

CHAPTER 4

Reliving the Past with Monmouth's Dearly Departed: What Can We Learn Through a Cemetery Tour

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Most cities and towns have at least a small number of famous (or sometimes infamous) residents who lend an air of importance to such communities based upon the fact that these well-known people were born there or lived in that locality for some portion of their lives. With some of these noteworthy citizens having their final resting place preserved within luscious green and manicured lawns in hometown cemeteries, there is an opportunity to attract tourists to their gravesites. Think particularly of Abraham Lincoln's stately tomb on the outskirts of the state capital in Springfield, Illinois, and what that city has accomplished to both honor the 16th president and benefit from visits to his respectful tomb.

Monmouth, Illinois, is a community where both of these categories of well-known citizens either born here or once residing here are well remembered. It was with such community interest that I had long thought of enlightening both local residents and more distant history buffs as to some interesting gravesites in this vicinity. (Unfortunately, Wyatt Earp, who was born in our "Maple City," and whose legendary exploits have been often described in books and exhibited in many films, is buried in California.)

After attending several "cemetery walks" in other attractive memorial parks, in which local actors portrayed the lives of fascinating residents interred in their burying grounds, I had the goal of creating a similar performance within Monmouth's largest cemetery on North Sixth Street. The time and effort required to attempt such a mission was, understandably, simply too problematic in the days when I was still teaching 7th grade Social Studies, teaching night courses at Monmouth College, coaching youth sports, and volunteering in a host of civic and church activities. Since retiring, I decided to finally pursue my dream of creating a local cemetery walk and thereby celebrate the community that had become my second home.

The essential support for carrying out this latest mission came through the help of Monmouth's Buchanan Center for the Arts (BCA). An organization dedicated to enhancing the artistic endeavors of local citizens across a variety of expressive formats (e.g., art, drama, writing, etc.), the BCA (of which I am a board member) is highly supportive of such creative missions. Gladly joining me in this effort was the enthusiastic president of the BCA board, historian Dr. Mary Osborne. Kristyne Gilbert, the BCA's talented, dedicated, and ever busy executive director, gave her blessing to our endeavor in 2023. Approval by Monmouth's City Council to use the cemetery for this presentation was also secured in early 2024.

Dr. Osborne and I next brainstormed a list of significant and fascinating people who were known to be buried in the Sixth Street Cemetery. This stage of research was exciting, as we realized how many possibilities existed for our research and the eventual creation of informational and entertaining presentations. Such performances would offer valuable insight about individuals who had once greatly contributed to this area's business, educational, cultural, and social environment dating from Monmouth's birth and the city's growth throughout the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The identities and backgrounds of professors and college presidents, bankers and entrepreneurs, writers who illustrated their literary talents in newspapers, books, and in the theater, baseball club owners, organizers of social clubs, military heroes from the days of the Civil War to World War II, and many other categories of intriguing people filled the pages in our expanding note pads.

Our next task was to narrow a list of dozens of possible subjects to a manageable size. Particularly guiding the downsizing of our extensive list was a consideration of how many gravesites could be visited and discussed within one hour of walking leisurely along paved roads and grassy paths leading to reachable gravesites. With an eventual reasonable list of about eight easily reached burial sites on the far southern side of the cemetery, we dived further into research at such sites as the Warren County Library and their Genealogy and Local History Center. Fortunately, Dr. Osborne and I were also able to reach out to local historians and area writers whose work we knew and respected. Jeff Rankin and Rich Hanson were two of those sources. Rankin was the undeniably best-known go-to person when seeking any information regarding the essential history of Monmouth, Monmouth College, and fascinating, but lesser-known, stories of residents and events related to Monmouth and Warren County's past. (His twin brother, Doug, was also helpful with advice, given his background in local theater.) Hanson is not only a good friend, but also an outstanding researcher and writer across a variety of subjects ranging from the Civil War to baseball history. Carla Kanthak, a one-time Monmouth resident who once lived in the historic Carr Mansion, was tremendously supportive and assisted in the research regarding the Carr family.

