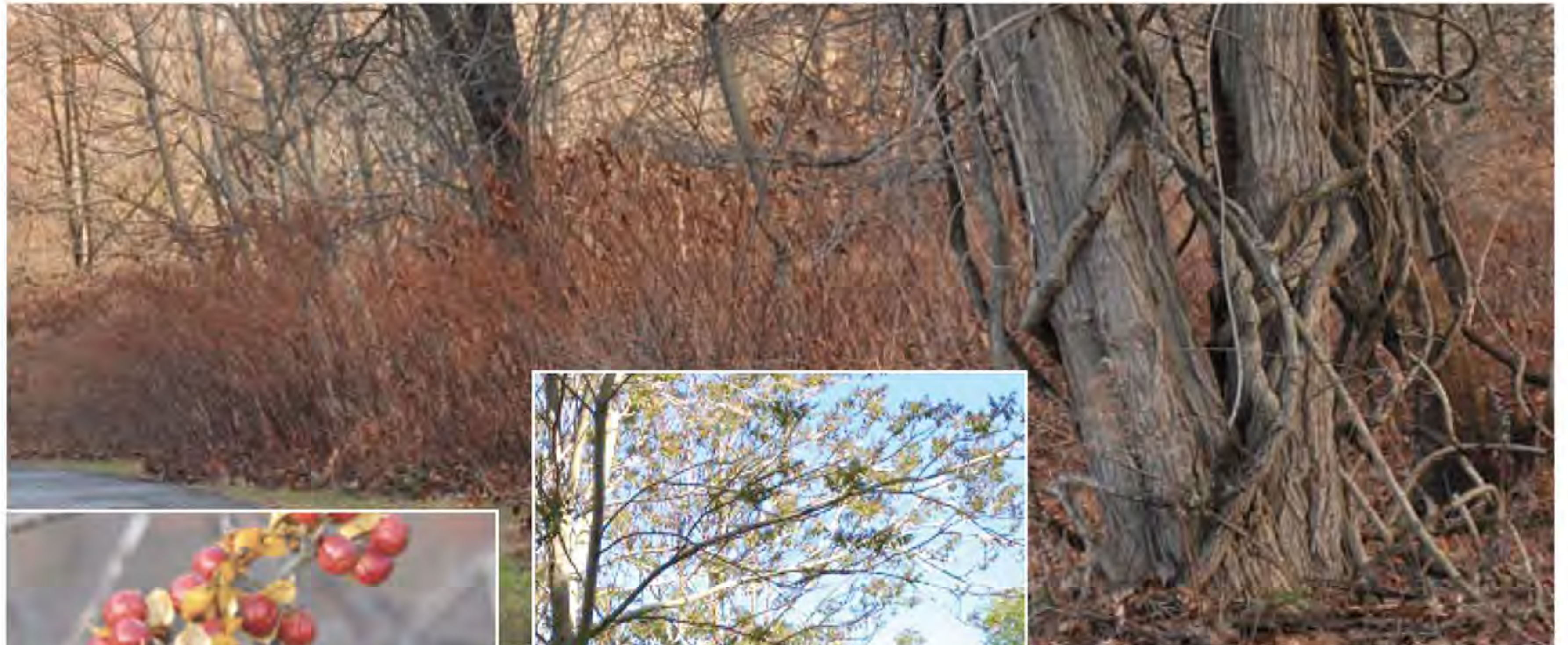
Maintaining the 100 or so acres of Oak Lawn Cemetery's property is quite a project, and a challenging one at that. The work requires a host of resources that include a staff of dedicated and skilled workers for maintenance, trained professionals and volunteers for project work, and last but not least, funding. Oak Lawn is very excited to be partnered this year with the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) for a very specific environmental initiative.

As background, realize that the sprawling property is made up of about half open space and half native woodlands, and includes wetlands along its southern border. The native woodlands are graced with mostly oak, beech, maple, black cherry, and birch — all hardwoods that contribute to the land's majestic beauty. Over the decades, the open space has been planted with a variety of native and introduced trees, and we now have about 110 different species. The collection of trees is so great that Oak Lawn received recognition in 2014 as an accredited arboretum from the Morton Arboretum, only the second such accredited arboretum in Connecticut.

