

Town of Greenburgh  
**ASSISTANT  
TOWN HISTORIANS**



———— felicia barber + riley wentzler ————

*There is no church here, but “the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated” this ground: The Story of The Little White Church Cemetery*

*By: Riley Wentzler & Felicia Barber*



On 43 Ashford Avenue in Dobbs Ferry, on nearly 3 acres of land, stands a peculiar sight, a cemetery named for a church, yet there is no church on this ground. Even if a church stood there, the name of the cemetery would not match the name of the church, for surely, no one would actually name their church The Little White Church. Stranger still, is the fact that this tiny cemetery named for a church which is actually somewhere else in Greenburgh, somehow appears on Westchester County's Inventory of Historic Places. Why on earth?

How did a cemetery come in to existence which is named for an absent church and why is it on Westchester County's Inventory of Historic Places? These are the questions this article will answer.

**A cemetery named for a church, but no church**

The land on which this cemetery now stands once belonged to Dirck Storm, who at some point in the 1800s, sold it to Martin and Rebecca Lefurgy. In 1823 the couple sold it to a group of Presbyterian ministers looking to form a church (DiLorenzo 2019). Two years later in 1825, they officially founded their church, at the time of its founding the congregation consisted of only six members. The name of this church was the South Presbyterian Church of Greenburgh, which still exists today, although at a different location. Its members gave it the nickname The Little White Church (Raftery 2011, p. 25). In 1842, Martin and Rebecca Lefurgy's son, Isaac, gave the church an additional half acre (deed Isaac Lefurgy to the South Presbyterian Church February 25<sup>th</sup> 1842). The church conducted religious services and burials on the property from the time of its founding until 1869 when it moved to a new location on 515 Broadway (Raftery 2011, p. 25). The building was torn down in 1883 and the property was then sold to Dr. Champion Judson who on his death deeded it to The Village of Dobbs Ferry (DiLorenzo 2019). This is how a cemetery named for a church came to exist in the absence of a church. But why is it on the Westchester County's Inventory of Historic Places?

### **Why is it on the Westchester County's Inventory of Historic Places?**

This question was answered long ago in one of the most famous speeches in American History.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war... We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives, that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. (Abraham Lincoln November 19, 1863)

President Lincoln had it right in his “Gettysburg Address,” Civil War veterans do indeed consecrate any ground they are buried in, and while the Little White Church Cemetery is not a Civil War battlefield, like Gettysburg, numerous Civil War Veterans are buried there. For that reason a plaque was dedicated to their memory and placed in the cemetery in 1904, and it is also for that reason that in 1991 it was added to Westchester County’s Inventory of Historic Places. Here are the stories of just a few of the veterans:



### **Brigadier General James Bowen**

General James Bowen was born in 1808. On October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1862, he enlisted in the Union Army (Veterans’ Cemetery Index, Service Card of Brigadier General James Bowen, found at the Westchester County Archives). Unlike most soldiers fighting for both the Union and the Confederacy which were either, West Point graduates in the case of officers, or combat veterans of the Mexican War, in the case of most enlisted men, James Bowen had no previous military training or experience prior to his civil war service. He was made a Brigadier General solely because of his close friendship with President Lincoln’s Secretary of State William Seward (Raftery 2011, p. 27).

This may strike readers as odd, however making people generals not based on their skill in combat, but based instead on their political connections was President Abraham Lincoln's habit. This very bad habit of Lincoln's nearly cost the Union the war. Even the West-Point educated Generals in Chief of the Union Army: General Winfield Scott (in command July 5, 1841-November 1, 1861), General George B. McClellan (in command November 2, 1861 - March 11, 1862) and General Henry W. Halleck (in command July 23, 1862 - March 9, 1864) lacked actual combat experience and were appointed based on their close friendship with President Lincoln. For example, General Henry W. Halleck was a military scholar during the Mexican War whose most significant contribution to the war effort was translating *Jomini's Vie Politique et Militair*, a book on military tactics written by Napoleon, into English (<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/henry-w-halleck>), and General George B. McClellan was also involved in the Mexican War, in a non-combat role. He was part of the Army Corps of Engineers (<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/george-b-mcclellan>). Only after many costly defeats, did Abraham Lincoln finally see the error of his ways and put General Ulysses S. Grant who had fought in the Battle of Shiloh and led troops in that engagement, in charge. This was not until March of 1864 (Grant 1885, p. 485).

Returning to Bowen, he did not serve in combat, instead he was the Provost Marshall of New Orleans from 1862-1864. He was honorably discharged on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1864, and died on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1886 (Veterans' Cemetery Index, Service Card of Brigadier General James Bowen, found at the Westchester County Archives).

### **Captain Geraidus P. Hillman of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry New York Volunteers**

This soldier's records are incomplete, but here is what we do know based on his service Card. He was born sometime in 1833 in New York City. On April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1861, he enlisted in the Union Army. During the First Battle of Bull Run, which took place July 16<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> 1861, he took part in the Occupation of Arlington

Heights. He was honorably discharged from the Union Army on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1861. He died on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1880(Veterans' Cemetery Index, Service Card of Captain Geraidus P. Hillman, found at the Westchester County Archives).