Once the research was completed, our next challenging assignment was to create the scripts to be performed by the actors. Deciding that a time allotment of three to five minutes would be sufficient to educate and entertain the audience, Dr. Osborne and I created brief presentations to be performed at the gravesites. With the scripts completed by late August, local residents were approached to help portray the ghosts of these departed citizens. Some of these people had experience in theater and we knew that memorizing a brief statement reflecting their character's background and life experiences would not be a difficult challenge for them. Some of the people who eventually agreed to play a role were those without theatrical experiences, but they were able draw on their backgrounds in military reenacting, teaching, and public speaking.

The performances we created were initially thought to be best staged in two time slots in early October. We originally envisioned a morning gathering in conjunction with the BCA's popular program "OFTA" (or "Old Folks Talk Art"), followed later in the evening with a lantern-guided tour of the assigned gravesites. Conflicts with some actors' morning schedules resulted in the final production being scheduled with up to two performances during early evening segments at 6 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. The date for the performance was settled upon for October 9, 2024. In the case of inclement weather, I created a Powerpoint presentation featuring photographs of the burial sites. This presentation included the actors delivering their lines next to the images at the BCA on the same night as the previously scheduled outdoor event. For the purposes of this article, it would be appropriate to discuss what can be learned by creating such a historical presentation. Moreover, what do I and the others involved in this pursuit hope our audience would learn from their participation? First, anyone embarking on such a project would, no doubt, appreciate how primary and secondary research offerings, gleaned from a host of traditional sources (biographies, obituaries, county histories, newspapers, etc.), satisfied a sufficient understanding

of these individuals and their vital role in shaping this western Illinois community. For instance, we established a chronological perspective by identifying the birth dates and the years in which their lives were relevant to Monmouth's past. Specifically, what information could be revealed by knowing the exact timeframe during which these people spent their formative years in Monmouth? A youthful experience in the days of rugged dirt roads, crude cabins, and antebellum period culture would obviously shape such individuals' lives differently than a childhood in the post-Civil War era, when fast-paced train travel afforded distant travel, when stronger brick homes were being constructed for residents, and when life in the Gilded Age structured an outlook leading toward the advancements in the soon-to-be twentieth century. Moreover, what were these people's church affiliations, educational development, opportunities for employment, inspiration for transplanting themselves and their families, associations formed with significant and transformative individuals or groups, and what success or failures marked their development? Answers gathered from sources in the Warren County Genealogy's local history collections and other online sources (Newspapers.com, etc.) revealed the complexity of these influential residents' lives based upon their social class, level of education, family connections, and opportunities for mentoring by helpful adults who often shaped lives in positive directions.

A particular appreciation for a deeper understanding of these people's lives within a historical period and place was secured through the generous research offered to us by Carla Kanthak. Kanthak's days of living in the Carr Mansion at 416 East Broadway opened a fascinating historical portal for allowing Dr. Osborne and me to grasp the meaning of the Carr family's life in Monmouth during a period of demographic growth and affluent economics. The extremely tall and prominent obelisk dedicated to the Carr family on the far south side of the cemetery (and visible within nearly every square foot of the southern section of this burial ground), due to the research and personal insight Kanthak delivered, eventually evoked far more insights about this family than the impressive visual nature of their burial marker. Indeed, Kanthak was once able to run her hands down the same bannisters as the Carr family as she descended steps from one floor level to another. As she once pulled back tall curtains to gaze out of architecturally attractive windows and imagine the Carr family members as they viewed passing public and vehicles on the Broadway of a century ago, she had a firsthand perspective which only such insightful homeowners may provide to researchers such as Dr. Osborne and me. Over the years, Kanthak also collected numerous photographs of the Carr family which she shared with us. Such images allowed her to pull meaning from the nature of the Carrs' physical appearance and period attire. Kanthak's inspired information was lovingly blended into the presentation afforded to those attending the October tour.

