

Remarks at Woolhouse/Hunn Cemetery Town of Canandaigua

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I want to thank the Town of Canandaigua and its Local History Team; and especially Town Historian, Ray Henry; for inviting me to participate in this celebration this afternoon. It marks a time of new beginnings; some that are very new—today and these last few weeks—and some that are more historical.

To start with, completion of this Eagle Scout service project certainly marks a new beginning in the life of Zac Palmer. For fifty-four years now, the Boy Scouts of America has required that Eagle Scout candidates show leadership by “planning, developing, and carrying out a service project” in their communities.¹ The new fence and clean-up of Hunn-Woolhouse Cemetery is the latest example of that kind of service in the Canandaigua area.

As a new beginning, however, this project is only the latest in a long series of Eagle Scout projects benefiting the community. Just a year ago, there was a similar project at Wolverton/Red Dock Cemetery. A generation ago, In May, 1967, Eagle Scout candidate, Mark Munson, then fifteen years old and a member of Troop 30, led his troop in refurbishing this very same burial ground.² It is a worthy tradition of the Boy Scouts and there will certainly be many such projects!

For Zac Palmer, this is a new beginning in ways he, and we, can only imagine. He has what we hope will be a long and productive life ahead of him. Throughout that life, he will carry the cachet of the Eagle Scout; over the years, a significant responsibility. Who knows where he, and his Eagle badge, will go? This project has helped Zac achieve one of his goals, and in turn it has helped the town achieve one of its goals.

Several times during the last century, this cemetery has had a new beginning. It has been cleaned up; stones have been righted and cleaned; and public attention has been momentarily focused on this special repository of our history.

¹ Robert Peterson and Joel Snyder. “The Way it Was: Evolution of the Eagle Scout Award.” *Scouting*. Nov.-Dec. 2002. Available on the Internet at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20060625225229/http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/issues/0211/d-wwas.html> (Nov. 2, 2019).

² Marge Van Iseghem. “Canandaigua Scouts Clean Up Cemetery.” Rochester, NY *Democrat & Chronicle*. May 9, 1967. p. B-1 . It is interesting to note that in 1967, Boy Scout Troop 30 was chartered to the First Congregational Church of Canandaigua, one of the churches founded by Rev. Hunn.

Sometimes that has been prompted by long neglect, and sometimes it has been related to traffic accidents on this sometimes icy curve, like the disaster that happened here in 2007.³

In 1938, there was a groundswell of support (a new beginning, if you will) for clearing up this cemetery. At that time, it was led by people, including many younger people, representing some of the Congregational churches established by Rev. Zadok Hunn.⁴

Eighty-one years ago, on July 10, 1938, dedication services were held here. The focus then was on ecclesiastical history and the “services,” as they were called, were led by clergy from local congregations founded by Rev. Hunn. The moderator and scribe of the Ontario District of the Western New York Association of Congregational Churches were present, as well.

One new beginning stemming from 1938 was the erection of the two-ton, Vermont granite memorial to Rev. Hunn that is now the focal point of this cemetery. It was originally proposed to the Congregational association, meeting in West Bloomfield in May, 1938, by Rev. Charles N. St. John, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Canandaigua.

Money for the monument was quickly raised by popular subscription among the parishioners of the nine churches founded by Rev. Hunn. In a span of just two months, the money was raised, this monument created, and a dedication service was held. Money raised in two months—right at the end of the Great Depression! To Frank Hunn of Bristol, a great-grandson of Rev. Hunn, was given the honor of unveiling the monument.

The drive for a granite monument to Rev. Hunn was based on the fact that “for many years, the grave was unmarked and neglected” according to an article in the *Clifton Springs Press*.⁵ The grave was, in fact, marked, as the existence of Rev. Hunn’s original stone (still here) proves, but apparently so neglected, overgrown, and probably flattened, that casual visitors could not find it. Old cemeteries with historic markers frequently need new beginnings!