Certain areas of the Oak Lawn property have slowly become colonized by a number of non-native invasive plants. Starting in 2014, Oak Lawn Cemetery and Arboretum developed an Invasive Plant Management Plan in an effort to manage this growing menace. The plan's goals are to rid the property of Japanese knotweed and oriental bittersweet and to manage the presence of other invasive plants such as ailanthus and black locusts. The invasive plants consist of about 35,000 square feet of Japanese knotweed, several areas of oriental bittersweet vines and a stand of about 20,000 square feet of mixed locusts and ailanthus. Oak Lawn has been able to partner with DEEP and has received a grant to fund the start of this project and this work has begun.

## Labor of love that will never end

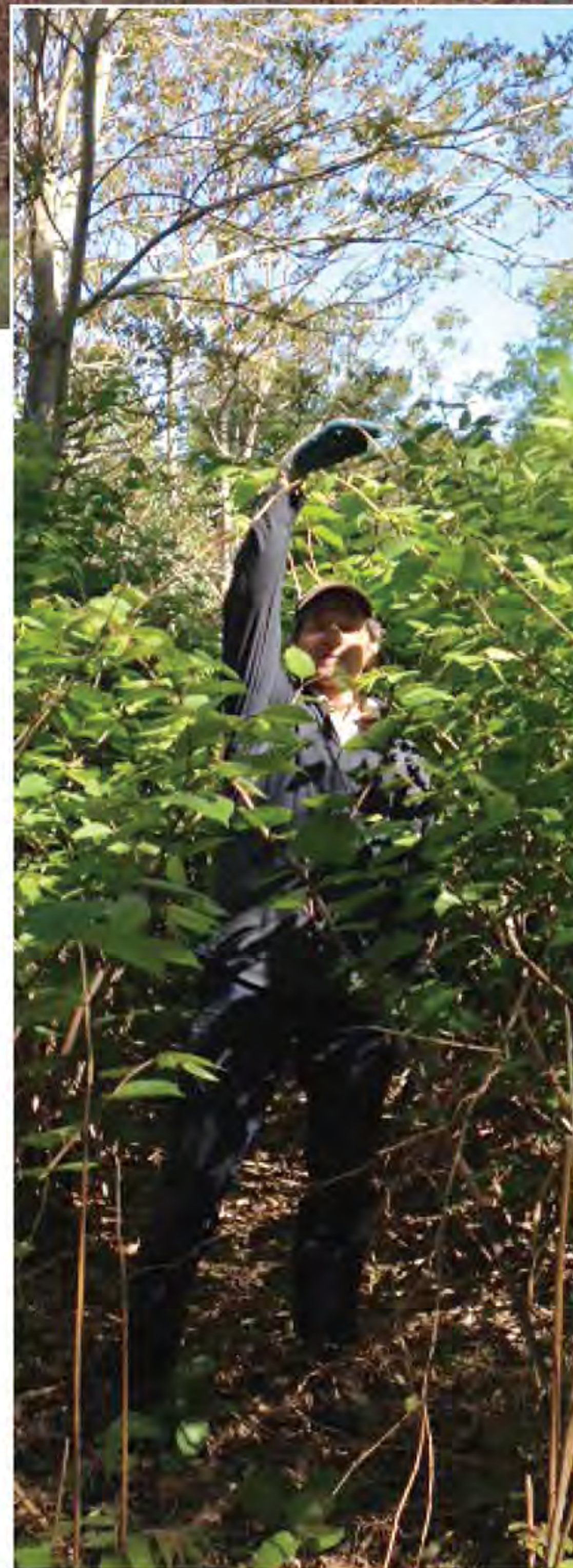
In order to develop Oak Lawn as a first rate Arboretum the encroaching invasive plants have to be eradicated. Already this first year the Japanese knotweed and the oriental bittersweet have been removed. In addition, approximately 30 ailanthus and black locust trees have been cut down. The stumps will be removed to



Top Photo: Invasive species at Oak Lawn Cemetery: A tree choked by Oriental bittersweet in a large field of Japanese knotweed. Bottom photo: Oriental bittersweet.

prevent re-growth. Ultimately appropriate shrubs and trees will be planted.