Specifically, we learned that their father, John Carr, and their grandfather, Nathan Carr, Sr., were prominent citizens who came to Warren County in the decades before the Civil War. John and his brother Nathan, Jr. accumulated their wealth from business ventures involving the manufacturing of hand-guided cultivators and other essential agricultural devices, as well as carriages. By 1880, the Carr family acquired a home at 416 E. Broadway among the other beautiful and stately Victorian homes running east and west through Monmouth's tree-lined streets. A carriage house was built on the property in 1885 and was later remodeled to better accommodate the unique requirements of an electric car which the family purchased in 1910. Specifically, a sturdy turntable had to be installed on the floor to rotate the entering vehicle as there was no reverse gear in the automobile to easily back out of the garage. Upon John Carr's death in 1892,

his wife, Mary, remodeled the home for herself and her daughters, Rilla, Lucie, Sara, and Mabel. The acquired wealth of the Carr family afforded the girls the chance to attend Monmouth College and travel extensively. In 1887, they were able to attend the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. In later years, they further toured Europe and were especially impressed by the look of French architecture. The remodeling of the original Second Empire-style home into a residence evoking the style of a French chateau is still visible today. Returning home with tales of the Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary and descriptions of the fine furniture they encountered were only part of what local citizens learned of their travels. Therefore, the script emphasized a myriad of experiences they encountered during their lifetime.

From such rich background information, Dr. Osborne created a telling script from which to present the Carrs' story. In one sequence at the Carr monument, Mary Carr pointed out to daughter Sara: "Sara, I've told you before. I don't want you to pay any mind to what other people say. You are not a provincial just because you live in Monmouth! You received a fine education in the public schools." Next, Sara recalled the poetry she and her sister had once been tasked to memorize in an elementary classroom. Celebrating the birthday of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Sara offered a quotation from a portion of the poem "Evangeline." Her mother's stern reply was that people did not come to their gravesite to hear her quote Longfellow. Mary, politely finished this segment of dialogue with "Please excuse my daughter's exuberance." Young Sara later spoke with more reverence for the opportunities which extensive travel and their purchasing power afforded to them by the skillful business acumen and wise financial practices of their father and the sage advice of their mother. Sara opined at one point in her dialogue: "We'll try to be worthy of the investment you and father made in us." Interestingly, this perspective would include the daughters' consequential decision to continue living at the home over the course of their lifetimes and not enter the institution of marriage (although most certainly, there would have been an ample number of suitors in Monmouth to seek their hands in matrimony). As Sara said to the audience: "My sisters and I loved our home. We never married but instead became strong surrogate aunts to the neighborhood children. We opened our home to them for parties and holiday celebrations." Such conversation offered at the stop at the Carr obelisk therefore offered the audience a greater appreciation for the cultural attitudes and illustrations of Victorian life.

Another opportunity to expand the public's understanding of the development of Monmouth, and specifically Monmouth College and its precedent-setting social development of the first sororities, was made apparent through the wonderful narrative developed by Dr. Osborne regarding the life of Margaret Campbell. Campbell's informative, but not ornate, gravestone rests amidst other family member markers, whose significant service to the community in the mid-nineteenth century and the life-changing Union war effort in the Civil War (her brother died fighting at the battle of Vicksburg in 1863) is valuable to read. Campbell's dialogue opens with a question for the audience as to whether any of them are alumni of Monmouth College. (Such conversational dialogue was designed to put roving audience members more at ease as the shadows of nightfall began to spread across the cemetery. Campbell informed them next of what the hometown college was like in the time period of the Civil War and the immediate post-war years. (She graduated in 1867). Specifically, she described how this educational institution offered only two tracks of study at the time: the classical and scientific courses. She chose the scientific path. Campbell followed up by describing the history for which she is best remembered. As a senior, she and eleven other young women bravely founded the

social organization known as “I.C. Sorosis.” This small group was the foundation for what became one of the most well-known women’s fraternities in the nation: Pi Beta Phi. For a period of time, they lived at the still elegant Holt House at 402 East First Avenue, where students roomed during a period when no dormitories yet existed.

As her fraternity’s treasurer, Campbell gained an appreciation for philanthropic service—an endeavor which she pursued throughout her many years. The audience also heard about her years serving as a matron of the Thyne Institute in Mecklenburg County, Virginia. This school was created by Presbyterians, the guiding religious body at Monmouth College, in order to educate Black children. In the 1920s, Margaret was still dedicated to the work of Pi Beta Phi and was instrumental in helping to reinstall the chapter at Monmouth College, which had earlier banned secret societies. Her pride in establishing this social organization for college women and the work she had performed as an educator over many decades was thoughtfully instilled in Campbell’s warm dialogue.