³ For example, see: “Cemeteries Cleaned Up.” Rochester, NY. *Democrat & Chronicle*. Aug. 24, 1970. That article details how Town Highway Superintendent, Harold C. Northrop, Jr. and other town employees and volunteers worked to clean up this and other town cemeteries.

⁴ In these remarks, I am using the spelling of Rev. Hunn’s name that appears on his original tombstone, and that of his wife, Mary, who died in 1813. On his daughter, Jemima Fanna Hunn’s, stone her father’s name was spelled Zadoc. Since 1938, at least, it has been common to spell the name, Zadock.

⁵ “Monument Dedicated to the Memory of Pioneer Preacher.” *Clifton Springs Press*. Jul. 21, 1938. p. 8.

A second new beginning was also proposed by the monument committee formed in 1938. The *Daily Messenger* noted that there was “a movement...on foot to change the name of the cemetery to the Zadock Hunn Memorial Cemetery.”⁶ The name most often used in common practice, for more than a century, was Woolhouse Cemetery. Today, the term Hunn Cemetery, is more often used—just look at the invitation sent out for this event. However, in this age, when more and more newspapers are indexed and available electronically, it behooves a researcher to remember the name Woolhouse and include it in any search requests.

Finally, those buried in this cemetery represent additional new beginnings we should note today. By definition using the dates of their life-spans, the people resting here were pioneers. Their entry into the Phelps & Gorham Purchase marked a new beginning for life and society in this homeland of the Seneca people. New beginnings are not always without debate and controversy—but they are new beginnings, none-the-less. With these pioneers came large cleared fields; the cutting of acres of timber; new types of housing; roads; new crops; new animals; new ways of organizing local government; new ways of worship—and much, much more.

Twelve of those buried here, perhaps more, rendered military or patriotic civilian service during the American Revolution less than a decade before they arrived here. Some of them were said to be members of the Sullivan Expedition (1779) that devastated the Seneca country and established a claim to this land based on a right of conquest. Those soldiers had walked here from the Hudson, Mohawk or Delaware Valleys. (In fact, their route of march from Canandaigua to Honeoye followed the present route of Co. Rd. 32.) They had seen the productivity and potential of this land, and when they got the chance to buy it from Oliver Phelps (or his successors) they took it. A revolution, by definition, is a new beginning and those citizens of revolutionary America buried here took a leap of faith.