As the invasive plants are removed from the property a more natural ecosystem will develop, benefitting native plants and animals. With each outreach program that Oak Lawn provides, the citizens of the area who participate also benefit, because they're getting a true hands-on educational experience. This participation is an exciting one at that, because they have the opportunity to witness the slowly evolving ecosystem change, thrive and prosper. All of Oak Lawn's programs are leveraged so that a variety of groups maintain plantings, conduct tree walks,



Japanese Knotweed can grow up to 10 feet tall.



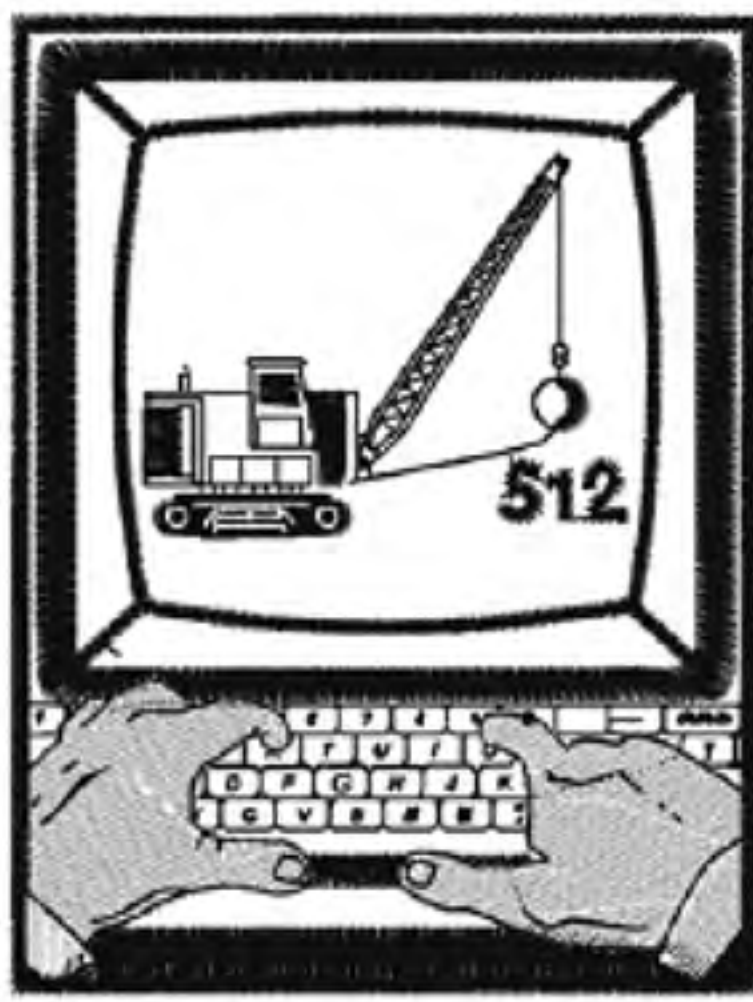
Japanese Knotweed

manage beehives and create nature trails. A special treat is Oak Lawn Cemetery's self-guided tour, for which a brochure and map are provided. The map directs visitors to 20 labeled trees with descriptions and accompanying botanical information.

The cemetery association is fortunate to work closely with the Connecticut Audubon Society, University of Connecticut, the Fairfield Garden Club and the Fairfield Museum and Historical Society, which maintains the adjoining property that contains the historic colonial Ogden House.

As the Oak Lawn Cemetery and Arboretum invasive Plant Management Plan moves forward, "our hope is that we can generate a better public understanding of the reality of invasive plants in Connecticut, why we need to control them and how this can be done through our example," said Bronson Hawley, president of the Oak Lawn Cemetery Association.

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## Oak Lawn Cemetery Biographies...

### Oliver Gould Jennings

*Continued*

He was president and founder of the Fairfield Trust Co., the Fairfield Memorial Library and the Fairfield Historical Society. Jennings was also a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives and one of the founders of the Country Club of Fairfield. He built the unique 40-room Norman chateau-style manor house, Mailands, on 76 acres. Now known as McAuliffe Hall, Mailands was sold to the Jesuits in 1941, and along with the almost simultaneous purchase of the 105-acre former Lasher estate, became Fairfield University.