Two of the men featured in the cemetery tour were born in Monmouth, although their eventual fame was often achieved far from their birthplace. Charles Dryden, whose grayish gravestone proudly declares him “Dean of the Sportswriters,” was a man whose quips and humorous statements were once widely known and often repeated across this nation among fans of American sports. Dryden’s appearance on the tour began with a question for the audience, which was quizzed about the once fretful reputation of the Washington Senators as a major league baseball team: “How many of you have ever heard the saying: ‘First in war; first in peace; and last in the American League?’” This was just one humorous example of the many witty aphorisms attributed to Dryden, an influential writer whose youthful days in Monmouth would have foretold nothing of an extensive career as one of America’s most recognized sportswriters.

Once hailed as the “Mark Twain of Baseball,” Dryden first worked at age 14 for the Pattee Plow Company for three dollars a week. Seeking a more suitable career to foster his interest in life beyond Monmouth’s rural setting (where it is possible that he never played a game of baseball), Dryden eventually found his way to cities ranging from San Francisco and Chicago to New York and Philadelphia. One of his most jovial tales shared with this traveling audience featured his story about once being barred from the grounds of the New York (baseball) Giants (who then played playing in the iconic horseshoe-shaped Polo Grounds), Dryden secretly managed to cover a game by climbing a telephone pole to follow the action. Seeking a closer view where he could more easily hear the stadium’s announcements, gauge the efforts of the ballplayers, and appreciate the reaction of the fans, he followed up his earlier subterfuge by disguising himself as a woman in order to get into the ballpark (maybe he conducted this ruse on one of the commonly held “Ladies Day” events). Such determination is emphasized in Dryden’s narrative about how he was forever forthright about getting his readers the story he felt they deserved.

Even less known to residents of Monmouth today is the role Dryden played in publicizing a 1909 exhibition baseball game in Monmouth. This unique opportunity for local baseball fans featured a contest between the then-dominant Chicago Cubs and a “D” level minor league team then competing in Monmouth. The “Browns,” named for their founder, John Brown (one of Monmouth’s better -known mayors, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists), played the Cubs one July afternoon in the ballpark field that stood on South Eleventh St. In his narrative regarding Monmouth’s preparations for the game Dryden described, for instance, the excitement of the

several thousand fans who filled the ballpark. So thrilled were they to have their local sports heroes taking on the vaunted Cubs in this once-in-a-lifetime event, these eager rooters were willing to squeeze together on hastily constructed bleachers composed of thick wooden boards resting on beer kegs. His further description of Monmouth's leaders arranging for the exhibition game (something Dryden dryly claimed Galesburg's leaders could not have pulled off) and the close outcome of the highly anticipated contest (a 4-2 victory for the World Champions of 1907 and 1908) highlighted Dryden's creative writing and his professionalism. Finally, the audience learned that in 1921 Dryden suffered a tragically debilitating stroke, which ended his stellar career. Upon his death, his sister decided that the proper resting place for his remains would be next to his other family members on the far southeastern side of the Monmouth Cemetery. Dryden's story in this restful overlook enticed audience members to return later (although more likely in daytime hours) and carefully read the inscriptions on other family members' gravestones.

Finally, a dialogue was shared regarding the life and theatrical career of William Wallace Young. Perhaps even less known to local residents than Dryden's adventures, Young's Monmouth origins were described in the vein of his youthful interest in the literary and dramatic arts while a student at Monmouth College. Allowed to enter the institution at age 14, Young excelled and became the president of the college's Philadelphian literary society. His excellent academic performance ultimately elevated Young to the status of class valedictorian in 1863. Thinking of entering the field of legal work in Chicago was initially part of his career plans; but not for long. Young's narrative focused on his developing love of writing poetry and producing theatrical works. Besides illustrating his poetic talent in magazines such as *The Atlantic*, he was demonstrating his exceptional talents as a playwright by the 1870s. The famed actor, Edwin Booth, staged one of Young's plays, *Jonquil; or Only a Heart*, in New York. Lawrence Barrett, a great Shakespearean actor, appeared in this same performance.