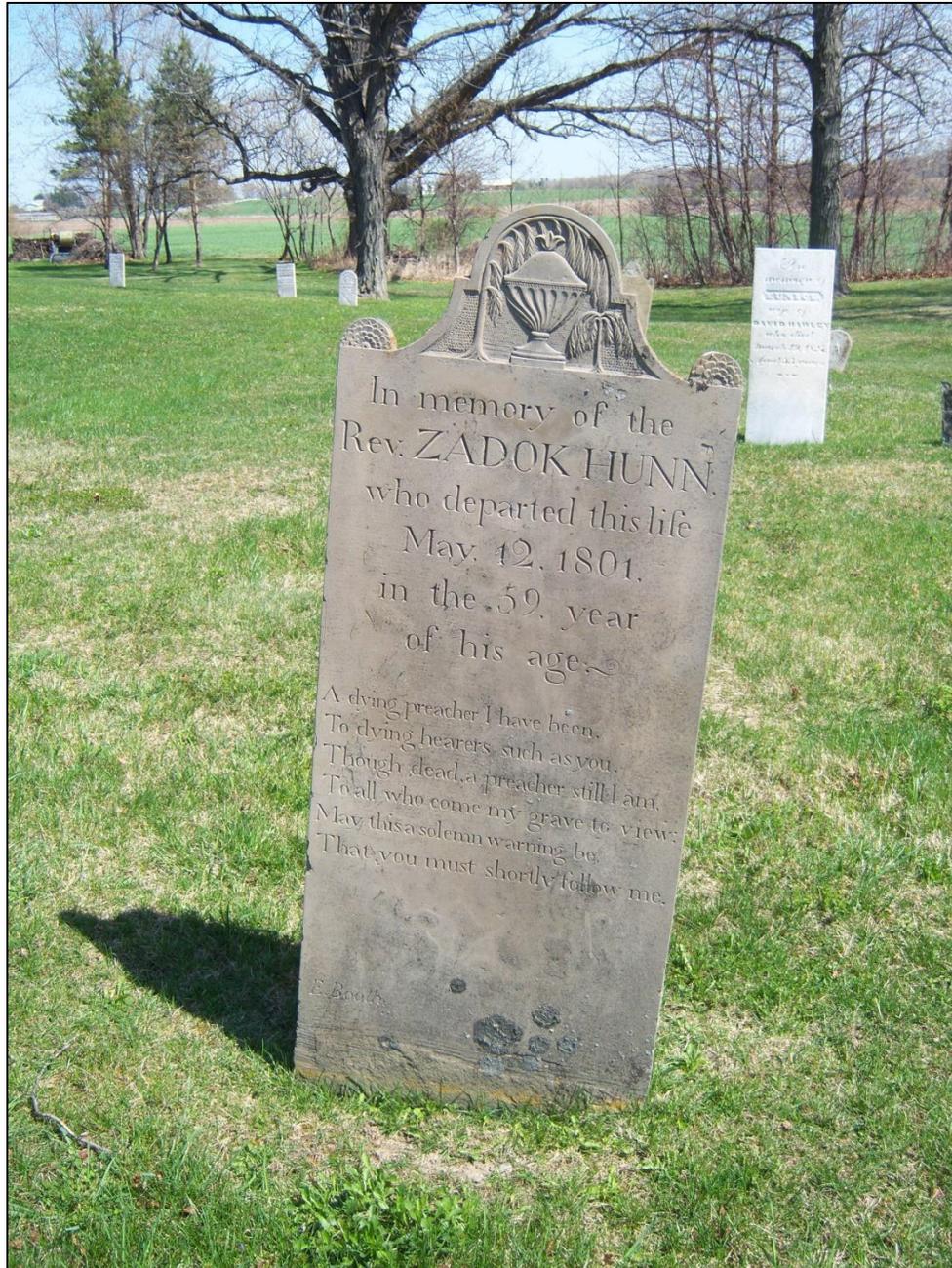
That thought brings us back to the Rev. Zadok Hunn. His life and work personified the concept of new beginnings out here on “the Purchase.” Recruited by Oliver Phelps in 1791, in response to a need for clergy expressed by his early settlers, Rev. Hunn became ill just before he was to arrive in Canandaigua. But in 1795, he experienced a personal new beginning, emigrated, and immediately set about establishing churches, preaching, baptizing, and tying the wedding knot as

⁶ “Hunn Memorial Services Held.” Canandaigua, NY *Daily Messenger*. Jul, 11, 1938. p. 3. This article contains detailed information about the origination of the Hunn monument and the dedication ceremony. An entry on the cemetery, found at the Internet site for Findagrave.com, points out that the cemetery “could also be called VanNorman Cemetery since it was first described as a “public burial ground” in a deed dated February 4, 1815, (Liber 23 of Deeds, Page 84) from Joseph VanNorman to his son Isaac VanNorman.” See: <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/64928/hunn-memorial-cemetery> (Nov. 1, 2019).

needed.⁷ In all, Hunn is credited with establishing nine new Congregational churches before his untimely death at the ripe old age of 59.

As the story of Hunn's monument shows, the good Reverend's deeds were never forgotten. Perhaps, in part, that is because some of his direct descendants still live here. His grave was "obscured" (probably the best way to say it) for decades, but in 1938 and now, his burial place, and those of his neighbors and friends has experienced a new beginning. Congratulations to everyone who made it happen.

⁷ William Herbert Siles. *A Vision of Wealth: Speculators and Settlers in the Genesee Country of New York, 1788-1800*. Univ. of Massachusetts. PhD. 1978. Pp. 229-232. Siles' documentation includes personal letters between Oliver Phelps and several business associates as well as Congregational church archives.



Rev. Hunn's gravestone. 2010. Image by the author.