

Images of America: The Homewood Cemetery

(A Review)

By Jim Wudarczyk

Arcadia Publishing boasts of having more than 14,000 titles in print. This firm has been a blessing to local communities, since it provides a vehicle for researchers to save old photographs that might otherwise never have been published. It is also a means for local historians to present a general overview of their community's heritage.

It should be noted that Arcadia provides the template, but it is also restrictive in that it mandates strict guidelines on the number of pages, amount of text, number of chapters, and amount of photographs that may be used. There are also guidelines relating to the size, age, and quality of pictures.

"Images of America: The Homewood Cemetery" author Lisa Speranza demonstrates a thorough knowledge of her subject, as well as the ability to work within the established guidelines.

This is Speranza's second venture into investigating the rich heritage of Pittsburgh's cemeteries. Her first book, ***"Images of America: Allegheny Cemetery"***, made its debut in December 2016. She coauthored the Allegheny Cemetery book with Nancy Foley. Both women showed their love for Pittsburgh's oldest romantic garden cemetery by producing a concise and exceptional book that captures the essence of their subject in 127 pages.

Then, Lisa Speranza turned her attention to another historic cemetery. Her examination of Homewood Cemetery hit the bookstores in December 2019. Considering the size of the cemetery, its age, and its role in Pittsburgh history; Speranza successfully tackled a vast amount of material and gave the historical community another well-written and well-documented study of one of Pittsburgh's often over-looked landmarks.

Opened in 1878, Homewood Cemetery is a premiere example of the lawn park cemetery concept developed by Prussian architect Adolphe Strauch. According to Strauch, a cemetery should be a "simplified, streamlined, open design that allowed for a more strictly conceptualized layout for all to enjoy."

Speranza starts her book with images of the area before there was a cemetery and illustrates the gatehouse, entrances, and chapel. There are even photographs of ponds that are no longer there.

Inside Homewood Cemetery is the Chinese Cemetery, founded by the Chinese Cemetery Association in 1901. It is one of the oldest Chinese cemeteries on the East Coast.

As the East End of Pittsburgh became more affluent in the latter half of the nineteenth century, an increasingly large number of the city's elite chose Homewood Cemetery for their final resting place. These included names such as Dilworth, Pitcairn, Herron, Bigelow, Flinn, Wilkins, Mellon, Hillman, Benedum, and Heinz. Members of the Frick family are also buried there. David Lytle Clark, the entrepreneur and confectioner who gave us the Clark Bar and the Zagnut Bar, is laid to rest in Section 25. Photographs of other millionaires and prominent people abound in the book.

Of particular note in the book is a picture of the mausoleum of William Harry Brown. It is accompanied by a picture of Brown and his family on one of their many trips abroad. Speranza wrote, "One of the most recognizable monuments in The Homewood Cemetery is the pyramid memorializing William H. Brown and his family. The Browns operated one of the largest coal shipping businesses of the time on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. They were well traveled and enjoyed exotic trips, like this visit to the Sphinx and the Egyptian pyramids around the end of the 19th century. The influence of that trip on the family was so great that they were eventually buried in this pyramid replica designed by the well-known architecture firm of Alden & Harlow."

Speranza does not only incorporate in the book the wealthy and better-known personages, but she also reminds us that there were many people who shaped our heritage that are often overlooked in the annals of Pittsburgh history. For example, she includes Henry Posner, Jr., who was a research scientist on the Manhattan Project, head of Pittsburgh Outdoor Advertising Company, and a generous contributor to Jewish communities around the world.

She also includes references to people who played prominent roles in the Civil Rights Movement, Air Force veterans, World War I veterans, and women that defied the social norms of their times.

One of the often-overlooked heroes of the Second World War was Stewart McClintic. “While stationed in London as a lieutenant colonel, McClintic analyzed reports to specifically coordinate military bombing campaigns against the Nazis.” He also worked on the Ultra project, which intercepted German communications sent via the Enigma cipher machine.

Another of the interesting biographies was that of “The Princess” Doris Mercer. A chorus girl, one of her marriages was to Persian royalty Prince Farid Khan Sadri-Kajar in 1933. Although the couple divorced, she refused to give up her title of “The Princess.”

The renowned artist George Hetzel, who died in 1899, is buried in Section 7. His paintings were displayed at 1876 Centennial Exposition, the 1893 Columbian Exposition, and the 1896 Carnegie International.

Of course, the book contains many more stories and accompanying photographs relating to Homewood Cemetery. One must commend the book’s author, Lisa Speranza, for her dedication and vast amount of research,

“Images of America: The Homewood Cemetery” is a book that will be treasured by those frequent visitors to the cemetery grounds, as well as by people totally unfamiliar with the rich heritage of this landmark.