Besides describing how he helped shape the early career of the famed international dancer Loie Fuller (herself a Monmouth resident in her youth), Young's dialogue concluded with a description of what was, perhaps, his most notable--the theatrical adaptation of General Lew Wallace's novel *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. This six-act extravaganza ran for more than twenty years and was seen in the United States and around the globe by as many as twenty million people. With four hundred actors, twelve horses, and three camels, audience members marveled at Young's cycloramic stage display weighing forty tons. Even today, modern audience members would likely agree that the highlight of this dramatic display was a chariot race performed live on stage. Such an achievement in the performing arts and literature earned Young the title of "Dean of American Letters."

Young's final days were spent in leisure along the shores of Lake Sunapee in New Hampshire, where he died in 1920 at age 75. His remains, like those of sportswriter Charles Dryden, were returned to Monmouth where Young now rests with other family members. Disappointingly, the names inscribed on the marble lid of the family's sarcophagus-shaped monument are badly faded due to its soft surface and the forces of erosion. Also, unfortunately for those who might appreciate knowing more of his literary importance (similar to Dryden's declaration of his prominence on his stone), nothing is inscribed on Young's tomb to alert and educate a wandering visitor to the cemetery of Young's lifelong accomplishments. These early Monmouth residents are just four of the characters chosen for this cemetery tour. The cemetery walk began with a presentation of the life of Eliza Brown, the daughter of a Revolutionary War

veteran in the early nineteenth century. Champion Miller, a one-time slave who bought his freedom, made his way to Monmouth, and became a respected citizen and church member, was the next stop. His presentation took place at the recently marked modern memorial stone just steps from the cemetery's entrance. One of this community's most influential citizens in the development of early Monmouth, Ivory Quinby, was also featured during this evening gathering. His one-time home, just a short walk south of the cemetery, is the current residence of the president of Monmouth College. William Pressly, another of Monmouth's early influential civic leaders, was another gentleman featured on the tour. Residents who have previously stopped by the Warren County Library and noticed the inscribed wall next to the main entrance, would have already read of his service in establishing the first library in Monmouth. Moreover, Pressly's importance—less likely known to residents—was further explained in terms of his establishment of two mission schools in Egypt. The last stop on the tour highlighted the life of Margaret Campbell and her role in helping to establish Pi Beta Phi, one of this nation's oldest and more significant sororities.

Here is the roster of featured players and historical characters listed in the order of appearance during the walk:

Eliza Brown (Stephanie Sims)
 Champion Miller (Jeremy Raymond)
 William Wallace Young (Jeff Rankin)
 William Pressly (Dr. Eugene Watkins)
 Mary Carr (Mary Osborne)
 Sara Carr (Gina Raymond)
 Charles Dryden (Duane Bonifer)
 Ivory Quinby (John Henderson)
 Margaret Campbell (Pamela Best)

Here are comments from some of the participants and attendees:¹

Pamela Best: It was fascinating to step into the shoes of a founding member of Pi Beta Phi, an organization that I was a part of during my days at Monmouth College. People seemed very much involved in hearing the stories of past citizens of Monmouth.

Ted Briscoe: The story of a community is told through the stories of the people who lived there, which is why we are fortunate to have this Cemetery Walk to give us access to those stories. It is a wonderful opportunity to learn from those who were here before us -- about those lives, about Monmouth, and perhaps a bit about ourselves as well.

¹ Approximately fifty people attended this cemetery tour.

Jeff Rankin: In portraying the now-forgotten but once celebrated Broadway playwright William Young, who was born and raised in Monmouth, it was gratifying to be able to introduce Monmouth residents to a former fellow citizen who transformed the novel *Ben-Hur* into an electrifying stage spectacle. I had fun with the role, startling the spectators by appearing suddenly out of the shadows like a ghost, which my character essentially was. The wide variety of personalities who emerged from their eternal rest that autumn night made the inaugural Monmouth Cemetery Tour both entertaining and educational.

Jeanne Robeson: A well-prepared and presented program. Interesting. Who knew there were so many fascinating folks buried locally!

Eugene Watkins: The cemetery walk was a lot of fun. It was an interactive and imaginative opportunity to learn about the amazing individuals who lived in Monmouth and contributed to making our community what it is today, and I personally learned a lot. I really enjoyed the creativity of the participants in their costumes and interpretations of the personalities they portrayed.