### **Private Isaac Taylor of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry New York**

This soldier's records are also incomplete. He was born sometime in 1818 at an unknown location. He enlisted on August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1862. He fought in the Battle of the Wilderness on May 5–7, 1864. Perhaps it was there that he lost interest in land warfare, and felt the call of the sea, because while his discharge from the military isn't recorded, his transfer from the Union Army to The United States Navy is. He died on February 22, 1887(Veterans' Cemetery Index, Service Card of Private Isaac Taylor, found at the Westchester County Archives).

### **Private William O'Brien of the 6<sup>th</sup> Artillery New York**

This soldier's records are also incomplete. He was born sometime in 1836 at an unknown location. He enlisted on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1862. He fought in The Mine Run Campaign in Orange County Virginia (November 27 - December 2, 1863). He did not survive the campaign, but he wasn't killed in combat. He died on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1863 in Harpers Ferry, Virginia of disease (Veterans' Cemetery Index, Service Card of Private William O'Brien, found at the Westchester County Archives). During the Civil War, Harpers Ferry was in Western Virginia, the only part of the state loyal to the Union. Today that part of what was Virginia is now the State of West Virginia.

### **Corporal John McGullough of the 6<sup>th</sup> Artillery New York**

This soldier's records are also incomplete. He was born sometime in 1844 in an unknown location. He enlisted on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, the day after William O'Brien. Since they were in the same regiment, and enlisted a day apart, and were

only one rank apart, chances are high that they knew each other. He fought in the Assault on Petersburg, on June 15-18, 1864 and in The Battle of Cold Harbor from May 31 - June 12, 1864. His date of death is unknown as is the precise cause, but it is certain that he did not die in combat because the Civil War ended on April 9, 1865 and his date of discharge was June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1865 (Veterans' Cemetery Index, Service Card of Corporal John McGullough found at the Westchester County Archives).

### **Private Charles O'Brien of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry New York**

This soldier's records are also incomplete. He was born sometime in 1838 in New York City. He enlisted on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1861. He was wounded in action at the Battle of Williamsburg on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862. He was honorably discharged on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1862 (Veterans' Cemetery Index, Service Card of Private Charles O'Brien found at the Westchester County Archives). All details about his death are unknown.



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About the Authors:

We are both Assistant Town Historians at Greenburgh Town Hall and we are engaged to be married and are currently looking for permanent employment.

**Riley Wentzler:**

I was born and raised in a small rural town in central Pennsylvania. In high school, I took every honors course available including four years of Spanish. I received A's in all of them. I graduated third in my class of 146 students. This brought me to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Once there, I continued my trend of academic excellence. I graduated summa cum laude in Political Science with a minor in Spanish and a Master's in Communication Studies, with a G.P.A of 3.94. It was also there that I met my lovely fiancée, Felicia Barber. My Master's in Communication has promoted public speaking, teamwork, and customer service. My Political Science degree has developed my research skills using computer-based tools and provided me with experience using the Microsoft Office products. My minor in Spanish has facilitated my bilingual capabilities. During my internship at Greenburgh, I created the petition for the State Roads project using website tools. My diverse education and areas of interest have provided me with a wide range of skills. I look forward to finding a career opportunity in business or government. **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at [assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com](mailto:assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com), or to help me find employment, you can contact me at [rjwentzler413@gmail.com](mailto:rjwentzler413@gmail.com)**

**Felicia Barber:**

I was born in New York City and raised in Hartsdale, New York. I graduated from Ardsley High School. I recently earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Graphic Design at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. It was here that I met my fiancé, Riley Wentzler. As a result of my academic excellence, I won a scholarship every year. I learned and applied many graphic design skills to projects during my summer internships and at school. I am proficient in using Adobe graphic design applications including Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. For my Identity/branding course at Edinboro, I created logos to appear on the tee-shirts of Physical Education majors. For a veteran's upcoming event, I used a typeface to focus the reader to the soldier in the poster. For the State Roads Legislative Campaign project, I created the embedded graphic-photo that accompanied the petition I am looking for a job to utilize my skills as a Graphic Designer in an agency, print shop, company or government **To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at [assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com](mailto:assistanthistorian@greenburghny.com). To learn more about my artwork or to help me find employment you can contact me at [feliciadbarber@gmail.com](mailto:feliciadbarber@gmail.com).**

**Two Interviews with the authors:**

<https://riverjournalonline.com/around-town/a-love-of-history-and-each-other/13708/>

<https://wcbs880.radio.com/articles/news/stories-main-street-couple-cerebral-palsy-brings-manytalents-town-greenburgh>

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Retrieved from The Battlefield Trust: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/henry-w-halleck>

White Plains Department of Land Records pertaining to a deed, liber #96 p. 160 recorded (1942) March 21 deed of 1/2 acre granted to South Presbyterian Church on February 25 granted by Isaac Lefurgy