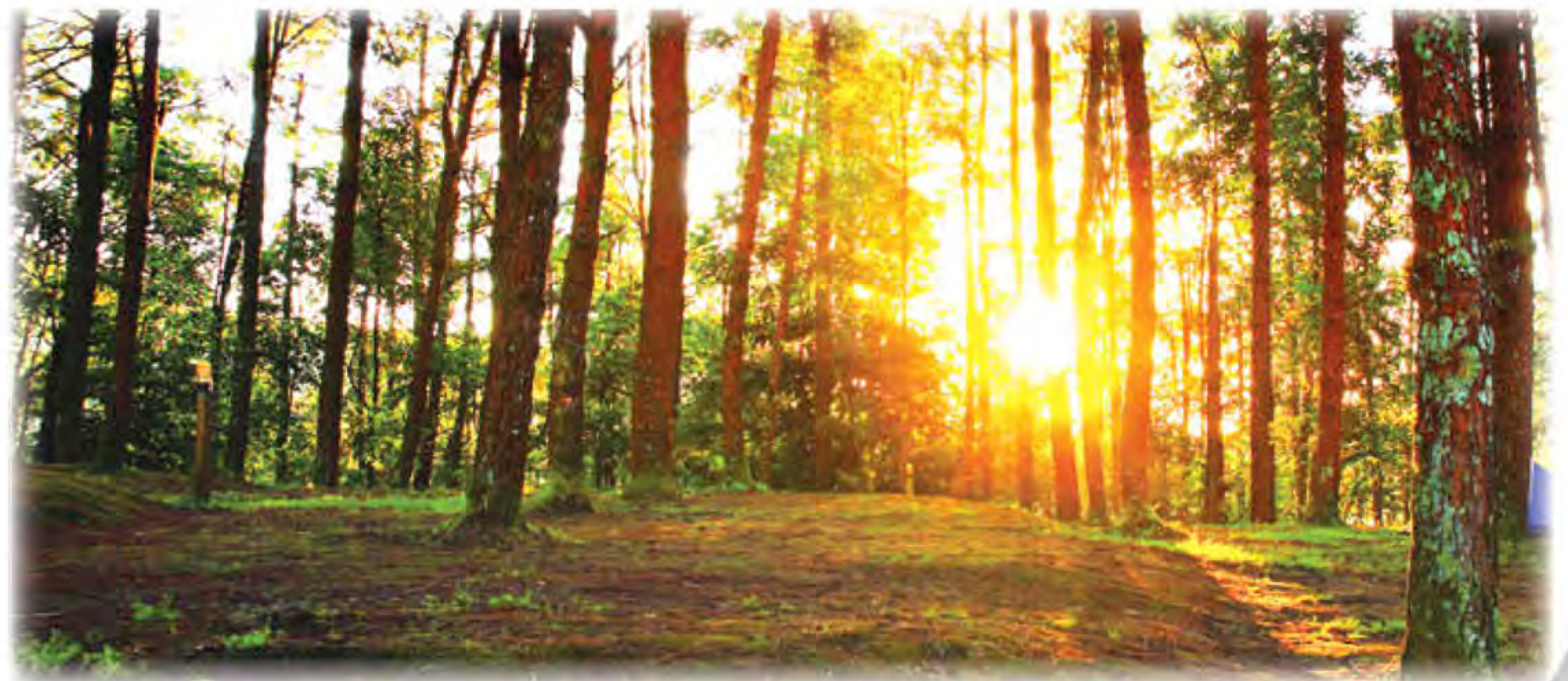
*Courtesy of Trinity Episcopal Church*

### Hull Sherwood (1792-1864)

A heroic veteran of the War of 1812, Hull Sherwood was the drummer boy and powder monkey for the Sea Fencibles, the militia manning Fort Defense at the mouth of Southport Harbor. A prominent public figure, community leader, Mill Hill farmer and family patriarch, Sherwood was also vestryman and warden of Trinity Episcopal Church.



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Courtesy of Trinity Episcopal Church

**Capt. Jeremiah Sturges  
(1779-1845)**

A prominent leader and veteran of the War of 1812, Capt. Jeremiah Sturges was responsible for building the town Powder House, and was commander of the Sea Fencibles, which defended Southport Harbor. Following the war, Sturges was U. S. agent for the construction of the Southport Harbor breakwater (1831-1837) and played a major role in designating the harbor as a Federal Waterway and

in building and developing Southport Borough. Sturges was also a vestryman and treasurer of Trinity Episcopal Church.