Vicki Young: Out at the Monmouth Cemetery in the month of Halloween, the BCA Armoury Players provided an historical thespian performance reminiscent of *Our Town* and the *Spoon River Anthology*. Rebecca Quick, from the BCA, led us on a walk through eight gravesites of some of Monmouth's notables, where Stephanie Sims, Gina & Jeremy Raymond, Jeff Rankin, Eugene Watkins, Mary Osborne, Duane Bonifer, John Henderson, and Pamela Best ably and accurately portrayed the departed, with convincing costumes and characterizations. The historical research was excellent, as we gained a treasury of information about Eliza Brown, Champion Miller, William Wallace Young, William Pressly, Mary and Sara Carr, Charles Dryden, Ivory Quinby, and Margaret Campbell. A map of the gravesites was thoughtfully provided in case one wants to come back and revisit at a less ghostly time of year!

Amy Zesbaugh: The Dearly Departed cemetery walk was a great way to learn about Monmouth's notable citizens and their influence on our city. I enjoyed being able to question the historical figures about their lives, and the nighttime tour had just the right combination of fun and spooky.

Given the success of this first cemetery tour, it is hoped that there will be future walks, perhaps focusing on other sectors of the cemetery. As area people have found out about this tour, there have been repeated questions about whether a future program could include the stories of other such famous Monmouth residents as William Nicol, “The Great Nicola,” a world-famous magician who over the last several years has been honored with a weekend magic festival at the Warren County History Museum. Similar interest has been expressed in those buried in the northern section of the cemetery, such as Ralph Greenleaf, a world champion pocket billiards player. Once called, “The Babe Ruth of Billiards,” young Ralph learned his skill here and took his talent beyond the borders of Monmouth to national tournaments and great success. Other possibilities for study include some World War II heroes who lost their lives in service during the war. Likewise, early businessmen such as Algot Bowman could become a subject of research. Bowman was one of several brothers who came to the U.S. over a century ago from Sweden and started a shoe business which expanded beyond Monmouth and throughout the Midwest (and for full disclosure, Algot was my wife’s grandfather).

Such historical presentations framed as cemetery walks have been staged over many regions of our nation for a number of years. Offering a unique approach to the narrative of local history, our hope is that this initial eight-stop tour will provoke heightened interest in preserving this municipal burial ground while inspiring Monmouth and area residents to seek out similar compelling stories regarding their own ancestors.

Photo Gallery: Some Scenes from the Dearly Departed Cemetery Tour



Figure 4.1: John Henderson as Ivory Quinby. Photo courtesy of Kristyne Gilbert.



Figure 4.2: Duane Bonifer as Charles Dryden. Photo courtesy of Kristyne Gilbert.

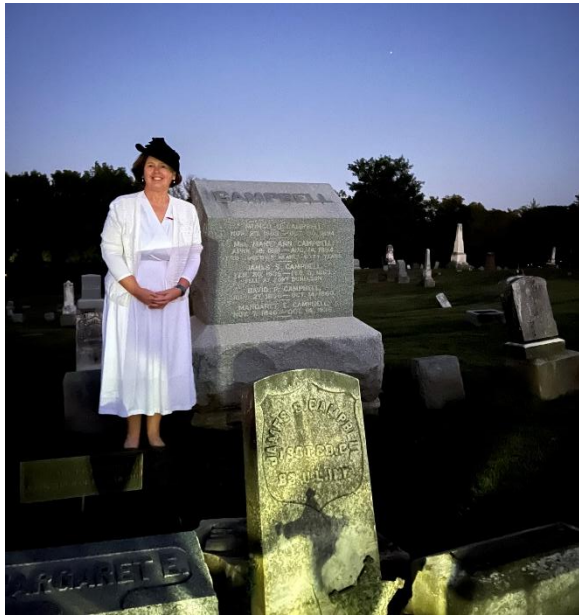


Figure 4.3: Pamela Best as Margaret Campbell. Photo courtesy of Kristyne Gilbert.



Figure 4.4: Eugene Watkins as William Pressly. Photo courtesy of Kristyne Gilbert.



Figure 4.5: Mary Osborne as Mary Carr and Gina Raymond as Sara Carr. Photo courtesy of Kristyne Gilbert.