**Stevan Dohanos  
(1907-1994)**

A nationally respected illustrator and magazine cover artist, Steven Dohanos created more than 125 covers for the *Saturday Evening Post*. His paintings and prints are part of the permanent collections of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Pennsylvania Academy of Art,

and Avery Memorial in Hartford, to name a few. Dohanos was also a founding faculty member of the Famous Artists School in Westport. In 1971, he was elected to the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame.



Courtesy of Pequot Yacht Club

**George P. Brett Jr.  
(1893-1984)**

A distinguished and prominent figure in the book-publishing industry, George P. Brett Jr. became chairman of the American Division of Macmillan Publishing in 1936, succeeding his father, George Platt Brett Sr. Brett

is best known for negotiating one of publishing's greatest victories, gaining the rights to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. The rights were sold to producer David O. Selznick in one of Hollywood's biggest early transactions. *Gone With the Wind* won 10 Academy Awards in 1940, and was the highest-earning film made at the time. A World War I veteran, Brett was also well-known as a philanthropist.



Courtesy of Pequot Library

**The Rev. William H. Holman  
(1852-1936)**

A distinguished spiritual leader, the Rev. Mr. William H. Holman was the fourth minister of the

Southport Congregational Church, serving as pastor for 38 years from 1877 to 1915. He started a free reading room in Southport, which eventually evolved into the community library. He attended Harvard, preparing for the priesthood, studying under Justin Winsor, noted librarian and collector of Americana. Holman was also purchasing agent for the Pequot Library Association collections. After he retired from the church, he devoted the rest of his life to the library and its collections of Americana. He served as the library's first director and president.

*Oak Lawn gratefully acknowledges and thanks David Sturges, James Biggs, and William E. Allen, MD, for their many contributions in editing and compiling these biographies.*

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# Oak Lawn Cemetery's Veterans Memorial



*Congratulations* to the dedicated staff and board members of Oak Lawn Cemetery.

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After two years of research, design, and construction, we celebrated the dedication of our Veterans Memorial on Armed Forces Day, May 17, 2014. The celebration was attended by over 150 people including local dignitaries, police and fire department honor guards, boy scout troops, and many local veterans. The memorial, which graces the entrance to our grounds, is “dedicated to all those who served in the armed forces of the United States of America to keep us a free and great nation.” Oak Lawn, founded in 1865, is the final resting place of over 1,200 veterans including a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor.



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# CONGRATULATIONS

Oak Lawn Cemetery's 150<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary

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*November 2, 1912*

Now here's an oak has stood the blast-  
A silent record of the past.  
Near this old tree an open gate  
Marked "Restmore." Now contemplate  
Beneath the shade of this old oak,  
Some "Red Coal" soldiers got a choke,  
In haste to get their luncheon down  
Just after burning Fairfield town.

Now turn around: on you will dawn  
Another spot, it's called "Oaklawn".  
It tells of rest for many years  
For those who've passed the vale of tears.  
And as I cross the verdant sod  
The very paths my fathers trod,  
I stand upon the self same spot  
Where stood by Great-great-grandpa's cot.  
And for the record I'm tellin,  
Their names were Benjamin and Ellen.

*John H. Sherwood, 1825 - 1918*



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The Cemetery Oak

Courtesy of Fairfield Museum & History Center



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*We join in celebrating Oak Lawn Cemetery Association on their 150th anniversary*

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Realizing the tremendous natural gift that we have with our nearly 100 acres, which include burial grounds, woodlands, wetlands and nature preserves, Oak Lawn's board of directors established a plan to further develop our natural resources in an environmentally conscious way. Our goal is to provide families with multiple interment options in our developed areas, at the same time managing our woodlands, wetlands and nature preserves for the benefit of our community and the environment.

#### **Oak Lawn's mausoleum**

For those who prefer above-ground burial, we opened the Oak Lawn mausoleum in 2003. Welcoming visitors with an atmosphere of style and grace, the mausoleum is a state-of-the-art facility located in a private, wooded setting on our beautiful grounds. A full range of indoor and outdoor above-ground burial options are offered, including single, double and family granite and marble crypts, and single and double granite and glass niches. The interior of the mausoleum provides the perfect setting for a funeral service for up to 100 people.

#### **Dedication of Veterans Memorial celebrated**

After two years of research, design and construction, we celebrated the dedication of our Veterans Memorial on May 17, 2014. The memorial, which graces the entrance to our grounds, is dedicated to all those who served in the armed forces of the United States of America to keep us a free and great nation.

An ever-increasing number of Fairfielders are visiting the memorial every day to pay homage to our veterans.

Just inside our front gates, you will also find the apiary (beehives) that we operate in partnership with the Fairfield Garden Club and the Fairfield Museum and History Center. The beekeepers are all volunteers from the Fairfield Garden Club. The bees pollinate a colonial garden at the nearby Ogden House, in addition to flower

# Oak Lawn Today

*By Bronson Hawley*

I hope that you have enjoyed reading about Oak Lawn's storied history —our founders, early leaders, and prominent figures interred here.

But Oak Lawn's story isn't over. I'm going to tell you about Oak Lawn today.



gardens that we have recently planted on our grounds, and the gardens of our neighbors. Many of the educational programs run by the Fairfield Museum and History Center include a beekeeping presentation at Oak Lawn. Honeybees are an important part of the ecosystem because they are responsible for 80 percent of insect pollination, which is critical to agriculture.

#### **Unusual collection of trees**

Part of Oak Lawn's beauty is attributable to our magnificent collection of mature trees. In 2012, we engaged an arborist to evaluate our trees and assess their condition. His report confirmed the fact that we had a very special collection of different species worthy of recognition.

In 2014 we applied for and were granted recognition as an arboretum by the Morton Registry of Arboreta, the benchmark accreditation organization for arboreta. Oak Lawn is the only cemetery in the state of Connecticut with that designation. We invite you to

visit us and take our self-guided tree tour, which covers 0.8 miles and takes about 30 minutes. Twenty trees are on the tour, all of which are identified with tags indicating their botanical and common names. The self-guided tree tour brochure can be downloaded from our website at [www.oaklawnct.com](http://www.oaklawnct.com).

In a further extension of Oak Lawn's commitment to the environment, we participate in "Trees in Memory," a program administered by the Arbor Day Foundation. As part of the program, we plant a tree in one of America's national parks in memory of every person laid to rest at Oak Lawn. By doing this, we are establishing a lasting living memorial to the deceased, at the same time contributing to the reforestation of our national parks that have been devastated by wildfires. Over the past year, we have planted almost 200 trees.

Many of you are aware of the danger imposed by invasive plant species that have been appearing in rural areas

throughout the United States. As part of our environmental stewardship, we applied for and were awarded a grant by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), under the agency's America the Beautiful program. We developed a program to eradicate non-native invasive plants, such as Japanese knotweed, Oriental bittersweet vines, black locusts and ailanthus trees, all of which had established a presence on our grounds near the Mill River. We expect this program will be ongoing for several years.

We are optimistic that this multi-year initiative will be successful and look forward to sharing our story with the community with the hopes that it will help others who undertake similar efforts to deal with this ongoing threat to the environment.

#### **Bird and nature walks**

As part of our community outreach, we have conducted bird and nature walks through our woodlands led by well-known

local ornithologists and arborists. This year, a local Boy Scout troop developed a nature walk on our grounds as part of an Eagle Scout project.

In summary, Oak Lawn today is a vibrant, multi-dimensional organization that is dedicated to preserving our community's proud past by providing and maintaining a sacred natural environment, which honors and memorializes our departed citizens. We are honored to be the custodians of our community's past.

While we honor the past, we embrace the present and future by offering the community a park-like environment rich with opportunities to explore nature through scheduled events on our grounds, a casual daytime self-guided tree tour or a leisurely stroll to admire our historic monuments.

Please stop by and experience all that Oak Lawn has to offer.

I want to thank all of the individuals and organizations that contributed to this commemorative issue by writing articles, supplying photographs or advertising. A special thanks to Michele Coscia, Oak Lawn's office manager, for her support in researching, proofreading and compiling photographs of our grounds.

To commemorate Oak Lawn's 150th anniversary celebration, we will be making a \$5,000 donation to the town of Fairfield. The proceeds of the donation will be used for the maintenance and upkeep of our town's historic cemeteries.

#### **Oak Lawn facts**

All of our burial records are available online at [www.oaklawnct.com](http://www.oaklawnct.com).

For those unable to visit our grounds, gravesite planting and maintenance services are available through TLC Gravesite Management.

*Bronson Hawley is president of the Oak Lawn Cemetery Association, Inc.*



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